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William Abraham and St. Thomas Aquinas

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In a recent study, the eminent Methodist theologian William Abraham has argued that Aquinas's theology, especially as received by the Council of Trent, marks the shift from "soteriological" exegesis to the reduction of the function of Scripture (and of the entire "canonical heritage") to epistemological concerns and claims.[1]

Abraham states his positive thesis—with much of which, as regards a broad "canonical heritage," I agree—in the preface to the paperback edition of his book: "I have proposed that we redescribe and reidentify canon in such a way that we think in terms of a canonical heritage; and that we envision that heritage as a network of means of grace intended for use in spiritual direction in the Church."[2] This "canonical heritage" includes the lists of canonized Fathers, the Scriptures, the Creed, and so forth; and the canonical heritage functioned not epistemologically (as authoritatively guaranteeing, in a foundationalist fashion, truth claims) but rather soteriologically, as "means of grace."[3] The canonical heritage, writes Abraham, was understood

[1] William J. Abraham, *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology: From the Fathers to Feminism*, paperback edition with a new preface (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). Cf. Abraham, "Faith, Assurance, and Conviction: An Epistemological Commentary on Hebrews 11:1," *Ex Auditu* 19 (2003): 65–75, which offers an insightful reading of Hebrews 11:1. In responding to this essay, D. Stephen Long treats as well Abraham's *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology*. Long's concerns are largely my own. Proposing a "reexamination of Aquinas and his incorporation of Aristotle's *phronesis*—thinking—into theology," Long asks, "Why is Aquinas's virtue tradition with its emphasis on practical reasoning and the key role of the gifts, beatitudes, and theological virtues so readily rejected in Abraham's work in favor of a call for 'a new subdiscipline identified as the epistemology of theology that will engage in a rigorous and comprehensive way the nature of rationality, warrant, justification, and knowledge in theology'?. . .I would designate the true culprit in the western tradition as Locke who turned miracles into positivist evidence and made possible something like the verification hypothesis" (Long, "Response to Abraham," *Ex Auditu* 19 [2003]: 76–80, at 78). As Long points out, "Would a recovery of the importance of illumination and a metaphysics of participation not provide what we need without the invention of a new subdiscipline of the epistemology of theology?" (79) See also John Webster, "Canon and Criterion: Some Reflections on a Recent Proposal," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 54 (2001): 67–83; Telford Work, *Living and Active: Scripture in the Economy of Salvation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002): 256–59.

[2] Abraham, *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology*, vii.

[3] Ibid., 112. Abraham admits that he is not clear on the full range and scope of what he calls the "canonical heritage," and he therefore suggests that his constructive proposals await first the work of historians: "In my view, despite the deeply contested nature of

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by the Church, at least during the first millennium (before the schism that divided East and West), "as materials and practices which fed the soul, which mediated the life of God, which returned human beings to their true destiny as children of God, and which ultimately led to a life of sanctity. Alternatively, we might say that they were seen as gifts of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church, intended to bring about participation in the life of God through the working of the same Spirit, who guided the Church in their selection and use."[4] It should be noted that Joseph Ratzinger makes a similar point with regard to ecumenical advances in interpreting the Bible. Ratzinger explains, "The great reformed denominations and the Anglican community accepted the ancient creeds as part of their own belief, and so the Trinitarian and Christological faith defined in the councils of the early Church has been kept of out the debate. Side by side with scripture and combined with it, this is the actual nucleus of the unity which binds us together and gives us hope of complete reconciliation. For this reason we must for the sake of unity strenuously resist any attempt to break up this central ecclesial deposit or to discard as outmoded the practice based on it of reading scripture together."[5]

historical investigation, and despite its corrosive effects on the canonical heritage of the church in the hands of much modern scholarship, historical investigation is richly inventive in throwing light on the content and significance of that heritage. In a way, my proposal is liberating in the extreme, for it allows the historian full and free range in coming to terms with the actual canonical heritage given to us in the Church. It is pivotal that we come to terms with the gifts of the Holy Spirit as they actually exist in the canonical heritage rather than impose some external standard on their content and meaning. History is indispensable in this process. Moreover, the results of critical historical investigation can be deployed in a spiritually fruitful and discerning way when canonical materials and practices are used as means of grace. To be sure, there are crucial metaphysical and epistemological issues in the neighbourhood, for there is no historical investigation without reliance on a vast network of varied assumptions. However, dealing with these matters does nothing to deliver us from the demanding labour of specific, detailed historical inquiry into the origins, content, and meaning of the canonical heritage of the Church" (xii).

[4] Ibid., 112.

[5] Joseph Ratzinger, "Anglican-Catholic Dialogue: Its Problems and Hopes," trans. Dame Fridesweide Sandemann, O.S.B., in Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism and Politics: New Essays in Ecclesiology* (New York: Crossroad, 1988): 65–98, at 83–84. Ratzinger continues, "If we had today to 'prove' the Trinitarian dogma and Christological faith from scripture in the same controversial way as the sacrificial character of the eucharist, our endeavour to reach common conclusions would certainly be no less arduous. On the other hand, if the basic form of the liturgy of the early Church were accepted as a lasting heritage, ranking with conciliar creeds, this would provide unifying hermeneutics which would render many points of contention superfluous. The Church's liturgy being the original interpretation of the biblical heritage has no need to justify itself before historical reconstructions: it is rather itself the standard, sprung from what is living, which directs research back to the initial stages" (84–85). This full "heritage" is "living" and (as liturgical) salvific, and thus no mere "criterion." Cf. for a positive ecumenical response to Ratzinger's essay, Geoffrey Wainwright, "Towards an Ecumenical Hermeneutic: How Can All Christians Read the Scriptures Together?," 639, 653. Wainwright also notes convergences between the *Catechism of the Catholic Church's* approach to biblical interpretation and that of John Wesley.

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Abraham pins the blame for the loss of this participatory and deifying understanding of the Bible largely upon Aquinas as received, or as Abraham puts it as "canonized,"[6] by the Council of Trent. Why Aquinas? The answer is complex, and certainly relates to Abraham's distaste for the structures of authority of the Catholic Church and for teachings that he deems "epistemological" rather than "soteriological," e.g., the infallibility of the pope.[7] While I would disagree with Abraham's account of such teachings[8]—which function within Catholicism in a way different than Abraham imagines—at the core of Abraham's critique of Aquinas is a more technical matter, namely Aquinas's view, stated in the first question of the *Summa Theologiae*, that *sacra doctrina* is a "scientia." For Abraham, "the fundamental character of [Aquinas's theological] system is determined by his commitment to an Aristotelian conception of *scientia*."[9] Not only is Aristotelian *scientia* non-biblical and far from the Fathers' approaches, says Abraham, but also the application of the notion of *scientia* to theology distorts the orientation of theology, from God-centered to human-centered. Theology becomes locked into foundationalist epistemological questions having to do with the nature of divine revelation, Scripture, and ecclesial authority. Whereas the Fathers understood their teaching and preaching, as well as the sacraments and Scripture, as means of elevating human beings to union with God in Christ by the Holy Spirit, after the introduction of theology as a divine *scientia*, theologians almost inevitably turned their

[6] Abraham, *Canon as Criterion*, 108–110, 471.

[7] As Abraham points out, "I see no good reasons why the best insights of the evangelical tradition cannot be preserved in a thoroughly robust way in my revisionist account of canon and scripture. The challenge to Roman Catholicism runs much deeper" (xii).

[8] Abraham treats this theme most deeply in his chapter on Newman. While ultimately strongly critical of Newman's account of papal infallibility, Abraham is impressed by what he takes to be Newman's distance from Aquinas, a distance that perhaps opens some room for Roman Catholic return to the canonical heritage that Newman himself deeply explored: "Thus, while Aquinas is committed to the primacy of the literal sense, Newman is committed to the primacy of the spiritual sense, locating theological error in the former. While Aquinas is one of the great inventors of natural theology, Newman is far from convinced by its validity, and explores altogether different territory in the experience of self and conscience for the foundation of his theism. While Aquinas favours *scientia* as the paradigm of theology, Newman develops an entirely different conception which picks up a very different legacy from Aristotle: namely, *phronesis*, or the illative sense. While Aquinas has one conception of probability, Newman has an entirely different one. While Aquinas is happy to appeal to the dexterity of the interpreter to find a reading of Scripture which will be reconcilable with science, Newman is happy to await the formal pronouncements of the Pope as a crucial ingredient in the apologetic task. While Aquinas clearly favours the relatively clear deployment of deduction and proof, Newman favours the more subtle and murky world of human judgement and probability. Aquinas and Newman are seen to represent radically different epistemological projects when these considerations are taken seriously" (352–53). The question is whether Abraham understands Aquinas's theology.

[9] Ibid., 107.

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focus away from deification and toward arguments about the foundations of Christian truth. This happened because Aristotelian *scientia* requires "universal, necessary, and certain" knowledge, in this case deriving from God through the modes of divine revelation and its ecclesial appropriation.[10]

The result, Abraham holds, was that "the canon was made captive to Aristotle. Despite protestations to the contrary, Aristotelian convictions about knowledge determined at a basic level the inner structure of the Christian tradition."[11] As part of "a concerted effort to epistemize the canonical heritage of the church"[12] in the West, Aquinas's transformation of theology into an Aristotelian *scientia* (no matter how different, as a divinely revealed knowledge, from Aristotle's own conceptions of *scientia*) led to fundamentally distortive understandings of Scripture as inerrant, the Creeds as a "pocket Bible" (in Brian Davies's phrase, attempting to summarize Aquinas's position), the Fathers as "authorities," divine authorship, prophecy, inspiration, other religions, the authority of the papacy, and the beatific vision (now presented as a full knowledge). No longer a "means of grace," Scripture now belongs within the *scientia* of theology. Scripture functions not soteriologically, but to grant theology its authoritative status.

This epistemizing of Scripture is reflected in a theological arrogance, Abraham finds, on the part of Aquinas.[13] For instance, with

[10] Ibid., 89.

[11] Ibid., 107. For somewhat similar concerns, cf. Michael J. Buckley, S.J.'s *At the Origins of Modern Atheism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987) and Buckley's recent clarification of his view in *Denying and Disclosing God: The Ambiguous Progress of Modern Atheism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004): chapter 3, "Thomas Aquinas and the Rise of Modern Atheism," 48–69, which acquits the *Summa Theologiae* of rationalism.

[12] Ibid., 85.

[13] While Abraham certainly possesses an animus against Aquinas, Abraham is right to note, as he does in the preface to the paperback edition, that his argument does not rest upon positive or negative assessments of Aquinas's personality or intentions. Abraham states in his preface: "Nothing I say about Aquinas is undermined by the additional claim that he had a resolute grasp of the spiritual content of the gospel, or that he was an extremely insightful commentator on scripture, using it to great effect soteriologically in exegesis and homiletics. My claim is that he also has the epistemological position I attribute to him here, and that this position is integral to his conception of canon" (viii). He goes on to remark that the view that Aquinas's "epistemology was really a secondary affair that operated as an anti-epistemology in the service of removing epistemological pretensions" is not a viable reading of Aquinas, because "Aquinas's doctrine of revelation is at the core of his doctrine of scripture. Once we relocate the canon of scripture within this framework, then the shift to canon as a criterion is as secure as it can be" (viii). Drawing upon Yves Congar, Abraham argues that Aquinas is instrumental in narrowing the meaning of "Scripture" and making its "primary function" to be "operating as an authority" (ix). In Abraham's view, this is the necessary result of Aquinas's theology of revelation. Abraham argues that Aquinas is "a towering figure" in the transition from appreciating the canonical heritage as a means of grace to giving "primacy to ideas of revelation and inspiration as applying in some unique fashion to the Bible, and to limit scripture to the Bible. However, it is only someone already smitten by epistemology, and more precisely by the kind of

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regard to the major ecclesial issue of Aquinas's day, the schism that separated the East and West, Abraham finds Aquinas treating the *filioque* debate and the debate over the nature of the beatific vision in an arrogant manner, "sweeping aside" and "dispatching" other positions while "without a pause" identifying Scripture with his own position.[14] Abraham remarks that Aquinas, while recognizing the weakness of the human mind in comparison to the divine mind, rarely expressed a doubt about his own position on theological problems. This "extraordinary confidence in the rightness of his own position" stems inevitably, Abraham suggests, "from his confidence in theology as *scientia*."[15] As a *scientia* theology enables demonstrative knowledge, and Aquinas is confident that he has such knowledge.

Everything else, Abraham affirms, takes second place to this need for epistemological assurance. Thus, Aquinas simply assumes that the Creeds state what is found in Scripture, without attending to the "distinction between canonical and non canonical creeds" or to "the complex intellectual, experiential, and spiritual process which actually lay behind their creation."[16] Similarly, Aquinas ignores the historical formation of the biblical canon and assumes that Scripture is fundamentally "written by God" and that the prophets' teachings convey God's own knowledge,[17] with the result that the canon of Scripture is "set apart in a radical way from the rest of the Church's canonical heritage."[18] Aquinas treats the Fathers as a set of epistemic "authorities" rather than spiritual guides.[19] What is lost is the more messy biblical and historical reality of God's soteriological accomplishment of the work of deification in the world; what is gained is a strict and clear epistemological account of the authority and modes of divine

epistemology furnished by Aquinas, who can accept the shift identified here so gladly and readily. If one has deep reservations materially about epistemological claims, and if one is sceptical formally of giving epistemology a privileged place in the life of the mind, then the changes proposed by Aquinas will be stoutly resisted. My book is a long-winded argument for stout resistance. We need a more modest conception of scripture as sacred writings; and we need to be more generous in identifying the range of material to which scripture can apply" (xi). Abraham seems to want both the "canonical heritage"—he suggests that "evangelicals who have long insisted on the great classical doctrines of the Church and who have focused on the soteriological function of scripture, should find a ready home for my proposals" (xi)—and the pluralistic approach to other religions offered by theological liberalism.

[14] Ibid., 98–99. For discussion of Aquinas's position vis-à-vis the Orthodox East, see the work of Gilles Emery, O.P., *Trinity in Aquinas*, trans. Matthew Levering et al. (Ypsilanti, MI: Sapientia Press, 2003): chapter 6, "The Procession of the Holy Spirit *a Filio* According to St. Thomas Aquinas," 209–69; idem, *La théologie trinitaire de saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: Cerf, 2004): 321–52.

[15] Abraham, *Canon and Criterion*, 98.

[16] Ibid., 100.

[17] Ibid., 101; cf. 107.

[18] Ibid., 95.

[19] Ibid.

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teaching, in which account the canon of Scripture now has its limited place and function. Aquinas, later joined by the Church in the West, exchanges the messy, but biblical, soteriological reality for a neatly packaged Aristotelian epistemological foundation for Christian truth claims. As Abraham states bluntly, "Aquinas and all who follow him are, then, departing radically from the earlier tradition," in which epistemological claims, while present in various competing forms, were not canonized, and in which "scripture" functioned "soteriologically" rather than instrumentally in accord with "the drastic reworking of the sense and reference of scripture developed by Aquinas."[20]

Not surprisingly, therefore, Abraham describes Aquinas's injury on his way to the Council of Lyons, an injury that prevented him from attending the Council and that led to his death, as almost certainly no loss for the Council's effort to heal the schism. Aquinas "was too committed to theology as *scientia*, too confident about the status of Aristotle in any accurate analysis of human reasoning, and too sure that the Church in the West was right, for anyone to expect the outcome [of the Council] to have been radically different from what it was."[21] As Abraham is aware, Aquinas on this reading appears as the first modern fundamentalist.[22] Whatever Aquinas's own intentions or motives in theologizing, Aquinas's account of the canon of Scripture as the foundation for theology's epistemological assurance led almost ineluctably to a fundamentalist "inversion" of the "canonical heritage."[23]

As Abraham summarizes this inversion, "Epistemic considerations became primary, with the result that the whole tradition was received to fit the primacy of epistemology. Within the Church in the West, how one knew that one knew the truth about God overshadowed knowing God."[24] The Reformation thus appears as a necessary response to Aquinas and the medieval Church. The Reformers, "[d]riven by soteriological interests and obsessed by what they took to be a corruption of the life of the primitive and patristic Church," reacted against Aquinas's distortions but did so, Abraham suggests, within the epistemological categories set by Aquinas by adopting the rallying cry of "sola scriptura."[25] Fortunately, the Reformers nonetheless managed to recover, in practice, a broad swath of the "canonical heritage," and the attempts since that time to

[20] Ibid., xi.

[21] Ibid., 109.

[22] Abraham notes in a footnote on p. 101: "In the light of the foregoing, it should come as no surprise that Aquinas should be admired and championed by astute and combative modern fundamentalists like Norman L. Geisler."

[23] Ibid., 471.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid., 472.

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re-establish philosophical and theological epistemological foundationalism have failed. Abraham sums up his book's larger argument:

> On this analysis, the canonical heritage should be seen as a network of means of grace given by God to be received through the working of the Holy Spirit. Thus the canon of Scripture is not an item in a theory of knowledge, like a criterion of justification; it is a body of literature inspired by God and adopted over time in the Church to make us wise unto salvation. Furthermore, it is one element in a rich tapestry of materials, persons, and practices which are to function together in harmony for the welfare of the Church and for the salvation of the world. Repairing this canonical heritage of the Church, or rescuing it from chronic dysfunction, will not be achieved by the discovery of a new epistemology. It will be brought about by patient renewal and retrieval inspired by the Holy Spirit.[26]

Abraham will not allow that Aquinas's actual practice of biblical exegesis has anything to do with the question of whether his inclusion of Scripture within a divine *scientia* epistemized theology; thus appeal to Aquinas's biblical exegesis itself cannot settle the question.

What stands out in Abraham's account of theology as a *scientia*, however, is how "nominalist," in the sense described by Catherine Pickstock as "the loss of an integrally conceptual and mystical path," Abraham's account is.[27] For Abraham, Aquinas's claim that *sacra doctrina* is a *scientia* that takes its principles from revelation as found in canonical Scripture, instrumentalizes Scripture as an epistemic norm. What Abraham does not see is that such a *scientia*, as *sapientia*, is for Aquinas a participation in God the Trinity—a participation that is a uniting of the believer, in faith, hope, and love and by means of spiritual exercises, to the cruciform incarnate Word of the Father revealed by the Holy Spirit. The *scientia-sapientia* that is *sacra doctrina* is a sharing in the teaching office of Christ the Teacher, who teaches most fully, Augustine and Aquinas agree, from the Cross. It is a participation in the Wisdom of the Cross, the wisdom of self-giving love. Such *scientia-sapientia*, far from being a rationalism or an exercise in epistemology, is the fruit of God's self-giving love, in which by deification—including the contemplative practices that wean us from idolatry and draw us into the truth of the triune God—we come to share in the trinitarian knowing and loving.[28]

[26] Ibid., 477–478.

[27] Pickstock, "Duns Scotus: His Historical and Contemporary Significance," *Modern Theology* 21 (2005): 543–74, at 54.

[28] On idolatry within a "postmodern" culture see Brian J. Walsh, "Late/Post Modernity and Idolatry: A Contextual Reading of Colossians 2:8–3:4," *Ex Auditu* 15 (1999): 1–17; cf. John Barton's study of the relationship between "you shall have no other gods before me" (Ex 20:3) and "you shall not make for yourself an idol" (Ex 20:4), "'The Work of Human Hands' (Ps 115:4): Idolatry in the Old Testament," in the same volume of *Ex Auditu*, 63–72. Walsh writes, "The most foundational distinction in biblical faith is between neither

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The practice of this *scientia-sapientia* belongs to the sacramental and spiritual practices by which the believer seeks union with the God revealed in Christ. Within this contemplative ascent, Scripture, as itself *sacra doctrina*, enables the believer to participate with the saints (including the prophets and apostles) in the *sacra doctrina* of the Trinity, a participation that requires the whole set of practices and materials identified by Abraham as the "canonical heritage." The *scientia-sapientia* that Aquinas proposes in the *Summa Theologiae* is thus not a rationalist knowledge/wisdom, but an embodied wisdom, rooted in the gifts of creation transformed and elevated by grace, that is a participation in the One who says, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (Jn 8:31-32). As Adrian Walker has remarked about the modern understanding of objectivity grounded in "pure" reason: "This typically modern ideal confuses objectivity, which is, of course, both attainable and important, with *neutrality*. But, because neutrality is in fact impossible, the result of the confusion just mentioned is not at all real neutrality, but a *prejudice* about the nature of objectivity. This prejudice diminishes the loving, disponible attentiveness to reality in all of its factors that is the true core of genuine objectivity and, indeed, intelligence in the first place."[29] As opposed to a nominalist account of human rationality (reason and will) as autonomous, truth and goodness constitute and draw human rationality, for Aquinas as for the patristic-medieval tradition.

The goal of *sacra doctrina* is soteriological: being configured to the cruciform image of the Word incarnate. By sharing in the Truth of God, a sharing fully possible only through God's gifts of faith, hope, and love, we become his friends. Drawing upon the biblical Wisdom literature, Aquinas explains in his introduction to the *Summa contra Gentiles* the soteriological purpose of his pursuit of wisdom:

> Among all human pursuits, the pursuit of wisdom is more perfect, more noble, more useful and more full of joy. It is more perfect because, in so far as a man gives himself to the pursuit of wisdom, so far does

heaven and earth, nor even good and evil, and certainly not infinite and finite or eternal and temporal, but Creator and creation. It is here that the biblical witness both begins and ends" (2). For further discussion see the introduction and first chapter of my *Scripture and Metaphysics*.

[29] Adrian Walker, "Editorial: Fundamentalism and the Catholicity of Truth," *Communio* 29 (2002): 5–27, at 9; cf. 23. Walker describes this development as the "secularization of *scientia*," and he attributes it to the division between nature and grace described by Henri de Lubac, S.J. Nature itself, one could add, has inbuilt teleologies (distinct, though not separable in actuality, from the gratuitous teleology of grace), and so the participatory dimension of "objectivity" is both Christological and metaphysical. Walker emphasizes, as do I, historical "participation in Christ's revelatory act" (11). On these questions, see also Lewis Ayres, "On the Practice and Teaching of Christian Doctrine," *Gregorianum* 80 (1999): 33–94, which likewise draws upon Aquinas, Augustine, and Hans Urs von Balthasar to advance an account of biblical interpretation as participatory *doctrina*.

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> he even now have some share in true beatitude. And so a wise man has said: 'Blessed is the man that shall continue in wisdom' (Ecclus. 14:22). It is more noble because through this pursuit man especially approaches to a likeness to God Who 'made all things in wisdom' (Ps. 103:24). And since likeness is the cause of love, the pursuit of wisdom especially joins man to God in friendship. That is why it is said of wisdom that 'she is an infinite treasure to men! which they that use become the friends of God' (Wis. 7:14). It is more useful because through wisdom we arrive at the kingdom of immortality. For 'the desire of wisdom bringeth to the everlasting kingdom' (Wis. 6:21). It is more full of joy because 'her conversation hath no bitterness, nor her company any tediousness, but joy and gladness' (Wis. 7:16).[30]

Ironically, Abraham, in opposing the epistemizing of theology, has fallen into the trap of treating Aquinas's *sacra doctrina* as epistemologically ordered, and thus he reads Aquinas as if Aquinas's theology were not participatory to its very core. When Aquinas is read with nominalist lenses, his theology, and thus his deployment of Scripture, becomes arid and barren. When such nominalism is diagnosed and excised, reading of Aquinas's theology and exegesis can once again take place with insight into Aquinas's transformative purposes and thus his continuity, rather than discontinuity, with the biblical and patristic practice of *sacra doctrina*. In addition to this point, Abraham's account of post-Aquinas decline offers a second lesson: the need to read Scripture as "soteriological," as caught up within the graced participatory pattern of the entirety of Christian life.

It can hardly be denied that many biblical scholars and theologians do not read Scripture in this way, but instead treat Scripture as a set of ancient texts whose diverse claims must be adjudicated first epistemologically. As Walker states, "The question is simply what counts as science—and, so, whether or not the paradigm of 'scientific' exegesis that dominates Scriptural interpretation today is indeed sufficiently scientific. Ultimately, this question hinges on the nature of *history*."[31] This seems to me to

[30] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, Book I, ch. 2 (trans. Anton C. Pegis, F.R.S.C. [Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975], pp. 61–62).

[31] Walker, "Editorial: Fundamentalism and the Catholicity of Truth," 21. Just before this quotation Walker writes: "If, in fact, the inspiration of Scripture passes through the Church's participation in Jesus' 'traditioning,' though without ever being simply reducible to it, then the historical genesis of the Biblical text is *never* neutral with respect to Tradition—and, therefore, cannot be properly understood without participation in the Church's sharing in Jesus' traditioning. To be sure, the introduction of the traditional reading of Scripture into 'scientific' exegesis need not, indeed, *should not*, mean a proof-texting that ignores the *specificity* of Biblical discourse in order to dragoon the Scriptural text into the service of some *a priori* agenda. There can and should be a relatively autonomous scientific exegesis in the Church" (ibid.). I share Walker's sense that "participation" is the key to understanding what ecclesial exegesis of Scripture might look like. Cf. my "Participation and Exegesis: Response to Catherine Pickstock," *Modern Theology* (2005): 587–601.

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be exactly right. If the Christian life is a graced participation in God, then so is history. As I have argued elsewhere, Aquinas's theology of history relies upon "participation."[32] Re-reading Aquinas with Abraham's concerns in mind may thus, happily, foster a renewal in soteriological, not epistemological, biblical interpretation.

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[32] This is the key point of *Christ's Fulfillment of Torah and Temple: Salvation according to Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002).

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