

THE BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF POPE BENEDICT XVI

I. INTRODUCTION: 1. Biblical Theology: "...unified understanding of the saving truths of inspired Scripture, as they have been handed down in the tradition of the Church."

-- Grounded in search for new synthesis in theology which unites truths & imperatives of faith with tools of modern historical & literary study of Scripture.

2. Understanding based on:
 - a) Unity of the Old and New Testaments
 - b) Christ as the interpretive key of the Scriptures
 - c) Church's divine liturgy (Eucharist) as fulfillment & actualization of Scripture's saving truths.

3. Theology based on continuity with Church's Tradition: a) Scholarly effort to recover forms of primitive Church finds deep unity & dialogic relation between divine Word and Church concludes:

- 1) Hermeneutic of Faith provides greatest explanatory power of biblical texts
- 2) Regard authors of Sacred Scripture as **normative** for approach to theology

b) Recovery of early Christianity reveals original unity of Word, Sacrament, & Church Authority

c) Early Church: Three "establishments" critical for authentic interpretation of Word of God:

- 1) *Apostolic Succession*: guarantees faithful transmission of apostolic witness to future generations
- 2) *Canon*: List of sacred texts deemed to be truly Word of God (suitable for liturgy)

-- acknowledged "sovereignty of Word," and Church as "servant of the Word."

-- Fixed form of Word as "single Scripture" and "master text:" OT & NT in unified "Bible."

-- Word and Church's witness to that Word cannot be separated.

3) *Rule of Faith*: Guarantee Church's authentic interpretation of Word consistent w/ apostolic witness.

II. DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS OF BIBLICAL THEOLOGY A. ***Biblical Realism***: Seeks meaning of divine Word, as it has developed over time in the living subject of the Church. (Liturgy, Fathers, Tradition):

1) Trusts the biblical Word; presumes the historical "reality" or "facticity" of words/events in text.

-- Holds the Christ of the Gospels to be the real Jesus; all of the Gospels tell us about same Jesus; and all of them together help us to know the true Jesus of history, who is the ***Christ of Faith!***

2) Faith is founded on the Bible: "A God who cannot intervene in history ... is not the God of the Bible"

3) Historical Reality of Jesus: "Reality of the birth of Jesus by the Virgin Mary;...effective institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper; His Resurrection from them dead are elements of Faith that can and must defend against only a presumably superior historical knowledge."

"-- That Jesus – in all that is essential – was effectively who the Gospels reveal Him to be is not mere historical conjecture but a fact of faith."

4) Jesus had to be extraordinary: “They don’t crucify average professors!”

“... unless there had been something extraordinary in what happened, unless the person and words of Jesus radically surpassed the hopes and expectations of the time, there is no way to explain why He was crucified or why he made such an impact. As early as 20 years after Jesus’ death the great Christ hymn of the Letter to the Philippians (CF Phil 2:6-11) that offers us a fully developed Christology, states that

“Jesus was equal to God but emptied himself, became man, and humbled himself to die on the cross, and that to him now belongs the worship of all creation, the adoration that God, through the prophet Isaiah said was due him alone (CF Isa 45:23).”

B. Unity of Bible and the Christological Hermeneutic: Co-penetration of the NT & OT and the OT’s interpretation in the light of Christ are key to Benedict’s biblical theology.

1) Unity of Bible an important consequence of Hermeneutic of Faith, without which, “... Scripture itself is not Scripture; rather an ill-assorted ensemble of bits of lit. that cannot claim normative significance...”

-- Rooted in preaching of Jesus who “imparted his message as a new interpretation of the OT” and thus, made this way of reading normative for New Testament authors.

-- Cites Luke’s description of post Easter Jesus teaching the disciples that the OT prophets, psalms and Moses are to be read in reference to his coming (Lk 24:27, 44-45).

-- W/O faith’s imperative, Figure of Jesus gets continually split into new “pictures” of Jesus... eg., Jesus the: logia; philanthropist; “marginal Jew;” Jewish Rabbi; revolutionary; feminist; etc.

2) Christological Hermeneutic: a) Christ is the **hinge** who unifies and explains the OT and NT. Christ is the “One that Moses and the prophets had spoken of.”

-- As a whole, Scripture moves inexorably toward the figure of Christ: “The NT itself wished to be no more than the complete and full understanding of the OT, made possible in Christ...”

-- “whole OT is a movement of transition to Christ, a waiting for the One in whom all its promises would come true; in whom the ‘Covenant’ would be fulfilled in the New Covenant.”

b) Singular covenant plan for salvation of all humanity: “... the Church herself is situated within the eternal covenant of the Almighty whose plans are immutable; respects the children of the promise.”

--“ Right from the beginning, the promise to Abraham guarantees salvation history’s inner continuity from the patriarchs of Israel down to Christ and to the Church of Jews & Gentiles...”

C. Transcendent Meaning of Biblical Words and Events: 1) Twofold meaning (literal/historical; spiritual)

a) Literal & Historical: Bible purports to document historical events, *first* in life of Israel; *later*, events in the life of Jesus and his Church.

b) Spiritual: (allegorical, moral, analogical) Events in Bible are more than moments in lives of a people. Bible claims that God himself was at work in the events it records; and that the words of various characters and their deeds represent the active intervention of God.

c) Benedict's 'Sense' & Inspiration of Scripture: based on findings of "source criteria" = how various texts were shaped and formed thru constant re-readings & reinterpretations over centuries

d) Decisive Nature of Church as Living Subject of the Word: "Inspiration" is part of the dialogic dynamic inherent in the relation between the Word of God and the people of God who receive this Word, interpret it and hand it on... Because they are borne in the Church, the living subject of the Word, the meanings of scriptural text cannot be "fixed to a particular moment in history." Later texts are always in dialogue with earlier ones, commenting on and reinterpreting them..."

e) Implications: 1) "Surplus of Meaning": While biblical events are factual, their meanings far transcend "historical facticity," because God in his spirit is their author. This surplus meaning gives biblical events significance for all time and for all men.

Divine meaning of scriptural events is contained within the original event, even though it transcends mere facticity. e.g., Jewish Passover liturgy was oriented toward its fulfillment in the Eucharist of Jesus. Thus, institution of the Eucharist at Last Supper is part of the "surplus of meaning" intended in the biblical event of the Passover."

2) "Hear the Living Speaker, Himself:" Literal meaning of text; must seek intentions of texts & events.

3) Typology the Essence of the Spiritual Sense: a) historical events and the Word of God are units in the singular action and intention of God.

b) reveals the unity and cohesion of history in light of that "central event" of history, the coming of the Word of God in the flesh.

c) without understanding the spiritual sense, there is "no revelation" in the scriptural text. Thus, modern exegesis' exclusive focus on literal & historical word of Scripture is insufficient.

D. IMPORTANCE OF CHURCH'S ECCLESIAL STRUCTURE FOR INTERPRETATION. 1) Spiritual Interpretation: Neither private nor subjective; not determined by caprice of individual interpreter. Spiritual exegesis always found in the *rule of faith, symbols and liturgy* of the Church.

2) Theology is nothing more than the understanding of Scripture from the heart of the Church. "Only Scrip as it is understood in faith is truly holy Scripture." This understanding makes Scripture 'revelation.'

III. BENEDICT'S THEOLOGY A. Christological Interpretation of the Old Testament: 1) Typological interpretation of OT that begins in NT and continues in the Fathers of the Church.

- Centered on the unity of the Bible
- that unity, Fathers' interpretive key to the Scriptures, was Jesus Christ, himself.
- OT is to be read as a "journey toward Jesus Christ."

2) Christ solves the problems of: How OT relates to NT; how Gospel relates to the Law: -- Individual passages are understood only in terms of the whole, which derives meaning from its end = Jesus Christ.

B. Faithful Continuity with Church Tradition: 1) Dogmatic: Church's conciliar creeds

2) Liturgical: Interpretation of biblical legacy of Church liturgical worship almost equally authoritative
 -- ..."being original interpretation of biblical heritage, has no need to justify itself..."
 -- Church's Christological beliefs in particular were shaped by the liturgy; entire parts of the NT are in fact about liturgy and worship.

C. Importance of Liturgy: 1) Liturgy has Normative Authority: regarding texts' interpretations:

-- "The liturgy is the true, living environment of the Bible... which can be understood only in this living environment within which it first engaged..."

-- "the Word heard in the liturgy is heard in the "great communion of the Church of all times..."

2) Benedict's Theology: Ordered to the liturgical encounter with the living Word that speaks in Scripture and brings about the very promises it speaks of in the life of the believer.

-- "the texts of the Bible, this great book of Christ, are not to be seen as the literary products of some scribes at their desks, but as the words of Christ himself delivered in the celebration of holy Mass."

-- "In the Mass, the liturgy gives the biblical Word its fulfillment. Interpretation becomes prayer and is united with Christ's prayer in the Eucharistic Prayer."

3) Scripture Alive in the Liturgy of the Living Church: "is also God's present power in the world today.

-- a power which remains an inexhaustible source of hope throughout all generations..."

D. Theology of the 'Divine Economy': "Bible tells a 'coherent story' of God's creation and salvation..."

-- Church Fathers: 'Economy' = deeds & words by which God reveals Himself in history:

1) Shows the unfolding in history of a divine 'pedagogy' that culminates in the revelation of Christ.

-- God adapts humanity to His own ways and prepares us for communion with Him.

2) Meaning of OT & NT shown in divine intent of this long tutelage: "Totality of Scriptures on which Christian faith rests is God's 'testament' to mankind issued in two stages as proclamation of His will..."

3) God's will for the world is His **testamentum** or covenant with humanity; by which God desires to father His people – making all men & women one family with him in a communion of love.

4) Benedict's concepts of Christ and Church are founded on the ideas of covenant and economy"

-- The church is "God's family," the living subject by which "the Father ... wishes to make a single family in His Son..."

IV. SUMMARY. 1) Critique of "scientific" study of Scripture; Historical-Critical method's systematic skepticism. Hermeneutic of Faith as most powerful explanatory model for interpreting Scripture.

2) Unified view of entire Bible as divinely inspired Word of God who reveals His love for mankind.

3) Accepts NT, esp. Gospels & Acts as eyewitness accounts of Jesus public ministry and teaching.

4) Entire body of Sacred Scripture leads up to and is fulfilled in the Paschal Mystery of Christ's institution of the Holy Eucharist, His sacrificial death on the Cross; and His Resurrection.