In his *Liber Exceptionum*, an introduction to the study of the Bible, Richard of Saint-Victor, a pupil of Hugh of Saint-Victor and prior and teacher himself (d. 1173), explains that

Scripture is like a meal that is presented according to the diverse capacities of its hearers, now as history, then as allegory, or again, tropology, or anagogy; now by the authority of the Old Testament, then by that of the New Testament; now enveloped by mystical veils, then again pure and open.¹

The majority of Richard’s texts and of scholarly works on him are concerned with his “mystical”, or tropological, interpretation of Scripture: *De archa mystica* or *Benjamin maior* and *De duodecim patriarchis* or *Benjamin minor* are the most famous examples. His efforts in the field of literal exegesis, and his theorizing on the multiple meaning of Scripture, have received much less attention. Beryl Smalley has argued that Richard made contributions to what she called biblical scholarship, but she mainly credited Hugh and his disciple Andrew for their concentration on the literal sense.² She refers especially to Richard’s

---


exegesis of Ezekiel’s visions: whereas Gregory the Great had given a mystical exegesis, Richard tries to find a literal explanation. She also claims for Richard a greater adherence to Hugh’s teaching, compared with that of Andrew, in his refutation of Andrew’s interpretation of the famous, or perhaps infamous, Isaiah text: “Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14, following the Vulgate). In his De Emmanuele Richard attacks Andrew for not distancing himself enough from the Jewish explanation of this text. Andrew had explained its historical meaning as referring, literally, to the events in the prophet’s time, while the Incarnation is the fulfilment of the text. Richard, in his refutation of this view, says that he will try to give an “exposition of the simple letter” and to show how the text “refers to the Incarnation of the Word.” Before Smalley continues with her seminal study of Andrew, however, she concludes: “If his [Richard’s] literal works were the only fruits of Hugh’s teaching, the Victorine movement would hardly be worth investigating.”

Henri de Lubac, reacting against what he saw as Smalley’s exaggeration of the novelty of Richard’s criticism, concentrates on Richard’s Ezekiel commentary and on his De Emmanuele. He counters an interpretation of Richard’s literal exegesis as a form of “biblical scholarship” and concludes that, in the parting of the ways between biblical scholarship, based on literal exegesis, and devotional works, Richard is firmly on the latter.

Jan van Zwieten has explained how the conflict between Richard and Andrew, both students of Hugh of Saint-Victor, is connected with a different interpretation of what literal exegesis means. Richard seems

---

3 Richard of Saint-Victor, De Emmanuele 1.1, 606C: “Sufficit mihi hoc loco, si detur in simplicis litterae expositone devotioni fidelitye satisfaceret, et quomodo debeat haec Isaiae prophetia ad Verbi incarnationem referri ostendere…”

4 Smalley, The Study of the Bible, p. 111.

