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How biblical is the *Ignea Sagitta*?

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HOW BIBLICAL IS THE IGNEA SAGITTA?

Introduction

According to the Carmelite Rule Chapter 10, one of the fundamental characteristics of being a Carmelite is "to stay in his own cell or nearby, pondering the Lord's law day and night." No wonder that many Carmelites in the Middle Ages were truly men of God's Word. They dedicated themselves not only to the reading of the Bible as their spiritual food but also to the study of the Bible as the most important part of their intellectual formation. For them doing theology was the same thing as interpreting the Bible. Like their contemporaries,¹ many Carmelites made the Bible the most studied book in their lives. As a matter of fact, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries many Carmelites became prominent biblical lectors in the universities of Paris and Oxford and were productive writers of biblical commentaries.²

In my earlier study, "The Use of the Bible by Medieval Carmelite Writers,"³ I have come to the following general conclusions:

- 1) The medieval Carmelite writers are men of God's Word. The practice of *Lectio Divina* certainly plays an important role in their lives. That explains why their familiarity with the Scripture is amazing.
- 2) They often cite biblical texts with an introductory formula (such as "the Wiseman says," "As scripture says," etc.), but it is more frequent that they simply borrow or appropriate biblical language and ideas without alerting their readers.

¹ Cf. Beryl Smalley's statement cited by Craig Morrison in his article "The Carmelite Rule: Reading the Bible", in *The Carmelite Rule (1207-2007). Proceedings of the Lisieux Conference* (Textus et Studia Historica Carmelitana Vol. 28; Rome: Edizioni Carmelitane, 2008) 17.

² Kevin Alban is worth quoting here: "Presso molte università, nei secoli XIV e XV, i carmelitani si dedicarono all'insegnamento biblico e ben presto il numero dei lettori biblici carmelitani divenne rilevante; ad esempio a Parigi nel secolo IV erano 25 su un totale di 70 (complessivo tra mendicanti, altri regolari e secolari), mentre nel secolo successivo diventarono 8 su 25; a Oxford, invece, costituivano una grande maggioranza, tanto che nel secolo XIV erano 16 su un totale di 35 e nel secolo XV 11 su 17. Questi dati statistici che è possibile ricostruire con repertori di scrittori medievali, mostrano con evidenza un forte orientamento biblico nell'ambiente accademico carmelitano" ("Bibbia nel Carmelo," in E. Bosga and L. Boriello [dir.], *Dizionario Carmelitano* [Roma: Città Nuova Editrice, 2008] 83-84; see also in this *Dizionario*, C. Pagliara, "Bibbia e vita spirituale," pp. 92-94).

³ Published in *Studia Philosophica et Theologica* (STFT Widya Sasana Malang, Vol. 1, No. 2 Maret 2002) 142-152.

- 3) They follow the biblical hermeneutics common at their times; accordingly, their biblical interpretation is predominantly spiritual (i.e. allegorical and moral) without paying too much attention to the literal sense of biblical texts.

In this modest article, however, I would like to focus my research on the *Ignea Sagitta*, a famous work by Nicholas the Frenchman, sometime Prior General of the Carmelite Order (1266-1271).⁴ The aim of this research is quite limited: simply to see how often Nicholas makes use of the Bible in his work and what kind of biblical interpretation he is accustomed to. So, this article will not deal with its content *in se* or with its meaning for the history of the Carmelite Order. Those who are interested in the discussion on of Nicholas' purpose in writing his *Ignea Sagitta* may read the article of Kevin Alban, "The *Ignea Sagitta* and the Second Council of Lyons."⁵

The extensive use of the Bible in the Ignea Sagitta

The starting point of my limited research was this question, "How often does Nicholas use the Bible in his work?" To answer this question I went through the critical edition of the *Ignea Sagitta*, including the biblical references found in the footnotes, by Adrian Staring O.Carm.⁶ As a result, I found a variety of ways used by Nicholas in quoting from the Bible. They are as follows:

1. By explicitly quoting the Bible

No fewer than 39 explicit biblical quotations are found in the *Ignea Sagitta*.⁷ By explicit quotations I mean all biblical verses which are cited

⁴ For discussion on the date and the place Nicholas composed his *Ignea Sagitta*, see Richard Copsey, "The *Ignea Sagitta* and its readership," in *Carmelus* 46 (1999): 166-173.

⁵ In *The Carmelite Rule*, pp. 92-96.

⁶ *Carmelus* 9, (1962) 271-307. In this article I follow the system of numbering chapters and lines done by A. Staring. For the English version of the *Ignea Sagitta*, including its biblical text, I follow B. Edwards' translation found in Richard Copsey (ed.), *Early Carmelite Documents, Volume 1* (A Selection for private use by Carmelite students; Old Aberdeen: no publishing house, October 2000) 9-36. For the English version of biblical texts not found in the *Ignea Sagitta*, I follow KJV.

⁷ Lam 1:6 (I:38-39); Ps 106:40 (I:45); Lam 4:1 (I: 46-47); Lam 1:3 (III:46-47); Ps 35:4 (V:16-17); Ps 11:9 (V:23); Ps 67:26 (V:34); Ps 68:15-16 (V:42-43); Ps 54:10-11 (V:48-50); Ps 30:22 (V:53-74); Ps 7:15 (VI:57-58); Ps 7:16-17 (VI: 61-63); Ps 54 8-9 (VII:60-62); Ps 118:97 (VIII:36-37); Ps 118:101 (VIII: 37); Ps 35:5 (VIII:40-41); Prov 24:4 (IX:15); Is 39:2 (IX:20-21); Ps 25:3 (X:17-18); Ps 68:21 (X:12-13); Ps 23:4 (X: 18-19); Ps 118:37 (X:39-40); Ps 15:10 (X-45); Lam 3:51 (X:47-48); Is 35:1-2 (XI:24-25); Ps 64:13 (XI:26-27); Jas 4:4 (XI:42-43); Heb 11:24-26 (XI:49-53); Jer 50:8 (XI:55-56); Jer 51:6 (XI:60-61); Jer 51:7 (XI:2-4); Dt 32:33 (XI:9); Ps 74:9 (XII:12-13); Ps 10:7 (XII:18-19); 1 Jn 5:19 (XII:36); Ps 72:28 (XII:47-48); Ps 11:3 (XIII:16-17); Ps 75:8 (XIII:42-43); Hos 8:7 (XIV:27-28).

with an introductory formula, such as "Jeremiah laments over you" (I:5-6); "Jeremiah may well continue his laments, and say" (II:27); "the Psalmist has words for you" (I:44), etc. In most cases the introductory formula precedes a biblical quotation. It is true that the quotation of Lam 4:1 in I:2-3 has no introductory formula but it becomes clear very soon from what follows that the biblical quotation is ascribed to the prophet Jeremiah. Also in II:7-10, Nicholas paraphrases Lk 10:30-37. Even though he does not mention the Gospel of Luke as his source, he explicitly says that it is the Samaritan of the Gospel that takes pity on the man who falls among the thieves. Sometimes Nicholas cites a biblical text wholly but, most of the time, only partially. Another thing is noteworthy here: in general the biblical texts cited in the *Ignea Sagitta* are identical with the Latin Vulgate version,⁸ but in a number of cases there is slight difference between the two versions. It is difficult to know what is the reason for the differences: maybe because he uses a different version of the Vulgate or because he cites the Bible from memory, or because he takes it from someone else's writing.⁹ However, in some cases it is clear that Nicholas changes a biblical little text to adapt it to his own writing. For instance in XIV:27-28, citing Hos 8:7 he changes the subject from "they" into "you":

Ignea Sagitta XIV:27-28 "What harvest is there for me to lay up from my sowing? Hosea will answer, if you will not: "You have sown a wind and shall reap a whirlwind."

Hos 8:7, "For *they* have sown the wind, and *they* shall reap the whirlwind."

2. By composing *florilegia*, i.e. mosaics of biblical verses as "proof-text" for his argument (preceded by an introductory formula):

* Lam 1:8; 1:7; 1:8; 1:2 in I:30-33

* Lam 4:2; 2:14; 2:18-19 in II:27-35

* Lam 1:13; 1:11; 3:56; 3:45; 1:18; 1:15-16; 1:19; 1:16; 4:14; 2:22; 4:6 in II:39-52

* Lam 3:40; 3:42; 4:19; 5:16-17 in XIII:27-32

⁸ In comparing the biblical texts in the *Ignea Sagitta* with the Vulgate, I use *Biblia Sacra iuxta Vulgatam Versionem*, edited by R. Weber, B. Fischer, H.F.D. Sparks and W. Thiele (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1983) in the *BibleWorks For Windows, Version 7*.

⁹ It should be noted that before the so-called *Biblia Sacra Vulgatae Editionis Sixti Quinti Pont. Max. jussu recognita atque edita* was published in 1592 by the command of Pope Clement VIII, there had existed several editions of the Vulgate. Those pre-Clementine Vulgates are often mixed up with reminiscences of the Old Latin text (=Vetus Latina). One confronts the same problem with regard to the Carmelite Rule. For a variety of possibilities in explaining the problem, see Craig Morrison, *The Carmelite Rule*.

3. *By explicitly paraphrasing biblical texts*

From time to time Nicholas paraphrases biblical texts. Two examples should suffice here:

(a) In II:7-10 Nicholas freely paraphrases Lk 10:30-37 in the following way:

Tenderest of Mothers, who can console me at the sight of you, *fallen among thieves in your descent from Jerusalem to Jericho*? How I grieve for you, how I grieve! There is no help for you - Oh, that I might die of grief! My soul is so crushed with sorrow at the sight of you, *robbed while you journeyed, wounded, and left half dead*, that it cannot go on living! Who will *feel compassion* for you? "Who will *heal you*?" Who will console you? "Who will take pity on you?" All, indeed, have passed by unheeding, nor is there any-one you may look to for healing except the Samaritan of the Gospel, should *he take pity on you* and come to your aid in your sufferings, to *pour wine and oil into your wounds*.

(b) In XI:9-11, Nicholas wrongly cites Isaiah (instead of Joel) as prophesying that *the mountains will drop down sweetness incomparable upon us*, and the friendly *hills will flow with milk*. This is clearly a free paraphrase of Joel 3:18 which reads, "And it shall come to pass in that day, that *the mountains shall drop down new wine, and the hills shall flow with milk.*"

4. *By speaking or re-telling biblical stories, e.g.:*

- * the story of Abraham's intercession for the people of Sodom and Gomorah in IV: 39-43.
- * some biblical events that take place on a mountain or in a desert (VI:22-70; X:10)
- * the difference between Martha and Mary (in VII:55-56)
- * the sin of idolatry done by the Israelites on Mount Sinai (X:15)

5. *By borrowing biblical language without alerting his readers:*

Throughout his exposition Nicholas borrows, or, better, appropriates biblical language. We can distinguish between probable borrowings and possible ones:

a) *Probable borrowing of biblical language*¹⁰

I count it as a probable borrowing of biblical language if a sentence in the *Ignea Sagitta* clearly cites (part of) a biblical verse or if

¹⁰ Jer 9:1 (II:2); 2 Sm 1:26 (II:8); Lam 2:13 (II:11); Jer 15:5 (II:11-12); Ps 17:46 (II:15-16); Ps 106:34 (II:19); Ps 93:16 (II:5-6); Job 32:18 (III:22); Job 3:25 (VII:19); Ps 1:4 (VII:29); Ps 91:6-7 (VII:50-52); Ps 132:1 (VIII: 46-47); Mk 14:4 (VIII:53); Ps 30:20 (IX 31-32); Is 1:8 (IX:49-50); Ps 118:37 (X:39-40); Jas 3:8 (X:51-52); 1 Jn 2:15 (XII:25 - a paraphrase); Ps 22:5 (X: 28-29); Eccl 4:12 (XII:44).

it contains two or more words which also occur together in a biblical verse. E.g.:

- * "the zeal of your house has eaten me up" in I:60 is certainly a citation from Ps 68:10
- * the phrase "the bond of peace" in I:28-29 is most likely taken from Eph 4:3.

As with explicit quotations, probable borrowings of biblical language are sometimes paraphrases of biblical verses, for instance:¹¹

Ignea Sagitta II:2, "Quis dabit capiti meo fontem lacrimarum ut diu noctuque plorans"

Jer 9:1, "Quis dabit capiti meo aquam et oculis meis fontem lacrimarum et plorabo die ac nocte."

Furthermore, a couple of times Nicholas combines or conflates biblical texts, e.g.:

VII:52-53, "Who has known the mind of the Lord whose wisdom is beyond measure, or who has been his counsellor?"

Rom 11:34, "For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?"

Ps 146:5, "his understanding is infinite."

Prolog 28, "*euntibus in luce ... ne arguantur opera eorum mala lucem odientibus*" Jn 1:7 ("*in luce ambulemus*")

Jn 3:20 ("*omnis enim qui mala agit odit lucem et non venit ad lucem ut non arguantur opera eius*").

b) Possible borrowings of biblical language

I consider it as a possible borrowing of biblical language when the similarity between the Bible and the *Ignea Sagitta* is limited to only one word, e.g.: "concaptivis" (fellow-prisoners) in Rom 16:7 and Prologue 5.

It is difficult to make a complete list of probable as well as possible borrowings of biblical language. No doubt, they must be over one hundred instances. The biblical references in the footnotes given in Richard Copsey's *Early Carmelite Documents* are more numerous than those provided by A. Staring. But, a closer look to the *Ignea Sagitta*, merely in the Prologue and in Chapter I, results in the finding of some biblical allusions not yet mentioned either by A. Staring or by Richard Copsey (or B. Edwards?), e.g.:

- * the pair of "to conceive" and "to give birth to" in Prologue 7 is very common in the Bible.

¹¹ For the sake of clarity, now and then I will compare the Vulgate to the *Ignea Sagitta* in its Latin version.

- * the combination of the words "mortuum" and "abortivum" in Prologue 7-8 may be an allusion to Job 21:10 or to Nm 12:12 where the two words also occur together.
- * the idea of awaking the Carmelite Order from her sleep of ignorance (*a somno ignorantiae ... excitare*) in Prologue 11 may be an allusion to Sir 22:8 in which awaking a fool is likened to awakening someone from his deep sleep (*qui narrat verbum non attendenti quasi qui excitat dormientem de gravi somno*)
- * the way Nicholas in Prologue 12 describes the spiritual decline of the *stepsons* of the Carmelite Order due to their ignorance (*per ignorantiam degenerantes*) might be borrowed from Lv 4:2 that speaks about *the sons of Israel* sinning out of their ignorance (*peccaverit per ignorantiam*).

In my calculation, the explicit and implicit biblical quotations, the paraphrases and borrowings of biblical language, and the weaving of *florilegia* all together constitute at least one fifth of the *Ignea Sagitta*. This fact reveals the extensive use of the Bible by Nicholas in his masterpiece.

His methods of interpreting biblical texts

1. A homiletic midrash on Lam 4:1

Regarded under some aspects, the first chapter of *Ignea Sagitta* might be considered as a homiletic midrash on Lam 4:1. It is not easy to describe briefly the nature of a midrash. A midrash (plural: midrashim) which is common among the Jews is a complex reality. Sometimes authors give a definition of midrash in ways that even the specialists in midrashic literature would not recognize. It is necessary, however, to know some basic ideas about what a midrash is all about. The word "midrash" comes from the Hebrew verb "darash" which means to seek, to investigate. Then the noun "midrash" means both the activity of interpreting the Bible and its products (oral and written). To get some basic ideas of a midrash the following quotation is very helpful:

It has been common to define midrash in terms of its function or purpose. Slonimsky found the essence of midrash in its "feeding of the life-impulse when harassed and threatened by tragic circumstances." Sanders wrote that "when one studies how an ancient tradition functions in relation to the needs of the community, he is studying midrash." Bloch has offered several functional definitions of midrash; the major characteristic she attributes to midrash is its attempt to make a biblical text contemporary and relevant. Wright has stressed the literary form of midrash and wrote, "the basic midrashic structure ... is merely that

one begins with a text of Scripture and proceeds to comment on it in some way."¹²

One of the main types of midrashim is homiletic midrashim, namely sermons or essays which start with a biblical quotation and proceed to comment on each element which constitutes that biblical quotation, adding here and there other biblical passages as illustrations and verifications.¹³ G. Wesley Buchanan¹⁴ is worth citing here:

Midrashic composers were resourceful apologists with amazing skill in manipulating words, phrases, and passages to suit their own needs in ways that were far removed from the original meaning of the text. The reason such a method was necessary was that the official interpreter had to relate an ancient text that was considered sacred to the needs of a worshiping community in a different period of time and under situations that differed from those that prompted the writing of the scripture on which they depended.

In the New Testament, Jn 6:31-59 is one such instance. In this famous passage Jesus makes a commentary on the people's statement in v. 31, "Our fathers did eat manna in the desert; as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat." In fact, in Jn 6:31-59 Jesus explains each of the constitutive elements of that statement: "to give," "to eat," "the bread from heaven," and "our ancestors ate."

Taking into consideration the characteristics of midrashim above mentioned, I am convinced that Chapter I of the *Ignea Sagitta* is truly a homiletic midrash on Lam 4:1, not only because it follows the pattern of a homiletic midrash but also because of the practical purpose Nicholas has in composing it: he wants to meet the needs of his contemporary Carmelites, whom he considers as, borrowing Sanders' words, "harassed and threatened by tragic circumstances."

Like other *midrashim* Nicholas starts with a quotation from Lam 4:1, "How the gold has grown dim, the finest of colours is changed, the stones of the sanctuary lie scattered at the head of every street!" Then he proceeds to comment on each element which constitutes that biblical quotation:

"How the gold has grown dim"

First of all, Nicholas interprets the word "gold" as the golden age of the Carmelite hermits when they still were in their cells and were

¹² D. Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992) s.v. *Midrash*.

¹³ P. Borgen, *Bread from Heaven* (Supplements to *Novum Testamentum* 10; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1965) 37ff.; G. Wesley Buchanan, *To the Hebrews* (The Anchor Bible 36; Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company Inc., 1981) XXI.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. XXI.

distinguished for their devotion and experience of secret contemplation (I:13). But, to his deep regret, he fears that the gold is now in the process of becoming just lead (I:25, "aurum hoc in plumbum convertatur") due to the fact that his contemporary Carmelites have left their cells and solitude. This is, in Nicholas' opinion, a spiritual degradation. Later, in II:28 he talks once again about their spiritual decline. Citing Lam 4:2, he compares the Carmelites to gold which, however, has now become just earthen pots! Finally, in I:27-33, Nicholas believes that this tragic change undergone by the Carmelite Order has been foretold by Jeremiah when he laments over the tragic fate of Jerusalem in Lam 1:8; 1:7; 1:8; 1:2.

"the finest of colours is changed"

Secondly, Nicholas comments on the change of its colour, not on the gold itself as metal. It is very interesting that Nicholas interprets the colour of the gold as the spiritual qualities of the Carmelites in their former state. "Was not your 'colour' then 'fine' above all others, radiant with the purest chastity, ruddy with the flush of modesty?" (I:16-18). But, unfortunately, this excellent colour of the Carmelites, in Nicholas's opinion, has greatly changed (I:37).

"the stones of the sanctuary lie scattered at the head of every street!"

Finally, in I:46-68, Nicholas comes to the last element of Lam 4:1. As a matter of fact, in I: 20-23 he has already said something about "the stones of the sanctuary" that are interpreted as the Carmelites in their former state. At that time they still have the following qualities: "solid in their steadfastness, hewn true by their resolute perseverance, becomingly polished by their harsh penances, and coloured, this with the hue of this virtue, that with the tint of that - all resplendently." But now, in I:46-68, Nicholas is speaking no more about their excellent qualities but about their spiritual decline. Nicholas sees the present situation of the Carmelites as the fulfilment of the lament of Jeremiah over the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem: "The stones of the sanctuary lie scattered at the head of every street." It is worth mentioning that again and again in his work Nicholas shows his belief that what is written in the book of Lamentations is a prophecy concerning the fate of the Carmelite Order. He believes that the holy stones of the temple have fallen apart and have been scattered. Now the Carmelites lie scattered at the head of every street because they leave their cells and wander in the cities, breaking the bond of peace, ruining the stability of their life and leaving behind their excellent habit of pondering God's Word day and night. For that very reason the Carmelites are not stones of the sanctuary any longer but just stones because of their hardstone obstinacy. What is worse is the fact that instead of being holy stones now they have become "stones of offence" and "stumbling-blocks" for others, referring to Is 8:14 rather than to 1 Pt 2:8 as suggested by A. Staring. The reason for my

choice is the fact that the word *sanctificationem* in Vulgate Is 8:14 is a translation of the Hebrew קֹדֶשׁ or the LXX $\alpha\gamma\iota\sigma\sigma\mu\omicron$, both of which can well be translated with "sanctuary," a theme that is totally in line with the sanctuary symbolism so far used by Nicholas.

Such an interpretation of biblical text, almost word by word, as we have seen above, is also found in I:38-45. Here, Nicholas begins with a near exact citation from Lam 1:6, "From the daughter of Sion all her beauty has departed, her *princes* have become like *rams* that find no *pasture*."¹⁵ He then goes on with the explanation of the word "pasture" (which means spiritual consolation), of the word "princes" (referring to the arrogant leaders of the Carmelites) and the word "rams" (symbolizing the arrogance of the leaders of the Carmelites).

2. The use of allegorical and moral senses of the Bible

On reading and pondering upon the Bible, especially the Book of Lamentations, Nicholas is convinced that the fate of his contemporary Carmelites is already foretold by the Bible. To prove it, Nicholas weaves a mosaic of biblical passages (or *florilegium*) from Lam 1:8; 1:7; 1:8 and 1:2, then applies that *florilegium* to the Carmelite Order: "Take heed, Mother, *take heed of all these things: they refer to you* - you who, brimming over with peace, as you were in former times, could rightly be called "Jerusalem." (I:30-35). Thus, he likens the Carmelite Order to the city of Jerusalem. Furthermore, he interprets the "princes" of Lam 1:6 as the arrogant leaders of the Carmelites. Through the idea of princes he easily jumps to Ps 74:11 which speaks about the Lord who will break the horns (supposedly of the rams) and to Ps 106:40 which foretells that God will pour upon the princes contempt and make them scatter in the trackless wastes. Later on, when in Chapter V he talks about the wandering of the Carmelites in the cities, leaving the holy solitude of the desert, Nicholas compares that change with the experience of the Israelites in the desert:

In the meantime you have plumbed the depths of wretchedness, for you have turned back from freedom to slavery, from sanctified repose to the unending toil of your wanderings, from the desert, in short, where you partook of the manna of devotion, to Egypt, where you were tormented of old, labouring with clay and brick, as slaves to Pharaoh - the devil (V:78-83)

¹⁵ "Egressus est a filia Sion omnis decor eius, et principes eius velut arietes non invenerunt pascua;" cf. Vulgate: "et egressus est a filia Sion omnis decor eius facti sunt principes eius velut arietes non invenientes pascuam".

As is clear from the above examples, Nicholas believes that biblical events in the past prefigure what is taking place in the Church nowadays. It is also implied in this belief that biblical events in the past, in Paul's words, "were written for our learning" (Rom 15:4).

The way Nicholas interprets the Bible as described above is fully in accordance with the method used in medieval exegesis. In order to describe medieval exegesis, it is worth citing here the famous couplet concerning the fourfold meaning of the Bible:

*Littera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria,
moralis quod agas, quo tendas anagogia.*
(The letter shows us what God and our fathers did;
The allegory shows us where our faith is hid;
The moral meaning gives us rules of daily life;
The anagogy shows us where we end our strife.)

The idea of the four senses of the Bible can be ascribed to John Cassian (died ca. 435) or to other earlier Fathers of the Church (e.g. Clement of Alexandria or Augustine). The formulation of that famous couplet, however, becomes popular due to its quotation by Nicholas of Lyra (died 1340). It expresses the medieval opinion that biblical texts have four meanings (1 + 3), that is: *literal* meaning and *spiritual* meaning which in its turn consists of three meanings (allegorical, moral/tropological and anagogical).

By *literal* sense is meant history (namely certain persons, events or things) of which biblical texts inform us. By *allegorical* meaning is meant the Christological meaning that can be deduced from the literal sense; but as far as the Church belongs to Jesus Christ, then by the allegorical sense is also meant the ecclesiological sense. Strictly speaking, this allegorical meaning should be sought only in Old Testament texts, because the *literal* sense of the New Testament texts are already speaking of Christ and/or his Church. By *moral* or *tropological* sense is meant the morality that can be deduced from the literal sense. It means that a fact/reality told in the Bible is useful as an instruction for the conduct of the Christian. Finally, by the *anagogical* meaning is meant the eschatological event as our definitive future that is implied in the literal sense.

The classical and pedagogical description of the four senses of the Bible is the city of Jerusalem. *Literally* interpreted, Jerusalem is the holy city in the Holy Land; *allegorically* it represents the Church; *tropologically* it stands for the human soul; and *anagogically* it stands for the heavenly Jerusalem. Another example is given by St. Thomas Aquinas. The "Fiat lux" of Gen 1:3 has the *historical* meaning of the creation of physical light. *Allegorically* it means the birth of Jesus in the Church, *tropologically* it means the enlightenment of the soul by Christ, and *anagogically* it means our entering into eschatological glory through Christ (*In Galatas, cap. v, lect. 7*).

Even though there exists also a variety in the number of the biblical senses —sometimes its number is reduced to 3 or enlarged to 7 in connection with the seven seals or the seven spirits mentioned in the Book of Revelation (5:1 and 1:4 respectively)— the most popular scheme is the fourfold one. It becomes also the pattern of some theological treatises, liturgical ceremonies and prayers, homilies, and books' classification of books in quite a few libraries. This fact reveals that the division of biblical meaning into four senses permeates the frame of thinking of medieval Christian society.

The teaching on the fourfold sense of the Bible makes it clear that the Bible is regarded as God's Word, written by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It is therefore very rich in meaning. The Bible is like an unfathomable ocean or a heavenly expanse or an impenetrable forest of divine mysteries. The biblical texts have different colours of meaning like the tail of a peacock. But those multiple and unpredictable meanings of the Bible cannot be found unless through *Lectio Divina*, i.e. through a constant reading and re-reading of the Bible under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, in purity of heart and prayer.

To the extent that Nicholas connects biblical events to the Carmelite Order (that is a reality within the Church) he interprets the Bible allegorically or ecclesiologicaly, and insofar as he uses biblical texts in order to call his Carmelites contemporaries to conversion, he interprets the Bible morally.

3. Canonical approach to biblical texts

Another way of interpreting the Bible used by Nicholas in his work needs some words here. Again and again, in dealing with the Bible, Nicholas lets the Bible interpret itself. And he does so by linking one biblical verse to other verses where the same word or idea appears. So, when in I:16-17 Nicholas comments on the gold that has lost its finest colour (Lam 4:1), he can easily jump to Lam 4:7 which speaks about colour; so, in light of Lam 4:7 Nicholas specifies the colour of that gold: radiant (*candida*) and ruby (*rubicunda*). Then, applying Lam 4:7 to the Carmelites, Nicholas interprets the word "radiant" as purest chastity and "ruddy" as flush of modesty. But now, in his opinion, the Carmelites are losing their excellent colour by going into the cities. "Mark too the woeful change that has come over that "colour" of yours, once so breathtaking in its beauty" (II:36).

Likewise, in I:19-20, Nicholas interprets "the stones of the sanctuary" as a reference to the Carmelites in their former state. Then, through the idea of the stones of the sanctuary he jumps to other biblical passages that speak about the qualities of stones used in the building of the sanctuary in Jerusalem. There he finds the following qualities of the stones: hewn

true (*quadrati*; cf. 1 Kgs 5:17), polished (*politi*, cf. 1 Kgs 6:36, "*lapidum politorium*") and coloured (*multivarie colorati*; cf. 1 Chr 29:2, "*diversorum colorum omnem pretiosum lapidem*"). Only in close connection with the sanctuary symbolism he is using here can we fully understand why 1:60 Nicholas also cites Ps 68:10 ("the zeal of *your house* has eaten me up").

Finally, in order to further describe the loss of the past glory of the Carmelite Order, he cites Lam 1:6, "From the daughter of Sion all her beauty has departed, *her princes* have become like *rams* that find no pasture." From here, through the idea "princes" and "rams" Nicholas easily jumps to Ps 74:11 (the breaking of the horns by the Lord) and to Ps 106:40 (the contempt poured by God upon the princes and their scattering in the trackless wastes).

What kind of biblical interpretation is used by Nicholas? In my modest opinion, his way of handling the Scripture is nothing else than what is now called a canonical approach to the Bible. According to *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* issued by the Pontifical Biblical Commission in 1994, a canonical approach

interprets each biblical text in the light of the Canon of Scriptures, that is to say, of the Bible as received as the norm of Faith by a community of believers. It seeks to situate each text within the single plan of God, the goal being to arrive at a presentation of Scripture *truly valid for our time*.¹⁶

Using such an approach, B. S. Childs, for example, interprets Ps 8 in light of Heb 2:5-9, Gen 1-3 and Rom 5:7-8, all of which speak of human beings. In light of Heb 2:5-9 Childs believes that the Psalm speaks of a glorification of man's nature which is already actual in Jesus, and potential for all mankind, whereas in light of Rom 5:7-8 he comes to the conclusion that man is so precious because God loves him so much.¹⁷ It is clear that the canonical approach aims at finding out fuller meaning of a biblical passage by linking it to other passages that contain the same theme or word. That is exactly how Nicholas handles the Scripture in his work.

4. Introductory function of Chapter I

Even though Nicholas writes a proper prologue to his work, it seems that Chapter I of the *Ignea Sagitta* is in the nature of an introduction to the whole book. There are two reasons for that:

¹⁶ Cited from Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Biblical Commission's Document "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church: Text and Commentary"* (Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1995) 68-69.

¹⁷ See John Barton, *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study* (London: Darton Longman and Todd, 1984) 83-84.

(1) it anticipates the main theme of the whole work, i.e. the constant contrast between the glorious state of the Carmelite Order in the past and her present situation which experiences spiritual decline.

(2) it contains words that will occur again and again in the rest of his work as the following list shows:

	Chapter I	Other chapters
* <i>damnum</i>	I:7.9	III:8; IV:45; VII:23; X:47.56; XI:2; XII:26; XIII:3.8.19.20.21.41
* <i>planctus</i>	I:10.30.67	II:27.37; XIV: 8.13
* <i>dispersi</i>	I:2.46.53	VI:70; VIII:49
* <i>discurrentes</i>	I:49	VI:50; VIII:31.42.56; X:33
* <i>platearum</i>	I:3.46.49.52	II:35.49; VI:49; VIII:55; XI:35
* <i>(in statu) pristino</i>	I:12	II:15.20; III:3; VII:17-18; (cf. antecessorum nostrorum in VI:43)
* <i>superborum</i>	I:43	III:4.18; VI: 56
* <i>altitudine</i>	I:4	V:7 and the whole of Chapter VI which talks about mountains
* <i>castitatis</i>	I:16-17	VII:39; VIII:18; IX:5 [bis]; IX: 11
* <i>caritatis</i>	I:51	IX:24; XII: 44
* <i>contemplationis</i>	I:15	III:31; V:7; VI:46; VIII:9; IX:16.26
* <i>devotionis</i>	I:13	V:80; IX:25

Conclusion

To sum up, Nicholas proves himself a man well versed in the Bible. Not only does he frequently cite biblical texts or paraphrase them, and appropriate them, but the ways he handles biblical texts is also very biblical. Four times he weaves a mosaic of biblical texts, an activity common enough in the Bible (cf. Lk 1:46-55; 1:67-79; Rom 3:10-17). Twice he makes a comment on a biblical quotation in the style of a

homiletic midrash, seemingly in imitation of the literary technique used by the Bible itself (cf. Jn 6:31-58; Lk 1:46-55; 68-79; Rom 3:10-17). Besides, it seems that Nicholas neatly composes Chapter 1 to be an introduction to the whole work, again in imitation of the Gospel of John which has Chapter 1 as an introduction to the whole Gospel.

It is not impossible that Nicholas had access to a biblical concordance, which reportedly had already existed since the beginning of the thirteenth century. Even if does so, his work remains a wonderful composition which, regarded under some aspects, is very biblical. Nicholas is a man of God's Word. Certainly his marvelous familiarity with the Bible is the fruit of a continual practice of *Lectio Divina*, staying in his own cell or nearby, pondering the Lord's law day and night (Carmelite Rule Chapter 10).

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