PARTICIPATORY

Biblical Exegesis

A Theology of Biblical Interpretation

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The chapters of this book advance the proposal that Christian biblical exegesis, in accord with the Christian and biblical understanding of reality, should envision history not only as a linear unfolding of individual moments, but also as an ongoing participation in God’s active providence, both metaphysically and Christologically-pneumatologically.

What are the implications of this proposal? While it must await a full spelling-out in the chapters themselves, some implications can be identified here. In agreement with historical-critical exegesis, I affirm that the Bible should be studied in its original ancient contexts. Yet what I call “participatory” biblical exegesis also holds that these original contexts never stand on their own. While temporal reality is a “linear” unfolding of moments, it is so precisely as participating in the triune God. Moment follows moment in succession, and yet these moments are not atomistic, but rather constitute an organic web of interrelation. This is so because the intimate “vertical” presence of the Trinity’s creative and redemptive action suffuses the “linear” or “horizontal” succession of moments. This metaphysical and Christological-pneumatological participation in God joins past, present, and future realities in a unified whole, so that through God’s presence each moment is related intrinsically, not merely extrinsically, to every other moment. It follows that one properly understands historical-temporal reality by integrating its linear and participatory dimensions. In short, my thesis is that to enter into the realities taught in the biblical texts requires not
only linear-historical tools (archeology, philology, and so forth), but also, and indeed primarily, participatory tools—doctrines and practices—by which the exegete enters fully into the biblical world.³

The problematic situation I seek to address is well captured by the biblical scholar Walter Moberly, who eloquently and accurately describes the current disjunction between biblical interpretation and systematic theology:

For most Christians there are also [in addition to the creeds] various post-patristic formulations and confessions which are also normative. On the other hand, none of these doctrinal confessions were formulated by the biblical writers, nor (in all likelihood) even envisaged by them. Although the biblical writers provide a content for which the Fathers and others have sought to provide appropriate means of articulation and appropriation, such formulations are always technically anachronistic with regard to any particular biblical text in its likely original context. It is common knowledge that modern biblical criticism only became a recognizable discipline through the process of explicit severing of the Bible from classic theological formulations. The basis for this was the belief that only so could the Bible be respected and heard in its own right, untrammeled by preconceptions which supposed that the answers were already known even before the questions were asked, or by anachronistic impositions of the conceptualities and assumptions of subsequent ages. The fruitfulness of the severance, in terms of a clearer sense of practical and conceptual differences both within the Bible and between the Bible and post-biblical formulations, is well known. Moreover, the approach has been justified theologically, at least by Protestants, in terms of the need for the authentic voice of scripture to critique the always provisional formulations of post-biblical theology. This has led to a curious situation. To be a Christian means, at least in part, the acceptance and appropriation of certain theological doctrines and patterns of living. Yet the task of reading the Bible “critically” has regularly been defined precisely in terms of the exclusion of these doctrines and patterns of living from the interpretative process.⁴
This “curious situation” has led theologians and biblical scholars increasingly to recognize the need for a deeper philosophical and theological understanding of historical realities. As Adrian Walker remarks with regard to the dominant “scientific” philosophy of history, “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.” In this book I suggest that a fully historical biblical exegesis depends on reinstating the participatory dimension of historical realities. One way to recover a fuller account of historical realities is to seek insight into why history became understood as solely linear or horizontal in the first place. Let me briefly introduce this approach, which I take up again in much more detail in chapters 1 and 2.

Linear and Participatory History

Numerous scholars have argued that fourteenth-century metaphysical nominalism led, in a gradual fashion as its implications were developed, to the modern understanding of history. While nominalism began in the twelfth century as a debate over the metaphysical status of such universals as “man,” later fourteenth-century “nominalist” thinkers advanced a powerful critique of the patristic-medieval account of the relationship between human beings and God. The standard patristic-medieval account explained creatures in terms of finite participation in divine being, and grace as a radical Christological-pneumatological deepening of this participation. As Norris Clarke comments with regard to Thomas Aquinas’s approach to reality:

This key metaphysical doctrine of St. Thomas—reconciling the One and the Many in the universe as diverse participations of all beings in the central perfection of existence through limiting essence—if properly understood, opens up a magnificent synoptic vision that can easily deepen into a religious or mystical vision of the whole universe of real beings as a single great community of
existents, with a deep “kinship” of similarity running through them all, which turns out when fully analyzed to imply that all are in some way images of God, their Source, each in its own unique but limited (imperfect) way.  

By contrast, for various reasons, the fourteenth-century nominalist approach to conceiving the relationship between creatures and God radicalized the patristic-medieval account of God’s freedom and creaturely contingency, so that “Creation itself became a discontinuous act to be renewed at each moment of a creature’s existence.” If I might summarize here the arguments of chapter 1, a new conception of the creature–Creator relationship emerged that, by breaking the participatory relationship of creatures to God, appears to have encouraged the modern understanding of temporal reality as a strictly linear or horizontal continuum rather than a participation in God (except when conceived extrinsically as a function of God’s will). Once the “historical” is understood as a solely linear temporal continuum, then a separation of historical exegesis from patristic-medieval exegesis becomes inevitable. As we will see in chapter 2, the former comes to provide historical/conceptual insights, the latter at best “merely” mystical meanings.

The participatory structure of the life of grace finds support in Scripture’s teaching that Christians “share Christ’s suffering” (1 Pet 4:13) so that they might “partake in the glory that is to be revealed” (cf. 1 Pet 5:1) and “become partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet 1:4).

What happens, however, if the order of grace is recognized as participatory while the order of creation is not? As I propose in chapter 1, late-medieval nominalist metaphysics brings about this situation, and the resulting account of reality, inclusive of time and history, is not theologically satisfying. Colin Gunton has put the problem well: “All historical action takes place with some relation to God,” a relation contextualized “within the created order established by divine action” and marked by human “intentional and purposive activity” in time.

Recovering this participatory way of understanding human and divine action assists in uniting traditional historical-critical biblical scholarship (which generally sees history as a linear continuum to be recon-
constructed) with patristic-medieval biblical scholarship (which sees history in relation to the triune God in whom we participate). As I should emphasize at the outset, there need be no dichotomy between the two approaches; they are not mutually exclusive.\textsuperscript{12}

Yet, in proposing this understanding of historical reality—linear and participatory, the horizontal participating in the vertical—one cannot help but raise the concerns about “eisegesis” mentioned by Moberly. At stake is the biblical texts’ historical character. For participatory biblical exegesis, it is not just that the words of Scripture point beyond themselves despite their very human historical composition and transmission. Rather, it is precisely in their humanness that the biblical texts are participatory. The texts and their human authors are already historically caught up in a participatory relationship, however obscure, with the trans-temporal realities of faith (Israel as God’s covenantal people, Jesus Christ, the Mystical Body, the sacraments, and so forth).\textsuperscript{13} Can exegesis that proceeds along these lines be sensitive to the “messiness” of the human composition and transmission of Scripture?

It seems to me that the answer is “yes.” For one thing, such problems as the apparent discrepancies in the Pentateuch or between the gospels no longer loom as large as they do when truth claims in biblical interpretation stand or fall entirely on history as solely linear. Second, the patristic-medieval tendency to suppose that the realities depicted by the biblical authors are truly penetrated by the Church’s later theological and metaphysical explanatory categories is not so much a condoning of eisegesis as it would seem to be from a perspective that understands historical realities as solely linear. Since historical realities are richer than a solely linear or atomistic understanding of time might suggest, the Church’s theological and metaphysical “reading into” biblical texts may largely be expected to illuminate the realities described in Scripture rather than to obscure them.\textsuperscript{14} While I discuss this point more fully in chapters 3–5, I should note that here I am agreeing with numerous contemporary historical-critical biblical scholars. Richard Hays, for instance, has recently challenged biblical scholars to read the gospel narratives with eyes illumined by the reality that Christ has risen from the dead.\textsuperscript{15}

Indeed, participatory biblical exegesis is already being done by numerous contemporary Protestant and Catholic biblical exegetes, as well
as by theologians, preachers, and persons in the pew in their efforts to understand and proclaim biblical revelation. Participatory biblical exegesis locates the linear-historical details within a participatory-historical frame, a frame established by God’s creative and redemptive work in history. Such exegesis is ongoing whenever people presume that a biblical text about Jesus is about the Jesus whom they worship in the Church, or whenever people suppose that the local churches founded by St. Paul have a real analogue today. It is ongoing whenever people pray, receive the sacraments, or ask forgiveness in the context of the reading and teaching of Scripture. It involves an understanding of historical realities, of our place in the history of salvation, that comes naturally to the believer. Yet it is one whose justification has largely been lost and needs reclaiming.

This book seeks to contribute to that task. The modern (metaphysical) understanding of history as a solely linear continuum, insofar as this understanding has taken hold in biblical scholarship, is incapable of accounting for the theological and metaphysical reality of human history. History cannot be confined to what can be known by linear historical modes, important as those modes are; the historical includes a participation in realities known by faith.

While Catholics and Protestants differ somewhat as to what those realities are, they agree much more than they disagree. Inaccessible to solely linear history, realities such as the Trinity, creation, original sin, Israel, divine Revelation, Christ crucified and risen, the grace of the Holy Spirit, the mission of the Church to proclaim the gospel and celebrate the sacraments, the forgiveness of sins, divine Providence, and final judgment largely unite Protestant and Catholic understandings of the participatory dimensions of human history.

Interpretation of the Bible thus requires, as Joseph Ratzinger puts it, examination of the biblical text’s “proper historical context” in light of a Christological-pneumatological understanding of reality: “the mechanical principle must be balanced by the teleological principle.” The realities recognized by linear historical-critical research are thus illumined also by the participatory understanding of reality, which flows both from faith (the order of grace) and from metaphysical reflection (the order of creation). Indeed paradoxically, the insistence on the va-
vailability of the participatory aspect of historical realities upholds history’s linear dimension against postmodernism, by affirni ng the existence of an intelligible continuum. 17

I should note that my proposal in this book should not be confused with the function that David Williams gives to the spiritual sense of Scripture—namely, to be “a bridge between past intention and present situation.” 18 As traditionally understood, the spiritual sense of Scripture serves to go deeper into the infinitely rich dimensions of the biblical realities. Williams is right, therefore, to say that the spiritual sense is not “a privileged or alternative understanding of the witness itself.” 19 But my proposal is different insofar as I hold that the literal sense itself possesses the resources for bridging past and present, because of the literal sense’s conjoined linear and participatory dimensions. The literal sense of the divinely ordained realities present and active in linear history (for instance, covenantal Israel, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Eucharist, the Church) possesses a participatory-historical dimension, since these diachronic realities expose how human time, already metaphysically participatory in God, shares ever more deeply in the infinite wisdom and love of divine action. The “bridge” then is another direction suggested by Williams, that of more fully drawing together divine and human agency so as to understand history more deeply. 20 I propose doing this through exploration of the inseparability of the linear and participatory dimensions of reality.

Admittedly, however, it is quite risky to broaden the concept of historical reality to an extent that most non-Christian, and many Christian, historians would find hard to accept. 21 I am aware that all the talk of metaphysics (participatory and nominalist) and its exegetical implications may put off both biblical scholars and theologians, for whom such discourse may be an undiscovered country or an outmoded theory. It might seem preferable to lay the standard linear-historical exegetical approach (with its hermeneutical variants) alongside other more “theological” exegetical approaches, as others have done. The most important example of such a strategy, of course, is that of Brevard Childs. This introduction requires here, therefore, a brief assessment of his work before I develop my approach in the chapters of this book. 22
The Contribution of Brevard Childs

How does the project of participatory biblical exegesis relate to Brevard Childs’s canonical approach? Throughout his impressive corpus, Childs’s main concern has been how to relate theology and history. In a relatively early essay he notes that when the patristic-medieval integration of history and theology broke down, the Reformers faced the problem that “to restrict biblical interpretation to a strictly grammatical reading seemed to threaten the whole theological dimension of the Bible as it related both to teaching and practice.” While he suggests that the Reformers reunited history and theology under the aegis of the literal sense, he finds that this unity too quickly collapsed due to the dissolution not (as previously) of theology but of history. Similarly in his most recent work, *The Struggle to Understand Isaiah as Christian Scripture*, he notes that “the heirs of the Enlightenment, indebted to but differing from the Protestant Reformers,” responded to the patristic-medieval exegetical tradition by arguing “that serious biblical interpretation required a rigorous separation between the author’s historical interpretation and all subsequent theological reflection.” The early Childs called for the restoration of the unity of history and theology in the literal sense of Scripture, but although he advanced the canon as a norm, he had not yet fully articulated how to achieve this unity. Childs’s mature account of his canonical approach enables him to affirm that the separation between history and theology is both methodologically valuable and fundamentally bridgeable.

He grants that the biblical texts contain a multilayered history that must be distinguished from later exegetical-theological framing, both intrabiblical and extrabiblical. The recovery of this multilayered history serves as a “constraining force” that, when functioning properly, keeps theology biblical. As Childs affirms in this regard, “The central hermeneutical issue turns on the question of whether there is indeed coercion from the biblical text in terms of its subject matter to serve as a constraining force.” Distinctly historical research into the authorship and redaction of biblical texts thus increases theological understanding of the Bible by acquainting theologians with the constrain-
ing pattern of God's historical activity. In this regard he agrees “with von Rad’s position that no stage in the Old Testament’s long history of growth is obsolete, and that something of each phase has been conserved until its final form. . . . The hermeneutical issue at stake does not lie in an alleged contrast between historical process and scripture’s final form.”  

As might be expected, then, the problem for exegesis, in Childs’s view, ultimately lies not with history, but with theology: God's action “cannot be fused with empirical history, nor can it be separated.”  

In other words, how are we to understand God’s action so as to bridge the distance between God’s action and history in Scripture’s literal sense? 

For Childs, as God’s action, this history must be understood theologically; as God’s action in history through historical agents, it must be understood historically. Childs concludes that the bridge between the two is the final form of God’s canonical revelation. He explains that “to speak of the privileged state of the canonical form is not to disregard Israel’s past history. However, it refuses to fuse the canonical process of the shaping of the witness of the prophets and apostles with an allegedly objective scientific reconstruction that uses a critical filter to eliminate those very features that constitute its witness, namely, the presence of God in the history of Israel and the church.” 

The canon provides the link that enables the interpreter to appreciate historical research critically from a theological perspective, making it possible for Childs to see a broad continuity between his canonical exegesis and patristic-medieval forms of exegesis as regards biblical authority, the literal and spiritual senses of Scripture, the relationship of the two Testaments, the relationship of the divine and human authors, the unity of Scripture, the Bible’s Christological content, and what he calls the “dialectical” understanding of history. 

All this is very well, but does Childs avoid a disjunction between the “canon” and “history” by making the former serve as the theological guide for evaluating the latter? In other words, in his effort to articulate their relationship as dialectical, does history lose too much of its theological depth and instead become a linear substratum on which theology, through its canonical principle, works?  

In Childs’s view, as noted above, non-theological readings of the “history” within the canon serve
theological purposes by exposing the workings of God in history. But the danger, to which Childs is well attuned, is that the unresolved issue of the nature of history (theological or non-theological?) threatens even in canonical exegesis to “eliminate those very features that constitute its [canonical] witness, namely, the presence of God in the history of Israel and the church.” Given this danger, he argues for a strict distinction between study of the Bible as “the sacred scriptures of the church” and “the study of the Bible in history-of-religions categories,” and yet he affirms that the former cannot cut itself off from the latter: “There is a subtle interrelationship that must be maintained.” Without this relationship, the “historical nature” of the Church’s “confessional stance toward its scriptures” would falter.

To what degree does Childs equate this “historical nature” with the presuppositions of “history-of-religions categories”? Describing Aquinas’s practice of “intertextual” reading, Childs comments on the expansion of the literal meaning and the value of the movement from the literal to the spiritual sense of Scripture:

The sophistication of his use of intertextual reference emerges especially when Thomas moves from the literal sense to a figurative level of interpretation. For example, in chapter 1 [of Isaiah], Thomas summarizes at the outset the intention of the main body of the text: the advent of Christ and the calling of the Gentiles. However, what exactly he understands by these two rubrics is revealed by close attention to the verses that follow. Ps. 25:10 begins his interpretation: “All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth.” This is followed by Luke 2:34: “This child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel.” Next the Apostle Paul provides a transition to the Gentiles in Rom. 11:25: “a hardening has come upon part of Israel until the full number of the gentiles come in and so all Israel will be saved.” In sum, lest we think that Thomas is only concerned with the advent of Christ and the inclusion of the nations, the intertextual references show that he interpreted the biblical context to address the ultimate joining of the “Old Testament saints” with “those hardened within Israel,” who together with the Gentiles comprise the salvation of all of Israel.
Another form of Thomas’s application of intertextuality is the addition of *notandum super illo verbo*, which are set editorially usually at the end of a section. Usually this rubric consists of theological reflections focused on a single word or concept that he joins together on the basis of content. This is to say, Thomas makes the association according to his understanding of a resemblance of subject matter that extends to both testaments (cf. chapter 9 on the attributes of the Savior). This procedure, like the *dicta probantia*, consists of a catena of verses without commentary that nevertheless prompts the reader to reflect on the nature of the reality undergirding these different witnesses. To name this ontological interpretation is probably a terminological anachronism, but it does touch on an essential feature of Thomas’s theological approach to the substance of scripture.  

Childs recognizes the central importance for Aquinas of interpretive reflection “on the nature of the reality undergirding these different witnesses.” As Childs suggests, this “ontological interpretation” involves expanding the “literal sense” through parallel biblical passages (and, he could have added, patristic commentary and metaphysical reflection) and inspires interpretive deepening through the spiritual senses.  

He also appreciatively notes “Thomas’s careful attention to the ontological force exerted by the subject matter itself (its *res*).”  

Yet Childs is unwilling to go quite as far as Aquinas. His hesitancy stems from the fact that “it remains hermeneutically significant to understand the range of questions that are in accord with the intention of the biblical author and those that are only indirectly related to the writer’s concerns.” Aquinas, Childs thinks, affirms this in principle (through the affirmation of the value of the literal sense), but in practice conflates questions about the literal sense with questions, such as the quality of prophetic knowledge, that do not pertain to the literal sense understood as the author’s intended meaning. In Childs’s canonical approach, such philosophical/theological questioning is kept carefully separated from research into the text’s original meaning. This separation limits the literal sense to a historical meaning that includes only the linear aspect of history, the province of “history-of-religions
Can these categories do justice even to the linear aspect of history? Childs seems to assume that in a certain sense they can, even while denying that “there is nothing intrinsically Christian about the Old Testament.”

Yet, one might ask, what would happen if one insisted on a historical engagement that includes the knowledge of faith, or even a minimal belief in a Creator? Would theological and metaphysical convictions swallow the diversity and messiness of linear history, and thereby swallow the distinct voices of the scriptural texts in their historical contexts? So long as the historical task is properly understood, the answer is surely “no.” N. T. Wright has described the historical method as one of “hypothesis and verification” where one seeks to explain the historical data as simply as possible, taking into account the society’s worldview, as evidenced by its symbols, characteristic behavior, and literature, along with what one knows about the aims, intentions, motivations, and mindsets of the historical agents. In connecting the data in this context and developing an account of “what happened,” the historian has to “tell a story.” But, as Childs is well aware, in order to tell the story—any story—one must already accept a framing narrative of what is historically possible and thus of what is presently ongoing. It is here that the (metaphysical and theological) question of whether history is strictly linear or both linear and participatory must be decided.

As Hans Urs von Balthasar puts it, one cannot neutrally describe, for instance, the development of ancient Israel’s religion: “the essential question concerns what is here developing.” This “what,” namely the reality, can be properly known, even as regards historical methodology, only in its metaphysical and teleological participation in God’s providential plan. There is no “original context” whose integrity requires, even temporarily, exegetical neutrality as regards the fullness of the participatory dimensions.

This point only enhances the value of linear-historical research into the Old and New Testaments. The process of hypothesis and verification, and the new hypotheses generated by this process, deepen and challenge our understanding of the particular realities the biblical authors attempt to describe. Von Balthasar also observes (following Karl Barth) that the “gap” between the portraits arrived at by historical-
critical scholarship and the reality known in faith—“between the testimony and that to which it points”—serves to make clear that the words of Scripture are themselves not the realities sought; rather interpreters must seek in and through Scripture the realities to which Scripture points. Yet these realities can only be sought in and through the words of Scripture, in and through the messiness of human history, into which linear-historical research can attain such valuable insight. For its full flourishing, participatory biblical exegesis thus requires not merely theological and metaphysical insights into God’s work of creation and redemption, but also the historical-critical procedure of hypothesis and verification, as well as literary analysis. These approaches give insight into the full fabric of the texts’ richly human aspects, which are both participatory- and linear-historical. The integrity of linear-historical research does not require bracketing the participatory reality of God’s presence and action in history.

In short, historical reconstruction that recognizes that historical reality is not solely linear, but rather is both linear and participatory (in the triune God’s creative and redemptive work), will be illumined both by linear-historical data and by participatory-historical ecclesial judgments about the divine realities involved. Granted the need for historical biblical interpretation open to both the linear and participatory dimensions of the realities of faith, exegetical work requires, as Childs has suggested, the canonical text of the Bible as the inspired communication, in the Church, of the triune God’s saving work. In canonical Scripture the Holy Spirit, through the human authors and the diverse literary-historical modes, makes manifest a “history” possessed of participatory dimensions that exceed what can be garnered from solely linear reconstruction of historical realities. But neither can these participatory dimensions be understood outside of the messiness of “linear” human history; the participatory indwells the linear.

Plan of the Work

In engaging with Childs’s position, then, we have seen that participatory biblical exegesis relies on a delicate interpretive balance, in which
linear and participatory exploration of Scripture must go hand-in-hand without negating either dimension of history. For various reasons, good and bad, this proper balance of participatory and linear was lost in the modern period, and it is not clear that Childs, despite his profound contributions, has fully recovered it. In the situation in which we find ourselves, the participatory dimension no longer counts as “historical” and “history” signifies a realm of human autonomy to which theological realities are extrinsic. Exploring the patristic-medieval participatory understanding of reality, and its gradual displacement from biblical exegesis after the high Middle Ages, is thus the task of chapters 1 and 2.

When the participatory dimension of reality is lacking, either anthropocentric readings or, conversely, theocentric readings that deny the human dimension altogether, take over. By contrast, in participatory biblical exegesis one can integrate conceptually divine and human agency. On the one hand, everything comes from the triune God, the one in whom all finite things participate (metaphysically and Christologically-pneumatologically). For biblical exegesis, this means that the Bible is not ultimately about human beings, but rather about the triune God. Interpreting the texts of the Bible in faith means to encounter, in a radically theocentric fashion, “God teaching.” This is the argument in chapter 3.

On the other hand, the participatory relationship means that God’s action and human action are not in competition. In Scripture, the centrality of God’s teaching does not displace the human writing, editing, transmission, and interpretation of biblical texts, that is, the human aspects of the text. These human aspects, of course, are not solely linear-historical. The task of appreciating the linear-historical “messiness” of the biblical texts requires engaging the human aspects in their participatory-historical dimensions. So chapter 4 shows—by means of dialogue with contemporary Jewish biblical exegesis—that participating in “God teaching” comes about most fruitfully from within the practices that God has ordained for his people. “Historical” and “critical” engagement with the biblical texts thus includes both historical-critical research into the linear past and participatory “wisdom-practices” (liturgical, moral, and doctrinal) that conform the divinely ordained in-
terpretive community, and individual exegetes within it, to the realities expressed in God's teaching as scripturally mediated.  

The central tasks of the first four chapters—namely, (1) renewing our Christological and metaphysical awareness of historical reality as "participatory," and thereby (2) perceiving God the Teacher in Scripture (sacra doctrina) and (3) identifying the role of the community, in Christ and the Holy Spirit, in receiving/teaching this scriptural sacra doctrina—go a significant way, I think, toward reclaiming for contemporary exegesis the strengths of patristic-medieval exegetical practice (which is exemplified in this book largely by Aquinas's exegesis of the Gospel of John). Chapter 5 then addresses the question of whether God's teaching and human ecclesial teaching can be reunited without biblical exegesis appearing to be an exercise of arbitrary power rather than wisdom. This final chapter takes up the modern inheritance in terms of biblical interpretation's relationship to ecclesial authority, and thus ultimately of the relationship of truth to power. An important reason for contemporary critics not wanting to relinquish any of the "objectivity" established by history understood as solely linear is the suspicion that ecclesial tradition and authority lead down a corruptive path in which the Church's authority threatens either human freedom or (by constricting God) divine freedom. On this view, biblical interpretation of the traditional historical-critical kind functions as an independent doctrinal corrective.  

Without overlooking such concerns, this book seeks to assist in the development of a biblical interpretation that understands itself as an ongoing ecclesial participation in God's historical sacra doctrina, and so engages once again with the full dimensions of "history" that the Bible itself envisions. While more is needed that cannot be done in this book, including a full-scale account of revelation and inspiration (and thus ultimately of ecclesiology), the book's proposed exegetical practice recommends itself by its capacity to unite historical-critical research with what otherwise would seem anachronistic or eisegetical readings of the literal sense—readings informed by metaphysical and theological understandings that belong to and are developments from (in Newman's sense) the realities depicted in the biblical text. The literal sense is thereby expanded to include fuller and richer exposition of the realities
present in the text. One can then see more clearly how the spiritual senses of Scripture flow intrinsically from the effort to probe and illumine the literal sense.\(^56\)

Once one understands reality as participatory-historical (providential and Christological-pneumatological) as well as linear-historical, what aspects of patristic-medieval biblical exegesis might once again be found valuable within contemporary biblical exegesis? Let this question stand as an overarching concern of the present book.