


Considering mystagogy as method in Biblical Spirituality

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In this contribution, the mystagogic engagement with Bible texts is considered. Good and bad reasons for drawing on the Bible are considered, both within personal and cultural frameworks. Different exegetical procedures are taken into review to inform a discussion of particularly the mystagogic engagement with the text. The latter is characterised by seeking *faith* from the biblical texts. For theological reasons, historical exegesis is proposed as particularly suited to mystagogic facilitation.

Contribution: There are good and bad reasons for drawing on the Bible, within personal and cultural frameworks. Different exegetical procedures inform a discussion of mystagogic engagement with the text, seeking faith from the biblical texts. Historical exegesis is proposed as particularly suited to mystagogic facilitation.

Keywords: mystagogy; Biblical Spirituality; methodology; historical exegesis; text-immanent exegesis, genitive-theological readings.

Why read the Bible? (Or: reading *in* the text, reading *from* the text and reading *through* the text)¹

Two of the strange phenomena that disconcertingly often accompany Bible reading – perhaps forgivably in popular circles, outright callously in political circles, surprisingly often also in academic–theological circles – are that:

- The Bible is read *for* the self, that is, in one's favour, as if the purpose of the biblical texts is to tell ourselves that we are okay,² on the right track (in one's discernment processes³, in the right (on justice-related issues⁴) – in other words, in this manner, one finds oneself mechanistically from the Bible in God's favour (be that personally or sociopolitically⁵).
- The Bible is held in high regard – particularly in religious circles, but even if for only cultural – historical reasons (cf. Beuken & Freyne 1995; Lombaard, Benson & Otto 2019:1–12) – but then, when speaking on or from these texts, that esteem seems to have little validity. The text is namely almost immediately departed from, left behind to various degrees, as if it had served as an inspirational moment, perhaps akin to the impulse that unleashes the creativity of a painter or poet. However, after that initial moment, the Bible is treated with scant regard for what the particular text could conceivably have said to its time and – by means of parallels and analogies – into ours.

In both such cases, one is left with a sense of bewilderment as to why Scripture had been referred to at all. If it seems that the Bible had been employed simply to add a veil of (theological) legitimacy to whatever is being proclaimed (or to whichever cause is furthered), a despairing instant may well include the wish that the Bible had rather not been used; that the canon or its significance should perhaps be dissolved; that the democratisation of the reading of the Bible that went along with the Gutenberg press and the Enlightenment had not occurred.

1. Paper at the joint conference of the *Society for the Study of Christian Spirituality* and the *Forum of Professors of Spiritual Theology in Italy*, 25–28 September 2019, titled 'The Study of Christian Spirituality and Spiritual Theology: Evolving Methodologies', held at the Pontifical University Antonianum, Rome.

2. The word play here is on the self-help culture, exemplified by the title of one of the early best sellers in this publication genre, *I'm OK – You're OK* (Harris 1969).

3. On discernment, more clearly understood, see, for example, Waaijman (2013:13–24).

4. For instance, in Lombaard (2001:69–87), I analysed how surprisingly similar in their hermeneutical and exegetical approaches the pro- and anti-apartheid readings of the Bible had been. This, naturally, is not to equate the respective underlying moralities, but, rather, the practice of employing the Bible in a political cause.

5. Scheffler (2011:192–207) indicates from Psalm 109 the parallels between that text and modern exegetes in trying to gain divine sympathy by associating rhetorically with the poor.

Note: Special Collection entitled The use of the Bible in Theology, sub-edited by Willem Oliver (UNISA).

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Naturally, these would be mere moments of despondency. The valuable role that the Bible has had in the spirituality of believers throughout the ages (cf. Lombaard 2012; Welzen 2017) and in the formation of an ever growing modern culture of freedom and respect (e.g. Otto 2004:181–188; Van der Ven, Dreyer & Pieterse 2004) leads to a much more affirming position on the role that the Bible plays (cf. Lombaard 1999:26–41). This kind of positive influence of the Scriptures requires, however (as the opposite of the two bulleted points above), reading the Bible:

- Not for legitimating an own position, but as a movement away from the self, to God and world (culture – individuals and groups – as much as nature; in all their depths and peaks);
- While taking the Bible seriously on *its* terms, rather than ours; for what it *is*, rather than what we assume it to be or might like it to have been.

Both these last two (in some respects related) ways of reading the Bible are signs of spiritual maturity (cf. Welzen 2017:363–364).⁶ Although we live in a time given to sentiments of imminent demise of apocalyptic proportions (be that on, e.g., ecological, technological, epidemiological or, more modestly, economic fronts), we also live in a time which is becoming decidedly more conducive to faith. To summarise all too briefly⁷ large bodies of literature on this unfolding faith-positive religio-cultural climate, usually called post-secularism:

1. Whereas in *modernist times*, roughly since the French Revolution, faith has been progressively marginalised in broader society, namely as illogical (amongst other reasons given).
2. Whereas in *post-modernist times*, roughly the 20th century, faith has been metaphorised, namely as a linguistic game of meaning.
3. During the *presently emerging post-secular* sensibilities, faith (in many forms) is being recovered as something both (a) normal and (b) actual. This means that (a) belief is acknowledged as having a finely attuned rationality to it, and (b) the Divine is encountered by people as something as fully real, though differently so, as any other aspect of the human experience.

In parallel to the alphabetisation above, then:

1. Whereas within modernism, *history* provides the anchor criterion for satisfactory understanding;
2. And *language* in post-modernism;
3. In post-secularism, *experience* (-of-meaning/fulness) produces that anchor criterion (on which, most recently, see Yang 2019:38–58; cf. Biernot & Lombaard 2017:1–12; Wildman 2011:1–30). Within this evolving cultural atmosphere, what is not sensed somehow to move the spirit or to touch the psyche or to stir one's being is not

6. On which, see the various rules of faith, such as the *Exercitia spiritualia* of Ignatius of Loyola, or the various mystagogies (cf. Mazza 1989:114–164) or, in more current Practical Theological terms, the *Stages of Faith* – in the language of Fowler (1981), with as a self-reflective case study, for example Van Schalkwyk 2003.

7. For an earlier view, still related to this point, see Lampe (1957:9–38).

regarded as speaking to the implicitly felt sense of validity of individuals and societies, ever more so.

As corollary outflows of this budding greater openness to concrete religious meaning-making (implied in the third options of both lists above), amongst other matters ('signs', in the terminology of O'Sullivan 2012:43–59), the transcendental is once more becoming intellectually acceptable (cf., e.g., Verhoef 2016:345–270), philosophers are again taking the Bible seriously (cf. Vanhoutte 2015a:125–143, 2015b:156–176), humanities scholarship as much as broader society has developed a renewed openness to matters that are religious (cf. respectively, Lombaard 2016:1–6, 2018:1–7) and Bible scholars in normally plainly exegetical conference sessions have begun seeking deeper meaning from their texts (e.g. Joosten 2016; Steyn 2016; Van der Meer 2016), with, for instance, the complex relationship between biblical metaphor and spirituality drawing exegetes' attention (cf. Hartenstein 2011:52–58, drawing in this respect especially on Liess 2004:155–164). It seems a 'turn' to the spiritual (so, e.g., Kourie 2006:19–38; O'Sullivan 2012:43–59; cf. Balcomb 2010:413–429) is indeed upon us, not only in theological academia but also as a broader, cultural trend.

This new awareness – both of the Divine and that God touches the inner life – has implications, for those who read the Bible, on how the Bible could be better read, in or for a different time.

How to read the Bible? (Or: how do you do, exegetically?)

Since Hans-Georg Gadamer's influential *Wahrheit und Methode* (1960), it has been realised that method does not render truth. Rather, the questions asked determine what is answered. Because no method asks all questions, no results can be all determinative. The hubris of too optimistic scholarship, overly confident in its ability to lay bare the truth or to unveil reality to reason, is soon moderated by hermeneutical humility, facilitated quite ordinarily by history. It takes mere time to realise in the academic enterprise that who asks the question (perspective; motivation), what specifically the question is about (the object studied; the task at hand) and the approach by means of which the object of inquiry is analysed (theory; method; analytical instrumentation) determine what is 'found'. What is then found is what was *sought* (on the occasional full deposition of a scholarly framework, thus establishing a new paradigm of understanding, cf. Kuhn 1962). This is just as valid for exegetical methods as for any other application of mind.

Again to condense voluminous scholarship, this time on exegetical history, practice, theory and theology, in what follows four broad approaches to exegesis are described, phenomenologically and ideal-typically (in the Weberian sense): historical-critical methods, text-immanent approaches, genitive-theological readings and mystagogic engagements.

Historical-critical scholarship (in text-, literary-, form-, redaction-, tradition- and reception-critical forms, and more;

cf., e.g., Law 2012) traces the compositional processes by which the Bible texts themselves had come into being, and the foregoing processes by which the histories which they relate or relate to had played out. This approach is typical of the modernist sense of understanding: once the authorial, sociological and historical developments have been traced, namely up to their smallest possible constitutive units, a sense of intellectual satisfaction is achieved. Understanding has been attained. We now know how this had happened (or more nuanced, of possible and probable ways in which the underlying history could have played out and/or the texts had come into being). Notably, the divine is not directly in the picture here; how God would speak latterly from these texts is hardly a concern; God comes into the picture at best in an unspoken apologetic orientation; so the Bible is read in a manner that would satisfy the sense of what constitutes valid understanding within the socio-intellectual atmosphere of modernism. In exegetical practice, God looms too large a concept to be investigated by a scholarly conceptualature designed to see the minutiae, except to trace the development of the views of God, historically and comparatively.

Text-immanent exegetical methods (structuralist, narratological and semiotic; cf., e.g., Aichele et al. 1995), on their part, see 'composition' differently: not how the parts of the texts had come into being, one after the other, and certainly not how the texts related or relate to the foregoing history. Rather, what the constituent elements of the text-as-is are, in its (more or less) final form, is indicated. Just as importantly, how these smaller parts then relate to one another, on the same level (of the text-as-is, rather than as text-in-development), is traced, with intricate such compositional patterns always found. From this is deduced the craft of the 'author'. At times, aesthetic pronouncements are made on this fine compositional technique just laid bare, but with the implication, almost always, (1) that the text-as-is is therefore a finely woven unity (a finding meant to stand over against historical-criticism's perceived dissection which, in that understanding, destroys cohesive meaning); (2) that this is a highly useful, supportive finding towards Systematic – or Practical Theological ends; and (3) with (1) and (2) adding up to a hint of something like divine inspiration, which would have caused such craft and such usefulness. This ascertained textual network is understood to give stability to the text, making the meaning taken from it comfortingly certain too. This focus both on the (final) text and especially on the synchronic interrelationship of the identified compositional parts is typically postmodernist. The patterns realised⁸ therefore create a sense of having attained comprehension through relationality. Once that network (of rhetorical or poetic units, of characters and plot and spatiality and so forth, or of signs) is seen, meaning is confirmed. Literary theorists are often drawn on – without attention however given to the undergirding value of 20th-century literary theory: the fully insulated self-referentiality alone of a text. This has as frightful theological implications (that God is a character or a sign in a text, merely, and can be nothing more)

8. Both the active and passive senses of the term 'realised' are intended here.

as those ascribed to historical criticism. On a more basic level, the assumption that valid God-talk could be had particularly from orderly patterns parallels most closely the intelligent design option in the creationism – evolutionism debate.

Genitive-theological readings of the Bible (i.e. theologies of liberation, feminism, ecology, etc.; cf., e.g., Castillo 2019) draw variously on historical-critical and text-immanent exegetical methodologies, although usually superficially, because the primary interest here is no longer the compositional nature of the Bible text. Rather, combined very strongly with current social theory (from the humanities, in general, but most particularly from sociology, with Marxist influences most pronounced even if not always acknowledged), this approach has the express purpose of contributing to the alleviation of pressing issues of the day: racism, colonialism, sexism, poverty, exploitation, injustice, the ecological crisis and more. These methods of exegesis are highly critical of both the previous broad approaches neglecting these latter-day matters of importance, specifically for not providing analytical or practical tools to communities of faith to set such wrongs aright. In order now to do so, concepts from critical theory, such as 'masculine hegemony', are employed (although not always in a fully refined manner, given the urgency of the cause and the levels of emotional involvement) with which to read the biblical text, often in a manner labelled 'against its grain'. The unacceptable practices found within the Bible texts (such as hierarchical gender roles) are exposed; the negative effects of these inner-Bible travesties are indicated as they play out in parallel (generally, the historical trajectories are not indicated) in church and society; and a more affirming way of reading the Bible is pleaded for, as is a better society (e.g. on equality of the sexes). Postmodern both in the way *ethical* matters are emphasised and in placing the Bible texts and modern society explicitly in *relation* to one another, the accompanying theology wavers between the metaphoric and the realist. Precisely where on such a metaphoric – realist theological continuum exegetes employing this approach would find themselves, is often not clear, as religion within genitive-theological readings functions mostly as a social resource. This resource could have negative aspects associated with it, in which case these are flayed open within the church(es) and/or society; alternatively, the spiritual capital inherent in the community of faith is drawn on to effect restorative change related to the matter at stake. Clearly, 'sin' is social, although the concept of sin is seldom employed, given its usually individualist orientation. Amongst critical voices on this approach, the often negatively applied concept of 'social gospel' tends, however, to forget the second term in this taxonomy: it is namely still principally 'gospel' oriented; Christianity, church and the Bible are called or drawn into action on a matter of grave concern. The role of the Bible is however no longer that of an authoritative resource, providing guidance, with its theological legitimacy set beyond criticism or, alternatively, with the Bible read sympathetically within its contexts of origination. Rather, the Bible is – again typically postmodern – (1) a conversation

partner, (2) with polyvalent possibilities and (3) open to be drawn on positively or in reaction.

The above three paragraphs intend to characterise the three most well-known broad approaches to exegesis amongst Old and New Testament scholars. The fourth is less known (cf. Welzen 2017). Although within spirituality studies and directly related fields *mystagogy* is no strange concept, within mainstream exegesis this term finds relatively little resonance. The protocols of scholarship in these fields are namely such that (a sense of) intellectual satisfaction is achieved once (1) the way in which the texts had come into being, along with the underlying historical developments, have been traced (historical criticism), or (2) the interrelationship between the constituent parts of the final text has been indicated (text-immanent exegesis), or (3) from a framework of positive social involvement both Bible text and modern society have been critiqued (genitive-theological readings). Once such a sense of having answered the questions posed is attained – accomplished in great detail, to exacting standards and at substantial intellectual and personal cost – the exercise is understood as having been fruitful. The goal has been achieved. There may be more to explore; competing results may be presented; alternatives of various kinds could in time be published – all of these however would operate within the same, established protocols of scholarship. What was sought has been found.

Or has it? At least, has it for our times achieved that sense of satisfaction, that internal and societal resonance which is required by the current underlying sensibilities on what constitutes a valid contribution? With an urge for experiencing meaning, and with a greater openness to the divine, both of which characteristics of our time (as features of the presently rising post-secular era) had been mentioned above, perhaps and older method, ripened by the intervening periods (i.e. drawing appreciatively on aspects of modernism and post-modernism, and not as a negative counteraction), could provide an alternate exegetical avenue.

What does *mystagogic exegesis* namely attempt? Mystagogy in the early church had been associated most directly with baptism rites, with, for example, the mystagogic catechesis of Cyril of Jerusalem from the fourth century understood as educating believers into Christ and into the liturgical meaning of the sacraments (Anatolios 2015:146–153; cf. Mazza 1989:ix–xi, 12, 167, 174).⁹ The mystagogic use of the Scriptures had namely been directed towards liturgy (Mazza 1989:9),¹⁰ within which the believer would experience the presence of the divine. With this ecclesial background, in the Bible – mystagogy relationship, ‘the use of Scripture was

9.The catechesis – mystagogy link remains strong in current times (cf. e.g. Christ 2001; Johnson-Miller and Espinoza 2018:156–170).

10.The Roman Catholic link between Bible–Christ–liturgy runs more directly (cf. Fagerberg 2009:77–80, regaining for our times the valuable works of Danielou 1956 and Lampe 1957:9–38; the latter especially important for the topic here) than in most other Christian denominations, paralleled only in the Orthodox churches. This enables a less problematic mystical appropriation of the Bible by readers than the intellectualism inherent to Protestantism (which creates distance between the events related in the Bible, the biblical text, the interpretative histories and current application) and the emotiveness associated with more charismatic expressions of Christianity (which sees hardly any distance between the Bible as text-and-event and the meaning it has for the present).

extremely important’ (Mazza 1989:7); the methods of drawing on the Bible were however what may be termed – in the language of our time – pre-modern. The latter, not meant here in any negative sense, but in the appreciative awareness (current throughout the greater part of Christianity, historically as much as contemporarily) that it was implicitly understood then that God spoke from the Bible to believer(s). It is this sense of and longing for God’s self-communication with believers (Waaïjman 2002:584–588), in our lives at present, which animates the current broad-spread interest in spirituality, and is again (i.e. returned) an essential instinct of our dawning post-secular era, and lies at the heart of mystagogic exegesis.

The question on such exegesis is, however, how?

Mystagogic facilitation, exegetically

The most ancient formal exegetical ‘methods’ in Christianity of typology and allegory (cf. Mazza 1989:9–13) were meant to solve the apparent lack of Christological meaning of the Old Testament texts. Whereas the New Testament writers had a more natural, and quite varied, engagement with the Old Testament, the church of the immediately subsequent centuries had wanted to find directly Christian meaning from this older collection. This led to a search for a deeper meaning, namely related to soteriology in Christ, in the Old Testament.

This quest rendered most particularly the texts of the Old Testament at once a mystery: the words from the Hebrew Bible, then in Greek and Latin translations (the Septuagint and the Vulgate), contained shrouded meaning, beyond the obvious, and that hidden meaning could be revealed to be Christian. The way in which the Old Testament had been interpreted in the New Testament (especially in the Pauline, deutero-Pauline, Matthean and Johannine writings) opened the door to such engagements with text-and-Christ. For a religious community that had its foundational orientation in the life and work of Christ, that is hardly surprising, and it is this same orientation that characterises Christianity across its historical life span, its geographical scopes and its (religious, social, intellectual and cultural) life engagements.

It is this soteriological meaning, differently formulated, this Christian-existential life engagement which, it is often sensed, the modern text-oriented exegetical methods (historical-critical as much as text-immanent) had not been able to sustain. The genitive-theological readings may have succeeded in recapturing explicitly the importance of the sensed social (or horizontal) impact,¹¹ but still, then, the force behind it, the religious meaning, differently formulated, the metaphysical grounding, does not receive its appropriate recognition.¹² For a believing community, that metaphysical

11.The current social engagements are often *implicitly* present in these text-oriented forms of exegesis, but is seldom spelt out in practice for various reasons.

12.As stated above, ‘the accompanying theology wavers between the metaphoric and the realist. Precisely where on such a metaphoric – realist theological continuum exegetes employing this approach would find themselves, is often not clear, since religion within genitive-theological readings functions mostly as a social resource’.

grounding is the founding and sustaining impulse that makes possible everything else. It is this sense of the divine, of God's presence and guidance, that mystagogic exegesis recognisably seeks.¹³

Mystagogy, ancient as much as current, namely 'sharpens one's eye for the person's final destiny', which is their 'perfection in God' (Waaïjman 2002:565). The latter is no human achievement, resulting from physical or intellectual prowess. Rather, God is the author of such an existential move, which may be described as growth in the faith of the person, but then again as part of the transformation that accompanies the discovery of God's call (Waaïjman 2002:566, 589, 870), rather than as a personal achievement (such as one might find in ever popular spirituality self-help books). Such a 'full flowering' or 'full bloom' of the believer's relationship with God takes contextually seriously who and where a person is, providing further guidance through God's self-communication (Waaïjman 2002:584–588). The language of mystery, unspecific as it sounds to ears trained for the specificities of modern science and its operationalised exactitudes, is the only language appropriate for this process, as '[i]n mystagogy no cognitive content is communicated; rather an experience that is already there is interpreted' (Waaïjman 2002:870).

That this is a fitting manner of engagement with text-and-the-divine, with Bible-and-God, in a post-secular religio-cultural atmosphere, seems clear. The question remains, though: how? Namely, how is the Bible then to be read as mystagogic engagement? Is methodology, as developed within exegetical scholarship, simply irrelevant? Or is a new methodology perhaps called for? Or could exegetical methods from our past be recuperated – *non novum, sed nove*?

Is mystagogic Bible reading, differently formulated, something that may be facilitated by exegetical technique, or ought it be left wholly to holy providence? Free of the exegetical craft and art, however, would this not lead again to the at times disconcertingly erroneous subjectivisms found with Bible readings that had gone (or still go) without exegetical expertise? Can the exegetical practice of past aeons be drawn upon, both to satisfy our intellectual sensibilities and still to be brought overtly into service as education unto faith, thus meeting our spiritual sensitivities? The relationship between intellect and faith, foundational to all religious encounters, remains a central matter here.

Some recently published instances may be taken into review, each demonstrating such validity in some respect (and here summarised only, to be taken into more extensive review in another forum):

- Van der Merwe (2015:1–11) seeks to relate sensory perception to sensing the divine, in an article entitled 'The Early Christian Spirituality of "seeing the divine" in 1 John'. (On the methodological considerations involved,

13. Also in other, non-biblically oriented Christian-mystagogic texts, such as magical arcana (cf. e.g. Lifschitz 1940:23), a Trinitarian salvation history underlies the thinking, with the New Testament contents therefore playing an important interpretative role, also where it is not overtly implied.

cf. Avrahami 2016:3–22.) In fully academic text-analytical mode, the linguistic aspect of sensory metaphors is meant to open the door to the realisation that God can indeed be directly experienced – the latter being a central aspect of mystagogic engagement.

- Young (2007:19–37) employs a thematic approach (akin to that of McGrath 1999:35–81, 88–108) to biblical spirituality, writing reflectively on (for instance) the experience of Israel in the desert, on the desert fathers and on parallel, common human experiences that equal the existential sense of aloneness and dependence. The correspondence of thematics between these three spheres is meant to provide the modern reader with a sense of religious belonging, in that a current experience finds resonance with ancient believers and in the Bible text itself. In this not un-academic contribution, the human experience is brought into a relationship with a biblical topic.
- De Haardt (2004:295–302) writes productively on the Proverbs as reflecting everyday spirituality, drawing strongly on standard Bible scholarship on this collection of sayings in the Old Testament, and indicating the parallels in lived spirituality between that book and modern life. The difficulty of finding plain logic as giving meaning to life is indicated as particularly true to the mystery of life and of faith.
- Welzen (2017:315–317) confirms that the spiritual reading of the Song of Songs (which is controversial again; see, e.g., Schellenberg & Schwienhorst-Schönberger 2016) influences later texts, both in content and in structure. Here, the effects of a Bible text, understood in a pre-modern way and applied to a pre-modern text, show the surprising and perhaps unintentional way in which mystery is sought and found.

These four examples provide instances of deliberately seeking faith from biblical texts, although in quite different ways. In all four instances, there is a clear awareness of the historical situatedness of the biblical texts employed – this, however, in most cases not only in the footnotes and bibliography, but apparent when read from an informed perspective. In addition to this kind of orientation, however, there is a mystagogic moment, a *faciliatory intent* at least, trying to say something about God-in-life (which would as naturally as the vertical orientation have horizontal implications, as all textbooks on spirituality insist), and not only about the text – which is, perhaps, the most that can be hoped for. The reason for the latter sentiment is: exegetes cannot do what is the terrain of the divine. As Welzen (2017:383–384) reminds us, furthermore, in the meeting with God it is as if the Bible thenceforth becomes redundant. The Bible is avowedly not in itself the essence of the matter here, but the divine encounter is.

It is from this perspective that mystagogy as an exegetical enterprise ought to be approached – something which plainly implies the humility that goes along with all faith, perhaps more intentionally so with *exegesis with mystagogic intent* than with other exegetical orientations.

For theological reasons, historical exegesis and mystagogic facilitation

Exegesis with mystagogic intent is, nevertheless, not to be understood as something entirely irenic, in which all the facilitatory texts are at one in purpose and method. The mystagogy written by Photios I of Constantinople in the 9th century was for instance intentionally situated within the *filioque* controversy (cf. Farrell 1987), the text of which mystagogy (translated in Farrell 1987:59–109) speaks still of heartfelt piety, meant confessionally to educate its readership towards a relationship with God. Such theological rivalry parallels directly the contestation within the biblical texts too, as the Old Testament authors amongst themselves, and the New Testament authors amongst themselves, argued their theological cases rhetorically as much as editorially. (It is by now standard fare amongst Bible scholars that inner-biblical debate was conducted, for instance, the way in which the Priestly authors and the Prophetic tradents in the Old Testament characterised the role of Moses, and in the New Testament, how the Synoptic Gospels amongst themselves and with Pauline texts argued about divorce.)

It should therefore not be expected, unrealistically, that the tensions inherent to the more standard exegetical approaches should now disappear where their practitioners were to have facilitatory mystagogic intent. Even more strongly, such diversity indeed illustrates the importance of the shared theological cause approached, albeit by different exegetical means. To that end, I will in the following paragraphs again declare my colours, at the hand of a specifically historical method, albeit one that has substantially fallen out of favour, yet which holds great mystagogic promise.

There has namely been a long-standing debate, more in word than in writing, within the field of Biblical Spirituality on the approach to the biblical text, which best befits the faith-positive intentionality of the field: The historical-critical or the text-immanent approach? Despite the methodological difficulties inherent to the historically oriented approach to a text for the sake of spiritual nurture (of which I am aware – cf. Lombaard 2011:211–225), for theological reasons I find myself inclining strongly towards that approach. The reason for this theological stance lies in the understanding that it is in history that the acts of God, fully understood as revelatory and salvific and foundationally relational, had played out. That history includes the periods reflected in the Old and New Testaments, and of the church (history-of-religions perspectives might lead us wider) and hence of individual believers (with the relative emphases on church and individual, which will be understood differently within the various ecclesiologies). Not naively understood (cf. Lombaard 2014:205–225), but with the problems of history and historiography fully appreciated (Le Roux 1993:35–63; Sheldrake 2009), the opaqueness and evanescence

of history are such that they approach that of faith. Both history and faith namely relate fully certainly to something or Something – even as that something or Something remains beyond our grasp. It is this direct parallel – which is also the ever-recurring problem of ontology and epistemology – that gives credence to this theological position in favour of historical readings of the Bible.

It is for related reasons that Lampe (1957)¹⁴ could hold that:

We must be very careful not to undervalue the salutary effects of this revolution [towards historical exegesis]. There can be no serious doubt that the development of the historical method of approach to the Bible brought about an immense advance in the understanding of Scripture. (p. 11)

The distinction on ancient exegeses which Mazza (1989:11) had drawn, as the Old Testament was related to the New and to the present, provides grist to this mill. Mazza namely finds such an existential-parallel interpretation of faith not in pre-modern exegesis in the form of allegory, but in pre-modern exegesis in the form of typology – which is essentially historical in orientation. The distinction is a fine one, and productive:

If the *written* text of the Old Testament is interpreted as referring and corresponding to the New Testament realities, then the Old Testament *events* likewise refer and correspond to the same realities by reason of their meaning. But the texts are not the events; the process by which the texts correspond can be called allegory, whereas the process by which the events correspond can be called typology. It follows that allegory has to do with the meaning of a text, whereas typology has to do with the realisation or fulfilment of a saving event ...

The distinction between texts and events is extremely important, since it allows us to recover typology while avoiding the serious problems attendant on the allegorical interpretation¹⁵ of Scripture. (Mazza 1989:11)

To this may be added the inference drawn by Lampe (1957), which because of its insightfulness on this matter deserves to be carried forward:

This being so, it is obviously a matter of great importance for us to inquire whether the typological method may legitimately be employed in what is said to be a 'post-critical' age, or whether it rests upon pre-critical presuppositions which the development of the historical and critical approach to the Bible has rendered untenable. Does typology, in fact, imply a reversion to Biblical fundamentalism? Can any criteria be discovered for making a distinction between legitimate and exegetically justifiable typology, on the one hand, and the unwarrantable exercise of private and uncontrolled ingenuity on the other? Can typology be employed without a return to that conception of Scripture which essentially belongs to a pre-critical age – the notion that the sacred writings are a mysterious collection of enigmas revealing divine secrets to those who can discover the key to their solution? ... (p. 21–22)

14. My thanks to David Fagerberg, University of Notre Dame, for pointing me towards this source.

15. '... uncontrollable ... (s)ubjectivism is the only objectivity at work in allegory' (Mazza 1989:11). Hence, insightfully: 'Allegory has historically been the death of mystagogy' (Mazza 1989:13).

Can we distinguish between legitimate and fanciful typology? Can this method ever provide a firm scriptural basis for Christian doctrine, or is it too subjective and individualistic for this purpose? Can we find any criteria for the use of the typological method, so that we may restore to the ordinary Christian reader something of his or her inheritance of Biblical exegesis, whilst still remaining faithful to the canons and principles of literary and historical criticism?

Upon this follows the laudable conclusion from Lampe (1957):

... [T]he insistence [is] that typology must rest upon authentic history, interpreted in accordance with the Biblical view of the divine economy and with due regard for the literal sense of Scripture and the findings of critical scholarship. (p. 22)

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