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“The Scriptures, St. Paul, and Jewish Methods of Exegesis”

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Introduction

- Scriptures: The October 2008 Synod of Bishops: “The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church” with Rabbi Shear-Yashuv Cohen, chief rabbi of Haifa, Israel, first Jewish representative addressing a Catholic Synod of Bishops
- St. Paul: the recently completed Year of St. Paul in the Catholic Church
- Early Jewish Methods of Exegesis: Examples from Paul’s Letter to the Romans

I. *The Scriptures in Judaism and in Christianity*

- Rabbi Cohen and Pope Benedict at the Synod
- Final Propositions of the Synod:
 - 10. “The Old Testament in the Christian Bible”: “awareness of the Old Testament is indispensable for anyone who believes in the gospel of Jesus Christ”.
 - 52. “Dialogue between Christians and Jews”: “Christians and Jews share the Scriptures of the Hebrew people, which Christians call the Old Testament.” [...] “The Jewish understanding of the Bible can help the understanding and the study of the Scriptures on the part of Christians.”
- 1965 Declaration *Nostra Aetate* of the Second Vatican Council: “the Church cannot forget that she received the revelation of the Old Testament by way of that people with whom God in his inexpressible mercy established the ancient covenant” (n. 4).
- 2002 Pontifical Biblical Commission, Document, “The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible”:
 - n. 84: “the Jewish people and their Sacred Scriptures occupy a very important place in the Christian Bible. Indeed, the Jewish Sacred Scriptures constitute an essential part of the Christian Bible. [...] Without the Old Testament, the New Testament would be an incomprehensible book, a plant deprived of its roots and destined to dry up and wither”.
 - n. 22: “Christians can [...] learn much from Jewish exegesis practiced for more than two thousand years, and, in fact, they have learned much in the course of history. For their part, it is to be hoped that Jews themselves can derive profit from Christian exegetical research.”

- Serge Ruzer (from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem), *Mapping the New Testament. Early Christian Writings as a Witness for Jewish Biblical Exegesis* (Jewish and Christian Perspectives Series 13; Leiden – Boston 2007) p. 6: “New Testament material can thus be studied as containing possible ‘missing links’ in the long trajectory of biblical exposition. The discussion [...] thus emphasizes the importance of the patterns of the Jesus movement’s ‘conversation with Scripture’ for a better understanding of developments in early Jewish exegesis.”

II. *Paul the Jew*

- Year of St. Paul, commemorating the 2000th anniversary (more or less) of his birth
- Revised Paradigm in Pauline Studies: Emphasis on Paul’s Jewish Background
- Paul’s Use of Scripture in His Letters

III. *Examples from the Letter to the Romans*

Overall Thesis of Letter: “¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; ...” (Rom 1:16-17a)

Initial Scriptural Support for Thesis: “... as it is written, ‘The one who is righteous by faith will live’” (Rom 1:17b citing Hab 2:4b).

1. Rom 4:1-12 citing Gen 15:6 and Ps 32:1-2, Technique: *Gezerah Shawah* (Analogy)
 - Analogy between two texts having a common word or phrase, such that the two verses can be mutually interpretive. Scriptural example: see 2 Chron 30:2-3, where the biblical precedent from Num 9 and a *gezerah shawah* between Num 9:10 and Deut 4:14 (which have the common phrase “on a distant journey”) are apparently used to reach the decision to celebrate the Passover in the second month that year because of the inability to celebrate it in the first month.
 - Thesis: Justification (1) by faith apart from works (2) for circumcised and uncircumcised (cf. Rom 3:21-22)
 - Support for (1): Gen 15:6 & Ps 32:1-2 in Rom 4:1-8
 - ¹ What then can we say that Abraham found, our ancestor according to the flesh? ² Indeed, if Abraham was justified on the basis of his works, he has reason to boast; but this was not so in the sight of God.
 - ³ For what does the scripture say? “*Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness*” (Gen 15:6).
 - ⁴ A worker's wage is credited not as a gift, but as something due. ⁵ But when one does not work, yet believes in the one who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness.
 - ⁶ So also David speaks of the blessedness of those to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works:
 - ⁷ “*Blessed are those whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; ⁸ blessed is the one against whom the Lord will not reckon sin*” (Ps 32:1-2)

- Support for (2): Ps 32:2 & Gen 15:6 in Rom 4:8-12
 - ⁸ “...*blessed is the one against whom the Lord will not reckon sin*” (Ps 32:2)
 - ⁹ Is this blessedness, then, pronounced only on the circumcised, or also on the uncircumcised? We say, faith was *reckoned* to Abraham as *righteousness* (Gen 15:6).
 - ¹⁰ How then was it reckoned to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised.
 - ¹¹ And he received the sign of circumcision as a seal on the righteousness received through faith while he was uncircumcised. Thus he was to be the father of all the uncircumcised who believe, so that to them (also) righteousness might be credited,
 - ¹² as well as the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised, but also follow the path of faith that our father Abraham walked while still uncircumcised.

- 2. Rom 9:24-27 citing Hos 2:25 & 2:1; Isa 10:22, Technique: *Gezerah Shawah* (Analogy) (Two Examples)
 - Thesis: God calls Jews and Gentiles
 - “²⁴ Even us whom [God] called not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles.”
 - Scriptural Argument Supporting the Thesis:
 - Gentiles: ²⁵ As indeed he says in Hosea: “I will call my *not-people* ‘my people,’ and the not-beloved ‘beloved’ [Hos 2:25; the phrase “not-people” also occurs in Deut 32:21, cited a little later in Rom 10:19 as “not-nation” and referring to Gentiles, so it seems that Paul interprets Hosea here as also referring to Gentiles].
 - ²⁶ And it shall be in the place where it was said to them, ‘My *not-people* are you,’ there they shall be called children of the living God” [Hos 2:1b].
 - Jews: ²⁷ And Isaiah cries out on behalf of Israel, “If the number of the sons of *Israel* be as the sand of the sea, the remnant will be saved” [Conflated citation of Hos 2:1a & Isa 10:22, the only two verses in Scripture with the phrase “Israel as the sand of the sea”].

- 3. Rom 11:12, 15 – Logical Argument, Technique: *Qal waḥomer* (*A Fortiori* argument)
 - “if A is true, then *how much more* is B true”: Scriptural examples:
 - Exod 6:12: “Moses spoke to the Lord, ‘If the Israelites would not listen to me, how can it be that Pharaoh will listen to me?’”
 - Prov 11:31: “If the righteous is requited on earth, how much more the wicked and the sinner!” (cited in its Septuagint form in 1 Peter 4:18)
 - Jer 12:5: “If running against men has wearied you, how will you race against horses?”
 - Thesis: Israel’s “misstep” is not final since “on account of [Israel’s] misstep, salvation has come to the nations” (Rom 11:11)
 - Logical Argument Supporting the Thesis:
 - ¹² Now if their misstep is riches for the world, and their loss riches for the nations, *how much more* their fullness. [...]
 - ¹⁵ For if the setting aside of them is the reconciliation of the world, what (will) their acceptance (be) but life from the dead?
 - Paul thus prepares for the climax of his argument:
 - Rom 11:25-26a: “²⁵ I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery [...]: a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles comes in, ²⁶ and then all Israel will be saved”

4. Rom 15:8-12 Chain of Linked Scriptural Texts from 3 Parts of Scripture: □*araz* Technique (“String of Pearls” – Song of Songs 1:10)
- Thesis: Jews and Gentiles together praising God:
 - “⁸ For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of the truth of God in order that he might confirm the promises given to the patriarchs,
 - ⁹ and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, ‘Therefore I will confess you among the *Gentiles*, and sing praises to your name’ (Ps 18[17]:50);
 - ¹⁰ and again he says, ‘Rejoice, O *Gentiles*, with his people’ (Deut 32:43 LXX);
 - ¹¹ and again, ‘Praise the Lord, all you *Gentiles*, and let all the peoples praise him’ (Ps 117[116]:1);
 - ¹² and again Isaiah says, ‘The root of Jesse shall come, the one who rises to rule the *Gentiles*; in him the *Gentiles* shall hope’ (Isa 11:10).
 - Midrash Rabbah on Song of Songs 1:10: linking Scripture texts together from all three parts of the Jewish Bible (Tanak) rekindles the fire from Mt. Sinai

Conclusion

- Final “Message” of the Bishops gathered at the 2008 Synod, n. 14: “Along the roads of the world, the divine word generates for us Christians an equally intense encounter with the Jewish people, [... to whom we] are intimately bound through the common recognition and love for the Scripture of the Old Testament. [...] These are a way of dialogue with the chosen people, [...] and they allow us to enrich our interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures with the fruitful resources of the Hebrew exegetical tradition.”