

Patristic Exegetical Theory and Practice in De Lubac and Congar

William M. Wright

Abstract

This article examines the retrieval of patristic exegesis in two major figures in Catholic *Ressourcement* theology: Henri de Lubac and Yves Congar. Henri de Lubac's driving concern in his biblical writings is not so much to chronicle the history of interpretation as it is to explicate the great theological synthesis, which underlies the doctrine of the fourfold sense of Scripture. For de Lubac, this synthesis, wherein the totality of Christian doctrine and practice is centered in Christ and grounded in the reading of Scripture, is an essential component of Christianity. De Lubac encourages the integration of this theological vision with modern biblical studies, but he does not offer much as to what such an integration might look like in practice. Congar, building upon de Lubac's work, goes beyond de Lubac in making concrete efforts to integrate some of the theory and practice of patristic interpretation with modern exegesis. Important here is Congar's notion of "typological tradition" whereby the divine mystery concealed and revealed in the realities presented by the biblical text, unfold in the tradition, doctrine, and practice of the Church.

Keywords

De Lubac, Congar, *Ressourcement*, patristic exegesis, senses of Scripture

As suggested by its name, the renewal movement in 20th century Catholic theology known as *Ressourcement* centered on a "return to the sources" of the Christian tradition, including Scripture, the writings of the Church Fathers, and the liturgy. Motivated in part as a reaction against late 19th and early 20th century neo-Scholasticism, this initiative to delve into Christianity's ancient and medieval sources was driven not by a nostalgic desire to take refuge in a bygone age but by the belief that the Tradition bears within itself the spiritual wisdom, which speaks powerfully and meaningfully to contemporary

human needs. For *Ressourcement* theologians, the biblical interpretation of the Church Fathers occupied a prominent place and provided an especially fertile resource for creative theological thinking.

In this article, I will take a wide-angled view on the retrieval of patristic exegesis by two figures associated with Catholic *Ressourcement*: the French Jesuit Henri de Lubac (1896–1991) and the French Dominican Yves Congar (1904–1995). My specific focus will be on what aspects of patristic exegesis each found especially important and how these aspects were to be retrieved and made serviceable in a contemporary setting. I will then conclude with some brief remarks as to legacy of their work.

I. Patristic Exegetical Theory and Practice in Henri de Lubac

More than any other figure associated with Catholic *Ressourcement*, Henri de Lubac was responsible for the retrieval of premodern exegesis as a perennially valuable resource for Christian faith and practice. His major contributions in this regard are his 1950 study of Origen's exegesis, *History and Spirit*, and the four volumes of *Medieval Exegesis*, which appeared between 1959 and 1964.

It should be noted that while *History and Spirit* is a sustained study of Origen as exegete, de Lubac's major concern in his biblical writings is not to chronicle the development of premodern Christian exegesis, that is, to write a history of interpretation. For instance, the first two volumes of *Medieval Exegesis* are given over to the discussion of discrete, but related, topics constituent to the theology of premodern biblical interpretation. These include the identification of this exegesis as theology, the origins of the threefold and fourfold arrangements of the Scriptural senses and the theological differences implied by each, the figure of Origen and his reception, and the thinking implied in each of the four Scriptural senses: literal, allegorical, moral, and anagogical. Only in volumes three and four of *Medieval Exegesis* does de Lubac offer an account of the history of interpretation proper, which tracks the thinking about the senses of Scripture from the early Middle Ages to its decline in late Medieval Christianity and Renaissance Humanism.

While a history of interpretation does come to light over the course of his biblical writings, de Lubac's primary interest in premodern exegesis lies in what he calls its "great synthetic idea."¹ Drawing on Maurice Blondel's philosophy of tradition, de Lubac sees premodern Christian exegesis, for all the variety among its practitioners and

¹ Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, trans. Mark Sebanc and E. M. Macierowski, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998–2009), vol. 2, p. 262.

techniques, as a coherent tradition, animated by an inner sensibility that exceeds its particular instantiations.² This guiding sensibility or “great synthetic idea” is its comprehensive theological vision of Christian faith and life. It is this theological vision which de Lubac especially wants to recover for the contemporary Church. For as he says, with reference to Johann Adam Möhler, this theological synthesis “reaches . . . to the permanent foundations of Christian thought.”³ De Lubac, therefore, is primarily concerned in his biblical writings with the explication of this great theological synthesis, which the doctrine of the fourfold sense of Scripture enfolds.

A basic orientation to the theological synthesis of the fourfold sense appears in de Lubac’s first book, *Catholicism*, which was published in 1938 and constitutes a microcosm of his entire theological oeuvre. As has been noted, the unfolding sequence of topics treated in the sequential chapters of *Catholicism* positions the chapter on biblical exegesis to follow upon de Lubac’s case for the social and historical nature of Christianity.⁴ Accordingly, this placement of biblical interpretation within the argumentative sequence of his book *Catholicism* accents Scripture as setting forth the history of God’s saving action in the divine economy.⁵ For de Lubac, the Christian claim that God has revealed himself and brought about the salvation of humanity through historical realities (such as the history of Israel and the flesh of Jesus) makes Christianity intrinsically historical.⁶ The literal sense of Scripture is the verbal presentation of these revelatory and salvific acts of God in biblical history. As the formula of the fourfold sense reads, *littera gesta docet*: the letter teaches events. Thus de Lubac writes: “God has intervened in human history: the first thing to do is to learn the history of his interventions from the Book where they have been recorded by the

² This is aptly argued in Kevin L. Hughes, “The ‘Fourfold Sense’: De Lubac, Blondel, and Contemporary Theology,” *Heythrop Journal* 42 (2001), pp. 456–459. See also de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, vol. 1, p. xiv; *ibid.*, “Doctrine of the ‘Fourfold Sense’ in Scripture,” in *Theological Fragments*, trans. Rebecca Howell Balinski (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), p. 119; Marcellino D’Ambrosio, “Henri de Lubac and the Critique of Scientific Exegesis,” *Communio* 19 (1992), pp. 373–376.

³ Henri de Lubac, *History and Spirit: The Understanding of Scripture According to Origen*, trans. Anne Englund Nash and Juvenal Merriell (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007), p. 431.

⁴ See William M. Wright IV, “The Literal Sense of Scripture according to Henri de Lubac: Insights from Patristic Exegesis of the Transfiguration,” *Modern Theology* 28 (2012), pp. 252–277.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 262.

⁶ Because God has revealed himself and acted in history, de Lubac (*Medieval Exegesis*, vol. 2, p. 44) writes, “it will never be possible to forget history, nor to put it into question again, nor to free oneself of it or spurn it. One must endeavor to receive and preserve its testimony.”

Holy Spirit. This is the reason that *littera* and *historia* often appear interchangeably.”⁷

This statement also highlights a certain ambiguity in de Lubac’s account of the literal sense. Given the interchangeability of *littera* and *historia*, de Lubac distinguishes, but does not separate, the revelatory and saving acts of God in historical realities (i.e. history in the objective sense) and the verbal communication of these events through the biblical text (i.e. history in the subjective sense as a recorded account).⁸ One might say that for de Lubac, the literal sense consists in the realities of salvation history *as they are given by the biblical text* in contrast to other, more recent accounts of the literal sense, such as the intended meaning of the original author(s) or the reference of the text or the literary sense of the words *per se* without overriding concern for their reference.

De Lubac’s concern for the concrete reality of God’s revelatory and saving interventions in salvation history leads him to put the theological emphasis on history in the objective sense (i.e. the biblical *res*) rather than on history in the subjective sense (i.e. the biblical *verba*). The biblical text is the means whereby readers are given the realities of salvation history by which God reveals and saves. As these realities bear the stamp of divine intervention and are given in the inspired biblical text, the literal sense possesses a firm and abiding religious value. A close reading of the letter and a positive valuation of the realities which it narrates is the foundation and starting point for all Christian interpretation.

While Christian interpretation starts with the literal sense, it cannot stop there. God’s use of history as the means for His self-revelation and saving activity entails that the various realities of salvation history possess a spiritual significance or interior meaning, the perception of which lies beyond ordinary human means (i.e. historicist positivism).⁹ As de Lubac puts it, “historical realities possess a profound sense and are to be understood in a spiritual manner: [*historika pneumatikōs*]; conversely, spiritual realities appear in a constant state of flux and are to be understood historically: [*pneumatika historikōs*].”¹⁰ In a word, the structure of salvation history, as Hans Boersma has argued, is

⁷ De Lubac, “Doctrine of the ‘Fourfold Sense’,” p. 114.

⁸ De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, vol. 2, p. 43.

⁹ De Lubac here builds upon the critique of historicist positivism and its confusing of “critical history” (that which can be known by critical historical method) and “real history” (past human realities in all their fullness) offered by Maurice Blondel in his “History and Dogma. See Maurice Blondel, *The Letter on Apologetics & History and Dogma*, trans. Alexander Dru and Iltyd Trethowan (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), pp. 236–239. Cf. D’Ambrosio, “Critique of Scientific Exegesis,” pp. 375–376.

¹⁰ Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*, trans. Lancelot C. Sheppard and Sister Elizabeth Englund, O.C.D. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), p. 165.

fundamentally “sacramental.”¹¹ The realities of salvation history bear within themselves the divine mystery, which they both conceal and reveal. Moreover, the many individual realities of salvation history all participate in the one divine economy, the single plan of God to bring about the salvation of the world through Christ. The presence of the mystery of Christ (whether veiled or revealed) in these realities of salvation history and their participation in the economy of redemption in Christ constitutes the substance of the spiritual, or allegorical, sense.

De Lubac is quite emphatic that the spiritual sense pertains to the biblical *res*, rather than the texts or psychology of the biblical authors. In *Catholicism*, he writes, “The spiritual meaning, then, is to be found on all sides, not only more especially in a book but first and foremost in reality itself: *In ipso facto, non solum in dicto, mysterium, requirere debemus* [we ought to seek the mystery in the fact itself, not only in the word].”¹² Later in volume 2 of *Medieval Exegesis*, de Lubac argues, “to discover this allegory, one will not find it properly speaking in the text, but in the realities of which the text speaks.”¹³ He later adds, “the text acts only as spokesman to lead to the historical realities; the latter are themselves the figures, they themselves contain the mysteries that the exercise of allegory is supposed to extract from them.”¹⁴ The spiritual sense is the presence of the mystery of Christ, concealed in the realities of salvation history, brought to light by the Holy Spirit. As Francis Martin has aptly put it, “[t]he theory of the spiritual sense of Scripture is based, not on a theory of text, but on a theology of history.”¹⁵

Given that Christian readers of Scripture themselves participate in the same economy of redemption and are united to Christ as members of his ecclesial body, Christians can read both Testaments with reference to themselves. The moral sense of Scripture, therefore, is “the interiorization of the biblical datum: its history and its mystery.”¹⁶ The prayerful reader encounters the mystery of Christ in the realities given in Scripture, and as the mystery takes root and increases in the reader, it shapes Christian life and practice. The mystery of Christ has been delivered in all its fullness, but it is neither perfectly understood nor has it been revealed in all its fullness. Anagogical reading—

¹¹ See Hans Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology: A Return to Mystery* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 154–160.

¹² De Lubac, *Catholicism*, p. 169.

¹³ De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, vol. 2, p. 86.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Francis Martin, “Election, Covenant, and Law,” *Nova et Vetera*, English edition 4 (2006): 867. Boersma (*Nouvelle Théologie*, p. 151) similarly writes that for de Lubac, “the spiritual meaning constituted a deeper dimension of reality, one that was contained within the historical event conveyed by Scripture”

¹⁶ De Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, vol. 2, p. 139.

the last of the four senses—contemplates how the present participation in the mystery of Christ is a veiled foretaste of heavenly life. De Lubac writes, “for that which we realize now in Christ . . . is the very same thing which, freed of every obstacle and all obscurity, will become the essence of eternal life.”¹⁷ As de Lubac so explicates it, the doctrine of the fourfold sense holds together God’s revelation in history, which culminates in Christ, and the fruits of Christ’s work, which unfolds in the faith and practices of Christians, members of Christ’s ecclesial body, and reaches its consummation in heavenly glory. It is a vision where history, theology, ecclesiology, morality, spirituality, and eschatology are all centered in Christ and grounded in the reading of Scripture. This is the primary theological substance, which de Lubac wants to recover from patristic biblical exegesis.

De Lubac is clear that it is neither possible nor desirable to reinstate such exegesis wholesale in contradistinction to modern biblical criticism.¹⁸ Rather, de Lubac encourages the integration of this classic theological vision with modern biblical study, so that the same theological principles can be adapted and thrive in modern circumstances. While he encourages this work, de Lubac, however, does not offer much by way of such an integration might look like in actual practice. Some of his more suggestive remarks appear in the Conclusion to *History and Spirit*. There he suggests several features, which such an integration of modern and premodern exegesis, might possess. They include Christocentrism, a more profound appreciation for the interior depths and mystery within historical realities, greater attention to the role of symbolism, which spans the biblical canon, and the consideration of “the eternal significance of the great biblical episodes, always in light of the Christian mystery.”¹⁹ Beyond such general suggestions, de Lubac leaves the work of integrating the theological synthesis of patristic exegesis with modern biblical criticism to others.

II. Patristic Exegetical Theory and Practice in Yves Congar

The same, however, does not apply to de Lubac’s slightly younger contemporary Yves Congar. Congar is not usually considered among the major *Ressourcement* contributors to the retrieval of patristic

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

¹⁸ De Lubac (“Doctrine of the ‘Fourfold Sense’,” 124) writes, “Does this mean what we would propose returning to it as a guide for today’s exegesis and theology? No one would seriously dream of that. Little by little, its sap has dried up. . . . [But] Preserving or rediscovering its spirit is not the same thing as literally reestablishing it.” Cf. *Ibid.*, *Medieval Exegesis*, vol. 1, p. xix–xxi.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, *History and Spirit*, pp. 491–495, quotation from p. 492.

exegesis because the majority of his theological work was done in ecclesiology, ecumenism, and pneumatology. However, Congar provides substantive discussion of patristic exegesis and its abiding theological value in his classic work *Tradition and Traditions*.²⁰ In this respect, Congar is quite similar to de Lubac, whose works Congar himself often references. However, in some of his other writings, Congar goes beyond de Lubac by making some concrete efforts to integrate the theological principles and substance of patristic interpretation with modern critical exegesis.

Like de Lubac, Congar sees great importance in the theological architecture, which undergirds patristic exegesis broadly speaking. When discussing the then conventional appeal in Catholic theology to “the consensus of the Fathers,” Congar acknowledges the great variety of patristic exegeses of any given text of Scripture, and this diversity of interpretations makes such a generic appeal overly-simple. Instead, Congar redirects the thinking on this topic to the larger interpretive matrix within which these different interpretations took shape. He writes in *Tradition and Traditions*, “As far as the reading of Scripture is concerned, there has been built up in that way something more valuable than an interpretive exegetical consensus on some individual verse, I mean the total framework, inside which and starting from which all Catholic reading of written revelation has been formed and educated.”²¹ This interpretive framework, by which Congar means the interpretation of Scripture in the context of and in concert with the Church, is “the most important element, the essential contribution of the Fathers to the formation of an exegetical tradition.”²²

Congar wrote *Tradition and Traditions* in two parts: the first part is an historical study of the topic of tradition and was published in 1960; the second part, the more programmatic and constructive theological contribution, was later published in 1963. The abiding value of the patristic hermeneutical framework appears in the way in which Congar appropriates aspects of patristic exegesis, which he discusses in the first, historical part, into the second, constructive theological part of *Tradition and Traditions*. These aspects would include the relationship between the Church and Scripture and the former as the interpretive context for the latter.

Especially significant for Congar is the patristic understanding of Scripture in sacramental terms. The importance of the sacramentality of Scripture for Congar is evident in the fact he discusses this topic in

²⁰ Yves M.-J. Congar, O.P., *Tradition and Traditions: An Historical and Theological Essay*, trans. Michael Naseby and Thomas Rainborough (London: Burns & Oates, 1911 [1960, 1963]).

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 399.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 399.

writings which date throughout his career.²³ Congar's analysis of the sacramentality of Scripture begins with the divine Word, the Logos, who is at work in the history of Israel and incarnated in Jesus. Congar cites chapter 8 of de Lubac's *History and Spirit*, wherein de Lubac explicates Origen's conceiving of Scripture (and also the Church) as "incorporations of the Logos."²⁴ Consistent with de Lubac's account, Congar affirms a distinction between the Word of God and the Scripture: "The Word of God is the Divine Word himself. Scripture, the word as preached—and we may add, sacraments and traditions—are only *means* whereby God's Word reveals and acts."²⁵ Scripture is not the Word of God proper, but a medium by which the divine Word discloses and communicates himself to readers. Moreover, like the sacraments of the Church, the Scripture, as a product of the Spirit's inspiration, has a divine institution.

On more than one occasion, Congar interprets the sacramentality of Scripture with the categories of sacramental theology which medieval Scholasticism developed from Augustine.²⁶ The text of Scripture, composed as it is of verbal signs, corresponds to the *sacramentum*, the sensible sign proper. The sacramental sign that is the text of Scripture mediates an encounter with the divine Word, who exceeds (i.e. is greater than) those verbal signs. In the Scholastic categories, this encounter with the Word would approximate the *res et sacramentum*, "the spiritual reality which the sacrament produces of itself."²⁷ This encounter with the Word, mediated by reading the text of Scripture in faith, also has causal power to produce an effect in the reader (the *res tantum*).²⁸

Drawing on both de Lubac and the analysis of Bonaventure's understanding of revelation offered by Joseph Ratzinger, Congar argues that the same Word of God, communicated by the text, also works in the Church and in the reader individually to bring about *understanding* of the text's spiritual meaning (i.e. the spiritual sense) and the readers' transformation.²⁹

²³ Yves Congar, O.P. *The Revelation of God*, trans. A. Manson and L. C. Shepard (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968 [1962]), p. 6; *ibid.*, *Tradition and Traditions*, pp. 403–406; *ibid.*, "Sur la valeur sacramentelle de la Parole," *La Vie spirituelle* 135 (1981), pp. 379–389.

²⁴ Congar, *Tradition and Traditions*, p. 281 n.2. Cf. de Lubac, *History and Spirit*, pp. 385–426.

²⁵ Congar, *Tradition and Traditions*, p. 281.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 404–405; Yves Congar, O.P., *The Meaning of Tradition*, trans. A. N. Woodrow (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004 [1964]), p. 91.

²⁷ Congar, *Tradition and Traditions*, p. 404.

²⁸ Congar (*Tradition and Traditions*, p. 280) so defines the *res tantum*: "it gives knowledge and produces an effect."

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 387–389, 405–406.

Congar's parsing of the sacramentality of Scripture within these Scholastic categories can be seen as a different articulation or a translation of the fourfold sense of Scripture expounded by de Lubac. The biblical text (or letter) is the sacramental sign, which communicates the divine Word, who both reveals and teaches himself to the reader (the allegorical sense). This encounter with the divine Word has causal power to inform and transform the well-disposed reader (the moral sense), the goal of which is sanctification and heavenly life (the anagogical sense).

The distinction between the divine Word and Scripture involves a third element: salvation history as the locus of the divine Word's revelatory and saving work in the world. When recounting the general view of the topic common to both the New Testament and the Church Fathers, Congar focuses attention on two conventional elements. First, the critical importance of the divine economy as the macro-structure for biblical interpretation: "The content and meaning of Scripture was God's covenant plan, finally realized in Jesus Christ . . . and in the Church."³⁰ Second, like de Lubac, Congar stresses importance of the biblical *res*, the realities of salvation history which the biblical texts present, as the revelatory *loci*. These realities all participate in the divine economy, which transcends their historical particularity. Accordingly, Congar writes, "the *facts of revelation* have a richness of meaning which transcends their reality as historic events, and consequently the texts which present them can indicate a content of reality which goes beyond what such facts constitute simply as natural history."³¹ For both de Lubac and Congar, the biblical *res* overflows with meaning, which goes beyond the apparent and literal. Although somewhat uncomfortable with the conventional language of literal and spiritual senses, Congar follows de Lubac's insistence that what is conventionally called the spiritual sense properly pertains to the biblical *res*, and not the biblical language or authors' psychology.

Historical and philological work on the biblical literary sense, Congar argues, is invaluable and necessary because of the human nature of Scripture (in this regard, he cites conventional analogy between the incarnate Word and the dual natures of inspired Scripture). However, historical criticism cannot constitute the sum total of Christian biblical interpretation because it cannot of its own accord delve into the deeper meaning, which the realities of salvation history have in the divine economy. Congar writes, "The literary meaning of a text . . . does not exhaust its content because it is witnessing to *events of revelation* which have their place in a plan at the heart of which they have something more to say, something that goes beyond their

³⁰ Congar, *Tradition and Traditions*, p. 69.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 69 n. 1.

immediate meaning.”³² According to Congar, the key for opening up and exploring “the richness of meaning” which the realities of salvation history have within the divine economy is typology and typological exegesis (even though he does acknowledge de Lubac’s critique of the typology vs. allegory distinction).³³ Congar recognizes the employment of this exegetical practice by New Testament Christians.

Given that on the one hand the Church participates in the same economy of the Word (to whom Christians are united in his ecclesial body) and on the other, the overflow of meaning in the biblical *res*, Congar extends such more-than-literal interpretation beyond the canon proper and into the Church’s faith, tradition, and practice.³⁴ The key category for Congar in this regard is what he calls “typological tradition.”³⁵ He defines this category in contrast with what he calls “*exegetical tradition*” (an exegetically demonstrable claim in the Bible’s literary sense) and “an *exclusively oral tradition*” (a tradition lacking any kind of reference to Scripture).³⁶ For Congar, typological tradition “starts with the events of revelation, great or small attested to in Scripture, in order to develop from them applications in the full human historicity of the Church which the Holy Spirit guides, but without making his own all the human effort of even the most faithful Christians.”³⁷ That is to say, typological tradition begins with the Bible’s literary sense, the object of study for historical and philological criticism, which articulates the *res*, the realities or content which the literary sense is about. The biblical *res*, caught up as they are in the divine economy, overflow with spiritual meaning. The particular *res* has a certain form given it by the biblical text, which the *res* nevertheless exceeds. The unfolding and intellectual and practical working out of this excess of meaning takes shape in the Church’s

³² *Ibid.*, p. 75.

³³ For Congar (*Tradition and Traditions*, 69), typological exegesis “consists in drawing out the relation between the various realities involved in the history of salvation of the unveiling and accomplishment of the plan of God.” Responding to Jean Daniélou, de Lubac criticized the legitimacy of the categorical distinction between typology and allegory as two fundamentally different ways of reading Scripture in a more-than-literal way. See Henri de Lubac, “Typology and Allegorization,” in *Theological Fragments*, pp. 129–164; Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie*, pp. 180–190; Peter W. Martens, “Revisiting the Allegory/Typology Distinction: The Case of Origen,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 16 (2008), pp. 283–317.

³⁴ O’Keefe and Reno likewise stress the importance of the divine economy for patristic, more-than-literal exegesis in John J. O’Keefe and R. R. Reno, *Sanctified Vision: An Introduction to Early Christian Interpretation of the Bible* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 107–113.

³⁵ Congar, *Tradition and Traditions*, pp. 75–77.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

tradition, doctrine, and practice—all of which are forms of biblical interpretation.

Even though Congar does not label it as such, his treatment of the Virgin Mary and the Temple in his 1958 book *The Mystery of the Temple* exemplifies his notion of typological tradition.³⁸ In this particular discussion, as in the rest of *Mystery of the Temple*, Congar endeavors to incorporate modern biblical criticism with patristic readings and hermeneutical principles. For instance, Congar discusses the connections between the Virgin Mary and the wilderness Tabernacle in the Lukan infancy narrative (which I will fill out exegetically). A key component of this association is Luke's use of the verb *episki-azein* in his account of the Annunciation to Mary (Luke 1:26–38). In the course of answering Mary's question about how she will conceive Jesus, the angel Gabriel says, "the Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow [*episkiasei*] you" (Luke 1:35). The reference to the divine power overshadowing (*episkiazein*) Mary forms a lexical link with LXX Exod 40:35, wherein "Moses was unable to enter into the Tabernacle of Testimony because the cloud was overshadowing [*episkiazen*] it and the Glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle." Through this lexical link, Luke connects the cloud of God's presence overshadowing the Tabernacle in Exod 40:35 and the power of God overshadowing Mary at Jesus' virginal conception in Luke 1:35.³⁹

The typological associations between the Virgin Mary and the *loci* of divine presence in Israel are continued (albeit subtly) in the following scene of Mary's visitation of her kinswoman Elizabeth (Luke 1:39–56). Referencing René Laurentin, Congar expounds various parallels between 2 Sam 6:1–14 and Luke 1:43, 56, which align the Virgin Mary and Jesus *in utero* with David's moving of the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem: "the ark goes up to Jerusalem, so too does Mary [go up to a town of Judah]; the people cry out for joy, so too does Elizabeth; David leaps for gladness so too does John."⁴⁰ To this one might add, the similarities in rhetorical questioning between David in LXX 2 Sam 6:9 ("How will the ark of the Lord come to me" and Elizabeth in Luke 1:43 ("how does this happen to me that

³⁸ Yves M.-J. Congar, O.P., *The Mystery of the Temple, or The Manner of God's Presence to His Creatures from Genesis to the Apocalypse*, trans. Reginald F. Trevett, (London: Burns & Oates, Ltd., 1962 [1958]), 254–261. Congar's *The Mystery of the Temple*, which, although published prior to *Tradition and Traditions*, nevertheless reflects may of the programmatic claims, which Congar makes in the later work.

³⁹ Congar, *Mystery of the Temple*, p. 256. See Raymond E. Brown, S.S., *The Birth of the Messiah*, New Updated Edition (New York: Doubleday, 1993 [1977]), pp. 327–328, 344–345.

⁴⁰ Congar, *Mystery of the Temple*, p. 257 n. 9, referencing René Laurentin, *Structure et Théologie de Luc, I–II* (Paris: 1957), p. 27 n.8.

the Mother of my Lord should come to me?”)⁴¹ and Luke’s identification of Jesus and God as *Kyrios*, which Luke cumulatively works out in his infancy narrative.⁴²

According to Congar, these associations, which come to light through an analysis of the Bible’s literary sense, provides the biblical basis, or type, for further theological exploration in the Church’s tradition of the deeper meaning of these realities in the divine economy. Such explorations appear, for instance, in the patristic interpretations of Mary as temple, as the Ark of the Covenant, and as Jacob’s ladder. Such interpretations go beyond the literary sense of the biblical words, but neither are they alien to it. They are an intellectual and spiritual working out of the implications of the typological association between two *res* in the divine economy. Typological tradition provides Congar with way to integrate historical and philological analysis of the Bible’s literary sense with the unfolding of the meaning of the *res* in the Church’s exegetical interpretation. To his credit, Congar not only discusses this integration in theory but, he endeavors to put it into practice.

III. Conclusion

The retrieval of patristic exegesis advocated by de Lubac and Congar, was, generally speaking, not well received by many Catholic biblical scholars.⁴³ Reasons for this tepid reception vary. However, the case for reappropriating the substance of patristic exegesis for contemporary use has become a permanent (and often unnoticed) feature in post-conciliar Catholicism since the time of their writing. For instance, both de Lubac and Congar contributed extensively to the Second Vatican Council’s “Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation” (*Dei Verbum*). In fact, the program for Catholic exegesis set forth in the two paragraphs of *Dei Verbum* §12, which calls for the integration of historical and literary exegesis with those ecclesiological and theological principles characteristic of patristic exegesis (e.g.

⁴¹ Fitzmyer likewise notes these similarities between Mary and the Ark but seems to think them too subtle to be intended psychologically by Luke. See Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., *The Gospel according to Luke*, 2 vols., Anchor Bible 28–28A (New York: Doubleday, 1970–1985), vol. 1, p. 364. For more developed argumentation against an intended link with 2 Sam 6, see Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, pp. 344–345.

⁴² See C. Kavin Rowe, *Early Narrative Christology: The Lord in the Gospel of Luke* (Berlin and Grand Rapids: Walter de Gruyter and Baker Academic, 2006), pp. 31–55.

⁴³ See John L. McKenzie, S.J., “A Chapter in the History of Spiritual Exegesis: De Lubac’s *Histoire et Esprit*,” *Theological Studies* 12 (1951), pp. 365–381; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., *Scripture: The Soul of Theology* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1994), pp. 59, 91 n. 70; *Ibid.*, *The Interpretation of Scripture: In Defense of the Historical-Critical Method* (Mahwah: Paulist, 2008), pp. 91–96.

the unity of the canon and the hermeneutical import of the Church's doctrine and Tradition), closely resembles that given in an essay of Congar written in 1956.⁴⁴ The formal incorporation of certain patristic exegetical principles into Catholic exegesis has received further Magisterial endorsement in Benedict XVI's *Verbum Domini* §36–41, and (while not a work of his papal magisterium) his *Jesus of Nazareth* trilogy patently aims at synthesizing modern and premodern exegesis into a theological hermeneutic.⁴⁵ Indeed, one might helpfully consider Benedict's *Jesus of Nazareth* as a continuation of what Congar strove for in *The Mystery of the Temple*. One can also point to the renewed attention to the practice of *lectio divina* in Catholic spirituality (the theological thinking and practice of which are deeply indebted to patristic interpretation).⁴⁶

Much work remains to be done toward the synthesizing of modern biblical criticism with the *Ressourcement* of patristic exegesis in Catholic biblical hermeneutics. The contributions of de Lubac and Congar have not only provided helpful content and direction, but have already started to bear fruit in the life and practices of the Church.

William M. Wright

600 Forbes Ave.

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15282

United States

E-mail: wrightw@duq.edu

⁴⁴ Compare *Dei Verbum* §12 with Congar's essay "The Bible and the Word of God" in his *Revelation of God*, pp. 16–33.

⁴⁵ See Joseph Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, trans. Adrian J. Walker (New York: Doubleday, 2007), pp. xv–xxiv; *Ibid.*, *Jesus of Nazareth Part Two: Holy Week—From the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, trans. Philip J. Whitmore (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2011), pp. xiv–xviii. For secondary discussion, see William M. Wright IV, "A 'New Synthesis': Joseph Ratzinger's *Jesus of Nazareth*," *Nova et Vetera*, English edition 7 (2009), pp. 37–45; *ibid.*, "Patristic Biblical Hermeneutics in Joseph Ratzinger's *Jesus of Nazareth*," *Letter and Spirit* 7 (2012), pp. 193–209.

⁴⁶ See Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini* §86–87.