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TEACHING SACRED SCRIPTURE IN THEOLOGICAL AND RELIGIOUS ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS: PRIORITIES AND ESSENTIAL CONTENT

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INTRODUCTION

Allow me to begin with a personal testimony. I am German and was raised in a practicing Catholic family. We never missed a Sunday mass. We never missed participating in activities the Church offered. We served the Lord in the sick and suffering. We prayed before meals and bed-time. We were certainly more catechized than the average German because my mother had studied theology. This is not to brag about my Catholic upbringing. Rather, it is to illustrate how one can grow up in a Catholic environment and yet never be exposed to the preaching of the Word of God. Despite my Catholic socialization, I had a very distorted image of God with practically no comprehension of the kerygma, the fatherhood of God, the redemptive death of Christ, nor the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of a Christian. Until, one day at the age of 26, I happened to participate in a charismatic parish mission preached by the Vincentian Fathers from India, Kerala, the famous Divine Retreat Centre at Potta. For the first time in my life did I hear the faith proclaimed in a biblical idiom. The preaching of these missionaries was so powerful that many of us experienced what the Acts of the Apostles say about Peter's preaching in the house of Cornelius: "While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word" Acts 10:44. We were all astounded at their teaching, for they taught "as one having authority, not as [one of our] scribes." (Matt 7:29). For me this experience was so overwhelming that I began to wonder what had gone wrong in priestly formation? Why did I have to wait for 26 years for these Indian missionaries to show up in my highly educated town of Munich--a place where the many distinguished German theologians had taught in the past--for me to hear the Word of God as if for the first time? It triggered a change of career in me. I left behind the lawyer's booth and followed a call to dedicate my life to the service of the Word of God. This led me eventually to obtaining a doctorate in Sacred Scripture at the *École biblique* and I now find myself teaching future priests in St. Patrick's Seminary & University, the Seminary of the Archdiocese of San Francisco.

So why is it, that as Catholics we so seldom here good biblical preaching? How is it possible that even almost 60 years after the Council the Bible still seems to be a book with seven seals to so many priests? And what can we do to bring about a change?

I will structure my paper in the following way: First, I will offer some simple observations about how Scripture is still taught in most academic and theological institutions. Secondly, I will draft a profile of the student we are being called to form which should inform the way we teach, and third, I will tackle my assignment to delineate some priorities and essential content for teaching Scripture in an academic institution of formation.

1. WHAT HAS GONE WRONG?

It seems to me that in addition to the unfortunate divorce between the Bible and the Sacraments in the aftermath of the Protestant Reformation over the course of the past 200 years, in countries with a particularly high level of education, the Church's theological institutions have gradually forgotten to distinguish between studying the Bible in a secular academic research institution and an ecclesial house of formation which has an entirely distinctive goal in its instruction. In almost any academic theological or religious institution known to me, biblical theology and exegesis are being taught almost exclusively according to the norms of secular academia. While I would defend that those in charge of teaching in theological faculties need to be trained in the academic sciences of philology, historical critical exegesis, and literary analysis, it is also clear that the Church is not served well if those approaches are transferred unaltered into the classrooms of future theologians. No doubt, the future priests and theologians need to have a solid grasp of the historical contingency and development of the sacred text. *Dei Verbum* is decisive on that point and Pope Benedict reiterated it in his post-synodal exhortation *Verbum Domini*, for the Catholic understanding of sacred Scripture, attention to [historical-critical exegesis and other ... methods of textual analysis] is indispensable, linked as it is to the realism of the Incarnation: "This necessity is a consequence of the Christian principle formulated in the Gospel of John 1:14: *Verbum caro factum est*. The historical fact is a constitutive dimension of the Christian faith. The history of salvation is not mythology, but a true history, and it should thus be studied with the methods of serious historical research". The study of the Bible requires a knowledge of these methods of enquiry and their suitable application. (VD 32).

This being said, an utmost realism is also warranted. It takes a minimum of three to four years of full-time training at the Biblicum to acquire a basic familiarity with the methods of historical exegesis. It is utopian to train future theologians in these same methods in a curriculum that allows for maybe six scripture classes of three credits each. The average student of theology will be lucky if he knows Latin well and has some basic knowledge of Greek and Hebrew. Rarely will the student be so well trained in the ancient languages that he is able to do text-criticism, form criticism, redaction criticism, or a narrative analysis of the Hebrew or Greek text. Nor should this be necessary. And yet, I cannot count the number of times I have heard priests lament that all they ever learnt about the Pentateuch is the Documentary Hypothesis, and the Synoptic Problem about the Gospels. You might find it hard to believe, but even today there are still Seminaries out there that teach their students nothing but redaction criticism in the class on the Synoptics. Let me re-iterate, lest I be misunderstood, I firmly believe that future theologians need to know that these problems exist, but they can be neither expected to solve them, nor should they constitute a major part of the theologian's initiation to the Word of God, which – after all – the Church holds to be the soul of theology (DV 24). Rather, those in charge of teaching the Sacred Scriptures in an academic theological institution should take to heart

Verbum Domini's advice to the Catholic exegetes, namely "to never forget that what they are interpreting is the *word of God*. Their ... task is not finished when they simply determined sources, defined forms, or explained literary procedures. They arrive at the true goal of their work only when they have explained the meaning of the biblical text as God's word for today" (VD 33). If this holds true for the Church's professional exegetes, then how much more for those teaching future theologians.

Before I develop what it might mean to teach the biblical text as God's word for today in a Seminary, let me end this section with a metaphor dear to one of our professors at the Biblicum. When describing the difference between the exegete's and the theologian's approach to the Bible he would compare this to two different approaches to a car. There is on the one hand the mechanic who must understand every detail of the engine, how it is put it together and how to repair it when needed. The driver, however, need not have more than a theoretical knowledge of how the engine works. For him to be an excellent driver he needs a whole different set of skills that the mechanic does not necessarily have. I consider the future priests to be something like super well trained Bus-drivers, who know the basic things about how the motor is built and where to check the oil, but the main focus of their formation must be on driving, else they might be able to give you an exact account on how the motor was engineered, but are unable to steer the bus in such a way as to avoid accidents, ride on icy roads or in the dark, and get the passengers to their destination. Unfortunately, my impression is that we have spent decades training priests to become engineers but failed to train them how to drive, with the result that most of their parishes were taken on a ride into the desert of historical criticism without ever finding their way out, because the driver had never learned how to read a map (obviously this was before GPS was accessible). The challenge for the Scripture professor in an academic theological institution is that he himself has been trained to be a mechanic but is now charged not only to teach the future drivers the basics of how the machine is put together but *also* how to drive really well, so that those entrusted to these future drivers will reach their destinations which is nothing short of communion with the Triune God. For this reason, we need to be very intent about the different approaches to training mechanics and drivers.

The main difference between teaching Scripture in a secular University or biblical program and a theological faculty can thus be defined by two very different goals or purposes:¹ In the academic environment the goal is to train students that are able to further the understanding of the historical meaning of the letter, which is essentially a non-confessional art. In a theological faculty, on the other hand, exegesis places itself deliberately "within the living tradition of the Church, whose first concern is fidelity to the revelation attested by the Bible."² The goal is to teach the Word of God in such a way that the students are enabled to enter into communion with the One who addresses man in this word

¹ Flesh out the difference between Biblical Scholarship in Academia and Ecclesia: See Peter Williamson, "Biblical Scholarship with a Pastoral Purpose," *Homiletics & Pastoral Review*, (November 2006), 9-10.

² The Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, III.: "Catholic exegetes approach the biblical text with a pre- understanding which holds closely together modern scientific culture and the religious tradition emanating from Israel and from the early Christian community. Their interpretation stands thereby in continuity with a dynamic pattern of interpretation that is found within the Bible itself and continues in the life of the church. This dynamic pattern corresponds to the requirement that there be a lived affinity between the interpreter and the object, an affinity which constitutes, in fact, one of the conditions that makes the entire exegetical enterprise possible."

and furthermore to interpret it in such a way that others will be drawn into that same communion (1 Jn 1:1-4).

2. WHOM ARE WE BEING CALLED TO FORM?

We need to have the end in mind. As a Church we must ask ourselves, what do we want our Seminary professors to achieve? What is their task? And what is the task of someone training future theologians? Ideally that would be the same, but not every program of priestly formation allows for the same rigorous training that an academic theological institution can require from its students. Because improvement of priestly biblical literacy seems to be of primary importance with regards to the Church's priority task of the New Evangelization, allow me to focus my remarks uniquely on the challenge of training future priests.

Approaching the task of teaching, it is important for the professor to have a clear vision of the future mission of his students. Not only are we training theologians, but we are also training men who will be ordained to exercise the *tria munera*. This means that we are not only preparing men for the art of preaching, as important as that is. Rather, a profound knowledge of the Word of God is indispensable for the exercise of all three offices – namely Christ's royal, priestly, and prophetic office of governing, sanctifying, and teaching.

That intimate knowledge of the Word of God is necessary for the office of governance is well expressed in Deuteronomy's instructions for the king, where it says:

When he [the king] has taken the throne of his kingdom, he shall have a copy of this law written for him in the presence of the Levitical priests. It shall remain with him and he shall read in it all the days of his life, so that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, diligently observing all the words of this law and these statutes, neither exalting himself above other members of the community nor turning aside from the commandment, either to the right or to the left, so that he and his descendants may reign long over his kingdom in Israel. (Deut 17:18-20).

As the entire Deuteronomistic History teaches us, the demise of both kingdoms and the resulting Exile was owed to their Shepherds not knowing and therefore not following God's law. It would be a worthwhile undertaking to write a Church History according to the same schema.

What about the office of sanctifying? Seminarians tend to think that the office of the priesthood can be restricted to offering the sacraments in strict adherence to the rubrics, "reading the black and doing the read." Even in the Old Covenant, however, this was not true, despite its heavy emphasis on the sacrificial cult. The Priest was to watch over the Law and to instruct the people of God in the same. Thus, we read in the book of Deuteronomy that in addition to offering incense and whole burnt offerings, the Levites were to teach Jacob the Lord's *mishpatim*, judgements, and Israel His Torah (cf. Deut 33:11).³ The same is affirmed in Malachi's praise of Levi: "He walked with me in integrity and uprightness, and turned many away from evil. For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts" (Mal 2:6-7, *ESV*).

³ See also, Jer 18:18; Ezek 7:26; Hos 4:4-6; Mal 2:5-9; Eccl 45:26-27 (Hebrew). André Feuillet: "Whereas the prophets aimed at making God's viewpoint understood in the face of changing historical situations, the priest's role was to preserve and teach what was laid up in tradition." *The Priesthood of Christ and His Ministers*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975.

Similarly the priesthood of the New Covenant also comprises an act of sacrifice which happens primarily in preaching, as revealed by Jesus Christ himself who said to the apostles, “You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you” (Jn 15:3). The proclamation of the Word of God is itself a priestly ministry that sanctifies the people of God. Paul makes this point when defining the purpose of his “priestly service of the gospel of God, *so that* the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit” (Rom 15:16). It is noteworthy, in this respect, that the Fathers unanimously read “the offering of the Gentiles” as an objective genitive, understanding Paul’s preaching and evangelizing to be a priestly service. St. John Chrysostom explains: “It was his [i.e. Paul’s] form of sacrifice. Nobody would reproach a priest for desiring to offer the most perfect sacrifice possible. Paul says this both to lift up their thoughts and show them that *they are a sacrifice* and to explain his own part in the matter, because he was appointed to this office. My sacrificial knife, he says, is the gospel, the word of my preaching.”⁴ The objective gospel, I may add, and not his personal reflections, philosophical ruminations, or socio-political observations.

Much depends on the priests knowing how to wield this sacrificial knife of sanctification properly. If they don’t instruct in the Word of God, the people go astray and risk perdition. Let it never happen that any of our students will have to hear God’s terrible judgement to the wayward priests “let no one contend, and let none accuse, for with you is my contention, O priest. ... My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because you have rejected knowledge, I reject you from being a priest to me. And since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children” (Hos 4:4-6, *ESV*). And further “But you have turned aside from the way. You have caused many to stumble by your instruction. You have corrupted the covenant of Levi, says the LORD of hosts, and so I make you despised and abased before all the people, inasmuch as you do not keep my ways but show partiality in your instruction” (Mal 2:8).

Finally, knowledge of the Word of God is, of course, most obviously necessary for the prophetic office of teaching, the *munus docendi*. The prophet is one who has so internalized the revealed Word of God that he is able in ever changing circumstances to preach and interpret it perfectly according to the intention of the divine legislator. This is powerfully displayed in Moses who in the Book of Exodus transmits the law as received directly from the mouth of God, but in the Book of Deuteronomy he re-promulgates it in his own words and adapts it to the new historic situation. Pope Benedict reminded us of the utmost importance of this office in a Wednesday audience on the priesthood:

Today, in the midst of the educational emergency, *the munus docendi* of the Church, exercised concretely through the ministry of each priest, is particularly important. We are very confused about the fundamental choices in our life and question what the world is, where it comes from, where we are going, what we must do in order to do good, how we should live and what the truly pertinent values are. [...]

In this context the words of the Lord – who took pity on the throng because the people were like sheep without a shepherd – came true (cf. Mk 6:34). The Lord had noticed this when he saw the thousands of people following him in the desert because, in the diversity of the currents of that time, they no longer knew what the true meaning of Scripture was, what God was saying.

The Lord, moved by compassion, interpreted God’s word, he himself is the Word of God, and thus provided an orientation. This is the function in persona Christi of the priest: making present, in the

⁴ *Homilies on Romans* 29.15, Gerald Bray and Thomas C. Oden, eds. *Romans*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture 6 (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 348.

confusion and bewilderment of our times, the light of God's Word, the light that is Christ himself in this our world.

Therefore the priest does not teach his own ideas, ... the priest teaches in the name of Christ present, he proposes the truth that is Christ himself, his word and his way of living and of moving ahead.

What Christ said of himself applies to the priest: "My teaching is not mine" (Jn 7:56); Christ, that is, does not propose himself but, as the Son he is the voice, the Word of the Father. The priest too must always speak and act in this way: "My teaching is not mine, I do not spread my own ideas or what I like, but I am the mouthpiece and heart of Christ and I make present this one, shared teaching that has created the universal Church and creates eternal life."⁵

The seminarians to be endowed with this threefold office, therefore, throughout the course of their formation, must be facilitated the opportunity to achieve such an intimate familiarity with the word of God that upon leaving the Seminary they feel equipped to follow the Lord's command: "teach all nations, ... teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." (Matt 28:20).⁶

Obviously, this kind of teaching requires of the priest a deep familiarity not only with the Bible as such but with the Bible as transmitted in the context of the Church's faith and magisterium. The challenge for those in charge of theological formation, however, is to present the Church's faith and teaching in such a way that their rooting in the written Word of God always remain evident. Too often in theological formation, the different disciplines are presented as completely unrelated to each other, it not being evident how the sacred Scripture is truly the soul of theology.

The blame for this cannot be put squarely on the systematians, liturgists, or pastoral theologians. Rather, we have to admit that if we as Scripture professors spend most of our time in the classroom initiating our students to historical critical problems, without ever moving to the second level, interpreting the Sacred Scripture in the light of the same Spirit by whom it was written, then it is no wonder that other theological disciplines fail to draw on Scripture as their soul, nor will future priests be able to teach what Christ has commanded the apostles in a biblical idiom, because they will neither know nor have understood it. We must take to heart Pope Benedict's words of admonishment: "Where exegesis is not theology, Scripture cannot be the soul of theology, and conversely, where theology is not essentially the interpretation of the Church's Scripture, such a theology no longer has a foundation." (VD 35).

3. PRIORITIES AND ESSENTIAL CONTENT

So, what are some priorities in teaching future priests and theologians? First, we need to be aware that we can no longer presume the most basic biblical literacy with our incoming students. While they might be acquainted with one or the other gospel, most of them are not able to tell a Pauline letter from a Catholic epistle, let alone name the five books of the Torah, or the former prophets. I will never forget a student at the Biblicum who had signed up for a course I was teaching on the Song of Songs. This was a priest who had completed his theological studies and was now studying for his license in Sacred

⁵ BENEDICT XVI, "Munus Docendi", General Audience, Wednesday, 14 April 2010. https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2010/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20100414.html

⁶ As Pope Benedict writes in *Verbum Domini* 80, "Only if he 'abides' in the word will the priest become a perfect disciple of the Lord. Only then will he know the truth and be set truly free."

Scripture. My first assignment was an exercise in structuring the book. When he handed in his homework, the student confessed that he had never previously read the Song of Songs and was shocked that such erotic literature was found in the Bible. When I shared this with one of my brothers, who is also a priest, he admitted that he had never read the entire Bible either. Any course on Scripture has thus to make sure that the students actually read the entire corpus of the material under study before we start taking the text apart in class. To this end, I administer regular quizzes.

Secondly, while academia trains the students to become an expert in the literal sense and its historical meaning, which is absolutely legitimate and necessary, the instruction of theologians must in no way limit itself to uncovering the literal sense. Thus, while it is important that students understand the role and intentions of the human authors, and the historically conditioned genesis of the texts to avoid any kind of fundamentalism,⁷ it is equally important “to stress the role of the divine author, that is, the inspiration and truth of Sacred Scripture.”⁸ For the future priest it is key to learn how to uncover the spiritual meaning, to read the OT in the light of the NT and according to the *analogia fidei* (DV 12).⁹

Moreover, from the Church’s belief in the inspiration of the Scriptures it is understood that ‘within the diversity of the inspired the biblical texts there will be a central thread of unified meaning’.¹⁰ It is the challenging task of the Scripture professor to draw out this overarching unity “manifest through the grand narrative of salvation history that Scripture relates.”¹¹ To this belongs the task of opening up

⁷ Unfortunately, in reaction to an over abuse of the historical critical method, a rising Neo-Fundamentalism can be observed even among Catholics Scripture scholars. As Pope Benedict warns us, this kind of fundamentalism fails to “take into account the historical character of biblical revelation,” and thereby “makes itself incapable of accepting the full truth of the incarnation itself. ... It fails to recognize that the word of God has been formulated in language and expression conditioned by various periods. Christianity, on the other hand, perceives *in* the words *the Word* himself, the *Logos* who displays his mystery through this complexity and the reality of human history.” As Catholics, we “seek the saving truth for the life of the individual Christian and for the Church. ... while not ignoring the human mediation of the inspired text and its literary genre” VD 44.

⁸ Peter Williamson, “Implications of the New Evangelisation for Priestly Ministry,” in: Kevin Zilverberg and Scott Carl (eds), *The Revelation of Your Words. The New Evangelization and the Role of the Seminary Professor of Sacred Scripture*, Saint Paul, Minnesota: Saint Paul Seminary Press, 2021, 22-23.

⁹ For this reason, we must give equal priority to all four steps proposed by *Dei Verbum* and not spend a disproportionate amount of time on problematizing sources, defining forms, redactional layers, questions of authorship, or different literary procedures. Yes, the students must be initiated to all these, but the Scripture courses must not be reduced to these, as has been the case for all too long. The actual practice of these methods should be left to institutions of higher training at the license and doctorate level. Rather, as the Church has repeatedly asked us to do, we need teach students how to arrive at the true goal of biblical interpretation, namely “to explain the meaning of the biblical text as God’s word for today” (IBC, 1993, III.C.1). Unfortunately, the exegetes capable of reading and teaching the Scripture in accordance with all four elements indicated by *Dei Verbum* 12 are rare.

¹⁰ See Francesca Murphy, *The Comedy of Revelation: Paradise Lost and Regained in Biblical Narrative*, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000.

¹¹ St. Augustine sets a lofty goal, and yet, we can settle for nothing less. “The narration is full” he says, “when each person is catechized in the first instance from what is written in the text ‘In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth,’ on to the present times of the Church.” *On the Catechising of the Uninstructed*, 3.5; see also, Williamson, *Implications*, 23.

what the fathers called the *concordia testamentorum*, the Christological-pneumatological unity of Old and New Testament.¹² Peter Williamson observes perceptively:

Many Catholics unconsciously practice a practical Marcionism marked by little regard for or familiarity with the Old Testament. But the teaching of both the New Testament (2 Tim 3:16 et passim) and of the Church is clear (*DV*, 14-16): the books of the Old Testament are inspired and of lasting value. They are important both for what they tell us of God's teaching and activity in Israel's history and for the light they shed on the mystery of Christ. Our students should learn from us the main types and themes that link the testaments. We cannot study the Old Testament books only in their individual historical and literary context, as is common in the academy, but rather we must interpret them in their canonical context, in the light of Christ and in the light of Christian tradition and faith today. Likewise, we must explain New Testament texts in light of the Old Testament texts, teachings, and institutions they presuppose.¹³

On a practical level this means that in every Old Testament class time should be dedicated to showing students how what is promised or prefigured in these texts is fulfilled in the New Testament, and how these foreshadowings are the alphabet or grammar employed by the New Testament authors to depict the fullness of revelation in Christ and his paschal mystery.¹⁴

Particular attention should also be given to those texts that have played a key role in the development of the Church's dogma and of her liturgical and spiritual life. I am thinking, for example, of the role of the Wisdom texts played in the great theological controversies, or the Psalms and the Song of Songs in the liturgy and the mystical tradition, Romans 5 and Original Sin, the Pauline texts on justification in the Reformation Era and the New Perspective, Genesis and Jesus' teaching on Marriage for the Theology of the Body, to name just some important examples.

¹² See *VD* 41: "From apostolic times and in her living Tradition, the Church has stressed the unity of God's plan in the two Testaments through the use of typology; this procedure is in no way arbitrary, but is intrinsic to the events related in the sacred text and thus involves the whole of Scripture. Typology 'discerns in God's works of the Old Covenant prefigurations of what he accomplished in the fullness of time in the person of his incarnate Son' (CCC 128). Christians, then, read the Old Testament in the light of Christ crucified and risen. ... Consequently, 'the New Testament has to be read in the light of the Old. Early Christian catechesis made constant use of the Old Testament (cf. 1 Cor 5:6-8; 1 Cor 10:1-11)' (CCC 129). ... 'The New Testament is hidden in the Old and the Old is made manifest in the New,' as Saint Augustine perceptively noted. It is important, therefore, that in both pastoral and academic settings the close relationship between the two Testaments be clearly brought out, in keeping with the dictum of Saint Gregory the Great that 'what the Old Testament promised, the New Testament made visible; what the former announces in a hidden way, the latter openly proclaims as present. Therefore, the Old Testament is a prophecy of the New Testament; and the best commentary on the Old Testament is the New Testament.'"

¹³ Williamson, *Implications*, 23.

¹⁴ We read the Old Testament and discover how it prepares us to understand the mission of the Son. It is important to know the Old Testament well, without which it is impossible to understand the full meaning of the New Testament. In this regard it can be helpful to use Jean-Noël Aletti's recent book, *Without Typology No Gospel. A Suffering Messiah: A Challenge for Matthew, Mark and Luke*, Rome: GBP, 2022. Moreover, "clarity about the grand narrative of Scripture should lead to an ability to articulate the *kerygma*—the basic Christian message that was the preaching of the apostles in Acts, is embedded in the epistles, and that is summed up in the creed." Williamson, *Implications*, 23.

In the same vein, and to further the development of a scripture-based Moral theology, we need to be mindful of a certain neo-Pelagianism. Many Catholics, including theologians, “do not grasp what Scripture says about the effects of faith, baptism, and the gift of the Spirit on the moral life.”¹⁵ It is therefore important to teach what Paul and John have to say in this regard (e.g. Gal 5:16-23; Rom 8:1-14; Eph 4:17-24; Col 3:9-10; Jn 15:1-17; 1 Jn 3:9). As Williamson rightly observes: “Even many seminarians approach morality and virtue primarily as a matter of human effort, instead of appropriating and learning to cooperate with the grace of the new life in Christ and the Spirit that the epistles explain.”¹⁶

Lastly, I take up another of Williamson’s helpful suggestions. “In teaching the Scripture,” he says, “we should know the most common pastoral issues our students are likely to encounter ... and should relate our teaching to these issues. As we teach through the various parts of the biblical literature, we can highlight texts in each body of literature that have particular usefulness for evangelization, preaching, catechesis, or counseling.”¹⁷

Moreover, and this is more daunting, we should equip our students to wade “into topics where popular or academic culture challenges the faith. We need to do this humbly and wisely, but what we must *not* do is ignore the issues that the people in the pew are encountering.” Among these topics Williams mentions “dark passages in Scripture” which often fuel the New Atheist debate, questions surrounding the historicity of the Old Testament narratives and the Gospels, the canon of Scripture itself, the area of sexuality, “what Scripture has to say about marriage, sexuality, holiness, and its implications for courtship,”¹⁸ and finally the often-avoided topic of the last things and eternal salvation. Of course, all of these topics, should and will also be covered in other areas of formation.¹⁹ It seems key to me, however, that we evince the biblical roots of the Church’s belief, so that these future priests will be enabled to preach on them not according to human wisdom, but with the Word of God which alone is capable of raising the dead and instill the faith necessary for salvation.

¹⁵ Williamson, *Implications*, 24.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid, 26-27.

¹⁹ For those interested in going deeper, I whole heartedly recommend a book edited by Kevin Zilverberg and Scott Carl (eds), *The Revelation of Your Words. The New Evangelization and the Role of the Seminary Professor of Sacred Scripture*, Saint Paul, Minnesota: Saint Paul Seminary Press, 2021, and particularly Peter Williamson’s opening article, “Implications of the New Evangelization for Priestly Ministry.”