Canon, Cult and Covenant

The Promise of Liturgical Hermeneutics

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To my mind, one of the most notable achievements of twentieth-century biblical scholarship has been the rediscovery of Scripture’s liturgical sense. This achievement is rightly associated with the pioneering work of Oscar Cullmann and Jean Daniélou, who demonstrated that the biblical acts of God were intended to be carried on in the church’s sacramental liturgy. Their insights were reinforced by Henri de Lubac’s study of medieval exegesis, and Yves Congar’s historical and theological work on tradition, which focused attention on the liturgy as the original and privileged locus of biblical interpretation.1

This movement of recovery, which has continued among both Protestant and Catholic scholars,2 is usually perceived as being in tension with historical and critical methodologies; but, in fact, these methods have also helped us to see that the church’s early cult and worship were decisive in the composition, content, and use of the scriptural texts.3 As a result of these developments, we

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1 See generally, Cullmann, Early Christian Worship; Daniélou, The Bible and the Liturgy and ‘Sacraments’; Congar, Tradition and Meaning of Tradition. De Lubac comments: ‘Let us not forget that Christian exegesis was born, first and foremost, in the office of the liturgy, regarding sacred reading that had to be commented upon. That is where it was developed’ (Medieval Exegesis, 2:28).

2 See Van Olst, The Bible and Liturgy; Old, Reading and Preaching; Vagaggini, Theological Dimensions; Ratzinger, Spirit of the Liturgy; Corbon, Wellspring of Worship.

3 For instance, source criticism, in moving from hypotheses about original documentary sources, discerns tradition history and liturgical usage underlying biblical texts. Form criticism has also distinguished a variety of liturgical forms such as hymns and prayers, among kerygmatic, catechetical and other forms. Redaction criticism, as well, has focused attention on how the historical situations of the various
The Liturgical Content and Context of Scripture

The formal and material unity of canon and cult

The recovery of Scripture's liturgical sense by Cullmann, Daniélou and others dovetails with two critical findings of modern biblical scholarship: First, the recognition that Scripture's final canonical shape is essential for determining the meaning and purpose of individual passages and books; and secondly, the identification of covenant as Scripture's keynot narrative theme. Together, these findings have helped us to see a unity between Scripture and liturgy that is both formal and material. Their unity is formal in that Scripture was canonized for the sake of liturgy, and the canon itself derived from liturgical tradition. Their unity is material in that the content of Scripture is heavily liturgical.

Details about the origins of the canon as a definitive collection of sacred writings expressing the faith, worship and instruction of the believing community, remain elusive and are still debated. However, there is increasing recognition that the motives for establishing the canon were largely cultic and that cultic use was an important factor in determining which Scriptures were to be included in the canon. Put simply, the canon was drawn up to establish which books would be read when the community gathered for worship, and the books included in the canon were those that were already being read in the church's liturgy.

its explanatory power is also its ability to maintain the inner unity of the corpus in question. It involves the ability to unify, to achieve a synthesis, which is the reverse of superficial harmonization. Indeed, only faith's hermeneutic is sufficient to measure up to these criteria' (Behold the Pierced One, 44–45; emphasis mine).

6 See generally, McDonald and Sanders (eds.), Canon Debate; Childs, 'Canon in Recent Biblical Studies'.

7 In considering the contributions of Childs, Sanders has written: 'That which is canon comes to us from ancient communities of faith, not just from individuals ... [T]he whole of the Bible, the sum as well as all its parts, comes to us out of the liturgical and instructional life of early believing communities' (Sacred Story, 162). Disputing another leading theory concerning the formation of the Hebrew biblical canon, McDonald states: 'Acceptance into a collection of sacred Scriptures did not have to much to do with a notion about the cessation of prophecy as with use in Israel's liturgy, or worship and instruction, over a long period of time' (Formation, 53). Bruce, finds similar imperatives behind the formation of the New Testament canon: 'When the canon was “closed” in due course by competent authority, this simply meant that official recognition was given to the situation already obtaining in the practice of the worshipping community' (Canon of Scripture, 42). Of the New Testament canon, Ferguson writes: 'Distinctive worship practices also served as
The importance of liturgical use in the origins of the canon is not a new 1.6 It has long been recognized, for instance, that what became canonical
tings originated as oral accounts of God’s redemptive interventions in his-
recited in liturgical settings and accompanied by ritual actions. This is true for
the Old and New Testament canons. 8 In each, we have testimony of
narrative/scriptural texts being read in the worshipping assembly (Ex. 24:7;
Dt 31:9–13; 1 Tim. 4:13; Rev. 1:3). And textual analysis and form criticis
helped us to also see the profound shaping influence of liturgical use on
composition and final form of individual texts. 9 Broadly speaking, we can
that inasmuch as the exodus was the foundational narrative recalled and cel-
ated in Israel’s liturgy, the ‘new exodus’ of Christ’s death, resurrection and
mission was the ‘subject’ of the texts heard in the church’s eucharistic liturgy.

**Covenant and Cult**

the cultic worship of the Jewish and Christian communities gave rise to the
canon, it is because that worship itself is a response to God’s redemptive initia-
tives. In particular, the worship of Israel and the church is a response to God’s
covenants. The unity that scholars have perceived between cult and canon is
shaped and constituted by the covenant. Again, this is true for both the
brew biblical canon and the Christian Bible.

For both Israel and the church, the Scriptures and the liturgical traditions of
ship emerge as a single, inseparable response to God’s redemptive initiative
pressed in his offering of a covenant to his people. For Israel, the covenant at
Sinai is foundational. For the church, the ‘new covenant’ made in the blood of

reconditions for a canon of Scripture. The Eucharist involved the remembrance of
the passion of Christ and particularly the institution narrative. Prayers and confes-
sional statements were grounded in the teachings of Jesus and the proclamation of
his apostles. Christian materials were read in the assemblies from quite early (Mk.
13:14; Rev. 1:3). The Church did not have to wait until the end of the second
century (and certainly not the fourth century) to know what books to read in church
‘Selection and Closure’, 296).

Moule: ‘many of the component parts of the New Testament were forged in the
name of corporate worship, and … this has left its stamp on its whole vocabulary’
(‘Birth’, 20, cf. 33).

See the early and important work of Østborn, *Cult and Canon*, especially ch. 5: ‘The
Canon as Cultic Representation’. See also, Weiser: ‘The reading aloud of the writ-
ten word in the cult gave a natural impetus to the collection of the Old Testament as
sacred writings. Here is the real setting (Sitz im Leben) for the Old Testament as holy

McGowan, ‘Is There a Liturgical Text in This Gospel?’, 4; Boulder, *Evangelist’s
Calendar, Swartley, Israel’s Scripture Traditions; Daube, ‘Earliest Structure’.

Christ (Lk. 22:20) is foundational. 11 Indeed, it is instructive that κατάφεντο was not
originally the word applied to the list of biblical books. Eusebius, writing in the
early fourth century, rather spoke of the Scriptures as ‘encovenanted’ or ‘con-
tained in the covenant’ (συνεφόρητος). 12

It is not surprising that many scholars have recognized the ‘covenant’ as the recurrent
and thematically significant theme in the canonical text. The vast liter-
aturature on this topic cannot be rehearsed here. 13 Two things are important for
our purposes: First, the finding that God’s covenants with humanity form the
narrative structure and dramatic content of the Bible. 14 Second, the conclu-
sion that the biblical covenants are initiated to form kinship or familial bonds
between God and his people or family. 15 And thirdly, that covenant-making is a
cultic, liturgical act, as much as a legal and ethical one. This last point has not
been well-studied. But it is crucial to see the unity of Scripture and liturgy in
the establishment, renewal, and maintenance of God’s covenant relationship
with his people. Again, simply put, for both Christians and Jews, the scriptural
texts were originally enacted in the liturgy for the purposes of remembering
and ritualizing the divine saving events, and renewing the people’s covenant
relationship with God. 16

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11 It is perhaps interesting to note that the exegesis of Pope Benedict XVI sees a pro-
found unity between the covenant at Sinai and the new covenant, a unity that
reflects the inner continuity of the salvation history told in the canonical text: ‘With
regard to the issue of the nature of the covenant, it is important to note that the Last
Supper sees itself as making a covenant: it is the prolongation of the Sinai covenant,
which is not abrogated, but renewed. Here renewal of the covenant, which from
earliest times was doubtless an essential element of Israel’s liturgy, attains its highest
form possible’ (Ratzinger, ‘New Covenant’, 62).

12 See McDonald and Sanders, *Canon Debate*, 295–320, 432. On these themes, see also,
McCarthy, *Institution and Narrative*.

13 For a review of the relevant themes and literature, see Hahn, ‘Kinship by Covenant’,
and ‘Covenant’.

14 This is a finding that cuts across confessional lines. Congar writes: ‘The content and
meaning of Scripture was God’s covenant plan, finally realized in Jesus Christ (in his
transitus) and in the Church’ (*Tradition and Traditions*, 68–69). See also Segal,
*Rebecca’s Children*, 4; Wright, *People of God*, 260, 262; Kline, *Correlation*, 265–79.

15 See for example Ps. 2:7; 2 Sam. 8:14; Lev. 26:12; Deut. 32:6, 8, 18–19; Jer. 30:22;
Ezek. 36:28; Hos. 11:1; Gal. 4:5–7; 1 Jn. 3:2. Cross, ‘Kinship and Covenant’; Kline,
*By Oath Consigned*.

16 Very few commentators have recognized what Vanhoyse has identified as the essen-
tial relationship between liturgical cult and covenant in the Bible: ‘The value of a
covenant depends directly on the act of worship which establishes it. A defective lit-
urgy cannot bring about a valid covenant … The reason for this is easily understood.
The establishment of a covenant between two parties who are distant from each
other can only be accomplished by an act of mediation and, when it is a question of
mankind and God, the mediation has of necessity to be conducted through the cult’
way: as presented in the canonical narrative, there is a liturgical reason and purpose for the creation of the world and the human person, and there is a liturgical ‘destiny’ toward which creation and the human person journey in the pages of the canonical text. At each decisive stage in God’s covenant relations with humanity, the divine-human relationship is expressed liturgically and sacrificially. The mighty acts of God in Scripture at every point climax in the liturgy, from the sacrificial offering of Noah following the flood to the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper. From the first page to the last, the canonical text presents us with a liturgical anthropology—the human person is homo liturgicus, created to glorify God through service, expressed as a sacrifice of praise.

This begins in the Bible’s very first pages. In the liturgical hymn of Genesis 1, creation unfolds in a series of sevenfold movements, beginning with the first verse which is exactly seven words long in Hebrew, and proceeding with seven clearly defined creative speech acts of God (‘Let there be ...’). Linguistic and thematic parallels between the account of the primordial seven days and the later building of the tabernacle (Ex. 25–40) have helped us to see the author’s intent: to depict creation as the fashioning of a cosmic temple, which, like the later tabernacle and Temple, would be a meeting place for God and the human person made in his image and likeness.

In the second creation account in Genesis 2–3, the Garden of Eden is described in highly symbolic terms as an earthly sanctuary—again with evident literary parallels to later sanctuaries, especially the inner sanctum of the Temple. For our liturgical reading, the most important parallels are those that describe the terms of the relationship between God and man in the garden and in the sanctuary. God is described as ‘walking up and down’ or ‘to and fro’ (גָּלַל) in the garden (Gen. 3:8). The same Hebrew verb is used to characterize God’s presence in the tabernacle (Lev. 26:12; Deut. 23:15; 2 Sam. 7:6–7). The first man is described as placed in the garden to ‘till’ or ‘serve’ (ਆָד) and to ‘keep’ or ‘guard’ (穑ינָא) it. These verbs are only found together again in the Pentateuch to describe the liturgical service of the priests and Levites in the sanctuary (Num. 3:7–8; 8:26; 18:5–6).

These literary clues suggest the biblical authors’ intent to describe creation as a royal temple building by a heavenly king. The human person in these pages is intentionally portrayed as a royal firstborn and high-priestly figure, a kind of priest-king set to rule as vice-regent over the temple-kingdom of creation.

18 Genesis 1 describes ‘a heavenly liturgy. With a severe and solemn rhythm the same expressions occur again and again throughout the whole chapter like a litany’ (Westermann, Der Schopfungsbericht vom Anfang der Bibel [Stuttgart, 1960], quoted in Maly, ‘Israel – God’s Liturgical People’, 9.
19 Levenson, ‘Temple’.
22 Callender, Adam in Myth and History, 29.
The priestly king of Genesis

is reading of Genesis is confirmed intertextually in the Old Testament and throughout the intertestamental and rabbinic literature. Perhaps the clearest inter-biblical reflection on the nature of the primate human is found in Ezekiel’s lament over the King of Tyre (Ezek. 28:1-19).

Among numerous echoes of the original Eden account, Ezekiel describes the king as created in Eden, which is depicted as 'the garden of God' and the holy mountain of God — that is, as a symbol of the site of the Temple (vv. 13, 16). He walks among the stones of fire or burning coals (v. 14), rich elsewhere are associated with the divine presence (Ezek. 1:3; Ps. 18:13). A signet of perfection or ‘resemblance’ (v. 12) — a symbol where associated with royal likeness and authority (Gen. 41:42; Hag. 2:23; 2:24-25).

As the king’s creation is described in Adamic and priestly terms, so his sin is characterized as a form of sacrilege and profanation punished by exile and consecration. The king’s sin, like Adam’s, is grasping after divinity — wanting to be like a god.” This becomes the refrain of Ezekiel’s indictment (compare Gen. 3:5, 22; Ezek. 28:2, 6, 9). Driven by cherubim he is cast from God’s presence as a profane thing who has desecrated God’s sanctuaries (Ezek. 16:18; compare Gen. 3:23-24).

This passage of Ezekiel suggests that already within the Old Testament there was a traditional understanding of the human person as created in relationship with God and endowed with an identity that is at once royal and iestly, filial, and liturgical. The terms of the human relationship with God ordered by the covenant of the Sabbath established on the seventh day.

See Oberholzer, ‘What is Man ...?’; Louis, Theology of Psalm 8. The Psalter, the wisdom literature, and the prophets all give us the picture of creation as a cosmic or heavenly sanctuary and the Temple as a microcosm (Ps. 52:8; 78:69; 92:13-15; Lam. 2:6; Isa. 60:13, 21). The Chronicler understands the task of the Levitical priesthood in terms of the serving, guarding and gatekeeping imagery in Genesis (1 Chr. 9:17-27; 2 Chr. 23:19; Neh. 11:19). The garden of Eden was the holy of holies and the dwelling of the Lord, we read in the intertestamental Book of Jubilees (8:9). A midrash on Genesis describes Adam’s primordial task as that of offering priestly sacrifices (Genesis Rabbah 16:5). In a Targum, Adam is described as having been formed from dust at the precise site where the Temple sanctuary would later be built (Targum Pseudo-Jonathan Gen. 2:7). The Qumran community apparently saw itself as the ‘Temple of Adam’ (4Q174 1:6). For a good review of these themes, see Beale, Temple.

Callender, Adam in Myth and History, 132.

The term ‘covenant’, of course, is not used in the creation account. However, that creation is ordered to the covenant is everywhere implied. See Murray, The Cosmic

The first of God’s mighty works then, the creation of the world, has a liturgical climax — the divine and human ‘rest’ of the seventh day. This becomes clearer further on in the Pentateuch, as we will see with Moses’ building of the tabernacle, and God’s giving of the Sabbath ordinances.

The priestly people of the exodus

These creation themes — man as made for worship in a covenant relationship as God’s royal and priestly firstborn — are made explicit in the canonical account of the Exodus. As Adam was made in God’s image and likeness, God identifies Israel as ‘my own people’ (Ex. 3:7, 10, 12, 5:1; 6:5, 7) and ‘my son, my firstborn’ (Ex. 4:22-23). And as Adam was made to worship, God’s chosen people are liberated expressly for worship.

The early chapters of Exodus involve a play on the word הנין, (‘serve’ or ‘work’), the word that described the primeval vocation given to man (Gen. 2:15). The word is used four times to stress the cruel slavery (‘hard service’) inflicted upon the Israelites by the new Pharaoh (Ex. 1:13–14; see also 5:18; 14:5, 12). But the same word is also used to describe what God wants of the Israelites (Ex. 3:12; 4:22; 7:16; 9:1, 13; 10:3, 24–26). They are to serve, not as slave laborers but as a people that serves him in prayer. They are to ‘offer sacrifice’ (הנין; Ex. 3:18; 5:3). Moses and Aaron are instructed to tell Pharaoh that God wants Israel to hold a religious ‘feast’ or ‘festival’ (נין; Ex. 5:1; cf. Ex. 12:14; 23:16; 34:25).

Israel’s vocation is most clearly stated in the preamble to the covenant at Sinai. There God calls Israel a kingdom of priests (아버지 לדתי) and a holy nation (עבדי ידתי) (Ex. 19:5–6). Israel is to be corporately what Adam was created to be individually — the firstborn of a new humanity, a liturgical people that will dwell with God in a relationship of filial obedience and worship.

The covenant at Sinai is ratified by liturgical actions — the reading of the book of the law, the profession of fidelity sworn by the people, the offering of sacrifices, the sprinkling of ‘the blood of the covenant’ and the meal eaten in

Covenant. The Sabbath was seen as a sign of God’s covenant oath with the first man and woman in the rabbinic and intertestamental literature. See, for instance, the midrashic Sifte Deuteronomy; the Book of Jubilees (36:7), and 1 Enoch 69:15–27. See also de Vaux: ‘Creation is the first action in this history of salvation; once it was over, God stopped work, and he was then able to make a covenant with his creature ... The “sign” of the covenant made at the dawn of creation is the observance of the Sabbath by man (Ezek. 20:12, 20)’ (Ancient Israel, 481). Recent Catholic magisterial documents have referred to the Sabbath of creation as the “first covenant.” See John Paul II, Dies Domini; cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 288.

Note the use of הנין to describe the priestly liturgical service offered to God in the tabernacle (Num. 3:7–8; 4:23; 7:5; 16:9).

Wells, God’s Holy People, 34–35.
the earth finds its expression in the liturgical consecration of the earth’s fruits to God. Through their worship on the Sabbath, God bestows his blessings on his people and makes them holy (Ex. 31:13).\textsuperscript{32}

As Israel is given an ‘Adamic’ vocation, it experiences an Adamic fall from grace. And as the primeval fall results in exile and deconsecration of the royal priestly figure, so too does Israel’s worship the golden calf.\textsuperscript{33} God calls the people ‘corrupted,’ using a Hebrew term (נֵס, Ex. 32:7) found elsewhere to describe an animal too blemished to sacrifice or a priest unfit for service.\textsuperscript{34} In defiling itself through ritual rebellion, Israel, like Adam, is rendered unfit for its divine vocation. It is interesting that the royal-priestly title of Exodus 19:6 is never again used to describe Israel in the Old Testament.

According to the biblical narrative, the apostasy results in the Levitical priesthood becoming the locus of the holiness that God intended for all Israel.\textsuperscript{35} God’s presence remains among the people, but access is highly restricted and must be mediated by the Levites. A complex array of cultic laws were introduced for apparently penitential and pedagogical purposes – as mechanisms that will enable Israel to atone for its inevitable sins against the covenant and to teach them the true meaning of worship.\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{32} Ratzinger: ‘The Sabbath is the sign of the covenant between God and man; it sums up the inward essence of the covenant ... It is creation exists to be a place for the covenant that God wants to make with man. The goal of creation is the covenant, the love story of God and man ... If creation is meant to be a space for the covenant, the place where God and man meet one another, then it must be thought of as a space for worship ... Now if worship, rightly understood, is the soul of the covenant, then it not only saves mankind but is also meant to draw the whole of reality into communion with God’ (\textit{Spirit of the Liturgy}, 26–27).

\textsuperscript{33} See Hahn, ‘Kinship by Covenant’, 226–53.

\textsuperscript{34} See also Lev. 22:25; Mal. 1:14; 2:8. Rodriguez writes: ‘The point to notice here is that the people of Israel as a whole have now a moral defect that separates them from God. They cannot come to the sanctuary for they have rejected God, and thus have become like a defective animal or a disqualified priest, unable to come into God’s presence’ (\textit{Sanctuary Theology}, 139).

\textsuperscript{35} Scholer, \textit{Proleptic Priests}, 13–22. Although well beyond what I can do here, it is worth noting that the ‘liturgical reading’ of Scripture helps us to understand why, by the Second Temple period in general, and in the Qumran material in particular, we have such an explicitly developed Adamic, high priestly theology. In other words, Israel’s high priest is portrayed as a kind of ‘new Adam’ who represents Israel, which in turn is seen as a kind of ‘new humanity’ that exists for ‘liturgical’ ends. See, Fletcher-Louis, ‘Jesus and the High Priest’, and \textit{All the Glory of Adam}.

The priestly kingdom of David

eation was ordered to the Sabbath worship of the royal and priestly first
uple. The exodus was ordered to the establishment of Israel as a priestly
ple to offer service to God. The exodus began with the Passover liturgy
minated in the building of the tabernacle, and the liturgical celebration of
’s presence filling the sacred space. The conquest of the land was ordered
the establishment of the priestly kingdom of David. Following the pattern of
exodus, the conquest of the land began with the overthrow of Jericho by
’s means — not by military engagement but by a liturgical procession
by the Ark of the Covenant and Israel’s priests. Also, as the exodus culmi-
red in the erection of the tabernacle, so too, the conquest culminates in the
struction of the Temple and the liturgical celebration of God’s abiding

The Davidic kingdom marks the fullest expression of the Bible’s liturgical
thropology and theology. In the dynasty established by his covenant with
id, God restates his divine will for the human person — to be a son of God, a
and a king. The royal-priestly primogeniture granted to David’s seed
am. 7:14; Ps. 110:4; 89:26–27) is linked to the royal priesthood intended for
rael (Ex. 3:16–17; 4:22; 19:5–6). David is portrayed as a ‘new Melchizedek’ — a
and king who serves the most high God from his capital in Salem, that is,
salem (cf. Gen. 14:18; Ps. 76:2; 110). David is shown taking actions that are
once cultic and political, military and liturgical. His first act after establish-
salem as capital of his kingdom, is to restore the Ark of the Covenant — the
ining symbol of Israel’s election and the site of God’s living presence among
people during the wilderness period (Ex. 25:8–22; Josh. 3:8–11).

David’s great concern for the Ark is central to the early drama of his reign,
and the Ark’s installation in the Temple marks the culmination of the Chroni-
er’s account. As the architectural expression of the Sinai covenant was the
ernacle, the architectural expression of the Davidic kingdom was not a royal
ace, but the Temple.

The building of the Temple is presented as a new creation. As creation takes
even days, the Temple takes seven years to build (1 Kgs. 6:38; Gen. 2:2). It is
icated during the seven-day Feast of Tabernacles (1 Kgs. 8:2) by a solemn
ayer of Solomon structured around seven petitions (1 Kgs. 8:31–53).

In the Temple worship, the precise sacrificial system of the Mosaic cult con-
ues, but there are new elements and accents. The kingdom’s corporate wor-
ship takes the form of praise and thanksgiving. Many commentators have

identified the centrality of songs of praise (תהלים) and songs of thanksgiving
(ודא) in the Temple liturgy. Many of the psalms of praise appear to have been
written to accompany the offering of sacrifices in the Temple (Ps. 27:6; 54:6, 8;
141:2). This is true also for the ‘thanksgiving songs’ organized by the Levites
(Neh. 11:17; 12:8, 31).

David’s own thanksgiving hymn (1 Chr. 16:7–36) is presented as a kind of
paradigm for Israel’s prayer. It is, in essence, a celebration of God’s covenant in
liturgical form. This hymn sets the tone and provides the content for the acts of
worship and the theology of worship we find in the Psalter. God is praised and
thanked in remembrance of his mighty works in creation and for his saving
words and deeds in the life of Israel — the defining experience being that of the
exodus and the covenant.

The sacrifice of praise

Praise and thanksgiving, accompanied by sacrifice, is understood to be the only
appropriate response to the God who has created Israel to be his own and rescued
them from death.39 This is seen most evocatively in the today (ודא) or
thanksgiving psalms (for example, Ps. 18; 30; 32; 41; 66; 116; 118; 138). Com-
posed to accompany the offering of a sacrificial meal of bread and meat in the
Temple (Lev. 7:1–21), these are some of the highest expressions of the Old Testa-
ment’s liturgical anthropology.40

In the today psalms, the experience of the individual believer is almost
typologically compared to that of Israel’s captivity and exodus experience.
Typically these psalms begin with a confession of faith and a vow of praise and
self-offering. There follows a lament concerning some life-threatening distress
that has befallen the believer. Then the believer describes how God delivered
him from death or Sheol (the netherworld) and brought him to sing God’s
praises in the Temple.41 In these psalms, ‘life’ is equated with worship and sacri-
fice in the presence of God in his Temple; ‘death’ is seen as a sort of exile or
captivity, to be cut off from God’s presence, outside of his Temple.42

We see in these psalms and in the prophetic literature a new and deepening
understanding of the liturgical vocation of biblical man. In the prophets, this
recognition of the inner truth of sacrifice often takes the form of denouncing

40 Geze writes: ‘It can be said that the thank-offering constituted the cultic basis for the
main bulk of the psalms. It not only represents the high point of human life, but in it
life itself can be seen as overcoming the basic issue of death by God’s deliverance into
life’ (Essays on Biblical Theology, 131). On the spirituality of the today and its influence
on Christology, see Ratzinger, 54–57.
41 See Gunkel, Introduction to the Psalms, 199–221.
Corruption of Israel’s cult and worship (e.g. Is. 1:10–13; 66:2–4; Jer. 7:21–23; Amos 4:4–5; 6b; Mic. 6:6–8; Hos. 6:6; Mal. 1:10, 13–14). Positively, worship comes to be seen as a sacrificial offering in thanksgiving for redemption, or deliverance from death. Praise is revealed as the sacrifice by which men and women are to glorify God (Ps. 50:14, 33; 141:2). God is portrayed as desiring at Israel serve him—not with the blood of animals but with their whole hearts, aligning their will with his, making their whole lives a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving (Ps. 40:6–8; 51:16–17).

With this profound understanding that they are called to a pure worship of the heart comes the recognition that no amount of ethical striving or moral form can make them holy enough to serve their God. A new covenant is promised as a new exodus and a new creation in which there will be a forgiveness of sins and a divine transformation of the heart (Jer. 31:31–34; 32:40; Ezek. 36:24–28).

In the vision of the prophets, the new exodus will mark a renewal of Israel’s vocation as the firstborn and teacher of the nations. Isaiah sees Israel fulfilling its ancient vocation as ‘priests of the Lord’ (Isa. 61:6), and the instrument of God’s blessings for the nations (Isa. 19:24). Isaiah foresees nations streaming to Zion to worship the Lord (Isa. 2; see also Jer. 3:16–17) — including arch-foes Egypt and Assyria, which serve (722) Israel’s God and offer sacrifices and burnt offerings.

We see then, on the threshold of the New Testament, the promise that Israel’s primal vocation will be renewed, that Israel will be gathered together with all nations at Zion to offer acceptable sacrifice to the God of Israel.

Reading Scripture Liturgically: The New Covenant Witness

The New Testament and the New Adam

In the New Testament, Jesus and his church are presented as the fulfillment of the promises and institutions of the old covenant. The story of the incarnation is told as a new creation. In Jesus there is a new beginning for the human race. He is explicitly called the new Adam (Rom. 5:12–20; 1 Cor. 15:45–49). In the early chapters of the letter to the Hebrews — especially in the opening catena of even Old Testament quotations — Jesus is described in terms of Adam’s original royal, filial and priestly vocation. Here and throughout the Pauline corpus, it is understood that the human vocation was frustrated at the outset by Adam’s sin.

It is impossible to put forward here a biblical-theological argument concerning the specific nature of Adam’s sin. However, I would suggest that Adam’s disobedience was understood inner-biblically as having something to do with a failure to offer himself — what we might call a failure of worship. His transgression of God’s command betrays a broader abdication of his task of priestly service in the temple of creation. In this sense, the story of the fall is truly the first chapter of the Bible, preparing the reader for Israel’s history. That history unfolds according to the pattern of Eden — divine benediction is offered and accepted only to be followed quite immediately by human profanation, resulting in punishment by exile from the land of God’s presence.

I do not want to reduce the history of sin in the Bible to a story of cultic failure. But I do want to suggest that a liturgical reading of Scripture enables us to understand better why Christ’s ‘obedience’ is so often cast in cultic, sacrificial and priestly terms. The identification of Christ’s redemptive work with cultic sacrifice is especially strong in those passages that most scholars agree represent christological hymns used in early Christian worship.

The hymn in Paul’s letter to the Philippians (2:6–11) underscores the dramatic reversal of Adam’s sin. Unlike Adam, who was made in the image of God, Christ did not grasp at equality with God, but instead offered his life in humility and obedience to God. In Hebrews, this obedience is compared to the liturgical act of high priestly sacrifice (Heb. 9:11–28). As Israel’s high priests would enter the sanctuary once a year to offer animal blood in atonement for the people’s sins, Jesus enters the ‘true’ sanctuary — ‘heaven itself’ (Heb. 9:24) — to offer his own blood in sacrifice ‘to take away the sins of many’ (Heb. 9:28).

By this priestly act, this offering of blood, Jesus does even more than atone for sin. He also reveals the true nature of sacrifice as intended by God from the beginning — man’s offering of himself in filial obedience to the divine will. Hebrews explains this through a christological reading of Psalm 40.

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46 For recent theories, see Barr, Garden of Eden, 1–20; Towner, ‘Interpretations and Reinterpretations’.
47 Beale, Temple, 69–70.
48 Anderson notes: ‘[T]he story of Adam and Eve in the J source shows a striking parallel to Israel’s larger national story. We might say that the entire narrative of the Torah is in tersely summarized form … Adam and Eve fall at the first and only command given to them. And like the nation Israel, the consequence of their disobedience is exile from a land of blessing’ (Genesis of Perfection, 207–208).
49 For example, see the redemptive ‘blood’ imagery in Rom. 3:24–25; Eph. 1:3–14; 2:13; Col. 1:15–20; Heb. 1:3; 1 Pet. 1:18–21. On these hymns, see Hengel, ‘Hymns and Christology’.
50 Martin, Carmen Christi.
the New Testament presents it. Jesus’ sacrificial death brought about a new exodus — liberating God’s people from slavery to sin and subjection to death, dng their exile from God, gathering them and all peoples and leading them to the promised land of the heavenly kingdom and the new Jerusalem. 

This ‘new exodus’ theme is now widely recognized as a decisive and shaping factor in the New Testament. It is now widely accepted that Jesus is presented as a ‘new Moses.’ His passion and death are described as an ‘exodus’ (ŷoš`: Lk. 9:31) in a transfiguration scene filled with allusions to the upheavals of the wilderness period. His death on the cross is described as a kátharism — that is, in terms of the liturgical sacrifice commanded by God be offered on the night before Israel’s exodus (Jn. 1:29, 33; 19:14, 33, 36; 1 t. 1:19; 1 Cor. 5:7; Rev. 5:6, 9; 7:17; 12:1; 15:3).

This typological reading of a new exodus and a new passover is hardly contested. It is also generally accepted that the New Testament writers present the raiments of baptism and the Eucharist as means by which Christian believers joined to the new exodus. Baptism is prefigured by the Israelites’ passage o’gh the Red Sea, the Eucharist prefigured by the manna and the water in the rock in the desert (1 Cor. 10:1–4; Jn. 6). As the first exodus is pre- by the institution of a liturgical memorial, by which Israelites would imally celebrate their establishment as a people of God, so too Christ instituted a memorial of his exodus sacrifice in the Eucharist inaugurated in the last per with his disciples.

But a critical aspect of the typology has gone largely unnoticed in the litera- ture — how the New Testament writers appropriate the Old Testament understanding of the purpose for the exodus. As we saw, God’s liberation of Israel was a very specific end — namely the establishment of Israel as God’s people of Israel and priestly people destined to glorify him among the nations. 

Echoes of that exodus purpose are clearly heard in Zechariah’s canticle at the outset of Luke’s Gospel (1:67–79). In a song resounding with exodus imagery, Zechariah sees the ‘goal’ of Christ’s exodus as precisely that of the first exodus — to establish Israel as a holy and righteous people that worships in God’s presence. Luke even employs here the specific term for the covenant ‘service’ (λατρεία; Lk. 1:74) that God intended for Israel. 54

In 1 Peter, we encounter a rich passage (1 Pet. 1:13–20; 2:1–10) in which the exodus themes are applied to the newly baptized. They are told to ‘gird up the loins,’ as the Israelites did on the night of their flight (Ex. 12:11). Peter says they have been ‘ransomed’ (λατρεία; 1 Pet. 1:18), using the same word used to describe Israel’s deliverance (Ex. 15:13), by the blood of a spotless unblemished lamb (Ex. 12:5). Their lives are described as a sojourning like that of Israel in the wilderness; they too are fed with spiritual food as the Israelites drank living water from the rock in the desert.

Finally, this passage culminates with the explicit declaration that the church is the new Israel — a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation. This direct quotation from the Septuagint translation of Exodus 19:6 is joined to a quote from an Isaiastic new exodus text that foresees the world-missionary dimension of Israel’s royal and priestly vocation as ‘the people whom I formed for myself, that they might announce my praise’ (1 Pet. 2:9–10; Isa. 43:21).

The new priestly kingdom

Christ’s new exodus is ordered to the establishment of the priestly kingdom that God intended in the first exodus. This understanding is enriched by another type found in the New Testament writings — that of the church as the restored kingdom or house of David. Jesus is portrayed throughout the New Testament as the son of David anticipated in the Old Testament, a priest-king according to the order of Melchizedek. The church, heir of the royal priestly sonship of Israel, is said to participate in the heavenly high priesthood and royal sonship of Christ.

The redemptive work of Christ is both sacrificial and priestly. It brings about ‘purification from sins,’ Hebrews tells us in language drawn from the Old Testament purification rites (καθαρισμός; Heb. 1:3). 55 Through his priestly work, Christ ‘consecrated’ believers (ἐγνωρίζω; Heb. 2:10; 10:10), as previously

53 See the review of ‘scriptural metaphors derived from the exodus’ in Green, Luke, 110–20.


55 See Hahn, ‘Kingdom and Church’; idem, ‘Kinship’, 592–93; Strauss, Davidic Messiah.

The liturgical consummation of the canon

The New Testament also depicts the church fulfilling the mission of Israel – to gather all nations to Zion to offer spiritual sacrifices of praise to God. This is the vision we see in the Bible’s last book. John’s Apocalypse is a liturgical book. The literary evidence clearly indicates that the book was intended to be read in its liturgy, most likely in the celebration of the Eucharist ‘on the Lord’s day,’ Rev. 1:10. The Apocalypse is also a book ‘about’ liturgy. What is unveiled is nothing less than the liturgical consummation of human history in Christ. The vision John sees is that of a Eucharistic kingdom, in which angels and holy men and women worship ceaselessly around the altar and throne of God. The vision even unfolds in liturgical fashion, in a series of hymns, exhortations, antiphons and other cultic forms.

Jesus, described throughout the book as ‘the Lamb,’ with obvious reference to the lamb of the Passover, brings about a new exodus. In this final book of the canon, we see the fulfillment of the canon’s first book: In the new heaven and new earth, the new Jerusalem of Revelation, the children of the new Adam worship as priests and rule as kings, and the entire universe is revealed to have become a vast divine temple.

Gathered together into this new paradise, those redeemed by the blood of the Lamb make up a priestly kingdom, as John sees it, quoting God’s commission to Israel in Exodus 19:6 (Rev. 1:6; 5:10). But in this new kingdom, the children of Abraham reign with people from every tribe, tongue, and nation (Rev. 5:9; 7:9). Jesus is the ‘firstborn’ of this new family of God, the prophesied root and offspring of David (Rev. 22:16; 3:7) in whom all are made divine sons and daughters of God (Rev. 21:7) – royal sons and priests who will rule with him until the end of ages (Rev. 20:6).

Before the throne of God and the Lamb, the royal sons of God are shown worshipping him, gazing upon his face, with his name written upon their foreheads and reigning forever (Rev. 22:1–5). John chooses his words carefully here to evoke the Old Testament promises of God’s intimate presence to those who serve him. The word rendered ‘worship’ in most translations of Revelation 22:3 is λατρεύωνοι. This, as we have seen, is the word used in the Septuagint to translate ἔρωτις – the Hebrew word that describes Adam’s original vocation as well as the purpose of the exodus and conquest.

At the conclusion of our liturgical reading of the canon, we hear the purpose and meaning of the entire Bible summed up in the refrain of the Apocalypse: ‘Worship God!’ (Rev. 14:7; 19:10; 22:9). The human person has been shown from the first pages of Genesis to the last of Revelation to be liturgical by nature, created and destined to live in the spiritual house of creation, as children of a royal and priestly family that offers sacrifices of praise to their Father-Creator with whom they dwell in a covenant of peace and love.

Towards a Liturgical Hermeneutic

Our liturgical reading of the canonical text reveals a clear liturgical trajectory and theology. The story of the Bible is the story of humankind’s journey to true
Orship in spirit and truth in the presence of God. That is the trajectory, the
section toward which narrative leads. This true worship is revealed to be the
pervasive purpose of God’s creation in the beginning. That is the teleology revealed
the canonical text.

The formal unity of Scripture and liturgy, and the recovery of the canonical
inscription’s liturgical teleology and trajectory have important methodological
implications for biblical scholarship. Indeed, I would argue that three interpretive
imperatives arise from our liturgical reading. These imperatives, which I will
consider under the headings economy, typology, and mystagogy, undergird the
sacramental story of the biblical authors and present themselves as crucial dimen-
sions that must be understood for any authentic interpretation of the text.

The unity of Scripture: The divine economy

Our liturgical reading highlights the importance of what ancient church writ-
er called ‘the divine economy’ – that is, the divine order of history as presented
the canonical text. Throughout the canonical narrative, the divine economy
presented as the motive for God’s words and deeds. The biblical writers
understood the economy as part of ‘the mystery of his will, according to his
purpose … a plan (σχονομοσχένια) for the fullness of time’ (Eph. 1:9–10). In this
economic witness is faithful to the teaching of Christ, who is shown teaching
us to see biblical history fulfilled in his life, death and resurrection (Lk.

As we have seen, the liturgy of both the old and new covenants is founded
in remembrance and celebration of God’s saving words and deeds. Liturgy, en,
as presented in the Scripture, is an expression of faith in the divine economy
and a means by which believers gain participation in that economy. The
covenants themselves are regarded by the biblical authors as the divinely
spired testament to the divine economy as it has unfolded throughout history,
culminating in the saving event of the cross.

It follows that if our interpretations are to be true to the integrity of the
inscription, we must pay close attention to this notion of God’s economy. The economy
gives the Bible its content and unity.

The typological pattern

The divine economy is comprehended and explained in Scripture through a
distinct way of reading and writing that originates in the canonical text and is
carried over into the living tradition of the faith community that gives us these
texts. We characterize this way of reading and writing broadly as typology.

In our liturgical reading, we observe the pervasiveness of typological patterns
of exegesis in both the Old and New Testaments. To recall but a few
examples: the world’s creation was portrayed in light of the later building of the
tabernacle. The tabernacle in turn was described as a ‘new creation.’ Jesus’
death and resurrection are seen as a new Passover and a new exodus. The
Christian sacramental life is illuminated by the exodus event.

The extensive use of typology in the Scriptures reflects a profound biblical
‘worldview.’ If the economy gives narrative unity to the canonical Scriptures,
weaving them into a single story, typology helps us to understand the full mean-
ing of that story. Recognition of this biblical worldview has important
hermeneutical implications. The interpreter of the Bible enters into a dialogue
with a book that is itself an exegetical dialogue – a complex and highly cohesive
interpretive web in which the meaning of earlier texts is discerned in the later
texts, and in which later texts can only be understood in relation to ones that came
earlier.

In order to read the texts as they are written, the exegete needs to acknowledge
the authors’ of the Bible deep-seated belief in both the divine economy and in the
typological expression of that economy. From our liturgical reading, we see that
three moments in the economy of salvation stand out as having decisive typologi-
cal significance for the entire canonical text – creation, the exodus, and the
Davidsic kingdom. These in turn should have special significance for the exegete.

We must remain mindful that the foundation of all authentic biblical typology
is the historical and literary sense of the text. Typology is not an arbitrary eisegesis.
For the biblical authors, God uses historical events, persons, and places as material
and temporal symbols or signs of future events and divine realities. The prophets
can speak of a ‘new exodus’ only because they presuppose the historical impor-
tance of the original exodus. The exegete likewise must see the literal and histori-
cal sense as fundamental to his or her approach to Scripture.

Mystagogy: Living the Scripture’s mysteries

The final hermeneutical imperative that emerges from our liturgical reading is
mystagogy. Mystagogy recognizes that the same typological patterns by which
The divine economy is comprehended in Scripture continue in the church's sacramental liturgy. As we noted at the start of this paper, the canon was a liturgical enactment – the Scriptures come to us as the authoritative texts to be used in Christian teaching and worship. But as it was written and passed on to us, Scripture has more than an instructional or exhortative function. When proclaimed in the church's liturgy, Scripture is intended to 'actualize' what is proclaimed – to bring the believer into living contact with the mirabilia Dei, the mighty saving works of God in the Old and New Testament.

Mystagogy focuses our attention on the deep connection between the written 'Word of God' – the Scripture itself – and the creative Word of God described in the pages of the Old and New Testaments. From the first pages to the last, we see expressed the biblical authors' faith that God's Word is living and active and possesses the power to bring into being what it commands. The church's traditional understanding of the sacramental liturgy is built on this belief in the performative power of the Word of God as a 'divine speech act.'

Proclaimed sacramentally and accompanied by the ritual washing of water, the Word brings the Spirit upon people, making them sons and daughters of God through a real sharing in his life, death and resurrection (Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:26; 1 Pet. 1:23). Proclaimed as commanded in the Eucharistic liturgy, the Word brings about true participation in the one body and blood of Christ (1 Cor. 10:16–17). The Word in the sacramental liturgy continues the work of the Word in Scripture. This pattern, too, is shown originating in the pages of Scripture. The interpretation of Scripture is ordered to the celebration of baptism (Acts 8:29–38) and the Eucharist (Lk. 24:27–31). The New Testament also gives us numerous passages in which the sacraments are explained typologically, that is, according to events and figures in the Old Testament (1 Cor. 10; 1 Pet. 3:18–21). This paschal catechesis is at the heart of what early church writers called mystagogy.

At a minimum, then, our interpretations of Scripture must respect the mystagogic content of the New Testament. In this exegetes will do well to recall that the sacramental liturgy afforded the first interpretive framework for the Scriptures. But on a deeper level, the exegete must appreciate the mystagogic content of the Bible. The exegete must always be conscious that the Word he or she interprets is written and preserved for the purpose of leading believers to the sacramental liturgy where they are brought into a covenant relationship with God.

Towards a liturgical hermeneutic

I believe that, as a natural outgrowth of the past century's rediscovery of Scripture's liturgical sense, we are prepared for the development of a new, liturgical hermeneutic. As I have tried to sketch in this paper, this new hermeneutic is at once literary and historical, liturgical and sacramental. It will be capable of integrating the contributions of historical and literary research while at the same time respecting the traditional meanings given to the Bible by the believing community in which the Bible continues to serve as the source and wellspring of faith and worship. A liturgical hermeneutic will recognize the liturgical content and 'mission' of the Bible – its mystagogic purpose in bringing about, through the sacramental liturgy, the communion of believers with the God who has chosen to reveal himself in Scripture. It is, then, a hermeneutic that grasps the profound union of the divine Word incarnate in Christ, inspired in Scripture, and proclaimed in the church's sacramental liturgy.

Much work remains to be done. But, I believe this understanding of Scripture has great potential to renew the study of the Bible from the heart of the church. Reading Scripture liturgically, we will find no tension between letter and spirit, between the literary and historical analysis of Scripture and the faithful contemplation of its religious and spiritual meaning.

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1 Pontifical Biblical Commission: 'In principle, the liturgy, and especially the sacramental liturgy, the high point of which is the eucharistic celebration, brings about the most perfect actualization of the biblical texts, for the liturgy places the proclamation in the midst of the community of believers, gathered around Christ so as to draw near to God ... Written text thus becomes living word' (Interpretation of the Bible in the Church, IV, c. 1. Emphasis supplied).

7 Ward, Word and Supplement; Vanhoozer, 'Speech Acts'.

7 Mazza, Mystagogy.

78 Daniéllou, 'Sacraments', 28, 31. See also DiNoia and Mulcahy, 'Authority.'
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