THE HISTORY OF EXEGESIS AMONG BIBLICAL SCHOLARS SEEN THROUGH THE COMMENTARIES ON DAN 7:13 AND ON ROM 2:14-15 OVER THE LAST ONE HUNDRED YEARS

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Summary: I. *Introduction*. II. *Reception History and Modern Biblical Criticism*. III. *With the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man* (Dan 7:13). 1. The Vision and Its Reception. 2. The Commentaries. IV. *The Law Written in the Heart* (Rom 2:14–15). 1. The Text and its Rhetorical Context. 2. The Commentaries. V. *Summary and Conclusions.*

i. Introduction

In this monographic issue of *Annales Theologici*, dedicated to the relationship between theology and history in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the present article intends to analyze the development of this relationship in the field of biblical studies. We should observe at once that speaking generically of "biblical studies" is problematic. They are so wide and varied that one may wonder whether it makes sense to refer to them as if they constituted a single field. Be that as it may, the intersections between the Bible and history are also very abundant and diverse. No scholar ignores the importance of considering the historical context in order to interpret a biblical passage correctly. Furthermore, it is not possible to distinguish between historiography and the study of some books, such as 1 Maccabees, the Acts of the Apostles, and many others. A historical dimension is also present in other fields, such as textual criticism, which not only seeks to reconstruct a form of the text as close as possible to the original but in recent decades has added a vivid interest in the history of the transmission of the manuscripts. This is also the case in many other topics related to the sacred Scriptures, which, by their very nature, require historical research.

Accordingly, the breadth of the relationships between the Bible and history obliges us to begin by establishing a delimitation of what we intend to consider in these pages. Among the various fields where the study of the Bible and the

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study of history intersect, I will be focusing on the history of biblical exegesis, namely the interpretations that the books of Scripture have received throughout the centuries. Thus, I leave aside many other areas of history related to the Bible, such as the history of ancient Israel, the history of early Christianity, the history of the text or the history of the canon.

The history of biblical interpretation covers a period of at least two thousand years—if not longer, depending on when one decides to establish the starting point, that is, the historical moment in which some written works began to be regarded as sacred or normative Scriptures. Moreover, under the label of "history of exegesis," some authors include the *Wirkungsgeschichte* or history of the effects of the texts, namely the influence of a text—in our case, of the Bible—on all the manifestations of culture, from politics to art and literature.[1] In what follows, I will be limiting myself to the history of biblical exegesis understood as the history of the interpretations of a biblical text that have been given in a formal or explicit manner. I am aware that this restriction should be formulated more precisely, but doing this would be futile, as the topic of this article will be further specified. In effect, the third restriction of the object of study is much more precise than the two previous ones—and thus it becomes less relevant to define what is exactly meant by the history of exegesis. Indeed, I do not intend to study the history of exegesis as such, but rather the way in which it has been considered and employed by biblical scholars in the last hundred years.

Since such a task is still too broad for a single article, it will be necessary to address it by way of examples. I will try to see how biblical scholars have valued the patristic and medieval exegesis of the Bible in light of how they have resorted to their predecessors when commenting on two books: one from the Old Testament, the book of Daniel, and another from the New, Paul's Epistle to the Romans. Both are suitable for our research because there is a practically uninterrupted tradition of reception of both. The opposite could be said if we took, for instance, Obadiah or 3 John.

Furthermore, I have selected a particular passage from each book—the vision of Dan 7 and the law written on the heart of the Gentiles (Rom 2:14–15). These two texts have received a great deal of attention both in ancient and modern times. The vision of the four beasts that come up from the sea, of the Ancient One, of the judgment, and of "one like a son of man" coming with the clouds of heaven described in Dan 7 is one of the passages of the Scriptures which has had great resonance in history. Christian interpreters have not been able to avoid reading this scene in light of Jesus' claims—in the four canonical gospels—in

[1] Cfr. I. Boxall, *Reception History of the Bible*, in J. Riches (ed.), *The New Cambridge History of the Bible*, IV: *From 1750 to the Present*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2016, 172–183.

which he designates himself as "the son of man."[2] On the other hand, the Epistle to the Romans is certainly one of the most studied and debated books in the whole of history, and the verses on the "natural law" have not had a minor place. Among the authors who have written a commentary on Romans, one finds Origen, Ambrosiaster, Thomas Aquinas, Melanchthon, John Calvin, Thomas de Vio (Cardinal Cajetan), and Karl Barth.[3]

Needless to say, the choice of these two biblical passages is highly selective and cannot avoid a certain degree of arbitrariness. Many others would have been good candidates for this type of research, as, for example, the vision of the bones in Ezekiel 37, interpreted differently by the prophet (cfr. Ez 37:11) and by the ancient reception (Qumran, Matthew, Revelation, Origen);[4] or the hymn to the kenosis of Jesus in Philippians 2, where the different ways of reading it throughout the centuries show the influence of the christological or philosophical controversies of each historical period on the exegetical work.[5]

Faced with the impossibility of doing justice to an enormous bibliography, I will limit myself to a specific literary genre, the academic commentary, since they reflect the *status quaestionis* of the respective field. Furthermore, since it would be useless to pretend to be citing all the commentaries on Daniel and on Romans, I will take only some of the most relevant of the last hundred years.

Before reviewing the commentaries, it is convenient to make a brief description of the path taken by the modern study of the Bible in the last two hundred years and to see what has been the place occupied in it by the history of exegesis.

II. Reception History and Modern Biblical Criticism

In a lecture held in 1987, during a Congress on the occasion of the twenty-five years since the opening of the Second Vatican Council, Maurice Gilbert stated:

[2] Cfr. especially Mk 13:26 // Mt 24:30 // Lk 21:27, and Mk 14:62 // Mt 26:64, where Jesus alludes to Dan 7:13; cfr. also Rev 1:7.13. For a summary presentation of the sources, cfr. C. Colpe, *ὁ υἱός τοῦ ἀνθρώπου*, in G. Friedrich, G. Kittel (eds.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 1965–1976, 8:400–477. Not surprisingly, the bibliography on this topic is huge. See L.W. Hurtado, P.L. Owen (eds.), Who Is This Son of Man*?: The Latest Scholarship on a Puzzling Expression of the Historical Jesus*, T&T Clark, London 2011.

[3] Cfr. R.N. Longenecker, *On the Writing of Biblical Commentaries, with Particular Reference to Commentaries on Romans*, in W.H. Brackney, C.A. Evans (eds.), *From Biblical Criticism to Biblical Faith: Essays in Honor of Lee Martin McDonald*, Mercer University Press, Macon 2007, 74–92.

[4] Cfr. N. Bossu, *Une prophétie au fil de la tradition : l'oracle des ossements desséchés (Ez 37,1–14) et ses relectures chrétiennes, entre herméneutique et théologie*, Gabalda, Paris 2015.

[5] Cfr. J. Heriban, *La dimensione salvifica della kenosi di Cristo in alcune interpretazioni di Fil 2,6–7*, in P. Nesti (ed.), *Salvezza cristiana e culture odierne: Atti del II Congresso internazionale "La sapienza della croce oggi", Roma, 6–9 febbraio 1984*, Elledici, Leumann 1985, 1:203–228.

> For nearly a century, the opening out and growth of scientific exegesis in the Catholic world was marked by an increasingly clear break with the ancient exegesis of the Fathers of the Church, the medieval Doctors and the commentators of the century following the Council of Trent. Even today, many Catholic exegetes are totally uninterested in the interpretations of their early predecessors.[6]

Although these words could seem harsh ("totally uninterested"), the truth of this description is indisputable, at least if one thinks of the kind of exegesis most commonly practiced during the 1960s and 1970s—and not only in the Catholic sphere, to which Gilbert explicitly refers.

We can say with equal certainty that the panorama has changed considerably since then. In 1993, the Pontifical Biblical Commission mentioned the development of some "Approaches Based on Tradition," among which the "Canonical Approach," the "Approach through Recourse to Jewish Traditions of Interpretation" and the "Approach by the History of the Influence of the Text (*Wirkungsgeschichte*)" were mentioned.[7] Moreover, it can be easily observed that there has been a rebirth of academic interest in the reception of the biblical texts, as shown, for example, by the ongoing publication of the *Encyclopedia of the Bible and its Reception*;[8] by the project of redoing the *Bible de Jérusalem* with the title of *La Bible en ses traditions* (www.bibest.org);[9] by the creation of the *Oxford-based Center for Reception History of the Bible* (www.crhb.org); or by the appearance of the *Wiley-Blackwell Bible Commentaries*, whose goal is to comment on the reception of a biblical book "through the centuries." It is worth quoting a paragraph from the editors' preface to this series:

> The Blackwell Bible Commentaries series, the first to be devoted primarily to the reception history of the Bible, is based on the premise that how people have interpreted, and been influenced by, a sacred text like the Bible is often as interesting and historically important as what it originally meant. (...) *Until quite recently this whole dimension was for the most part neglected by biblical scholars*. The goal of a commentary was primarily, if not exclusively, to get behind the centuries of accumulated

[6] M. Gilbert, *New Horizons and Present Needs: Exegesis since Vatican II*, in R. Latourelle (ed.), *Vatican II: Assessment and Perspectives: Twenty-Five Years After (1962–1987)*, I, Paulist Press, New York 1988, 321–343, here 335.

[7] Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church (April 23, 1993)*, Part I/A.

[8] D.C. Allison, H.-J. Klauck (eds.), *Encyclopedia of the Bible and its Reception*, de Gruyter, Berlin 2009-.

[9] On the origin of the Jerusalem Bible in the 1940s, cfr. O.-T. Venard, *The Cultural Backgrounds and Challenges of La Bible de Jérusalem*, in P. McCosker (ed.), *What is it that the Scripture Says?: Essays in Biblical Interpretation, Translation and Reception in Honour of Henry Wansbrough OSB*, T&T Clark, London 2006, 111–134.

> Christian and Jewish tradition to one single meaning, normally identified with the author's original intention.[10]

The question we should ask is why the practice of the so-called "scientific" or "modern" interpretation of the Bible implied a neglecting of its reception in pre-modern times. To answer this, it is convenient to go back to the birth of the critical study of the Bible, the remote origins of which are usually set in the seventeenth century with Spinoza's *Tractatus theologico-politicus* (1670). However, it will be more practical not to move so far away and go back only to the nineteenth century when modern biblical criticism, embryonic until that moment, was developed and expanded.[11]

The nineteenth century is commonly considered to be the great century of history. The increasing "fascination with history" can be understood partly as a reaction to the contempt of the past implicit in the rationalist idea of progress, and partly as a consequence of new discoveries and of the development of elements already present in Renaissance humanism.[12] It is interesting to note the practical effects of such cultural changes. For example, a monument that today receives millions of visitors each year, the Flavian Amphitheater in Rome (the Colosseum), began to be restored only in 1805 after centuries of neglect.

The interest that arose in the nineteenth century in studying the biblical texts in their original language and context cannot be understood independently of the great development experienced in this same period by philology, archeology, history, and other disciplines that study the ancient world. Modern biblical exegesis was not born alone but was accompanied by an entourage of new subjects, such as Orientalism, Egyptology, and Semitic studies. In all these areas, the cultural predominance of Germany—especially the Protestant Faculties of Theology—was undeniable.[13]

[10] My emphasis. This preface appears in all the volumes of the series, whose editors are John Sawyer, Christopher Rowland, Judith Kovacs, and David M. Gunn. I quote from J. Carruthers, *Esther through the Centuries*, Blackwell, Oxford 2008, xiii-xiv. Unfortunately, the commentaries on Daniel and on Romans have not yet appeared.

[11] On the critical study of the Bible before the nineteenth century, cfr. M. Sæbø (ed.), *Hebrew Bible / Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation, II: From the Renaissance to the Enlightenment*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 2008; P. Gibert, *L'invention critique de la Bible: XVe-XVIIIe siècle*, Gallimard, Paris 2010; E. Cameron (ed.), *The New Cambridge History of the Bible 3: From 1450 to 1750*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2016.

[12] Cfr. M. Sæbø, *Fascination with 'History': Biblical Interpretation in a Century of Modernism and Historicism*, in M. Sæbø (ed.), *Hebrew Bible / Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation* III/1*: The Nineteenth Century: A Century of Modernism and Historicism*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 2013, 17–28.

[13] This is not the place to describe in detail the avatars of the modern criticism of the Bible, from the comparison of the Genesis stories with the Mesopotamian cosmogonies (the "Babel-Bibel

Among the various characteristics of nineteenth-century biblical criticism, I am interested in highlighting a paradox closely related to the theme of these pages and to the relations between history and theology in general. Despite the awakening of a strong interest in the human past, the German biblical scholars of this time not only did not study the history of interpretation but in many cases openly disregarded the exegesis that preceded them, considering it loaded with dogmatic assumptions, alien to the historical-critical method. Although there are exceptions, the study of biblical texts developed in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries paid scant attention to the reception of texts beyond the time of their composition.[14]

This lack of interest is not accidental but is due to philosophical factors. In a schematic and undoubtedly simplifying way, at least two different and complementary reasons can be indicated.

1) On the one hand, the modern desire for scientificity—the attempt to develop a discipline that could be considered rigorous and objective in the manner of the natural sciences—, together with a great confidence in the capacity of human reason—considered capable of bypassing cultural mediations and of reconstructing the original meaning of the texts—led scholars to overlook the kind of interpretation practiced in the "pre-critical" ages. It is the naivety of considering all one's predecessors naive, a mentality inherited from the Enlightenment and manifested in various cultural currents of the nineteenth century, especially in positivism.

2) On the other hand, the romantic mentality, which was of great influence in the nineteenth-century way of conceiving the task of the interpreter, contains two idealizations that favor disinterest in the history of interpretation: the idealization of the individual personality in the face of society (the aesthetics of genius, the evocation of the hero) and the idealization of the distant past ("the older, the more authentic", or "truth lies at the beginning," so that every gloss is judged to be qualitatively inferior). Both idealizations lead readers to wish to skip the mediations through which the texts have reached us and which are systematically mistrusted. It is not difficult to notice that we are facing a development or consequence of the Lutheran principle of *sola Scriptura* as a rejection of tradition.[15]

controversy") to the phenomenon of the "lives of Jesus," through the hypotheses about the origin of the Pentateuch, or other chapters of this story. Among the abundant bibliography, cfr. R. Fabris, *Lo sviluppo e l'applicazione del metodo storico-critico nell'esegesi biblica (secoli XVII-XIX)*, in R. Fabris (ed.), *La Bibbia nell'epoca moderna e contemporanea*, Edb, Bologna 1992, 103–145.

[14] Cfr. G. Scholtz, *The Phenomenon of 'Historicism' as a Backcloth of Biblical Scholarship*, in M. Sæbø (ed.), *Hebrew Bible / Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation III/1: The Nineteenth Century: A Century of Modernism and Historicism*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 2013, 64–89, especially 82–89.

[15] "(...) the *sola scriptura* watchword of the Reformers was transmuted in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries into a historical search for the primal revelation, to be freed from the distortions

Both these reasons converge in the definition of the goal of the philological and hermeneutical work: the task of interpreting an ancient text consists in reconstructing what the author intended at the time of its composition, a task that must be carried out according to an objective method comparable to that of the exact or natural sciences. The scholar must discover what was the meaning of the text in the original conditions of the message's creation. Understood in this way, access to the author's intention does not require knowing the way in which the texts have been received and interpreted throughout time, but rather is opposed to it, because—at least in romantic hermeneutics—the tradition is under suspicion because it would have misunderstood the original author.[16]

As mentioned, the great development of modern biblical criticism took place mainly in Germany and, to a lesser extent, in other countries such as the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and the United States. It was always within a Western Christian cultural context, mostly Protestant, but generally linked to public academic institutions independent of established churches or communities.

In the German Jewish world, there were some attempts to enter into dialogue with the biblical scholars or at least to respond to their attacks, which arose not only from rationalism but also from anti-Semitism—a prejudice more or less latent in much work of this kind. In this context was born the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, an intellectual movement that sought to offer a rational and Jewish response to the challenges of criticism, with authors such as Leopold Zunz, Abraham Geiger, Heinrich Graetz, and Benno Jacob.[17]

For its part, the Catholic Church observed the development of modern biblical criticism from the outside until the last years of the nineteenth century. The situation began to change, thanks mainly to the efforts of Father Marie-Joseph Lagrange, O.P. (1855–1938), founder of the *École Biblique* in Jerusalem. Starting from archeology, Lagrange tried to put the Catholic intellectual world into contact

and corruptions accreted through centuries of ecclesiastical tradition," W.A. Meeks, *The History of Religions School*, in J. Riches (ed.), *The New Cambridge History of the Bible,* IV, 133.

[16] Cfr. J. Grondin, *Einführung in die philosophische Hermeneutik*, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt 2001, 103–108.

[17] It continued into the twentieth century with the creation, for example, of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Cfr. K.S. Davidowicz, *The 'Science of Judaism' (Wissenschaft des Judentums) and the Bible*, in K. Finsterbusch, A. Lange (eds.), *What is Bible?*, Peeters, Leuven 2012, 1–12; E. Breuer, C. Gafni, *Jewish Biblical Scholarship between Tradition and Innovation*, in M. Sæbø (ed.), *Hebrew Bible / Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation III/1: The Nineteenth Century: A Century of Modernism and Historicism*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 2013, 262–303. See also C. Wiese, *Challenging Colonial Discourse: Jewish Studies and Protestant Theology in Wilhelmine Germany*, Brill, Leiden 2005; Y. Shavit, M. Eran, *The Hebrew Bible Reborn: From Holy Scripture to the Book of Books: A History of Biblical Culture and the Battles over the Bible in Modern Judaism*, de Gruyter, Berlin 2007, parts I and II.

with modern biblical criticism, which was highly rationalist.[18] As could have been expected, these early contacts were not free of friction. Under the pontificate of Leo XIII, a controversy called "the biblical question" took place in France.[19] This can be considered a foretaste of the great confrontation of the early twentieth century, the modernist crisis, in which a frontal clash between rationalist exegesis and the magisterium of the Church occurred.[20]

After the First World War, the positions on both sides became more moderate, and a slow rapprochement between Catholic culture and modern biblical criticism began.[21] This process had a turning point on the Catholic side in 1943 with the publication of *Divino Afflante Spiritu*. This encyclical of Pius XII represented an opening on the part of the magisterium to some elements of modern criticism. This explains its enthusiastic reception by many Catholic biblical scholars who considered it "revolutionary." Talking about a revolution as if it were a 180-degree turn is an exaggeration, but it is true that there was a clear change of tone by contrast with the defensive position maintained by the pontifical magisterium during the modernist crisis. It can be said that with *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, the critical study of the Bible made its official entry into the Catholic Church.[22]

[18] The most complete biography is B. Montagnes, *Marie-Joseph Lagrange: une biographie critique*, Cerf, Paris 2004. See also M.-J. Lagrange, *Le père Lagrange au service de la Bible: souvenirs personnelles*, Cerf, Paris 1967. To get an idea of the man, J. Guitton, *Portrait du père Lagrange: celui qui a réconcilié la science et la foi*, Laffont, Paris 1992, is useful.

[19] The expression, which is an allusion to the "social question" addressed by the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891), comes from the title of an article by Maurice d'Hulst, first rector of the *Institut catholique* de Paris: *La question biblique*, «Le Correspondant» January (1893). Cfr. G. Courtade, *Inspiration et inerrance,* «DBS» 4 (1949) 482–559; H. J. T. Johnson, *Leo XIII, Cardinal Newman and the Inerrancy of Scripture,* «Downside Review» 69 (1951) 411–427.

[20] On modernism and the modernist crisis, there is an abundant bibliography. As an orientation, cfr. C. Izquierdo, *Cómo se ha entendido el* modernismo teológico*: Discusión historiográfica,* «Anuario de Historia de la Iglesia» 16 (2007) 35–75.

[21] The Great War put into crisis the nineteenth-century faith in human progress and reason. Thus, the foundations on which modernism was based lost solidity. At this time, Karl Barth headed a theological movement of reaction against liberal Protestantism. It is also worth remembering the publication of Albert Schweitzer's important monograph *Von Reimarus zu Wrede: eine Geschichte der Leben Jesu Forschung* (1906) in which he criticizes the lives of Jesus and rescues—following Johannes Weiss—the eschatological dimension of the New Testament which had been neglected by rationalist criticism.

[22] "Cette charte libératrice, préparée par un labeur obscur de quarante années, a permis à l'exégèse catholique de sortir enfin de son ghetto pour traiter d'égale à égale avec l'exégèse protestante et la critique détachée de la foi," P. Grelot, *La Bible, Parole de Dieu: Introduction théologique à l'étude de l'Écriture Sainte*, Desclée, Paris 1965, 216. On the genesis and reception of the *Divino Afflante*, cfr. J. C. Ossandón Widow, *El* sentido literal *de la Sagrada Escritura según la encíclica Divino Afflante Spiritu de Pío XII: algunas consecuencias para la exégesis bíblica*, in M. Ayuso, Á. Pezoa, J. L. Widow (eds.), *Razón y Tradición: estudios en honor de Juan Antonio Widow*, I,

This delay on the part of the Church led many Catholics to want to catch up quickly, adopting—in a more or less uncritical way, depending on the case—the hermeneutical presuppositions of the historico-critical method. In a famous article, published in 1956, Bouyer described the rapid transition that took place in France from ignorance to enthusiasm for everything that seemed "biblical," and warned that this passage from neo-scholastic apologetics to liberal Protestantism was being carried out in many cases without proper discernment.[23] It was precisely at this moment that many Catholic biblical writers began to forget the patristic, medieval, and post-Tridentine exegesis, as pointed out by Gilbert.

This description of the evolution of biblical studies since the nineteenth century has been unavoidably broad and generic. Our next step consists of comparing this quick vision with the way in which the biblical scholars of the twentieth century have commented on the two biblical texts previously mentioned: the vision of one like a son of man in Dan 7 and the reference to the Gentiles and the law in Rom 2.

III. With the Clouds of Heaven There Came One Like a Son of Man (Dan 7:13)

1. *The Vision and Its Reception*

To respect the unity of the text, it would be necessary to quote the entire chapter 7 of Daniel. However, for our purpose, which is to go through the commentaries of the last century to see how much space they grant to the history of interpretation, it will be enough to limit ourselves to a few verses:

> [13] I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. [14] And to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed. [...] [16] I approached one of those who stood there and asked him the truth concerning all this. So he told me, and made known to me the interpretation of the things. [17] 'These four great beasts are four kings who shall arise out of the earth. [18] But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom for ever, for ever and ever.'

Globo Editores, Santiago 2011, 191–212. On biblical studies in the Catholic Church during the twentieth century, cfr. G. P. Fogarty, *The Catholic Church and Historical Criticism of the Old Testament*, in M. Sæbø (ed.), *Hebrew Bible / Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation,* III/1*: The Nineteenth Century: A Century of Modernism and Historicism*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 2013, 244–261.

[23] L. Bouyer, *Où en est le mouvement biblique?,* «Bible et vie chrétienne» 13 (1956) 7–21.

> [...] 27 And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey them.' (Revised Standard Version [RSV]).

For the vast majority of the Church Fathers, medieval commentators, and modern authors before the nineteenth century, this "one like a son of man" designates a messianic eschatological figure. Starting from the Gospels (cfr. Mk 13:26 and parr., Mk 14:62 and parr.), it is common to apply Dan 7:13 to the second coming of Jesus at the end of time, an interpretation found in the second century (Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 31) and repeated by Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Cyril of Jerusalem. Perhaps a little bit more surprisingly, most Jewish commentators identify this mysterious figure with the Messiah of Israel, as reflected not only in the Similitudes of Enoch (first century AD) and in 4 Ezra (late first century AD) but also in the opinions of some rabbis included in the Talmud.[24]

On the other hand, it is important to point out that some ancient authors, both Christian and Jewish, affirm that the vision of Dan 7 refers to the situation of the Jews during the persecution of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who is identified with the little horn of the fourth beast. A pagan author, the Neoplatonic philosopher Porphyry, is to be included in this group as well.[25] This line of interpretation of Dan 7 will become predominant in the late nineteenth century and much of the twentieth—as we shall see when reviewing the commentaries—with an important addition: the figure of "one like a son of man" is understood as a symbol of "the people of the saints of the Most High," that is, of Israel, a way of reading that appeals to the interpretation of the vision offered by the text itself (cfr. Dan 7:18.27). In general, modern scholars are aware that most of the ancient authors saw the son of man as the messiah or at least as an individual figure, but they prefer the collective interpretation. The identification of the son of man with the people of Israel remained prevalent among scholars from the late nineteenth century until the last quarter of the twentieth century, when the discussion reopened, as we shall see.

[24] Cfr. A. J. Ferch, *The Son of Man in Daniel 7*, Andrews University Press, Berrien Springs 1983, 9–12; R. Bodenmann, *Naissance d'une exégèse : Daniel dans l'Eglise ancienne des trois premiers siècles*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 1986; J. J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, Fortress, Philadelphia 1993, 86–89 and 112–123; M. Müller, *The Expression* Son of Man *and the Development of Christology: A History of Interpretation*, Equinox, London 2008, 178–182 ("Excursus I: The Interpretation of Daniel 7.13 until ca. 1850").

[25] In addition to Ferch, *Son of Man*, 12–17, and Collins, *Daniel*, 112–117, cfr. P. F. Beatrice, *Pagans and Christians on the Book of Daniel,* «Studia Patristica» 25 (1993) 27–45, especially 36–45.

2. *The Commentaries*

Through the following review of some commentaries on the book of Daniel, we will look for two things: how each of them interprets the figure of one like a son of man and how much attention they grant to the older interpretations of this text. On the other hand, we will leave out two aspects: the explanations of the text that consider that it was composed in successive stages—this kind of hypothesis is not relevant to our goal—and the debates about the possible presence in the background of Dan 7 of cosmogonic myths, something first proposed by Hermann Gunkel in 1895[26] and that determined a large part of the discussions about the text in the twentieth century, even more after the discoveries of texts in Ugarit in 1929.[27]

We can start with a brief commentary on Daniel written in German and published at the beginning of the twentieth century by the Swiss, Karl Marti (1855–1925), Professor at the University of Bern and Pastor of the Evangelical Reformed Church (Calvinist). The book is part of the *Kurzer Hand-Commentar zum Alten Testament*, a collection edited, among others, by Bernhard Duhm. Commenting on Dan 7, Marti affirms that the figure of "one like a son of man" corresponds to "the people of the saints of the Most High," namely to the faithful Jews, and that it represents the spiritual kingdom of God, opposed to the pagan kingdoms, represented by the beasts. Marti recognizes that the figure was understood in another way, in a messianic sense, by the author of the Similitudes of Enoch and by the Gospels.[28] When introducing chapter 7, he mentions that Porphyry and Ephraem identified the little horn with Antiochus.[29]

We continue with a commentary on Daniel published in 1927 by the American James A. Montgomery (1866–1949), an Episcopalian. It is a much larger book than Marti's. The series to which it belongs—*The International Critical Commentary*—is characterized by devoting a special attention to the philological aspects, and this commentary is no exception in this regard.[30] There is a specific note on the "son of man," in which Montgomery analyzes the meaning of the expression and gives several reasons to justify his conclusion: as used in Dan 7, it

[26] Cfr. H. Gunkel, *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit: eine religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung über Gen 1 und Ap Joh 12*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 1895, 323–335.
[27] As an introduction to this issue, J. H. Walton, *The Anzu Myth as Relevant Background for Daniel 7?*, in J. J. Collins, P. W. Flint (eds.), *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception*, Brill, Leiden 2002, 69–89, is helpful.
[28] Cfr. K. Marti, *Das Buch Daniel*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 1901, 52–54. Referring to other points of interpretation, he quotes Justin, the Letter of Barnabas, and "the rabbis."
[29] Cfr. *ibidem*, 48.
[30] "Montgomery's commentary remains invaluable in its discussion of textual problems", Collins, *Daniel*, 123.

is a symbol of the people.[31] After offering arguments internal to the text, he adds another taken from tradition: a collective interpretation appears in some ancient authors and in Calvin. At the same time, he recognizes that the earliest known interpretations of the passage (Similitudes of Enoch, Jesus, 4 Ezra) understood the son of man as the messiah.[32]

The concern shown by Montgomery towards the history of the interpretation of the text—reflected not only here but in the whole commentary—is remarkable. Judging only from the cases of Marti and of Montgomery, the idea that modern biblical criticism is not interested in the history of exegesis seems to be disproved. However, if we advance a few decades, we do find a couple of commentaries in which the reception of the text is conspicuous by its absence.

The first of these is the commentary of the German Evangelical Otto Plöger (1910–1999), published in 1965 as part of the *Kommentar zum Alten Testament*. Before justifying his interpretation of the son of man as a way of representing the people of Israel, Plöger explains that this figure is not as important in Dan 7 as it would become later, when, as a result of a development, it is identified with the Messiah by the Similitudes of Enoch, the Gospels, and 4 Ezra. This is the only reference to the reception of the text in Plöger's commentary on Dan 7.[33]

The second case comes from the commentary on Daniel of the *Anchor Bible*, which has two authors, both of them Americans and Roman Catholics. Alexander A. Di Lella, O.F.M. (1929–2010) wrote the final bibliography, the commentary on Daniel 10–12, and the introduction, while the commentary on chapters 1–9 is the work of Louis Francis Hartman, C.Ss.R. (1901–1970), who died before being able to conclude the book. Their work offers a good example of the situation of biblical studies in the mid-twentieth century.

In the commentary on Dan 7, Hartman states that "one like a son of man who comes with the clouds of heaven" is a way of referring to the people, as explained in the internal interpretation of the vision. Therefore, it is not a messianic figure, "except perhaps as connected with messianism in the broad sense, i.e. with God's plan of salvation for his Chosen people".[34] Next, Hartman observes that the son of man was associated with the Messiah in the first century, as seen by the Gospels and by the Similitudes of Enoch. There are no more mentions of the history of interpretation in this part of the book.

[31] Cfr. J. A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, T&T Clark, Edinburgh 1927, 317–324.
[32] Cfr. *ibidem*, 320.
[33] Cfr. O. Plöger, *Das Buch Daniel*, Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, Gütersloh 1965, 110–119, especially 113 and 115.
[34] L. F. Hartman, A. A. Di Lella, *The Book of Daniel*, Doubleday, Garden City 1978, 219.

In the introduction, Di Lella dedicates a specific section to the son of man.[35] As a starting point, he states that there is "sufficient consensus" that it is a symbol of the saints of the Most High. For this reason, he concentrates on defending the thesis that the several mentions of these "saints" in the book of Daniel always refer to a group of individuals, not to a single one. In this context, he makes an extremely interesting observation for our subject: Di Lella criticizes those who interpret Dan 7 in the light of its later reinterpretations, saying that this is *eisegesis*: "Such a methodology is questionable, for it leads to «eisegesis,» or reading into a text ideas that arose only at a much later date."[36] He is certainly right that one should not make the book of Daniel say what 1 Enoch or 4 Ezra have seen in it. But his statement seems to imply that the older interpretations are irrelevant and therefore should not be taken into account when it comes to finding the original meaning of the text, something that corresponds to the modern disregard of the history of exegesis described above.[37]

Moving a couple of decades later, we arrive at the commentary on Daniel by the Anglican John Edgar Goldingay (born 1942). His book was published in 1989 within the *Word Biblical Commentary*, a series that wants to offer "a showcase of the best in evangelical critical scholarship" as can be read in the dustjacket of its volumes. After examining the various interpretations proposed by scholars about the "one like a son of man," Goldingay prefers to leave this figure in a certain indeterminacy: we must—he claims—respect the allusiveness present in the text itself, whose author does not make everything clear, although he was able to do so.[38] The commentary mentions the reception of Dan 7 in an extremely generic way: "Tradition, both Jewish and Christian, has commonly understood the humanlike figure to be the hoped-for future king of Israel".[39] Thus, Goldingay takes reception into account, but, in proportion to the length of his book, his treatment of it may seem rather poor. However, he provides more detailed information about the reception when he refers to the identification of the fourth beast with the Roman Empire;[40] and in the introduction one can read several pages devoted to the history of the interpretation of Daniel throughout the centuries, with several allusions to Dan 7.[41] Furthermore, Goldingay's proposal of leaving the figure of the son of man indeterminate seems an effort to establish

[35] Cfr. *ibidem*, 85–102.
[36] *Ibidem*, 88.
[37] On the other hand, Di Lella uses the ancient versions (Theodotion, LXX, Peshitta) in his favor: cfr. Idem, *Daniel*, 95. Here he does consider reception.
[38] J. E. Goldingay, *Daniel*, Word Books, Dallas 1989, 167–172.
[39] *Ibidem*, 170.
[40] *Ibidem*, 173–175.
[41] *Ibidem*, xxvi-xxxviii.

a critical interpretation compatible with or open to a Christian reading. In sum, Goldingay is closer to Montgomery than to Plöger or Hartmann-Di Lella in his consideration of the history of interpretation.

A few years after the publication of Goldingay's commentary, there appeared the one written by John Joseph Collins (Roman Catholic, born 1946 in Ireland, Professor in the U.S.). Because of its quality and diffusion, this is probably the most important commentary on Daniel in the last fifty years. It belongs to the series *Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible*, edited by Frank Moore Cross. The introduction dedicates considerable space to the history of reception, both Jewish and Christian, with special attention to Dan 7 and the son of man.[42] In arriving at the verse by verse commentary on Chapter 7, Collins inserts two excursuses that interest us, the former on "One like a Human Being" (304–310) and the latter entitled "Holy Ones" (313–317). Both are closely linked. In the first, he proposes that the figure of one like a human being must be understood as the archangel Michael, later described as "the great prince who has charge of your people" (Dan 12:1; cfr. Dan 12:13.21). In justifying the individual interpretation of the son of man and distancing himself from the collective one, Collins claims that the identification of this figure with the saints of the Most High is not self-evident, as the defenders of the collective interpretation maintain. Collins mentions in his favor the ancient interpretations, both Jewish and Christian: "traditional exegesis has assumed a distinction for nearly two thousand years",[43] although he recognizes that this tradition sees the son of man as a human messiah, not as an angel. In the second excursus, relying on numerous parallel texts, Collins states that the expression "the saints of the Most High" of v. 18 should be understood as referring to angels, not to human beings, while "the people of the saints of the Most High" of v. 27 refers to Israel as the human counterpart of this heavenly reality.[44]

We can conclude our review of commentaries on Daniel by taking the one published in 2014 by Carol Ann Newsom (born 1950; presently Professor at the Emory University in Atlanta, U.S.). In the same book, Brennan W. Breed (Assistant Professor at Columbia Theological Seminary) has written the sections on the history of interpretation, both in the introduction and in the commentary on each chapter of Daniel; all the rest is the work of Newsom. For our subject, the presence of these sections is very relevant since they confirm the increasing sensitivity towards reception in recent decades. At the same time, the fact that

[42] Cfr. Collins, *Daniel*, 72–123.

[43] *Ibidem*, 309.

[44] *Ibidem*, 294–323. An updated summary of Collins' commentary on Dan 7 can be seen in J.J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids ³2016, 126–133.

they are the work of a different author reduces the unity of the commentary and shows how difficult it has become for a single scholar to be competent when dealing with such large fields.

When Newsom comments on the vision of Dan 7, she follows Collins in identifying the one like a son of man with Michael, and the saints of the Most High with angels.[45] As expected, she does not say anything about the history of reception for that is the content of the following section. In it, Breed mentions some ancient authors who understood the son of man as Israel, while the vast majority thought of the Messiah.[46]

IV. The Law Written in the Heart (Rom 2:14–15)

Before going through the commentaries of the last hundred years on the Epistle to the Romans and their recourse to the history of exegesis, it is convenient to present the place and function of Rom 2:14–15 within the argument of the letter.

1. *The Text and its Rhetorical Context*

In Rom 2:14–15, Paul writes:

> 14 When Gentiles who have not the law do by nature what the law requires [*ὅταν γὰρ ἔθνη τὰ μὴ νόμον ἔχοντα φύσει τὰ τοῦ νόμου ποιῶσιν*], they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. 15 They show that what the law requires [*τὸ ἔργον τοῦ νόμου*] is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them. (RSV)

The interpretation of this passage depends strongly on how one understands its function within its immediate context, which is the argument of Rom 1–3. Therefore, we have to recall what Paul has said previously and what are the steps of his demonstration. We can leave aside Rom 3:21–4:25 and concentrate on the structure of Rom 1:18–3:20. Paul wants to explain his gospel to the Christian community of Rome. Before saying that all have sinned and receive justification by faith in Christ (Rom 3:21–24), he must face the possible objection of the pious Jew who thinks that human justification depends on belonging to the people of the covenant who are in possession of the law or Torah. Thus, Paul must first undo the Jewish privilege. His thesis can be formulated as fol-

[45] C. A. Newsom, B. W. Breed, *Daniel: A Commentary*, Westminster John Knox, Louisville 2014, 212–243.

[46] *Ibidem*, 243–252. Breed deals also with the reception of the vision in the Islamic tradition, a subject that had not appeared so far in the commentaries. Can we see here an example of how the study of ancient texts is influenced by the historical circumstances of the scholar?

lows: "possession of the law does not of itself secure the Jew from condemnation."[47]

In Rom 1:18—"the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth" (RSV)—Paul presents his thesis or *propositio*;[48] in 1:19–3:18 he develops its demonstration or *probatio*; and 3:19–20 is the concluding part or *peroratio*. Within Rom 1:19–3:18, we can distinguish the following four sections:

a) 1:19–32, demonstration of the revelation of the divine wrath from events (past and present): God punishes those who work unrighteousness;
b) 2:1–29, the principles that rule the divine wrath: God knows people's hearts and punishes (or rewards) impartially according to their works; this section is commonly divided into two parts: 2:1–16 (on which see below) and 2:17–29;
c) 3:1–8, reflections on possible misunderstandings;
d) 3:9–18, a demonstration by authorities.[49]

The argument developed in Rom 2:1–16—the section that interests us at present—can be summarized as follows. First, Paul argues that criticizing evil deeds is no guarantee if one desires to escape the divine wrath (2:1–6). Then he states a general principle: God is impartial both in retribution and punishment (2:7–11). If one does evil, belonging to the Jewish people does not mean freedom from punishment. At the same time, whoever does good works will be rewarded, whether Jew or Gentile. The possibility that a non-Jew does good works requires an explanation: this is the function of verses 12–16.[50]

It is important to take into account that, in order to demonstrate his point convincingly, Paul must build his argument using ideas accepted or at least acceptable to the other party, the pious Jew.[51] For this reason, Paul is not interested in defending a thesis that is too technical. Accordingly, he chooses vague expressions. He speaks of "Gentiles" in 2:14 without specifying whether they are many or few.

[47] J.D.G. Dunn, *Romans*, I, Word Books, Waco 1988, 104.
[48] Or *subpropositio* inasmuch as subordinated to the main *propositio* of the letter, which is set forth in Rom 3:16–17. Cfr. J.-N. Aletti, *Rm 1–3: Quelle fonction? Histoire de l'exégèse et nouveau paradigme*, in J.-N. Aletti, J. L. Ska (eds.), *Biblical Exegesis in Progress: Old and New Testament Essays*, Pontificio Istituto Biblico, Roma 2009, 469–499, here 479.
[49] Cfr. *ibidem*, 476.
[50] The outline comes from J.-N. Aletti, *Romans*, in W.R. Farmer et al. (eds.), *The International Bible Commentary: A Catholic and Ecumenical Commentary for the Twenty-First Century*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville 1998, 1553–1600, 1559; cfr. also J.L. Caballero, *Rom 1:18–2:16 and Natural Law: A Rhetorical Approach*, in A.N. García, M. Šilar, J.M. Torralba (eds.), *Natural Law: Historical, Systematic and Juridical Approaches*, Cambridge Scholars, Newcastle upon Tyne 2008, 25–26.
[51] Cfr. Aletti, *Rm 1–3: Quelle fonction?*, 475.

The expression "things of the law" (τὰ τοῦ νόμου) of v. 14 is quite generic and it is not possible to determine what kind of precepts are concerned. The same applies to "what the law requires" (τὸ ἔργον τοῦ νόμου) in Rom 2:15.[52]

The impartiality of the divine judgment does not ignore the fundamental difference between the Jew and the Gentile, namely the possession of the Mosaic Law. At this point, Paul is unambiguous: the Gentiles do not have the Torah. However, if sometimes they fulfill "the things of the law," they must have some access to its contents, as evidenced by their conscience, so they are responsible and therefore eligible for reward or punishment. Gentiles who observe a law they do not possess are a law to themselves (v. 14): they carry the ἔργον of the Torah written in their hearts (v. 15).

Since ancient times, two main issues have attracted the attention of the readers of this passage: the identity of the Gentiles and the sense of "by nature" (φύσει). Concerning the identity of the Gentiles spoken of in Rom 2:14, Augustine held—against the Pelagians—that Paul is referring to non-Jews who have been baptized (cfr. *De Spiritu et littera* 26.43–28.49; *Contra Iulianum* 4.3.23–25). Luther and many modern authors follow Augustine on this point, which aims at preserving the internal coherence of the argument. If Paul has claimed in Rom 1:18–32 that all the Gentiles are sinners, how can he say that they are doers of the Torah?[53] Nevertheless, most scholars take the text at its face value, i.e., as dealing with Gentiles without further specification. The alleged inconsistency disappears if one sees that in Rom 1:18 Paul did not refer to all men but only to those "who by their wickedness suppress the truth."[54]

The other debate concerns the element of the sentence with which "by nature" should be associated in Rom 2:14. The most convincing solution is to link it to the following verb: "they do by nature what the law requires"—as in the quoted translation of the RSV—rather than with the preceding element, "who by nature have

[52] Many commentaries note that Paul avoids here the plural form "works of the law," typical of his vocabulary. I think that he employs this expression here mainly in order to avoid asserting the presence of the Mosaic Torah among the Gentiles. The "work", "reality", or "effect" of the Torah seems to indicate just "something related to the Torah" without further explanations, something that Paul does not need for his argument.

[53] Among the recent proponents of this view stand out N. T. Wright, *Law in Romans 2*, in J.D.G. Dunn (ed.), *Paul and the Mosaic Law: The Third Durham-Tübingen Research Symposium on Earliest Christianity and Judaism, Durham, September, 1994*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 1996, 131–149; S. J. Gathercole, *A Law unto Themselves: The Gentiles in Romans 2.14–15 Revisited,* «Journal for the Study of the New Testament» 85 (2002) 27–49; and R. Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary*, Fortress, Minneapolis 2007.

[54] Cfr. Aletti, *Rm 1–3: Quelle fonction?*, 478 and 488–489; and P. Spitaler, *An Integrative, Synergistic Reading of Romans 1–3,* «Biblical Interpretation» 19 (2011) 33–71, here 37–42.

not the law."[55] Behind this discussion, there lies not only a problem of syntax but also the philosophical and theological controversies concerning the existence of a natural law and the capacity of human reason to discern between good and evil.

There are different opinions about almost every term in Rom 2:14–15. It is not my purpose to offer a solution to all the exegetical difficulties of this passage, but to see how it has been treated in the commentaries, with a special focus on the consideration they grant to the history of exegesis.[56]

2. *The Commentaries*

A simple research on the internet is enough to discover that there are several dozens of academic commentaries on Paul's Epistle to the Romans published in the last hundred years. After having examined more than twenty commentaries, I will limit myself to mentioning thirteen of them.

First, we can take a commentary from the late nineteenth century, written by two Anglican authors, William Sanday (1843–1920) and Arthur C. Headlam (1862–1947). They wrote together *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, published in 1895, with successive editions until the fifth of 1902, which is the one that I have consulted. It has been reprinted several times, the last in 1992! Indeed, even today this book can be read with profit especially because of its attention to the meaning of the Greek terms.[57] It is part of *The International Critical Commentary*, the same series as Montgomery's commentary on Daniel.

Concerning Rom 2:14–15, Sanday and Headlam cite several parallel texts: Pirque Abot, 4 Ezra, the Assumption of Moses (today called the Testament of Moses), and the Talmud. They also quote several times Origen and Augustine, and make reference to "Christian theologians" and to "the Protestant expositors."[58] As was the case when examining the commentaries on Daniel, if one

[55] An extensive and convincing argument is provided by R. Penna, *Lettera ai Romani 1: Rm 1–5*, Edb, Bologna 2004, 234–237.
[56] For a *status quaestionis*, see C. G. Kruse, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 2012, 130–144.
[57] "[...] to this day still a more important and reliable guide to the Greek text of Romans than many if not most commentaries written since", S. E. Porter, *Commentaries on the Book of Romans*, in S. E. Porter, E. J. Schnabel (eds.), *On the Writing of New Testament Commentaries: Festschrift for Grant R. Osborne on the Occasion of his 70th Birthday*, Brill, Leiden 2013, 365–404, here 403; cfr. also 373.
[58] W. Sanday, A. C. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, T&T Clark, Edinburgh [5]1902, 60. On the following page, there is a quotation from Shakespeare.

assumes that modern biblical criticism does not consider reception history, this commentary causes astonishment and shows that the situation is not so simple.

The opposite is found in the commentary published in 1913 by a German Lutheran author, Ernst Kühl (1861–1918), Professor at Göttingen. He quotes many parallel texts but says absolutely nothing of the reception of Romans.[59] As Lagrange criticizes, Kühl has written a comment "sans aucun égard pour la tradition exégétique."[60] The contrast with Sanday and Headlam is sharp.

Let us now take an important author, so much so that he has just been quoted: Lagrange, whose commentary on Romans was published in 1916. In his explanation of Rom 2:14–15, he mentions Tertullian, Augustine, John Chrysostom, and Thomas Aquinas, as well as 2 Baruch and several passages from rabbinical literature.[61] As was the case with Sanday and Headlam, Lagrange cannot be accused of ignoring what his predecessors have said. On the other hand, the fact that Lagrange cites rather few authors of his time might baffle the reader. In order to understand this disproportion between the references to ancient and modern authors, it is necessary to explain why Lagrange published a commentary on Romans in 1916 when his initial field of study was the Old Testament, especially the book of Genesis. Between one thing and another, there was the modernist crisis, a period which in his personal case involved some difficulties and misunderstandings with the Holy Office. When Lagrange saw that his commentary on Genesis caused serious problems in Rome that delayed its publication, he decided to change his field of study and moved on to the Gospels. However, since his publications on the synoptic question also aroused suspicion of heterodoxy, he changed again and proceeded to study the Pauline letters. Thus, Lagrange's abundance of references to the reception of Romans can be explained not only by their intrinsic value but also by the context in which he was writing. Modern criticism was viewed with distrust by many in the Church while ancient and medieval exegesis were valued positively. Lagrange moved cautiously and sought to take cover from possible attacks, showing that much of what he was writing matched what had already been said before.

[59] E. Kühl, *Der Brief des Paulus an die Römer*, Quelle & Meyer, Leipzig 1913, 79–87. He alludes to Marcion as witness for a textual variant (see page 82), and, in an excursus on the Stoa, the natural law, and conscience (84–87), he mentions Plutarch, Cicero, Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius, the Book of Wisdom, Philo, Josephus, and several texts of the NT (Acts, Hebrews, 1 Peter).

[60] M.-J. Lagrange, *Saint Paul: Épître aux Romains*, Gabalda, Paris 1916, xii.

[61] Cfr. *ibidem*, 48–50.

Taking a leap of several decades, we arrive at Ernst Käsemann (1906–1998).[62] His commentary on Romans was published in 1973.[63] To explain Rom 2:14–15, he cites various texts contemporary with Paul: Philo, 2 Baruch, 4 Maccabees, 4 Ezra. Moreover, his commentary is remarkably rich in terms of the secondary literature on Romans. On the contrary, he does not say anything about the reception of the text. He quotes neither the Fathers, nor the medieval authors, nor even Luther, whose interpretation of Romans Käsemann knew well (he does quote it in other parts of the commentary). As can be seen, we are literally at the antipodes of Lagrange.

It is interesting to ask ourselves why Käsemann does not cite the Church Fathers or the reformers in this case. A possible and simple answer is that the purpose that gave rise to his book was to review Lietzmann's commentary on Romans, published in 1928, and that, accordingly, Käsemann wanted to give a platform to only the literature published since then.[64] However, it should also be remembered that Käsemann declared himself a disciple not only of Bultmann but also of Ferdinand Christian Baur (1792–1860) whose works offer one of the clearest examples of rationalism applied to the history of the origins of Christianity. In line with both Baur and Bultmann, Käsemann resolutely defends the need for a critical approach to history, separate from faith. Perhaps this disposition moves him to put aside almost completely the pre-modern interpretations of Romans.[65]

Returning to the Anglo-Saxon area, we can take the two-volume commentary on Romans of Charles E. B. Cranfield (1915–2015).[66] The first volume was published in 1975; the second in 1978; the whole work has been reprinted several times and translated into Portuguese, Spanish, and Korean. When he comments on

[62] This disciple of Rudolf Bultmann occupies a prominent place in the development of biblical studies in the twentieth century for three reasons especially: he is credited with starting the "second quest" for the historical Jesus (against Bultmann); he defended the notion of a canon within the canon; and, thirdly, he claimed that Jewish apocalypticism can be considered "the mother of all Christian theology." On Käsemann, cfr. R.A. Harrisville, W. Sundberg, *The Bible in Modern Culture: Baruch Spinoza to Brevard Childs*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids ^{2}2002, 122 and 249–270.

[63] I have employed the English version: E. Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 1980, based on the fourth edition of the German original, *An die Römer*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 1980^{4}.

[64] *Ibidem*, vii.

[65] For Baur's position on the relations between faith and history, see P.C. Hodgson, *Idealist/Hegelian Readings of the Bible*, in J. Riches (ed.), *The New Cambridge History of the Bible*, IV, 197–207, especially 204–205.

[66] In 1954, he moved from the Methodist Church to the Presbyterian Church of England. Cfr. J.D.G. Dunn, *Charles Ernest Burland Cranfield 1915–2015*, «Biographical Memoirs of Fellows of the British Academy» XV (2016) 187–204, 193.

Rom 2:14–15, Cranfield quotes 2 Baruch, Pelagius, Calvin, and then Ambrosiaster and Augustine, in addition to modern authors.[67] As was the case with Cranfield's predecessors in the *International Critical Commentary*, Sanday and Headlam, we find again that reception history occupies a prominent place.

Let us briefly summarize the situation of other six commentaries on Romans. In 1988, a two-volume commentary was published—within the *Word Biblical Commentary*—by James D. G. Dunn (born 1939), a Scottish scholar associated with the "new perspective on Paul," of Methodist confession. If we read what he writes concerning Rom 2:14–15, we find many references to parallel texts, but no mention of reception history.[68] The same can be said of the commentaries by other three important scholars who are also members of the Methodist Church: the British Charles K. Barrett (1917–2011),[69] and the Americans Ben Witherington III (born 1951),[70] and Robert Jewett (born 1933).[71] By contrast, the American Joseph Fitzmyer, S.I. (1920–2016), mentions Augustine, Luther, and Calvin, when he explains the scholarly debates on the identity of the Gentiles of Rom 2:14 in his commentary of the *Anchor Bible*.[72] Finally, the commentary by Douglas Moo (Evangelical, born 1950 in the U.S.) is quite rich in its accounting of the history of the interpretation of our verses.[73]

To conclude, we can look at two recent commentaries on Romans. To begin with, an Italian Catholic, Romano Penna (born 1937), author of a commentary in three volumes, published respectively in 2004, 2006, and 2008. It is an excellent commentary both for its almost encyclopedic nature and for its depth and maturity. Regarding Rom 2:14–15, Penna takes into consideration the opinion of Ambrosiaster, Augustine, and Thomas Aquinas about the possibility of taking the Gentiles of v. 14 as Christian.[74] He also quotes Philo, 2 Baruch,

[67] Cfr. C.E.B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, I: Introduction and Commentary on Romans I-VIII*, T&T Clark, Edinburgh 1975, 136–141 and 153–163.
[68] Cfr. Dunn, *Romans 1*, 93–107. In the "Commentary Bibliography" (*ibidem*, xxxviii), no author older than Luther and Calvin is included. A consultation of the indexes at the end of volume 2 shows that the references to patristic works are very few: for example, no allusion is ever made to Origen or to Augustine (cfr. page 974).
[69] Cfr. C.K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, A&C Black, London 1991[2] (first edition: 1957), 48–51.
[70] Cfr. B. Witherington III, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 2004, 73–84.
[71] Cfr. Jewett, *Romans*, 212–217.
[72] Cfr. J.A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Doubleday, New York 1993, 310.
[73] Cfr. D.J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 1996, 148–153. This book is part of the *New International Commentary on the New Testament* series.
[74] Cfr. Penna, *Romani 1*, 234–247.

and several Greek authors, such as Origen, John Chrysostom, and Theodoret of Cyrrhus,[75] without neglecting the dialogue with the secondary bibliography.

Finally, we can assess Richard N. Longenecker's *The Epistle to the Romans*, published in 2016 as part of the *New International Greek Testament Commentary*. The author—of evangelical confession—was born in 1930 in the U.S. He knows well the history of interpretation and often refers to it. It is sufficient to see the presentation of a "Bibliography of Selected Commentaries" in the initial pages, a selection which is divided into three categories: "The Patristic Period" (including eleven different authors), "The Reformation Period" (eight authors), and "The Modern Critical Period" (76 authors).[76] In introducing Rom 2:1–16, Longenecker mentions in passing Origen, Jerome, Augustine, and Erasmus just to emphasize that for them it was also difficult to understand whom Paul is addressing in this section: the Gentiles only, the Jews only, or all of humanity?[77] In the commentary on Rom 2:14–15, we find allusions to parallel texts, such as 4 Ezra, Philo, the Stoics, and passages of the rabbinic literature, as well as references to some important interpreters of Romans, such as Augustine and Luther.[78]

v. Summary and Conclusions

All the commentaries on the book of Daniel that we have examined take into account the earliest interpretations of the figure of the one like a son of man found in the Gospels, in the Similitudes of Enoch, and in 4 Ezra. On the other hand, not all speak of the subsequent reception of the Danielic text. Montgomery, Goldingay, Collins, and Newsom-Breed do so, while it is almost completely absent in Marti, Plöger, and Hartman-Di Lella.

In the case of the commentaries on Romans, we also found differences regarding the attention devoted by each of them to the history of interpretation of the two verses here considered. It is possible to establish a distinction between Kühl, Käsemann, Dunn, Barrett, Witherington, and Jewett, who rather ignore it, and the rest (Sanday and Headlam, Lagrange, Cranfield, Fitzmyer, Moo, Penna, and Longenecker), who do consider it.

The first conclusion we can obtain is that the initial description, in which we talked of a poor consideration of the history of interpretation by modern exegesis,

[75] Penna quotes them concerning the function of "by nature," as far as they can be considered as the "primi e più genuini interpreti del linguaggio greco di Paolo," *Ibidem*, 236.

[76] R.N. Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 2016, xxviii-xxx. Curiously enough, Thomas Aquinas is included in the "Reformation Period"!

[77] *Ibidem*, 240.

[78] *Ibidem*, 272–281.

has not found a clear confirmation. To claim that all modern scholars disregard the reception of the biblical texts is simply false. In their exegetical practice, many twentieth-century biblical scholars manifest neither a systematic rejection nor an explicit disdain of the history of interpretation. Many of them simply go to ancient authors to the extent that the interpretations of the latter can help with understanding the meaning of the text.

At the same time, we can say that our review of commentaries does not invalidate the judgments of Gilbert and of the editors of the *Wiley-Blackwell Bible Commentaries* cited at the beginning of these pages. A scarce interest in the history of reception is reflected in three important commentaries: those of Plöger and of Hartman-Di Lella on Daniel and, more clearly, that of Käsemann on Romans, the three published at the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century. It does not seem accidental that two of these three are German Protestant authors. If we add the case of Kühl, this element seems significant, even more so if we contrast it with the Anglican or Episcopalian line (Sanday and Headlam, Montgomery, Goldingay, whom we could add Cranfield, Moo, and Longenecker), which appears to be more respectful of tradition than the German Lutheran one and therefore more moderate and more sympathetic to the ancient authors. A Methodist tendency (Dunn, Barrett, Witherington, and Jewett) has also emerged from our review, which is closer to the Lutherans than to the Anglicans concerning their scarce attention towards reception history.

The case of Hartman and Di Lella requires a different explanation. It seems to confirm not only Gilbert's description but also Bouyer's complaint, both cited above: the encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* contributed to the integration of Catholics in the world of biblical studies, but many of them seem to have felt that they had arrived "late" to modern criticism and therefore wanted to imitate the Germans and to show themselves as the most scientific of all. By contrast, the publications of more recent Roman Catholic authors, such as Collins, Fitzmyer, and Penna, show that, after one or two generations of Catholic biblical scholars, there is no longer the need to prove scientific rigor. The complexes that in the fifties and sixties had led some Catholics to ignore patristic and medieval biblical exegesis have disappeared, as have also the difficulties experienced by Lagrange at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Another change, no doubt smaller, is seen in the appeal to the Greek Christian writers of the first centuries of our era to clarify philological questions, as Penna makes, something that a hundred years ago was less frequent than today.

Although it is not clearly deduced from the commentaries just seen, it is worth adding that the differences between Protestant and Catholic authors, so marked a century ago, have disappeared almost completely. At the present time, one finds more diversity in academic biblical commentaries because of the methodology employed than because of the confession of the author.[79]

On the other hand, the examination of the commentaries has confirmed that academic interest in the history of interpretation has increased in the last thirty years. This can be seen in the degree of attention devoted to it by the most recent commentaries (Newsom-Breed, Penna, Longenecker). At present, it is difficult to find a biblical scholar who systematically ignores the reception of texts, even if it is studied with the limitations imposed by the breadth of the subject, something which far exceeds the competence of a single exegete.

We can conclude that the assessment of the history of interpretation should not be considered an essential element of modern biblical criticism. That is to say, the critical study of the Bible does not change substantially according to whether or not the Fathers of the Church or the medieval scholastics are considered. The goal of modern exegesis consists in trying to reach the original meaning of the author, applying to the Bible the same methods employed for other ancient literature. If reception history is taken into account today, it is not because the goal of the interpretive task has changed, but because the confidence in individual reason has diminished. The reception of a text through the centuries is studied not only by itself but also as a means of getting to know what the first author meant. The claim to reach the original meaning is much more modest, owing to the awareness of one's own limits, and the adjective "scientific" is used more moderately today than in the nineteenth century. For various philosophical and cultural reasons, which it would be too long to enumerate, progress has been made in the awareness of the scholar's own position, overcoming the naivety of many nineteenth-century approaches. In our time, most scholars are aware that every methodology or interpretation is inevitably conditioned by the cultural location and interests of the interpreter.

From a philosophical point of view, increased attention to the history of the interpretation of the Bible is undoubtedly a step forward in overcoming a positivist rationalism. However, it does not solve all the problems concerning the relationship between biblical exegesis and theology. By itself, modern criticism aims to find what the author of the text meant; on the other hand, it does not intend to come to know what God is saying to the Church today. From the standpoint of dogmatic theology, the interpretation of the biblical texts must not only attend to their reception but must be done within the normative framework of the ecclesial tradition, that is, within the doctrinal and disciplinary limits of the Church. There is a normative element in ecclesiastical tradition: the hermeneutic role that Catholic theology attributes to tradition and to the doctrine of faith is

[79] Cfr. P. Neuner, *The Reception of the Bible in Roman Catholic Tradition*, in J. Riches (ed.), *The New Cambridge History of the Bible*, IV, 537–562, 556–562.

not limited to seeing there a mere reflection of the meaning of the texts that can help us to understand them.

I would like to finish with a personal remark. Modern biblical criticism has been rightly criticized from various points of view. No one denies that it has several limits. However, I must confess that reading these commentaries has produced in me a strong intellectual admiration, at seeing how much philological study and historical erudition, and how much work and energy have been demonstrated by biblical scholars in the last 150 years. Although much remains to be done—especially to integrate these results into theology—, such efforts have not been in vain. It is not naive to say that, thanks to the critical study of the Bible, we know the biblical texts better than centuries ago.

Abstract

The article intends to analyze the development of the relationship between theology and history in the field of biblical studies, focusing on the way in which the history of biblical exegesis has been valued and employed in the last hundred years. Since such a task is too broad for a single article, it will be necessary to address it by way of examples: the resort to the history of interpretation in a selection of academic commentaries on two texts, Dan 7 and Rom 2:14–15. Before that, a survey is offered of the place of reception history in modern biblical criticism. A final section presents a summary and conclusions.