Module 3

HERMENEUTICS

Thesis Statement:

"The study of the sacred page, the very soul of sacred theology" (DV24), guided by an understanding of the nature and purpose of the sacred text, demands critical hermeneutics that leads not only to information but formation and transformation of the everyday lives within the believing community. Critical hermeneutics reveals a richer understanding of the sacred text. This renewed biblical exegesis is used practically on the reading of important text, such as the first and second Creation stories in Genesis.

Section 1:
What is Sacred Scripture?

Section 1A - Sacred Scripture

Sacred Scripture, collected in the Bible, is the inspired record of how God dealt with His people, and how they responded to, remembered and interpreted that experience. The Scriptures arose as an expression of the people's experience of God, and as a response to their needs. The Bible was written by persons from the people of God, for the people of God, about the experience of the people of God. Thus, collectively, the Scriptures form "The Book of the People of God, the Church."[1]

God is said to be the "author" of the Bible not in the sense of having taken the place of the human authors, but in the sense that God's grace impelled the human authors to write and directed them to give a pure and reliable expression of the faith of the people of God at their particular stage in salvation history.[2]

Section 2A - Characteristics of Sacred Scripture

A. Biblical Inspiration

Biblical inspiration is a charism referring to the special divine activity, communicated to individual authors, editors and compilers belonging to the community of faith, for the sake of the community of faith. It produced the sacred texts both of the Old Testament and the New Testament.

Sacred Scripture as "inspired" simply means that the entirety of the Bible was written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. God chose certain human authors (not just authors, but even editors and communities), who made full use of their human faculties, but were also guided by the Holy Spirit who so enlightened their minds and moved their wills, that they put down in writing what God wanted written.[3]

For most of Church history, theories of inspiration have focused on the Holy Spirit's influence on particular biblical authors. The great Alexandrian theologian Origen understood inspiration as a kind of "illumination" of the biblical author that gave a relatively greater place for human agency, as the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is not a direct verbal transference of information from divine origin to human recipient, but rather a production of ideas within the human author's mind. Such an understanding also allowed for the possibility of human error in biblical texts, as will be revealed in the next section.

More contemporary theories on Biblical inspiration have moved away from the singular author theory. Rather, most modern biblical scholars present the following important question: if many biblical texts emerged out of a multi-stage process of development, sometimes being preserved through generations of oral transmission before being transcribed as a written text, then how does one identify the author who is the subject of divine inspiration? The solution of Karl Rahner, one of the well-known Catholic systematic theologians, was to resituate inspiration within the life of the early Christian community. Inspiration is presented as a charism active within all the complex human interactions of the early Christian community that ultimately gave rise to the biblical texts. Inspiration becomes a social reality, not just an individual one.[4]

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[1] Cf. *CFC* 81.

[2] Avery Dulles, "Faith and Revelation," in *Systematic Theology Volume 1*, Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John P Galvin eds. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991), 118-9.

[3] *CFC* 85.

[4] Cf. Richard R. Gaillardetz, *By What Authority? A Primer on Scripture, the Magisterium and the Sense of the Faithful* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press), 20-21.

B. Biblical Inerrancy

Biblical inerrancy is often times understood as "freedom from error." We must acknowledge that the books of Scripture, firmly, faithfully and without error, teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wish to see confided to the Sacred Scriptures.[5] This statement is carefully phrased. It affirms the value of the Bible as a whole for transmitting in its purity the truth that leads to salvation, but leaves open the possibility that individual authors may have erred, especially with regard to scientific and historical matters. [6]

To give you a bit of history regarding the development of the Catholic understanding of biblical inerrancy, originally an early version of the schema on divine revelation in the Bible proposed "total inerrancy," regarding all truths whether sacred or profane (*re religiosa et profana*). The reference to "profane truths" (*veritates profanae*) is quite disturbing, as in modern biblical understanding, there are many errors within the Bible concerning such profane truths, like historical and scientific truths. The classic example often cited is Mark 2:26, which recounts David entering the house of God under the high priest Abiathar when, according to 1 Samuel 21:1ff, David did so not under Abiathar but under his father Ahimalech. Was the Bible contradicting itself, and if so, does this counter the inerrancy of the Bible?

In October 2, 1964, Cardinal König of Vienna gave a crucial speech in which he warned that the bishops of the world could not afford to ignore the findings of modern biblical exegesis that certain data of history and the natural sciences contained in the Bible were "deficient." His address was well received by the bishops. Eventually, Vatican II gave a final formulation of Biblical Inerrancy in *Dei Verbum* 11, that shifted the emphasis of inerrancy from the CONTENT of Scripture, to the INTENTION of Scripture.[7]

There are problems, however, when people pick and choose which portions of the Bible are correct or not, just like the point of St. Augustine. He said: "*If you believe what you like in the gospels, and reject what you don't like, it is not the gospel you're believing, but yourself.* " This is reflected by the general sentiments of the bishops in Vatican II, which was to avoid any sense that only "parts" of Scripture were inspired.

For instance, some people overemphasize statements in Genesis to legitimize the subduing of women under men, and the abuse of nature because of our "dominion" over it. Others approach Scripture with legalism, especially the Law found in the Old Testament and use it to pursue various social sins – the various discriminations against women, discrimination against children, discrimination against homosexuals, the push for slavery, and the overemphasis on sexual sins by the hierarchy, just to name a few.

This is the wrong way to view inerrancy. Otherwise, everyone should stop eating shrimp because that's "against the Bible!" We have to look at the totality of the Biblical message, the gospel of Jesus Christ. Remember, for every one statement in the Bible about masturbation, there are around a hundred (an understatement) other passages about justice. This is to put things in perspective.

B. Canon

Because of disputes, the Church found it necessary to make a definitive list, a "canon"(derived from the Greek *kanon*, referring to a "reed" or instrument of measure). A canon of the books were listed, which were decided to have been truly inspired by God and thus have God for their author. The Canon of Scripture is divided into the books written before Jesus' life, the inchoate revelation known as the **Old Testament** and those written after the definitive revelation of Jesus, which is known as the **New Testament**. Guided by the Holy Spirit, the Church determined the inspired and normative books in terms of three important criteria. These are as follows:

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[5] *DV* 11.

[6] Cf. Avery Dulles, "Faith and Revelation," in *Systematic Theology Volume 1*, Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John P Galvin eds. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991), 119-120.

Cf. Richard R. Gaillardetz, *By What Authority? A Primer on Scripture, the Magisterium and the Sense of the Faithful* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press), 22-23.

1. APOSTOLICITY - is the text connected with a known apostle of Christ? Although for the most part, apostolicity has been more a matter of legend, and there is no sure way to prove apostolicity beyond the "claim" that a text is related to an apostle.

2. SOURCE COMMUNITY - what is the community from which the text emerged? E.g. the disruption of early Palestinian Christianity may explain why no strictly Palestinian text ever found its way into the canon. Compare this with the fact that several texts from Syria (Matthew, James and Jude) were accepted.

3. COHERENCE WITH ESSENTIAL GOSPEL MESSAGE - is the text consistent with the general understanding of the Christian message of the early Church? This was a way to prevent text that had Gnostic undertones from being added to the canon. (FYI: Gnosticism is a sect of Christianity that believed that Jesus was only fully divine, but not fully human, therefore, it is contrary to the essential understanding of Christ that has been established in the early Church)

4. LITURGICAL USE - is the text used in liturgy, like the Eucharist or the Sacraments? "In saying Scripture is liturgical, we do not mean to say merely that liturgy is scriptural; but moreover that what was originally liturgy became Scripture. Scripture had its emergence and continued existence in the liturgy, the liturgical life of the Temple and Church, the communal prayers of the people of God."[8]

After a long development, the Church finally accepted as inspired, sacred and canonical the 46 books of the Old Testament and the 27 books of the New Testament that we find in our Catholic Bible.[9]

Many Christians are aware that there are differences between the Catholic and Protestant canon of the Old Testament. The rough classical consensus to explain this was that Luther initially accepted the canon adopted by Catholics today. However, in his debates with Johann Maier of Eck, he was confronted with 2 Maccabees 12:46 that seemed to support the Catholic doctrine of purgatory, which raised the question of whether the books after Ezra were still part of their canon. Eventually, Protestants removed these books from their canon. Catholic typically refer to those books included in their canon, but not that of the Protestants, as "deutero-canonical" books, while Protestants will generally refer to these books as "apocrypha." A more pragmatic explanation for the difference is that of liturgical usage. Protestants have found that these books bear no usage in their own official worship. In the case of the Catholics, many "deutero-canonical" text are still used in the Eucharist and the other Sacraments, and is thus deemed canonical.

What is the purpose of the canon? Scholastic theologians of old would formulate their answer through a wonderful exercise in Latin alliteration: Scripture is the *norma normans non normata* (the norm which norms all other expression of the faith butt which is not itself normed). The canon was made to unite all Christians by grounding them under a normative set of text that will be considered sacred and true. Such attempt at unity is so important, that it is quite impossible for any person to change the canon, whether by addition of new books, or subtraction of already present books. Another important function of the canon is to remind us that Christianity is a historical religion; it is not simply a collection of eternal myths, but it is also a set of historical accounts of God's saving action on behalf of humanity. In other words, Christians do not believe that they can "make it up as they go."The Christian faith is always in some sense tethered to its past, even if that tether can appear elastic at times. The canonical books of the Bible anchor that elastic tether.[10]

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[8] Michael Prokurat, "Orthodox Interpretation of Scripture," in *The Bible in the Churches*, Kenneth Hagan, ed. (Milwaukee: Margquette Univeristy Press, 1998), 62.

[9] Cf. *CFC* 88.

[10] Richard R. Gaillardetz, *By What Authority? A Primer on Scripture, the Magisterium and the Sense of the Faithful* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press), 36.

Activity

Bible Brain Twister
by John Kezer

I once made a remark about the hidden books of the Bible. It was a lulu, kept people looking so hard for facts, and for others it was a revelation. Some were in a jam, especially since the names of the books are not capitalized, but the truth finally struck home to numbers of readers. To others, it was a real job. We want it to be a most fascinating few moments for you. Yes, there will be some really easy ones to spot. Others may require judges to help them. I will quickly admit it usually takes a pastor to find one of the 17, and there will be loud lamentations when it is found. A little lady says she brews a cup of tea so she can concentrate better. See how well you can compete. Relax now, for there really are the names of 17 books of the Bible in these sentences.

Section Conclusion

"Our lives unfold in stories. Perhaps the bible has captivated us for such a long time because it is filled with stories -- stories that transcend time and space that they can happen to any of us, any time. They are vivid, colorful stories with which we can identify -- being born, being lost, being fed. They are stories of healing and of learning, suffering and dying. They are stories that move us, challenge us, and evoke recognition in our hearts.

Who among us cannot feel the spray of the waves as they crash over the boat during the storm on the lake. (Luke 22:23-25), or smell the scent of the ointment or of the woman herself as she dries the feet of Jesus with her hair (John 12:3)? We know the thirst quenching refreshment of a cool drink of water on a hot day, and the deeper thirst that never goes away. We are familiar day, and the deeper thirst that never goes away. We are familiar with dinner parties and wedding feasts, arguments along the way, and the gut-ripping fear of those who wield the sword, whether over our bodies or over our convictions of conscience.

But for anyone who takes this library of stories as a guide for living, the scriptures that we call *sacred* draw us in, inviting us to spend time, entering them deeply enough to be transformed."[11]

Section 2:
Introduction to Hermeneutics

Section 2A - What is Hermeneutics?

The traditional meaning of hermeneutics is relatively simple: the discipline that deals with principles of interpretation. Some writers call it the science of interpretation; others prefer to speak of the art of interpretation. It would be wise to call it a mix of both. It is science in so far as there is a method to the madness, referring to guidelines prescribed as generations of hermeneuts have come up with. There are steps to interpretation, as is logic. However, it is an art in so far as there is also a creative spirit in interpretation, allowing one's imagination to draw meaning where it appears to hide.

Often, the words "hermeneutics" and "exegesis" are used interchangeably. However, for our benefit, it might be prudent to differentiate. Hermeneutics refers to a more general sense of interpretation. As such, hermeneutics can be done on a wide variety of texts, like philosophical writings, the Law, poetics, or narratives of whatever fashion, outside the realm of theology. However, when we speak of exegesis (from the Greek *exēgeomai* [ἐξηγέομαι] which means "explanation" or "interpretation"), it refers solely to Biblical Interpretation. Exegesis is a kind of hermeneutics.

[11] Fran Ferder, *Enter the Story: Biblical Metaphors for Our Lives* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010).

Section 2B - Pioneers of Hermeneutical Theory

Before we begin any sort of delving into exegesis, it might be best to take a look at the history and evolution of hermeneutical theory. Three major pioneers come to mind: Hans-Georg Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur, and E.D. Hirsch Jr.

Hans-Georg Gadamer

The modern theory of interpretation is said to have been heavily influenced by German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer. He is best known for his book *Truth and Method*, published in 1960. It is considered by many to be his *magnum opus*, and arguably his greatest contribution to philosophical hermeneutics.[12]

According to Gadamer, truth cannot reside in the reader's attempt to get back to the author's meaning, for this ideal cannot be realized because every interpreter has a new and different knowledge of the text in the reader's own historical moment. Therefore:

1) Prejudice (*Vorurteil*) in interpretation cannot be avoided, but it is to be encouraged if we are to grasp the whole of a work and not just the parts. This preunderstanding comes from ourselves and not from the text, since the text is indeterminate in meaning.
2) The meaning of a text always goes beyond its author; hence, understanding is not a reproductive but a productive activity. The subject matter, not the author, is the determiner of meaning.
3) The explanation of a passage is neither wholly the result of the interpreter's perspective nor wholly that of the original historical situation of the text. It is instead a "fusion of horizons" (*Horizontverschmellzung*). In the process of understanding, the two perspectives are subsumed into a new third alternative.
4) Past meanings cannot be reproduced in the present because the being of the past cannot become the being in the present.

Paul Ricoeur

French philosopher Paul Ricoeur is another famous hermeneutic phenomenologist. In one of his works, *Interpretation Theory*, published in French in 1965, Ricoeur challenged the notion that a text is simply "talk writ down," a dialogue placed on paper. Instead, in his view writing fundamentally alters the nature of communication and sets up a whole new set of operations.[13] Therefore:

1) A text is semantically independent of the intention of its author. The text now means whatever it says, not necessarily what its author had meant.
2) Literary genres do more than just classify text; they actually give a code that shapes the way a reader will interpret that text.
3) Once texts have been written, their meanings are no longer determined by the understanding the original audiences had of those same texts. Each subsequent audience may now read its own situation into the text, for a text, unlike talk, transcends its original circumstances. The new readings are not any less valid. The must not be completely contradictory to the original audience's understanding, but they can be different, richer or even impoverished.
4) Once a text is written, the sense of what it says is no longer directly related to its referent, that is, what it is about. The new meaning is freed from its situational limits, thereby opening up a whole new world of meaning.

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[12] Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method: Elements of Philosophical Hermeneutics*, English trans. (New York, NY: Seabury, 1975; reprint, Crossroad, 1982).

[13] Cf. Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*, English trans. (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press, 1976)

E.D. Hirsch, Jr.

Eric Donald Hirsch, Jr. is an American literary critic and a professor at the University of Virginia. Considered as the only American to exert a major influence on hermeneutics during the epochal decade of the 1960s, E.D. Hirsch countered the trends established by Gadamer and Ricoeur.

Hirsch affirmed that the meaning of a literary work is determined by the author's intention.[14] In common usage, the terms *meaning* and *significance* overlap. For Hirsch, meaning is that which is represented by the text, and is determined by what the author meant by his use of a particular sign sequence. On the other hand, significance names the relationship between the meaning and something else beyond the author's intention (whether it is the relationship of the meaning to the interpreter, to a person, to an event, to a context, etc.).

As Hirsch argued, "To banish the original author as the determiner of meaning [is] to reject the only compelling normative principle that could lend validity to an interpretaion."[15] Therefore:

1) Verbal meaning is whatever someone (usually the author) has willed to convey by a particular sequence of words and that can be shared by means of linguistic signs.
2) The author's truth-intention provides the only genuinely discriminating norm for ascertaining valid or true interpretation from invalid and false ones.
3) The first objective of hermeneutics is to make clear the text's verbal meaning, not its significance.
4) In this manner, meaning is fixed and unchanging. On the other hand, significance is never fixed and always changing.

Section 2C - The Catholic Approach to Hermeneutics

For hundreds of years, until the time of the Enlightenment, Catholics accepted the Bible literally. The historicity of the text was seldom questioned. However, Catholics had also developed a great sensitivity to deeper, more spiritual meanings of biblical texts, primarily under the influence of many patristic commentators (also called the Church Fathers from ca.100AD-600AD). Take for instance Origen, a Church Father who, in 254AD, expounded on the "allegorical method of exegesis," which stated that there are three meanings to a text, the literal, moral and spiritual. According to Origen, all passages had a spiritual sense, but not all had a literal sense. But even with Origen's groundbreaking work, all throughout a vast majority of Catholic history, believers *still* took things literally,

It was not until the end of the nineteenth century where a glimmer of hope dawned on Catholic exegesis. In 1893, Pope Leo XIII promulgated the encyclical *Providentissimus Deus*, or the Encyclical on the Study of Holy Scripture, the first to definitively tackle the issue of Scripture interpretation. In 1902, he established the Pontifical Biblical Commission, an official body of experts whose ob was to help guide Catholics in the appreciation of the Bible, albeit in a cautious and vigilant manner. Although still very guarded and defensive, the Church began to open to the possibility of a more nuanced form of interpretation.

To give you some idea of the various important milestones in the progress of Catholic biblical interpretation, let us take a look at the following table:

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[14] Cf. E.D. Hirsch Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967).

[15] Ibid., 4-5.

Key Catholic Documents on Biblical Interpretation[16]

Document Title	Author and Year	Description	Authority Level
Providentissimus Deus	Pope Leo XIII (1893)	Papal encyclical that promoted some scientific study of Scripture, but within certain limits, to protect the historicity of biblical data. Catholic scholars were urged to participate in biblical research, but were not allowed to question the Bible's historicity, or cause skepticism on the part of the faithful.	B
Divino Afflante Spirito	Pope Pius XII (1943)	Papal encyclical sometimes called the *Magna Carta* of Catholic biblical studies. This document strongly promoted the use of linguistic and scientific means for professional Bible study among Catholic scholars.	B
Sancta Mater Ecclesia	Pontifical Biblical Commission (1964)	Instruction that recognized three embedded levels of meaning in the Gospel: 1) historical life of Jesus; 2) apostolic preaching; 3) context of each evangelist and their community.	C
Dei Verbum	Vatican II (1965)	The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation; it is regarded as the highest authoritative text on revelation and the sources of the faith. It promoted the value of the Bible for Catholics and all Christians.	A
The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church	Pontifical Biblical Commission (1993)	Instruction that recognized the strengths and weaknesses of all methods of scientific biblical studies. This instruction clearly states the rejection of fundamentalism.	C

The impact of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) cannot be exaggerated in terms if its effect on Catholic appreciation of the Bible. Vatican II, with its resulting documents being more open, brought a breath of fresh air to Catholics who were enthusiastic to learn more about the Bible. Most important of these documents is the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, or *Dei Verbum*. It became the most authoritative document on Scripture and Scripture interpretation to this day.

Given these key documents as guides, there are three major characteristics of Catholic exegesis or biblical interpretation, as is described and prescribed in The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC 112-114)

1) UNITY OF THE WHOLE SCRIPTURE - Catholics must pay attention "to the content and unity of the whole of Scripture." This means that there is a unity between the OT and the NT that must be recognized and that is part of God's mysterious plan of salvation
2) RELATEDNESS TO TRADITION - Catholics should interpret the Bible within "the living Tradition of the whole Church." This is an acknowledgement that the Holy spirit always guides the process of interpretation and that no one period of Church history or any single Church teaching contains all that Scripture can teach. The *living* Tradition reminds us of the signs of the times, especially in matters of exegesis.
3) ANALOGY OF FAITH - Finally, Catholics must pay attention to the "analogy of faith," that is, "the coherence of truths" that are contained in God's revelation. Remember how revelation is a complex (or hierarchy) of truths. All doctrine are essentially connected with one another. Just as there is unity within the Bible (OT and NT), and there is unity in the primary sources (SS and ST), there must also be a unity of all the sources together in faith (Primary and Secondary), where the Biblical meaning truly finds authentic interpretation.

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[16] Adapted from Ronald D. Witherup, "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches," in *Scripture: An Ecumencial Introduction to the Bible and Its Interpretation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2005).

However, if there is any particular enemy to the Catholic exegete, the greatest of which would probably be Biblical Fundamentalism, the belief that the Bible contains simply "literal" truth. For a fundamentalist, the Bible must be understood only in the literal sense (eg. Genesis story as actually happening in history). To a certain degree, this belief is attractive, insofar as it highlights the preservative nature of the Bible, especially in matters of inerrancy. It is also rather simple, and does not require much thinking and creative imagination, as meaning is already simply given based on what the text says on the surface level.

However, fundamentalism is INCOMPATIBLE with Roman Catholic biblical interpretation because of its opposition to scientific methods of exegesis, such as the historical-critical method. Fundamentalism overemphasizes the divine nature of Scripture, forgetting that at the end of the day, the Bible is also a human product. Fundamentalism also negates Tradition and Human Experience, saying that fundamentally, Scripture is above all of these other sources because if there were inconsistencies between Scripture and the other sources, a fundamentalist will claim Scripture to be more weighty. Thus, many Fundamentalists have tendencies toward practicing Sola Scriptura as well.

Section 2D - Suggested Method for Biblical Exegesis

Some preliminary aspects to be noted with regards to the interpretation of Scripture:

> First, due regard must be given to the poetic character of biblical language, and that demands a refusal to let traditional doctrinal or philosophical considerations dictate the way questions are raised. Second, due attention must be given to the way biblical language functions in its given literary contexts or circles of tradition, and that requires refusing to "use" the Bible by appealing to isolated texts in support of positions arrived at on other grounds.[17]

Scriptural text must never be just isolated and taken out of context. Many of the problems faced by the Church comes from its "abuse" of the sacred text by just picking and choosing text that support particular stands and positions, without proper consideration of the context that went into the creation of such text. The Bible and all its text must be interpreted in a proper manner, that does not disregard the totality of the Biblical message.

Also, when interpreting Scripture, we must take into consideration the nature of language, and that many of the things written in Scripture must not be taken literally. Rather, we must see how there is a literary function and a poetic function behind many of the narratives and statements found in the sacred text. Thus, they must be taken as such.

For a scholarly approach to Scripture consistent with practical theology and hermeneutic phenomenology, one suggested method for scripture interpretation is presented below[18]:

1. Clarification of the *horizon of pre-conditiong* which the interpreter and his/her audience bring to interpretation. Thus one must explicitate how we today approach the issues addressed by the text. This is not necessarily a denial of the assumptions we bring, but a clarification of them, so they can be reviewed and confronted by the message of the text. Actualization is, in one sense, either the confirmation of the pre- conditioning I bring to the text, or its criticism.

2. Study of the text in its own *Sitz im Leben*, that is, the situation of the author and his/her audience, the literary form, the structure of the whole document. But then one has to set the text and its message in the context of the successive re-interpretations that were carried out in scripture before and after its utterance.

3. Explicitation of *the larger context of the mystery of Christ*, that is, the correlation of the text or message with the person and work of Christ, with his paschal mystery, with his death and resurrection for the salvation of many. One asks both how the text helps the mystery of Christ and how the mystery of Christ helps interpret the text.

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[17] Bernard W. Anderson, *Creation in the Old Testament* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1984), 3.

[18] Cf. F. Dreyfus, "L'actualisation de l'ecriture," *Revue biblique* 86 (1979), 376-9.

4. Explicitation of the *ecclesial dimension*, by noting how the living tradition of the Church has actualized the text of message at the different stages of its unfolding of the mystery of Christ in history.

5. Returning to the present situation, where under the influence of the Holy Spirit, one can seek out an authentic typological reading, or an interpretation in relation to a contemporary event (which either the text interprets or which interprets the text), or dimensions of personal experience which the text interprets (or which interprets the text) in the context of an authentic Christian spirituality. Finally, one must ask whether the initial assumptions are confirmed, or whether they must be modified.

Section 3:
Applied Hermeneutics: The First Story of Creation in Genesis

Section 3A - Context of the Writers of the First Creation Story

The first creation story was written around the time of the Babylonian exile, a point in the history of the Jewish people where all the centers of meaning in their lives have been destroyed (the Temple was sacked and they were exiled from their land). It was developed by the Priestly Tradition (P, sixth-fifth centuries B.C.). Cultural and anthropological studies remind us that, in general, a people finds its identity in story and rebuilds its hope in times of crisis from the recall and retelling of that story. In essence, this was an attempt of the Priestly tradition to reclaim meaning in their lives through mythic narrative. This was an attempt to answer the metaphysical question at the core of every Israelite at the time: WHY?

"A cursory look at Genesis 1 in its historical context will make it clear that it is written as a vigorous protest against the then accepted notions of creation. The historical context of the Priestly account of creation is the Babylonian exile in the sixth century B.C. The exile was a devastating experience for Israel politically and theologically. Those who survived the trauma reasserted their belief in God's power over chaos. They did this by developing their own creation narrative."[19]

Section 3B - Following the Movement of the Text

The story begins with vv 1-2. Although there has been a tradition within the Church about *creatio ex nihilo* (creation out of nothing), it only came out later on in the tradition (eg. Maccabees, etc.), but the original conception of creation was creation out of something. That something can be pointed out to be the darkness and the waters. In Hebraic literature, waters were always brought a connotation of destruction. We are led to images of the Flood story, as well as the See of Reeds engulfing the Egyptian army. In essence, the waters were *chaos*, a world without form, a world without order.

The movement of ordering this chaos came about beginning in verse 3 and moving onwards. Here we see the image of light, which is central to the story. This is because the image of light in the Ancient Near East cultures usually was meant as a symbol for the wholeness of life, of victory and of freedom. Most of the time, the light itself was associated with God, "the light beyond the light." The ordering of the world is a movement known as *kosmos*, and this is a world with form and structure. This is the world of order.

Verses 20-31 show the creation of the first human being. This movement toward a focus on the human in the movement of *anthropos*. And ultimately, the end of creation, the world where humans will dwell. Effectively, by ending the creation story here in verse 31, some people miss out on a very important point. First of all, ending the creation story with the creation of human beings is very anthropocentric, the created order was created for the human. And this kind of thinking has led to the careless waste and abuse of creation in the hands of humanity. But when we take a closer look at things, it would seem that the true ending of the creation story is actually in Chapter 2, verses 1-4a.

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[19] Anne M. Clifford, "Creation" in *Systematic Theology Volume 1*, Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John P Galvin eds. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991), 199.

When dealing with Old Testament narratives, we must be aware that in Hebrew literature and poetry there is such a thing as the "the rule of end stresses." It is based on the fact that good storytelling builds up and focuses interest on the conclusion of the story. A good mystery holds the reader in suspense until the very end when everything is explained and becomes clear. That is why we dare not miss the closing minutes of an episode of "Sherlock," "CSI," or "Criminal Minds." Even as a good comedian does not give away the punchline of a joke until the very end, and a good mystery does not give away the solution until the end, so a good story builds up and concentrates the attention of the hearers on the final conclusion.[20]

More often than not, the very last portion of a certain story or poem will most likely hold the most important point. Here, we are led to the most important point of the first creation story. There is a movement to God, marking everything as good and resting. And therefore the very end, the very foundation, the very goal of creation is God. This is the movement to *theos*. Creation has its origin, ground and final goal in God. God is the center of creation, not human beings.

Section 3C - The Holiness of Place

Return to verses 3-19. Notice the ordering of the world in the movement of *kosmos*. Is there a purpose to the order? Every living creatures (including the sun, moons and stars, which were considered living creatures as well) were given a place of dwelling.

This is holiness. The holiness of a thing means that the thing is uniquely set apart from others in order to be uniquely set apart for God. The holiness of a living thing is reflected in its having a "proper" dwelling in God's created order.

On Day 6, only human beings, who have one foot on earth, and another foot in the eternal have yet to find their proper dwelling. It is an invitation for human beings therefore to find their proper place in the world. Where are you being called to "dwell"? What spot on earth will you make holy for God?

A Patch of Holiness, Please[21]

Our torn, tattered history needs patching,
pieces of love to cover the tears,
fabric of affection to heal our hardness of heart.
And patches have come.
Francis mended his time with troubadour songs.
Mother Teresa with her hospice care.
Patches of love holding together
whole nations on the edge of disintegration.

whether Italy or India,
Wall Street or a monastery,
The halls of parliament or university dorm,
Baghdad or Darfur,
we need a patch of holiness,
a light to shine in our dark universe

[20] Cf. Robert H. Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic,1994),147.

[21] Robert Morneau, *The Color of Gratitude* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009).

Section 3D - The Holiness of Time

It is not only dwellings which set creatures apart in holiness for God. Time is also a spot which can be set apart for God.

There are two kinds of time: historical time and liturgical or sacred time. Historical time refers to time that has no meaning beyond itself. You do things and things happen to you in this time. That's it. However, there is such a thing as liturgical time. This is the time when the "light beyond light" enters into our world. It is a time set apart and made holy in the eyes of God. It can come through the reading of the sacred text, in prayer and most especially in good works set apart for God, like works for social justice and social transformation. Sacred time illuminates our everyday life with sacred light.

An example of liturgical time is Christmastime. Many people say that placing the birth of Jesus on the date December 25 was taken from the pagan tradition. That is why other Christian denominations condemn the placement of Jesus' birth on that date. And they have a point. Most likely we won't know when Jesus' was actually born. But, that is not important. The important thing is we set apart a time that we give surely for God. (It so happened that it was easier to convert people from the pagan tradition if we carry over some of their traditions into ours). In its very core, Christmastime time's meaning goes beyond the date December 25 in historical time. The birth of the child Jesus in liturgical time makes sacred the birth of human child in historical time. Thus, historical time acquires meaning.

On Day 7, God creates holiness for the human being in the form of sacred time, and in a way, we find our proper dwelling in time. (It is still an invitation to continue finding our sacred space in the created order.)

Where did the Sabbath tradition come from? Remember the first Genesis story's context. It is the Babylonian exile. The centers of meaning of Israel are gone. More importantly, sacred space is gone (the temple has been destroyed by the Babylonian assault). Without sacred space, the Israelites have no "place" to meet with the sacred. In lieu of sacred space, the Israelites suggested sacred time. Thus, the concept of Sabbath was born.

This is an invitation for us to acquire once again a sense of sacred time, of Sabbath practice. Without rest, it is possible to be caught up, sent into a whirlwind, and drown in creation.

Classic example: Cool off in relationships. When you spend so much time together, you will feel tired of the presence of one another. "Rest naman tayo, so I can appreciate you more." :))

What is scary in today's world is the fact that we are often caught up in so much work, that we forget to set apart time to rest, time for God. (And often times, we have so many "things" to blame. Maraming homework sa accounting, kailangan ko ng time with my gf/bf, time to spend with friends, time to study, time to cram that paper, etc.)

Dorothy Bass warns us:

> "The overwork that afflicts so many and the isolation or lack of work that afflicts many others are only two of the conditions that highlight the contemporary need for a renewal of Sabbath practice in some form. Another reason looms beyond these: the time contemporary Americans do have is losing its shape. Within the rhythms of the global marketplace, work, shopping, and entertainment are available at every hour. As a result, work and family life are being thrown into new and confusing arrangements, not only among the technological elite, but very widely indeed as the United States moves steadily toward a 24-hour-a-day, 7-day-a-week, 365-day-a-year economy. Meanwhile, the free time people do have comes as fragments best fit for channel-surfing. It is not the lack of time but rather its formlessness that is troubling in this scenario. One can see human lives becoming ever more fully detached from nature, from community, and from a sense of belonging to a story that extends beyond one's own span of years."[22]

[22] Dorothy Bass, "Christian Formation in and for Sabbath Rest," *Interpretation* (1 January 2005): 32.

Not only do we have not "enough" time, our time isn't structured. Maraming sudden meetings, impromptu hang out with friends, org work piling up. Our free time lies only in bits and pieces. Our time is formless. (Sounds familiar! Waters and *chaos*!)

What we need is a little *kosmos* in our time. Away from the formlessness of time. We must set our foot down, and set it in a certain place and time which we set apart for ourselves, which we set apart for God.

Section Summary

A point of highlight on the first creation story is the sovereignty of God, who was able to make *kosmos* from *chaos*. We can see that God truly is origin, foundation and final goal of the created reality. However, we must not only focus on the power of God, but the fact that creation was created to have a relationship with God. And this relationship reflects the necessity of relationships between creation. This will all be seen in the second Creation story.

Section 4:
Applied Hermeneutics: The Second Story of Creation in Genesis

Section 4A - Context of the Writers of the Second Creation Story

"The second creation account, found in 2:4b-3:24, is the literary and theological product of a much earlier generation. It reflects the concerns of the united kingdom of David and his successor, Solomon (ca. 1010-930 B.C.). Unlike the Priestly teaching, which grew out of the exile experience of dissolution, the Yahwist tradition reveals biblical Israel's appropriation of a royal ideology and its development as a national identity... The creation narrative found within this tradition is theological and anthropological; it is not an account of the historical origins of the then-known world."[23]

The era of the the Davidic dynasty was often called the "Golden Age of Israel" primarily because of the prosperity of the Israelite nation during this period, on the surface. Some of the successes experienced in this time include the deliverance from the oppression of the Philistines and the security of the possession of the land of Israel.

However, what was the social climate of the time of the supposed "Golden Age" under the Davidic dynasty? David and Solomon increasingly followed the patterns of royal absolutism learned from Egypt, Phoenicia and the Canaanites. Jerusalem and the royal court prospered while the poor lost possession of their land. A royal census eliminated old tribal boundaries in favor of districts more efficient for taxation and conscription (2 Sam 24; 1 Kgs 4:7-19).[24]

When Solomon acceded David as heir to the throne of Israel, the abuse of power by the royal court only became worse. Solomon's politics were an extension of David's in roughly the same measure. Where David never owned up to a murder (e.g. the murder of Uriah the Hittite), Solomon transformed all his murders into executions. Solomon's *Realpolitik* subjected Israel under oppressive public policy.[25]

To give even more perspective of the various social abuses of the royalty and its cronies during Solomon's reign, one can take a look at the daily rations consumed by the royal court during this time. "To get an idea what might have been consumed then, one should note that Solomon's daily provisions included thirty *kor* [equivalent to 6.5 US bushels] of fine flour, sixty *kor* of flour, ten fat oxen, twenty oxen, a hundred sheep, as well as stags, gazelles, roebucks, and fattened fowl (1 Kgs 5:2-3)."[26]

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[23] Anne M. Clifford, "Creation" in *Systematic Theology Volume 1*, Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John P Galvin eds. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991), 201-202.

[24] Allen Verhey, *Remembering Jesus: Christian Community, Scripture, and the Moral Life* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002), 366-367.

[25] Baruch Halpern, *David's Secret Demons: Messiah, Murderer, Traitor, King* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001), 406-407.

[26] Oded Borowski, *Daily Life in Biblical Times* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical , 2003), 65.

Solomon was also known for the imposition of corvée (or unpaid imposed labour by the state) upon Israel (as introduced in 1 Kgs 5:26-32). The use of forced labor in service of the state is well known in Solomon's kingdom. It can be considered as a form of taxation that appears alongside requirements to present a certain percentage of one's crops and other goods to the state. The corvée was imposed to provide the labor necessary for acquiring wood and stones for building the temple Solomon planned to construct.[27] When Solomon died, his son Rehoboam quite deliberately threatened to continue a policy of oppression and absolutism.[28] The backlash from the people was evident, as a later narrative tells of the revolt of the northern tribes against Rehoboam (1 Kgs 12), with an explicit expression of Israelite dissatisfaction at the burdens of Solomon's forced labor as the reason for the revolt (1 Kgs 12:11).

And this was not the end of the iniquities of Solomon. Because of his alliances and arrangement with Hiram I, King of Tyre and King of the Phoenicians, Solomon needed a massive military force that would defend not only Israel, but also the political allies of Israel. The expense of these military projects can be noted as follows:

> Each vehicle required three horses, so chariot and team came to 1,050 shekels. Then there were the accessory costs; crews, maintenance personnel, weapons, spare parts, housing for personnel, storage areas and repair shops, stables and fodder. Frequent disassembly and lubrication with olive oil were essential. The corps thus consumed a large quantity of the basic foodstuffs of Palestine. The horses required months of training, then ongoing practice and grooming by skilled personnel. The chariot army all told required an outlay on the order of one, 470, 000 shekels, leaving aside the expense of upkeep and renewal.[29]

Hungry, poor and dying of overwork, Israel groaned under the rule of the Davidic dynasty. In the face of the vast injustice faced during the time of David, Solomon and their sons, the general Israelite populace began to question God. Why does God allow injustice to occur? Does God side with the corrupt and the unjust? Is God the source of evil and injustice? These are the questions that the Yahwist tradition sought to answer through their writing.

The Yahwist (J, tenth-ninth centuries B.C.) account is an etiology, "a story rich in symbolism that attempts to locate and give expression to the causes of the present condition of the people. This etiology encompasses both the experience of goodness and intimate relatedness with God, the benevolent Gardener, and the contrasting experience of sin and estrangement from that God.[30]" This etiology attempted to highlight that the source of evil and sin is not God, but humans who have abused the gift of freedom by God (the very same abuses that were now present in the time of the Davidic dynasty's reign).

Therefore, in terms of this narrative's foci, "this tradition tells of the creation of humankind and the crisis of alienation."[31]

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[27] Marvin A. Sweeney, *I & II Kings: A Commentary* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 103.

[28] Allen Verhey, *Remembering Jesus: Christian Community, Scripture, and the Moral Life* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002), 366-367.

[29] Robert B. Coote, *In Defence of the Revolution: The Elohist History* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 52.

[30] Anne M. Clifford, "Creation" in *Systematic Theology Volume 1*, Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John P Galvin eds. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991), 201-202.

[31] Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion, 2d ed. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984), 232.

Section 4B - Exegesis of Genesis 2:4b and Beyond

vv. 4b-6

The day the Lord God made the earth and the heavens. But things are missing. No plants, animals and man to till the ground (v.5).

vv. 7-15

Filling the missing void, man was created. Take note: there is a deep connection between man (Hebrew '*adam*) and the ground (Hebrew '*adama*). This also shows how the fragility of the life created by God (dust of the ground) and how we are so dependent on this God to sustain our existence (because without the breath of life from God, we are merely dust). However, the fact that God continues to sustain us affirms the fact that we are worth something, we are worth it to God. We have an eternal value.

v. 15

The central core concept of this verse is that part of man's vocation is work. Every human being must work on something, and thus, all human beings have a created purpose. It will be our personal duty as created beings to search out for that place in the world where our work is needed (and with the size of this world, I bet all of us has a place. We just need to discover it). This verse highlights the necessity of vocation and the destiny of each human to have a purposeful existence. We have an eternal purpose.

vv.16-17

Life has a law. "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die." This law was given by someone who is beyond this world. Notice, the word "eat" is an important pivot (Repetition is key in understanding Jewish literature and eat has been repeated a lot in this story). This means that man transcends the level of food and eating alone. Man is meant for a supernatural destiny beyond this world. Humanity is meant for that which is beyond the beyond. We are meant for the eternal Thou (God).

vv. 18-25

Loneliness is a curse or malediction. Therefore, there is a necessity for companionship.

The first companions were created, animals, who are created in the image of man, just as humans are created in the image of God. This is seen in the way God invites man to participate in creation through the naming of the animals. God has given part of the responsibility by allowing us to be co-creators. As co-creators, the responsibility and accountability for creation has also been given to us.

The first instance of human speech is found in verse 23. Here the use of poetry is important. There is the image of bone and flesh, bone in Hebrew means strength and flesh in Hebrew means weakness. When two opposites are used to describe something, it is often times a merism. A merism denotes a totality through paradox. For example, when God created the heavens and the earth, it means God created everything. In this case, to speak of bone (times of strength) and flesh (times of weakness), imply a communion in everything every time. Man and woman were meant to live side by side, equally with each other, in harmony.

Why the rib? The rib is found in the side, and in Hebrew, sides also mean halves. They complement, better yet complete, each other. "The word for 'woman,' *ishshah*, designates her as one who comes from man, *ish*. She is created, the text says, as 'helper and partner.' In this context, being a helper does not mean being man's subordinate, but rather being his partner and companion." The '*ezer* (Hebrew for helper) was created to accompany the man. In Hebrew, '*ezer* usually denotes a stronger army coming to the aid of a weaker army. Most times, the connotation of this is God himself coming to the aid of the weak, "God as helper or deliverer."[32]

[32] See Christiana de Groot, "Genesis," in *The IVP Women's Bible Commentary*, Catherine Clark Kroeger and Mary J. Evans, eds. (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP, 2002), 6.

In conclusion, this portion states that humanity is meant for harmonious relationship with other creatures (animals, shrubs, etc.) as well as harmonious relationship with each other. We are not meant for the eternal Thou (God) only. We are also meant for the eternal thou (fellow creatures).

* The paradox is that by understanding the harmony of the relationships we have with other human beings, as well as the created order, we also understand the harmony if relation with the absolute otherness of the Other (who is God). We find the Other as a profound reflection of myself. Thus, together, the sense of the eternal Thou and eternal thou bring together a greater understanding of my personal place in the world (purpose) and my personal worth in the world (value). When we acquire the sense of the eternal value, purpose and Thou, we acquire *shalom*, wholeness.

Section Summary

The important point to not here is the *relatableness* of God. He is a God who is capable of being just like us, through his anthropomorphic actions (walking, talking, etc). This will eventually culminate in the future when God becomes actually a man, in the person of Jesus Christ. This God is a god of relations, and we mirror his relatability in the way we approach our fellow creatures.

Section 5:
Applied Hermeneutics: The Story of Sin in Genesis

Section 5A - Deconstructing the Old Catechism on Original Sin[33]

The question of original sin actually begins with a question of human nature. Is man intrinsically good or intrinsically evil? Considering how the world today is, it is more likely for people to believe in man's inherent evil rather than his inherent goodness. Thomas Hobbes, in his famous work Leviathan, speaks of human life as "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short."[34] This is true in part because of the idea that every man has their own self-interest always in the forefront. Considering these allegations, it would seem rightly so that human beings by nature are selfish, manipulative and out to get others for their own sake. And isn't that just evil? The attempt of this lesson is to understand the reality of evil, which we name sin, by pointing out how by nature humanity is created good, but erred in a way that was both personal and social, and thus creating a situation of evil called original sin. By correcting old notions and establishing a renewed Christian anthropology behind, we can hopefully correct the misconception that humans are intrinsically evil. We shall begin with an examination of the old catechism with regards to original sin.

The original understanding of the doctrine of original sin was as follows: Adam and Eve, the first man and woman, were endowed with the gift of sanctifying grace whereby they shared in God's divine life as well as with preternatural privileges such as freedom from concupiscence or the inclination to sin, freedom from death, toil, pain, ignorance and error. But our first parents sinned, and as a consequence, lost sanctifying grace and the preternatural gifts not only for themselves but for all their descendants. Each human being thus enters the world without grace, that is, separated from God. God's son became man and died and rose again in order to save man not only from personal sins, but also from this state of separation from God or original sin, but remains separated from God. The baptized, on the other hand, receive sanctifying grace and share in God's life but remain liable to death, pain, toil, error and to inclination towards sin which is concupiscence. *So... what's wrong with this picture?*

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[33] Adapted and excerpted from Vitaliano Gorospe, SJ, "Original Sin" in *A Theology of the Catholic Social Vision* (Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2007), 149-51.

[34] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan, or the Matter, Forme, and Power of a Common-wealth Ecclesticall and Civill*, ed. C.B. Macpherson (New York, NY: Viking Penguin, 1968), 186.

MORAL OBJECTIONS
1. How can sin or guilt be inherited?
2. What happens to infants who die without baptism?
3. The inevitability of sin in every man seems to deny human freedom. However, we experience and know that we are free to choose good or evil
4. Original sin seems to presuppose that human nature is intrinsically corrupt. However, (remember Genesis story, God created everything in the world to be good, including man.

BIOLOGICAL OBJECTIONS
1. Did we descend from a single pair of ancestors (biological monogenism)? Based on evolution and scientific theory, mankind must have descended from several "first couples" (biological polygenism).
2. In an evolutionary world view, Adam as the perfect man is very questionable. The first men – *Homo erectus*, early *Homo sapiens*, etc. – would have been very primitive people with none of the preternatural gifts.

PHYSICAL OBJECTIONS
1. How can Adam's sin, which is in the moral order, radically change the physical and psychological pattern not only of the sinner but also of his descendants?
2. Did one sin cause all sin?

Section 5B - A Look at Genesis 3: Creation and Salvation[35]

On the tree of the knowledge of good and evil

There are two special trees in the garden. The first, the tree of life, is well known under different forms in the Bible and outside of the Bible. In the Bible the tree of life is mentioned in texts such as Prov. 3:18; 11:30; 13:12; 15:4; in the New Testament, in Rev. 2:7; 22:2, 14, 19. This tree is probably a wisdom motif. The second tree, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, has no parallel and Gen. 2-3 is the only text where it appears. Several interpretations of the ″knowledge of good and evil″ have been proposed. Let us mention the most important.

(1) *An existential meaning*. "To know," in Hebrew, can mean "to be able to." "Good" and "evil" can mean what is useful and what is harmful. Thus ″the knowledge of good and evil″ would be the capacity of discerning what is useful and what is harmful, in order to choose the first and avoid the second.
(2) *An ethical meaning*. "Good" and "evil" mean what is morally good and morally evil. The knowledge of good and evil, in this case, would be equivalent to "moral sense". Some exegetes combine this second interpretation with the first, the existential or functional interpretation.
(3) *A sexual meaning*. The verb 'to know' may have in Hebrew some sexual connotations. Some elements of the narrative corroborate this interpretation. The snake is a common fertility symbol. Nakedness is another theme related to sexuality. Against this background, some exegetes propose to interpret "knowledge of good and evil" as the discovery of sexuality or sexual maturity.
(4) *A sense of totality (merism)*. A merism is a form of speech which describes a totality by naming its opposite elements . . . If 'good and evil' is to be understood as a merism, then the knowledge of good and evil means 'omniscience"–the knowledge of everything. And this knowledge can only be God′s.

Several biblical texts can be produced to support each interpretation. Nonetheless, some important points should be mentioned. First, only God really knows ″good and evil″ (2 Sam 14:17, 20). Second, the discernment of what is good and evil is indispensable. Deut. 30:15-20 is very clear in this regard since it says that Israel must choose good and not evil, life and not death, a blessing and not a curse. This would be impossible if Israel could not know what is good or evil. Third, the discernment is characteristic of adulthood; in contrast, children are characterized by the fact that they cannot distinguish between good and evil (Deut. 1:39; Isa. 7:15-16). The same holds true for old age; its sign is that it can no longer distinguish between both (2 Sam. 19:36). Fourth, it is dangerous and harmful to confuse good and evil (Isa. 5:20).

[35] Adapted and excerpted from Jean Louis Ska, S.J. "Creation and Salvation (Gen 1-3)," *Sijon* 9 (1997): 22-48

If one keeps these different elements in mind, it is possible to propose a simple interpretation of this puzzle. . In human life, it is impossible to act without the knowledge of good and evil, which is more than simple moral discernment. Many texts confirm that this knowledge includes not only the intellectual faculty of distinguishing in an abstract way what is morally good from what is morally evil, but also the ability of finding the means to accomplish what is good and to avoid what is evil. In other words, it is the art of obtaining a successful and blissful existence. "Good" is synonymous with "life" and "blessing," and "evil" with "death" and "curse"(Deut. 30:15-20). The only real problem with this knowledge comes from the fact that it is not easy to acquire it, since only God really possesses it. This brings us to the second problem, namely, why is it forbidden to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil?

The problem is serious, because we have just affirmed that this knowledge is far from dangerous. On the contrary, it is indispensable. Why then does God forbid the access to the tree which can offer this precious gift? In this case, as in many other biblical texts, the solution depends very much on the way the problem is formulated. Here, it is essential to read God′s sentence with care. What exactly is forbidden? The knowledge of good and evil? By no means. What God forbids is to *eat* of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In other words, God forbids the acquisition of the knowledge of good and evil by *eating* a fruit. It means that a human being cannot treat this tree like all the other trees in the garden, because the knowledge of good and evil is not a simple fruit that can be eaten like all the other fruit in the garden. There is a difference which is essential to human existence. In more modern language, all the fruit of the garden are pleasing and enticing because they awaken the appetite. But the tree of knowledge of good and evil should not be the object of human desire and appetite. It should wake up our consciousness, our freedom, and our sense of responsibility.

What does the snake represent?

In the late Jewish and Christian tradition the snake is the devil himself. See, for instance, Wis. 2:24: "Through the devil′s envy death entered the world" (RSV). But is this the original meaning of Gen. 3? The snake, in the Bible, in the Ancient Near East, and in other religions of the world, is a very common symbol. It is the most commonly represented animal. In a few words, the snake represents and evokes "natural life" as opposed to "conscious and free life". For instance, the snake is often a symbol of fertility and fecundity, especially because the snake appears with the rainy season, when the cycle of vegetation begins again. For this reason the snake is also linked to the cycle of seasons and the different cycles of nature, the most important of which is the cycle of life and death. Everything in nature is born for eventual death. And what is dead "feeds" the living beings. For instance, when a plant dies it goes back to the soil from which other plants grow. In nature, life is cyclic and this is what the snake chiefly symbolizes.

There is another aspect to the snake that is relevant to Gen. 3: the snake crawls on the ground (3:14). This narrative actually explains why it does so. By crawling, the snake is especially linked to the mystery of the soil from which every life sprouts and to which every living being, plant, animal, or human being returns. Hence the snake "knows" the mystery of life and death. The snake also loves the dark, the night, and it can kill. Therefore, it is an image of the unpredictable world of instinct and of the dark side of the human personality. It is opposed to the world of light, reason, freedom and language.

To sum up these few ideas: the snake is connected to the deepest levels of life - the unconscious, the dark and unknown side of human life. It is connected to the earth and the darkness. It represents our earthen nature, with all its appetites and instincts, with its ambivalence; for this reason, the snake can be easily identified with the devil.

Section 5C - A Look at Genesis 4 to 11: The Great Hamartology

After being exiled from the Garden, humanity continued to sin, and the dark ages that followed was called the Great Hamartology (meaning "the great history of sin"). The Hamartology followed several key stories, namely:

1. Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:1-16)
2. Lamech (Genesis 4:17-26)
3. Noah and the Flood (Genesis 6-9)
4. The Tower of Babel (Genesis 11)

Each story proclaims a certain state of the world being engulfed in a history of sinfulness. Man's pride, his feeling of being able to surpass God and being able to be independent of God is what drives him to sin. It is this pride that drove Cain to murder Abel, it is pride that allowed Lamech to boast about God's protection, it is the pride of men in Noah's time that made God regret he even made the world, and it is the pride to "make a name for themselves" that drove the people to build the tower of Babel.

Sin became such a normal thing in the history of the early world, that it became a pattern, infusing into their systems, structures, institutions. It was a world engulfed, drowning in sin. And the consequence of this sinful world resonated through the generations. They say history repeats itself. Then this history of sin repeated itself all throughout the history of man.

An excerpt from Bruce Birch can give insight regarding the Hamartology and its impact on humanity:

> We have spent a good deal of time on the opening chapters of the Old Testament. From these chapters we know much of the nature of God as Creator and ourselves as creatures, but as the story moves forward, Creator and creatures are alienated from one another. In the chapters that follow, alienation seems to grow. Sin abounds and its consequences grow more violent. In the Cain and Abel story, violence is directed towards an innocent brother (Genesis 4). In the story of the flood, sin and violence have reached universal proportions and God is sorry that the world was created (Gen 6:5-7). At the tower of Babel, humanity attempts to assault the havens themselves for their own glory ("let us make a name for ourselves," Gen 11:4) The gulf between God and humanity seems to grow greater, as does the brokenness in humanity itself.
>
> In each story there are consequences of sin: Cain's exile, the flood, the scattering and confusion of language. But in each story there is a sign that in spite of sin God continues to care and to act with grace: God marks Cain for protection, saves Noah, guarantees the natural order with the rainbow. After the tower of Babel story, there is no immediate sign of God's care. We are dramatically suspended for a moment. Where can this escalation of sin and alienation end? It is then that we are shifted from stories that speak of all humanity to the story of a single man and woman and the people who spring from them. Genesis 12 begins the story of Abraham and Sarah. Significantly, their story begins with a promise, and it becomes clear that the story of this people of promise is the sign of God's grace. God acts to bridge the gap through relationships to a particular people. The story of God's relationship to this people is now the subject of the rest of the Old Testament. By beginning with creation and broken creation, the scripture reminds us that this people is not to be an end in itself but a means of God's grace to "all the families of the earth" (Gen 12:3).[36]

[36] Bruce C. Birch, "In the Image of God" from *What Does the Lord Require?* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Westminster Press, 1985), 30-31.

Section 5D - A Look at Romans: The Pauline Corpus on Original Sin[37]

The complete doctrine of original sin is found in St. Paul whose primary focus in Romans 5 is the universal need of redemption and grace in Christ.

In Rom 5:12-20, Paul contrasts Adam and Christ.: just as through Adam sin and death entered the world, so through Christ, justification and life comes to us. From Adam springs the old human race penetrated through and through by the power of sin and death, from Christ springs the new race, reborn in the power of grace and new divine life. Paul affirms human solidarity in the grace of Christ who is the cause of the redemption for all human persons. Note that "death" in the Bible, especially in Paul, does not refer to physical death but to the state of alienation from God. Paul presents Adam as the first example of sin which later generations followed and also the cause of the tendency to sin which all men inherited from.

Therefore, Paul reveals the universal need of the redemption and grace of Jesus Christ and emphasizes humankind's solidarity in grace. "Despite the increase of sin, grace has far surpassed it, so that, as sin reigned through death, grace may reign by way of justice leading to eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Rom 5:20-21)

Section 5E - Original Sin Defined

What then is original sin? Based on Scripture, as well as the helpful ideas generated in the various Councils, original sin can refer to two things:

1) the actual sinful situation into which we are born (**sin of the world**). This is the *passive* aspect of sin. (eg. John 1:29)
2) the inner affect of disordered desires, or concupiscence (**the heart of darkness**). This is the active aspect of sin, an involuntary inclination to sin and connivance with the sins of others prior to choice; an unwillingness and powerlessness in the human heart. Paul aptly describes this experience as: "*I do not the good I will to do, but the evil I do not intend. The desire to do right is there but not the power.*" (Rom 7:19,18)

Considering these things, original sin appears to be the **pressure to sin**. The sin of the world is the pressure of external factors to sin. The heart of darkness is the pressure coming from inside oneself to sin. Together, human beings are pressured to sin both externally and internally.

Where do we see original sin today? We see it in the sinful situation in today's Philippine society: violence, discrimination, unjust structures, graft and corruption, bank robberies, kidnapping, child abuse, corrupt police and military. We are all born into a world marked by the tensions between sin and grace, a world in which temptations, bad example, greed, immorality, dishonesty, the frustration of so many good intentions, are in tension with the opposite movements of grace toward moral integrity and courage, truthfulness and honesty, self-sacrifice, generous service commitment and fidelity. So many times, evil is rewarded with "success" while those trying to do what is right seem to fail. In the end, it would seem the sin of the world has prevailed. This is the contemporary face of evil, and this experience we refer to as original sin.

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[37] Adapted and excerpted from Vitaliano Gorospe, SJ, "Original Sin" in *A Theology of the Catholic Social Vision* (Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2007), 153-4.

Elizabeth Willems expounds on this so-called contemporary face of evil which all of us see today:

> The contemporary face of evil has the look of starving children in Afghanistan and South America; it has the desperate look of men and women trying to work in order to support themselves and their children; it has the look of well-heeled executives whose only interest is financial gain; evil shows its face in political "bargaining" that gives people personal power. Contemporary evil is present in the political decisions that keep some countries dependent on others while other countries prosper economically. Refugees and immigrants show the world the face of evil created by oppressive regimes and desolate poverty... Marriages that end in screaming and brutality, hatred and violence, remind us that moral evil is harbored within the walls of homes, not just on the streets. Contemporary society reveals the visages of evil in many forms: social ills; deterioration of interpersonal relationships; economic and political systems that favor the powerful and sacrifice the powerless; structures of evil in offices of police, education, social welfare, law, medicine, and even religion... *at root, sin is spiritual in nature and reflects the lack of a personal relationship of love with God, self and others.*[38]

Let's turn back to the Genesis story again as basis for our discussion of what sin is and its consequences.

> The consequences of sin in [the Genesis] story are many. Death in the Old Testament is not simply biological. For *shalom* to be broken, for humans to be denied wholeness, is to experience death already. In this story the disobedient act immediately creates brokenness in the harmony of creation, as indicated by the appearance of shame and fear and guilt. In the creation story the man and woman were naked and not ashamed (2:25). Now they are ashamed of their nakedness and attempt to cover themselves (3:7). *Shame* is here the sign of brokenness in the openness of relationship between the man and the woman. When God finds the couple hiding from the divine presence, the man says he was afraid (3:10). Fear is here the sign of brokenness in the trustful relationship with God. Finally, there is a great buck-passing ceremony where the man and the woman try to pass responsibility on to others rather than face their own choice and its consequences (3:12-13). This is guilt, and it is here the sign of brokenness within one's own self.[39]

Section 5F - Grace and Freedom: Responding to the Experience of Sin

Just as I highlighted in the previous sections, as much as sin is such a prevalent experience in the world, God's final word is always of hope and deliverance. As much as the experience of original sin threatens to consume the world, the experience of God's grace attempts to liberate it. What is the experience of God's grace? How do we further it as human agents in this world?

If sin is that which breaks relationship, it is grace that mends relationship once more. There are a variety of ways in which God attempts to rekindle the relationship that is hurt or broken by sin. An example of grace, for instance, is revelation. Another example of grace can be the love that is poured out to us through the Holy Spirit, which is evident in the sacraments. However, my personal take on grace is not merely a personal view, but also a social view as well. It is not so much a selfish question of "how do I receive grace?" but rather the question "how do I help make reality graceful?"

To respond to the reality of sin, we must redirect our fundamental option towards God and his Kingdom ideals, as well as ascertaining that we ourselves are responsible for the plague that sin is. To combat sin in this world is a difficult task, and often times, this call will be a challenge for most of us. As Christians, it is our task to engage sin in a way that is liberating, and one that attempts to establish relationship with God, self and others.

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[38] Elizabeth Willems, "The Reality of Evil and Sin" in *Understanding Catholic Morality* (New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing: Company, 1997), 80-81.

[39] Bruce C. Birch, "In the Image of God" from *What Does the Lord Require?* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Westminster Press, 1985), 28-29.

Summary

"A great development has taken place in the twentieth century as Christians everywhere become aware of the social dimensions of their religion. Christians see that to follow Christ they must resonate with the suffering of the world - with the poor and afflicted and distressed.

And if men and women are moving toward a sense of solidarity, those called to the mystical life cannot claim exemption. The authentic mystic can never flee from the world.

Active mystics who live in the hurly-burly enter into the same inner silence as those in the desert. They experience the same inner fire and inner love. Now the inner fire drives them - no longer to the wilderness but to the crowded marketplace and to the inner city. The living flame of love drives them to walk in peace marches, to denounce oppressive structures, to go to prison and to die. Like the mystics in the desert they pass through agonizing dark nights and come to profound enlightenment. The mystic in the silent desert and the mystic in the noisy city are alike in following one who emptied himself taking the form of a slave and was given a name that is above all names."[40]

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"Only those who are truly aware of their sin can truly cherish grace."

-C.J. Mahaney

[40] William Johnston, *Mystical Theology: The Science of Love* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998).