

Portraits of Christ:

An Introduction of the Four Gospels for
Critical Minds
and Contemplative Hearts



With Fr. Vincent Pizzuto, PhD.

Workshop:
Critical Minds,
Contemplative Hearts



Opening Meditation

In the Gospel of John 5:39, Jesus declares:

*“You search the scriptures because
you think that in them you have eternal life;
but it is they that testify to me.”*

From the 39 Articles of Religion Church of England, 1571

§6. Of the Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures for Salvation.

Holy Scripture contains all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of anyone, that it should be believed as an article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation. In the name of the Holy Scripture we do understand those canonical Books of the Old and New Testament, of whose authority was never any doubt in the Church.

Notice what the Articles of Religion Do Not Say...

To claim, “Holy Scripture contains all things necessary to salvation”

does not say “All things in scripture are revelatory...”

“The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation,” *Dei Verbum*, of the Second Vatican Council reiterates and expounds this same idea in light of modern methods of Historical Critical Methodology which had come into prominence by the 20th Century.

Dei Verbum, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, Vatican II, 1965

III.11-12 SACRED SCRIPTURE, ITS DIVINE INSPIRATION AND INTERPRETATION

§11. Those divinely revealed realities which are contained and presented in Sacred Scripture have been committed to writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. For holy mother Church, relying on the belief of the Apostles (see John 20:31; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 1:19-20, 3:15-16), holds that the books of both the Old and New Testaments in their entirety, with all their parts, are sacred and canonical because written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they have God as their author and have been handed on as such to the Church herself. In composing the sacred books, God chose men and while employed by Him they made use of their powers and abilities, so that with Him acting in them and through them, they, as true authors, consigned to writing everything and only those things which He wanted.

Inspiration implies the fullness of human creative faculties not the absence of them.

Dei Verbum, continued...

Therefore, since everything asserted by the inspired authors or sacred writers must be held to be asserted by the Holy Spirit, it follows that **the books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching solidly, faithfully and without error that truth which God wanted put into sacred writings for the sake of salvation.*** Therefore "all Scripture is divinely inspired and has its use for teaching the truth and refuting error, for reformation of manners and discipline in right living, so that the man who belongs to God may be efficient and equipped for good work of every kind" (2 Tim. 3:16-17, Greek text).

*** [Again, notice what this does *not* say].**

Dei Verbum, continued...

§12. However, since God speaks in Sacred Scripture through men in human fashion [history is the arena of revelation], the interpreter of Sacred Scripture, in order to see clearly what God wanted to communicate to us, should carefully investigate what meaning the sacred writers really intended [Form Criticism], and what God wanted to manifest by means of their words [Redaction Criticism].

Dei Verbum, continued...

To search out the intention of the sacred writers, attention should be given, among other things, to "literary forms." For truth is set forth and expressed differently in texts which are variously historical, prophetic, poetic, or of other forms of discourse. The interpreter must investigate what meaning the sacred writer intended to express and actually expressed in particular circumstances by using contemporary literary forms in accordance with the situation of his own time and culture.

For the correct understanding of what the sacred author wanted to assert, due attention must be paid to the customary and characteristic styles of feeling, speaking and narrating which prevailed at the time of the sacred writer, and to the patterns men normally employed at that period in their everyday dealings with one another.

Contemplative Reading of Scripture

Contemplative readings of the Bible assume it is “sacred scripture” and thus begin with a presumption of the text as a *revelatory* Word of God not merely a historical artifact. We *expect* an encounter with God in *Lectio Divina*.

Contemplative readings of Scripture are not “Post-” Critical because they *reject* the historical methods of interpretation, but because they recognize them as a *first*, though not *exhaustive*, step to interpreting the Bible.

Contemplative Readings

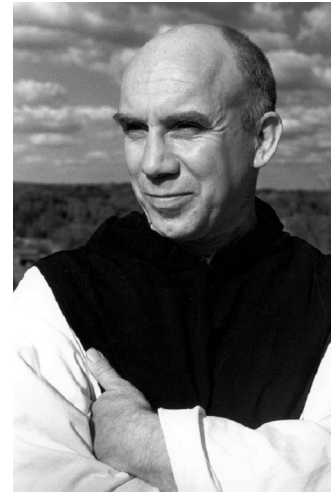
The central concern of contemplative readings of scripture is to explore how the text mediates an *encounter* or *communion* with God, and thus an emphasis not only on what the text *meant* historically, but what it *means* today for the believing community.

Contemplative Readings

- Thus, a contemplative reading of the Bible *assumes its revelatory character* not merely its historic value. Thus, contemplative readings are holistic in nature, necessarily unfolding in light of the larger Christian tradition, ethics, doctrine, theology, and liturgy.

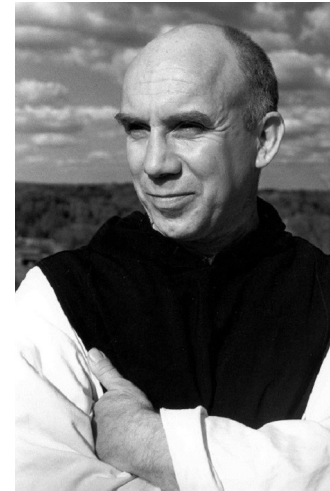
Contemplative Readings

In reading the Bible, we have to be quite objective and realistic in seeking out the actual meaning intended by the authors of each text... Yet at the same time we cannot disregard the fact that the book has come to be a unified whole and, by the time the canon was completed, was clearly read as such. We must at the same time respect the wide variety of literary forms and historical backgrounds, which give special characters to the separate books, and yet remember that the Bible as a whole can and should be seen as importing a unified or unifiable, theological message. To do this is perhaps inevitably to bring in something external to the Bible, namely tradition; but whatever one may think about that, the fact is that the book is the work not only of many writers but also of many editors, whose intentions must also be taken into account along with those of the authors, for to edit is also to interpret.



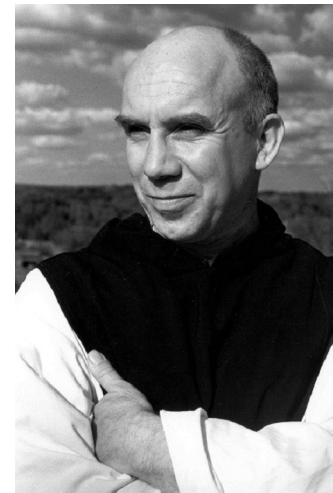
Contemplative Readings

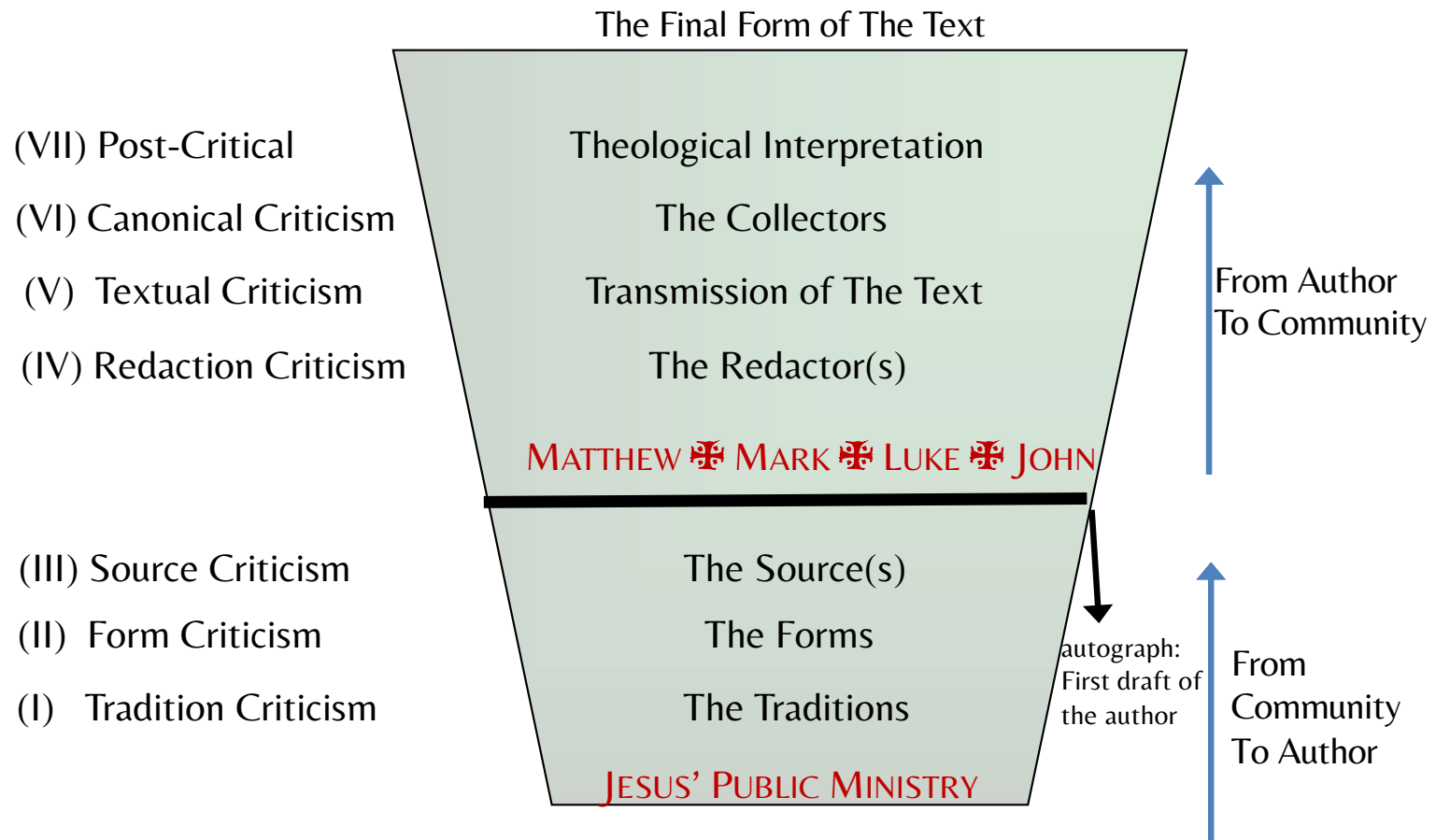
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Adapted From: Susan E. Gilliam, *One Bible, Many Voices: Different Approaches to Biblical Studies* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 170.