

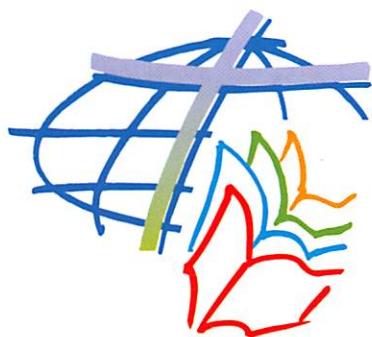
# **DEI VERBUM**

**Catholic Biblical Federation**

**NEWS  
LETTER  
BULLETIN**

## **40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Dei Verbum**

International Congress  
“Sacred Scripture in the Life  
of the Church”



**N° 76/77  
3-4/2005**

**English Edition**

ISSN 1729-3022



*BULLETIN DEI VERBUM* is a quarterly publication in English, French, German and Spanish.

#### Editors

Alexander M. Schweitzer  
Claudio Ettl

#### Assistant to the editors

Dorothee Knabe

#### Production and layout

bm-projekte, 70771 Leinf.-Echterdingen

A subscription for one year consists of four issues beginning the quarter payment is received. Please indicate in which language you wish to receive the *BULLETIN DEI VERBUM*.

#### Subscription rates

- Ordinary subscription: US\$ 20 / € 20
- Supporting subscription: US\$ 34 / € 34
- Third World countries: US\$ 14 / € 14
- Students: US\$ 14 / € 14

Air mail delivery: US\$ 7 / € 7 extra

In order to cover production costs we recommend a supporting subscription. For members of the Catholic Biblical Federation the subscription fee is included in the annual membership fee.

#### Banking details

General Secretariat  
(Address as indicated below)  
LIGA Bank, Stuttgart  
Account No. 64 59 820  
IBAN-No. DE 28 7509 0300 0006 4598 20  
BIC Code GENODEF1M05  
Or per check to the General Secretariat.  
We also accept payment by credit card (VISA, MasterCard).

#### Reproduction of articles

We invite our members to reproduce in their own publications any articles printed in the *BULLETIN DEI VERBUM* indicating the source, unless a statement to the contrary is given.

Opinions expressed in the articles are those of the authors, not necessarily of the Federation as such.



#### CATHOLIC BIBLICAL FEDERATION

General Secretariat  
Postfach 10 52 22  
70045 Stuttgart  
Germany

Tel.: +49-(0)711-1 69 24-0  
Fax: +49-(0)711-1 69 24-24  
E-mail: bdv@c-b-f.org  
www.c-b-f.org

The Catholic Biblical Federation (CBF) is an "International Catholic Organization of a public character" according to Canon Law (CIC, can. 312, §1, n.1).

## CONTENTS

# Dei Verbum Congress 2005

## Summary

4

## Audience Granted by Pope Benedict XVI

### Message of the Holy Father

5

## Solemn Opening

### The Word of God in the Life of the Church

#### Greeting Address by the CBF President

Msgr. Vincenzo Paglia

6

#### "Ut Dei Verbum currat"

### Opening Address of the Exhibition by the CBF General Secretary

Alexander M. Schweitzer

11

## Main Speeches

### "Dei Verbum audiens et proclamans"

#### The Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*

Cardinal Walter Kasper

14

#### From *Dei Verbum* to *Novo Millennio Ineunte*

#### The Reception Process of *Dei Verbum*

Msgr. John Onaiyekan

24

### The Central Role of the Word of God in the Life of the Church

#### Biblical Inspiration of the Entire Pastoral Ministry

Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini

33

Various contributions and additional information on the congress can also be accessed on the Internet at

[www.deiverbum2005.org](http://www.deiverbum2005.org)



Dear Readers:



One of the most important achievements of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) was to have reminded us of the central significance of the Bible for the Church and the world. A decisive part in this was played by a document, which, after years of preparatory work and discussion, was the last of the conciliar texts to

be released, the so-called Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*. A text that "led to a growing awareness of the significance of Holy Scripture, promoted the biblical pastoral ministry, and gave new impetus to the scientific study of the Bible", as Cardinal Walter Kasper, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, put it.

*Dei Verbum* was at the same time the founding document of the Catholic Biblical Federation (CBF) and remains its "Magna Charta" even today. The Federation was founded by Pope Paul VI after the Council precisely in order to implement the Council's commission to make possible an understandable and life-related access to Holy Scripture for as many people as possible (cf. DV 22).

Already during the Sixth CBF Plenary Assembly in 2002 in Lebanon the idea emerged to celebrate the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Dei Verbum* in the framework of an international meeting. For this reason the CBF and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, to which the CBF has been affiliated since its founding, issued a joint invitation to the Dei Verbum Congress, which took place from September 14-18, 2005 in Rome. The motto for this congress "Sacred Scripture in the Life of the Church" was taken directly from the sixth chapter of the Constitution on Divine Revelation.

Among the approximately 450 participants were more than 160 representatives of CBF member-institutions. Many of the speakers, too, as well as numerous moderators of the various sessions, were drawn from their ranks. The congress thus became an extraordinary event – one that not only brought clearly to light the

decisive role of Scripture for the Church, but also gave new and important impulses to the work of the Catholic Biblical Federation.

The present issue of the *Bulletin Dei Verbum* documents a few of the important texts of the Dei Verbum Congress. Besides the opening addresses and the address of Pope Benedict XVI, which took place during the private audience at Castel Gandolfo, you will also find the three main papers that were given on each of the three work-days of the congress. Further contributions from the panels and from the various plenary session events of the congress will follow in upcoming issues. Additional information and texts from the congress can also be accessed on the Internet at [www.deiverbum2005.org](http://www.deiverbum2005.org).

The Church "is a community that listens to and proclaims the Word of God. The Church does not live from itself but from the Gospel, and from the Gospel it draws direction for its journey ever and anew." With these words, Pope Benedict described the central position that belongs to Holy Scripture in the life of the Church.

The measure of our personal behavior as Christians as well as of the action of the Church as a whole can only ever be God's revelation, his good news of salvation for all human beings. It is to this Gospel that we are oriented and we must allow ourselves to be measured by it: "For, as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it" (Is 55:10-11).

I wish you an interesting reading and send you warm greetings from the General Secretariat.

*Claudio Etti*

Claudio Etti



## “Sacred Scripture in the Life of the Church: 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of *Dei Verbum*” International Congress in Rome

The Catholic Biblical Federation and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity were joint organizers of an international congress in Rome to celebrate the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of the promulgation of *Dei Verbum*. This congress entitled “Sacred Scripture in the Life of the Church” took place in Rome from September 14-18, 2005.

The congress was not about celebrating a piece of paper and merely looking back. The point was rather an honest assessment, a critical evaluation of the present situation and, consequently, a discussion of central questions and challenges which a pastoral ministry in the 21<sup>st</sup> century taking its inspiration from Sacred Scripture would have to raise – against the background of the inner-ecclesial situation, with an eye to ecumenical dialogue, in the context of a variety of cultures and religions, and in dialogue with society and with the world.

Since this was to take place at the level of the universal Church, all Bishops’ Conferences were invited, as were also the members of the CBF and numerous other institutions and individuals engaged in Bible work. As it was being conceived and planned, the hope also resonated that the congress in Rome would be in a position to contribute to a further sharpening of consciousness with respect to the concerns of *Dei Verbum* also in the central ecclesial structures. And, finally, the organizers had in mind a possible function of the congress as a door-opener for a Bishops’ Synod on the Word of God – especially against the background of the celebration of a Bishops’ Synod on the Eucharist that was to take place at almost the same time.

Almost 450 participants from 100 countries around the globe attended the congress, among them more than 60 cardinals, bishops and other church dignitaries as well as numerous high-ranking officials of other religious confessions.

A total of 18 panels and discussion forums dealt with relevant questions pertaining to biblical pastoral ministry. The topics concerned: exegesis, catechesis and liturgy, ecumenical topics, interreligious dialogue with Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism, the challenges created by religious sects and the growing problem of fundamentalism, the question of religious values in today’s secularized societies and the theme of justice and peace in a globalized world.

Main speakers at the congress were Cardinal Walter Kasper, the former archbishop of Milan, Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini, and archbishop John Onaiyekan, chairman of the Symposium of the Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar. Besides these main addresses more than 50 internationally renowned biblical specialists also contributed as guest speakers. A highlight of the congress was the celebration of mass in St. Peter’s Basilica, followed by a private audience with Pope Benedict XVI. As a young theologian and professor of fundamental theology and dogmatics at that time, Joseph Ratzinger was actively engaged in the intensive consultations on *Dei Verbum*. His authoritative commentary on *Dei Verbum*, valid to this day, was published shortly after the closing of the Council.

An exhibition took place in parallel with the congress where some 30 biblical pastoral organizations presented their biblical materials – from translations, religious books on specialized themes, journals, programs of study and training to materials for Internet, radio and television.

It would be unrealistic, indeed presumptuous, to want already to declare this congress a success. For one thing, since we are still too close to the event; for another, since its fruits precisely in the area of consciousness-raising are difficult to measure or to quantify. But there are indicators that enable us to get some idea of the first tender fruits of this congress. For example, the bishops who took part have agreed to take up corresponding initiatives in their respective Bishops’ Conferences. A resolution on full membership in the CBF, the establishment of a biblical pastoral department in two Bishops’ Conferences, the intention to introduce a national Bible weekend and the plan of a diocesan bishop to erect a biblical training center in an empty seminary building perhaps also belong to these first fruits. In the name of the congressional participants the Holy Father received a letter in which the idea of a Bishops’ Synod on the Word of God is raised, an objective which the CBF has been pursuing for many years. The same suggestion was taken up in a number of speeches during the Synod on the Eucharist. We are, therefore, confident that the insights and results of the congress will not remain confined to the circle of the participants; rather, its effects will be seen in the local churches and at the grass roots level. ■



## Message of the Holy Father

Lord Cardinals, venerable brothers in the episcopate and in the priesthood, dear brothers and sisters:

My most cordial greeting to all of you who are participating in the congress on *Sacred Scripture in the Life of the Church*, convoked through the initiative of the Catholic Biblical Federation and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, with the purpose of commemorating the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the promulgation of the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*. I congratulate you on this initiative which concerns one of the most important documents of the Second Vatican Council.

I greet the Lord Cardinals and the Bishops, who are the primary witnesses of the Word of God, the theologians who investigate, explain and convey it in the language of today, and the pastors who seek in it solutions relevant to the problems of our time. I heartily thank all those who work in the service of the translation and diffusion of the Bible, supplying the means for expounding it, teaching it and interpreting its message. In this sense, a special thanks goes to the Catholic Biblical Federation for their activities, for the biblical pastoral ministry they promote, for their faithful adherence to the direction of the Magisterium and for their spirit of openness to ecumenical collaboration in the biblical field. I express my profound joy for the presence at the congress of the *delegati fraterni* of the Churches and Ecclesial Communities of the East and the West and I greet with cordial deference those who are attending as representatives of the great religions of the world.

The Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum*, whose drafting I witnessed in person, taking part as a young theologian in the lively discussions that accompanied it, opens with an expression of profound significance: "Dei Verbum religiose audiens et fideliter proclamans, Sacrosancta Synodus ...". By employing this expression, the Council indicates an aspect of the Church that qualifies it in its essence: it is a community that listens to and proclaims the Word of God. The Church does not live from itself but from the Gospel, and from the Gospel it draws direction for its journey ever and anew. This is a qualifying note that all Christians should accept and apply to themselves: only those who adopt the position of listeners to the Word can then become its announcers. Such persons should not in fact be teaching their own wisdom, but the wisdom of God, which often appears as foolishness to the eyes of the world (cf. 1 Cor 1:23).

The Church knows well that Christ lives in Holy Scripture. For this very reason – as the Constitution underscores – it has always given to the Divine Scriptures a veneration similar to that reserved for the Lord's Body itself (cf. DV 21). It was precisely in consideration of this fact that Saint Jerome made the pointed statement, cited by the Conciliar document, that ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ (cf. DV 25).

Church and Word of God are indissolubly connected with one another. The Church lives from the Word of God and the Word of God resounds in the Church, in its teaching and in its whole life (cf. DV 8). This is why the Apostle Peter reminds us that "no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." (2 Pet 1:20).

We are grateful to God that in these last times, thanks among other things to the impulse given it by the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum*, the fundamental importance of the Word of God has been more profoundly revalued. And as a consequence of this a renewal has taken place in the life of the Church, above all in preaching, in catechesis, in theology, in spirituality and on the path of ecumenism itself. The Church should continuously renew and rejuvenate itself, and the Word of God, which never grows old and is never exhausted, is a privileged means of attaining this goal. It is in fact the Word of God which, through the Holy Spirit, is continuously guiding us anew into the whole truth (cf. Jn 16:13).

In this connection, I would like especially to recall and to recommend the ancient tradition of *lectio divina*: the assiduous reading of Holy Scripture accompanied by prayer realizes that intimate colloquy where, by reading, we listen to God who speaks and, in prayer, we respond to Him with confident openness of heart (cf. DV 25). This practice, if effectively promoted, will bring to the Church – of this I am convinced – a new spiritual spring. As a firm point of biblical pastoral ministry, *lectio divina* should for this reason be further encouraged, through the use, too, of new methods, carefully considered, that are fully up-to-date. We ought never to forget that the Word of God is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (cf. Ps 118/119:105).

As I invoke the blessing of God on your work, on your initiatives and on the congress in which you are participating, I join you in the wish that animates you: "That the Word of God may speed on" (cf. 2 Thess 3:1) to the ends of the earth, so that through the proclamation of salvation the whole world may be brought from hearing to faith, from faith to hope, and from hope to love (cf. DV 1).

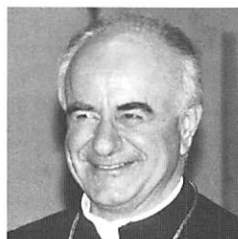
I thank you with all my heart!

Benedictus PP XVI



## The Word of God in the Life of the Church Greeting Address of the CBF President

*Msgr. Vincenzo Paglia*



*Msgr. Vincenzo Paglia, Bishop of Terni-Narni-Amelia, has been President of the Catholic Biblical Federation since 2002.*

Dear friends:

It is with great joy and emotion that I take the podium to initiate this congress on the occasion of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Dei Verbum*. We decided on it at the Plenary Assembly of the Catholic Biblical Federation held in Beirut in 2002. And I must say that the enthusiasm generated by that meeting has sustained us in overcoming the many difficulties we had to confront to make it a reality. Dear beatitude, reverend cardinals, bishops, dear brothers and sisters of the Catholic Biblical Federation, all you dear friends, here we are together in Rome: welcome to this long awaited congress! I believe none of us were present in the conciliar hall on November 18, 1965 when the conciliar Fathers confirmed the text of *Dei Verbum* almost unanimously (of 2.350 voting, 2.344 placet and 6 non placet.) The drafting of the text was exhausting, among other things because it was confronting a complex theological issue that had notable consequences also at the pastoral level. The positive reception of the document demonstrated how opportune, how providential was the choice.

And it is truly remarkable that *Dei Verbum*, the shortest of the conciliar texts, was the one which, together with the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, brought with it more profound changes in the life of the Church than any other. And the presence at this our congress of so many brothers and sisters of other Christian churches and confessions – whom I greet with genuine affection: welcome among us! – is a strong indication of the ecumenical value that the *Dei Verbum* had and continues to have in the lives of our Christian communities. It is enough to think of the impetus that resulted from the conciliar document to overcome disagreements relative to the structure and translation of the interconfessional Bible. The Holy Scriptures, venerated by all as an invaluable treasure, have become the privileged place for the

encounter among Christians, and hence one of the richest sources for supplying a second breath to ecumenism. We could also say that listening together to the Word of God is today the way that not only allows us to see the visible unity among all Christians but that can also most expeditiously lead us toward Eucharistic communion. Was this not after all the path taken by the two disciples on the road to Emmaus? If we allow the Word of God to follow its course, as Paul writes to the Thessalonians (2 Thess 3:1), if we allow it to transform our hearts, we too will be led to the Eucharistic table, the sign of full communion.

*Dei Verbum* incorporated the results of a long itinerary of debates and reflections. This is not the forum to discuss them here: though it would be very useful to trace the history of the hearing of the Bible on the part of the faithful in the course of the two thousand years of Christianity. You all know how dominant was the influence of Holy Scripture in the life of the Church during the first millennium: bishops and priests, monks and theologians, engaged in regular and passionate discussions on the Bible. Their words, their preaching, their studies were for the most part commentaries on the Sacred Scriptures. And even the common faithful were exhorted to have daily contact with them. One need only recall the severity of Saint John Chrysostom who scolded a Christian for not knowing how many Letters of Paul there were. The fact is that the entire theological and spiritual literature of the first millennium testifies to the centrality of the Bible in the reflection and in the life of the Church. And the reading of Scripture was recommended to all. Not the slightest evidence exists of any prohibition against the reading of Scripture in those centuries, even though they witnessed strong interventions on the part of bishops against heresy. Cesarius of Arles was so convinced of the spiritual importance of the daily reading of the Bible that he exhorted the illiterate rich to pay someone to read to them from the Scriptures: "If people who cannot read enlist the services of professional scribes to procure themselves earthly goods, you, whoever you are, who know not how to read and write, why not seek out someone who for a fee will read to you the divine Scriptures, so that you can obtain eternal rewards?"

The situation in the second millennium has been somewhat more vexed, even though since its beginning it



saw the diffusion in the churches of the so-called *Biblia pauperum* whose aim was to enable even the illiterate to "read" the Bible through images. The awareness that one could not be a Christian without knowing Sacred Scripture was clear. And the engagement for a more evangelical Church passed through a renewed relationship between Scripture and the life of the believer. One need think only of Francis of Assisi and the radical character of his determination to follow the Gospel *sine glossa*. Unfortunately, the polemical climate that subsequently involved Western Christianity had the added effect, above all in the Catholic sphere, of diminishing the direct recourse to the Bible on the part of the faithful. The Council of Trent, which had, however, reminded the bishops to strengthen biblical studies, did not find an adequate hearing. It is certainly true that in the complex situation of the life of the Church in the modern age, the polemical climate did much to weaken the bond between the Bible and the faithful. But, among other things through the stimulus of the other Christian traditions, a movement of renewal of biblical studies began in the Catholic Church, which was then sanctioned by the encyclical *Providentissimus Deus*. In the first half of the twentieth century the Catholic Church increasingly discovered a new relationship with Scripture. Not only did a more rich understanding of the sacred texts mature through historical-critical studies, but the Bible was also more robustly rediscovered as a source of the spiritual and pastoral life.

### The book and the chalice

Dear friends, within a few days the Eucharistic Synod will begin. An extraordinary event for the whole Church. And how could we not see as providential the fact that this is following immediately upon our congress? The nexus between the Word of God and the Eucharist is a firm tradition in the Church. Blessed John XXIII, when he was patriarch of Venice, in the pastoral letter on the Word of God addressed to the faithful for lent of 1952, wrote:

*To teach Sacred Scripture, particularly the Gospel, to the people ... and to make the sacred book more familiar to them, is the alpha of the activities of a bishop and of his priests. The omega – allow me to use this image from the Book of Revelation – is represented by the consecrated cup of our daily altar ... The two realities go together: the Word of Jesus and the Blood of Jesus. Between the one and the other follow all the other letters of the alphabet: all the affairs of individual, domestic, social life; everything that is also important, but secondary with reference to the eternal destiny of the children of God, and which has no value except to the extent that it is nourished and sustained by the two terminal letters: that is, the Word of Jesus that continues to resound in all its tones in the Holy Church from the sacred book: and the blood of Jesus in the divine sacrifice, perennial source of graces and blessings.*

These words express with uncommon spiritual force how much the *Word* and the *chalice*, the Bible and the Eucharist, constitute the *alpha* and the *omega* of the Church's life and the life of every believer.

*Dei Verbum* also affirms: "The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord" (DV 21). And John Paul II, opening his letter for the indiction of the Year of the Eucharist with the icon of Emmaus, traced the connection as follows: from the hearing of the Word one moves to the *fractio panis*. For this reason we feel profoundly linked to the next Synod of Bishops. For our part we would like to make a small contribution for a first verification of the reception of *Dei Verbum* with the hope that it might be useful for a reflection at the universal level. The presence of so many bishops coming from more than 100 countries could effectively suggest to the respective episcopal conferences that they should hold a meeting on the reception of *Dei Verbum* in their respective countries (if they have not already done so, as has been done, for example in Italy).

The fortieth anniversary of *Dei Verbum* is without doubt a propitious occasion. And it is certainly with pleasure that we observe what the conciliar Fathers wished for, namely a new spiritual thrust among believers that results from a new understanding of the Scriptures, together of course with the implementation of new initiatives. The text goes: "Just as the life of the Church is strengthened through more frequent celebration of the Eucharistic mystery, similarly we may hope for a new stimulus for the life of the Spirit from a growing reverence for the Word of God, which 'endures forever' (Is 40:8; see 1 Peter 1:23-25)" (DV 26). And so it has come to pass. There can be no doubt that today the Bible is not only studied with far greater competence, but above all the bread of the Word of God is distributed with greater abundance and tasted with greater awareness. This is what very specifically concerns us here.

The theme of our congress, in fact, is a literal citation of the title of chapter VI of the Constitution: "The Word of God in the life of the Church". Moreover, the Catholic Biblical Federation, born in 1969 on the initiative of Cardinal Bea, has the objective of helping believers to drink more broadly and more continuously at the inexhaustible fountains of life contained in the Bible. The conciliar Fathers invite the faithful to "gladly put themselves in touch with the sacred text itself, whether it be through the liturgy, rich in the divine word, or through devotional reading, or through instructions suitable for the purpose and other aids which, in our time, with approval and active support of the shepherds of the Church, are commendably spread everywhere". They know well, in fact, that "ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ".



The Catholic Biblical Federation, which today numbers more than 92 full-fledged members and 231 associate members representing 127 countries, has for all of these years sought to serve that invitation of the Council and would like to continue to do so. The many qualified people who are participating in this congress evidence the vitality of the work of the members of the Federation. I would like to say that this congress, too, is also a sign of this: I think it is the first time so many bishops, together with so many of the faithful, from more than a hundred countries of the world, and with the presence of many representatives of other Churches, are meeting to reflect on and discuss the centrality of the Word of God in the life of the Church. And allow me to thank the Italian Episcopal Conference for the contribution they have made in making possible this congress of ours, in cooperation with Siemens Italia which, with farsightedness and generosity, has understood that assistance for a meeting like this is not marginal to the objectives of an enterprise that looks to the entire world. For my part it is my sincere wish that such ties will only be strengthened in the future.

The congress – as you can see from the program – will center around three principal reports: that of Cardinal Kasper, which will underscore primarily the theological aspect of *Dei Verbum*, then that of Archbishop Onaiyekan, which will trace the itinerary of the last forty years following the conciliar document, and the third, that of Cardinal Martini, which will reflect above all on the pastoral aspect of the Constitution. These days will also feature a rather nutritious series of round table discussions. These will demonstrate the extraordinary journey that has been taken in the Church with regard to the relationship of the faithful with the Sacred Scriptures. They will also highlight the problems that remain unresolved today in the effort to insure that the Bible becomes the book of every believer and of all Christian communities.

### **At the beginning of the third millennium**

We should certainly begin right now thanking the Lord if Christians have entered into the third millennium with a significant baggage of knowledge and love for the Holy Scriptures – a baggage far richer than in the past and which, therefore, makes us hope that they will become ever more “the salt of the earth and the light of the world”. However, we should not hide from the fact that we still have a long way to go before the Bible will truly have its proper centrality both in the pastoral life of our communities and in the spiritual lives of individual believers. Not that there could ever come a time when the journey would be at an end. Every Christian generation should allow itself to be fashioned by the Word of God. Every generation should listen and then announce. And this is a task that cannot be postponed.

And I would like, as it were in synthesis, to recall the exhortation of John Paul II to the Christians of Europe and to propose it once again to the Churches of every part of the world, which we here, in a certain way, represent. John Paul II said: “Church in Europe, enter the new millennium with the Book of the Gospel! ... in the careful study of God’s Word we will daily find nourishment and strength to carry out our mission.” This is not so much a mere exhortation as it is an expression of the very mission of the Church at the beginning of the third millennium. And the Pope continued:

*Let us take up this book! Let us receive it from the Lord who continuously offers it to us through his Church (cf. Rev. 10:8). Let us devour it (cf. Rev 10:9), so that it can become our very life. Let us savour it deeply: it will make demands of us, but it will give us joy, because it is sweet as honey (cf. Rev 10:9-10). Filled with hope, we will be able to share it with every man and woman whom we encounter on our way (Ecclesia in Europa, 65).*

But looking today at our ecclesial communities would we not perhaps have to say, even if somewhat summarily and approximately, that there is still little Bible in the life and culture of believers, as well as in pastoral life itself? The situation is, of course, very different in the different countries. But I think we all feel the urgency for a greater presence of the Word of God in the lives of our communities. Wishing to pause at one aspect, that of the relationship the faithful have with the Sacred Scriptures, which is the heart of the task of the Catholic Biblical Federation, a recent survey (the data are in process of being published) reports that 80% of practicing Catholics in a number of countries of Europe (Italy, France, Spain) hear the Bible only during Sunday mass, and hardly 3% of practicing Catholics read it on a daily basis.

Obviously, this involves not only a material ignorance of the Bible (for example, 40% believe that Saint Paul wrote a Gospel and 26% that Saint Peter did, too), but above all it suggests that people do not have a feel for the Bible as their own book, as the book for their own lives. It would seem, in sum, that for practicing Catholics of Europe the Bible continues to be a book largely reserved to the clergy. There is, however, a piece of evidence that raises an interesting question because it shows the desire the faithful have for the Word of God. 41% of practicing Catholics maintain that the homily is the most useful moment in their lives for the growth of their faith. This means that this moment of the Eucharistic liturgy has an absolutely extraordinary potentiality for the growth of faith among believers. And here the question becomes truly a burning one: how are the homilies of our celebrations? I think that none of us can doubt the urgency to reflect profoundly on this aspect of pastoral life. I recall that an Italian writer, referring to the homily, once defined it as “the torture of the



faithful". But besides this there are numerous other open problems. One need think only of the danger of a fundamentalistic interpretation of the Bible or, at the other extreme, the minimizing of its importance even in liturgical celebrations (it happens, and not infrequently, that literary texts are preferred to Sacred Scripture even in liturgical celebrations!). I think in these coming days a good number of questions relative to our topic will emerge. I have in mind, for example, those Christian communities that still do not have a translation of the Bible in their own language, or the task of seeing to it that the liturgical translation matches the Bible the faithful have in their hands so that they have the same text. In this connection, we could wish for an even closer dialogue with the Bible Societies in the various countries, both with reference to the problems pertaining to translation and with regard to the commentaries on the sacred texts. In any case, these are some among the many other questions that will make this meeting particularly interesting.

### **The centrality of the Word of God in the spiritual life and in pastoral engagement**

But I would like to spend a word underlining what I think is the heart of the question, that is the encounter of believers with the Word of God. I do not intend to dwell on the necessity of the diffusion of the Bible. Every effort should of course be made to get the Bible into the hands of every believer. I would say that it is a fundamental right of every Christian to have a copy of the Bible of his or her own. John Paul II, speaking to a meeting held by the Italian Bishops' Conference on the topic of the Word of God, remarked: "The arduous task of the new evangelization involves putting the Bible back into the hands of the people of God" (1997). It often happens that it is hard to find a Bible in some parishes; if we are obliged to have the liturgical books, lectionaries in particular, it is all the more evident that we should have a Bible in the parish. The Bible is, as it were, the tabernacle of the Word of God: it should accordingly be honored and open so that everyone can nourish themselves just as they do with the Eucharist.

But what I would like to underscore is the effort we must make to insure that every Christian has his or her own Bible, one that they can read from every day, one that they can even take with them when they go on vacation. I can testify to the efficacy I see in the diocese of Terni, where I am bishop, when each year I supply every member of the diocese with a book of the Bible to which is attached a brief commentary of my own. The commentary – which is more spiritual than exegetical in character – makes the text immediately fruitful along the lines of the *lectio divina* that we all look forward to and that becomes a kind of common ground that unites all Christians. And I make only a brief reference to the Old Testament to say that with the Jewish people, too,

a path is opened here that we should follow more boldly: the midrashic reading of the Bible is closely related to our spiritual reading.

In any case, it is here that the true question of the relationship between the Bible and the believer comes into play. And I express this with a question: is the Bible the true inspiration of the life of believers in all of its aspects? Is the Bible the source of pastoral ministry in our dioceses, in our parishes? If Saint Gregory the Great said: "Sacred Scripture grows with the one who reads it", are we and our Christian communities growing under the guidance of the Word of God? An exegete friend of mine once told the story of a bishop who gave him the draft of his pastoral letter and said to him: "would you mind adding a few good biblical quotations to the text?" Poor bishop; in the past the Bible was used at least to serve as supporting evidence for dogmatic truths, certainly not for the statements of bishops! This little incident is a kind of emblematic if extreme example of how problematic it is to think of the Bible as at our service, to view it as an armory of statements to be used at our pleasure. It is urgent instead to rediscover the primacy of Scripture both in our spiritual lives and in pastoral ministry. Some are even speaking of the "supremacy" of Scripture in the lives of the faithful. "Supremacy", obviously, does not mean exclusivity but that the Bible should be the inspiration of our whole lives as believers and of the Church itself. It is the light that illuminates the situation, not vice versa. The Bible is not understood from the outside, but from the inside.

And part of this inside is the Church, is the community of believers. These words of then Cardinal Ratzinger are significant:

*The Church is not the Word, but the place where the Word dwells and lives. This means that the Church is obligated to be truly a space of life and not a space of death for the Word. The Church cannot allow the Word to get lost in the chattering of just anyone, in the Word that belongs to the times that change, but should preserve it in its immutable identity. But in order that the Word might be preserved, the Church should live it, should suffer it. It should subject the vital forces of an epoch to the judgment of this word, but it should also place a new life, human flesh and blood, at the Word's disposal. To limit ourselves merely to preserving the Word would be to avoid suffering and would certainly not be the way to bring the Word into the present time. (J. Ratzinger, Dogma und Verkündigung)*

Viewed in this vital perspective the Bible becomes a light that illumines the spiritual life, the pastoral life, culture, the sciences, psychology, even politics and the other fields of life. Moreover, is it not perhaps true that the bishop, the theologian, the priest, the seminarian, the religious, even every individual Christian as such should be born and formed with the incorruptible seed of the Word of God?



To be sure, at this point, the questions become personal too: "How much time do I devote to reading and listening to the Bible? And how many books of the Bible have I read?" Questions such as these reveal the intensity of our love for the Word of God and the intensity of our desire to listen to the Lord. And it follows from this that it is indispensable for us to find the time to read the Bible, if not to memorize it. And if it happens that we have too little time, because we have so much to do, it is the "to do" that should be sacrificed, rather than the listening to the Word of God. We know well that this all requires a struggle against the mentality and the very culture in which we are immersed. The hearing of the Word of God – we could say *lectio divina* understood as a reverend hearing – becomes the examination board for the Church at the beginning of this new millennium. Moreover, we know well that the Christian community depends on the hearing of the Word. *Dei Verbum* says: "The force and power in the word of God is so great that it stands as the support and energy of the Church, the strength of faith for her sons, the food of the soul, the pure and everlasting source of spiritual life. Consequently these words are perfectly applicable to Sacred Scripture: 'For the word of God is living and active'." (DV 21)

For this reason, the Holy Scriptures cannot be merely the possession of certain people, the clergy, for example, or the educated. John Paul II, when presenting the 1993 document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission entitled *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, said: "It gives us great joy to see the Bible taken in hand by people who are humble and poor, who can bring to its interpretation and actualization a more penetrating light, from the spiritual and existential point of view, than that which comes from a science that is sure of itself". And Benedict XVI, continuing along these lines, said that "the Christian people are the true owner of the Bible and for this reason its true exegete" (*The Salt of the Earth*). By listening to the Bible in fact the believer discovers his or her true identity: to be a disciple. And that he or she always remains. For this reason, together with Samuel, every Christian should repeat the words: "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening" (1 Sam 3:10). This is a spiritual attitude that places the believer under the force of the Word. And this is the significance of the splendid opening of the *Dei Verbum*: "Hearing the Word of God with reverence ...". Hearing the Word of God means allowing oneself to be formed by it, allowing oneself to be led by it, allowing oneself to be offered the words so that they can become our own. The Bible, in sum, makes the Church also in the sense that it "makes" the believer, whom it builds up in its image and likeness.

The Bible is the privileged place where God and man meet each other. Abraham J. Heschel wrote: "The Bible speaks not only of a search for God on the part of man, but also of the pursuit of man on the part of God" (*Dio*

*alla ricerca dell'uomo*, Roma 1983, p. 156). This is why the Bible touches the deepest chords of man's being and of his history. Bonhoeffer, with great spiritual wisdom, said:

*One who has received the word of God should begin to search for God; he cannot do otherwise. The more clearly and profoundly the word of God is revealed to us, the more lively does the desire in us become to know in a perfectly clear manner the unfathomable depths of God himself. With the gift of his word, God moves us to seek an ever more rich knowledge and an ever more wonderful gift. He wants no false gratification. The more we receive, the more we should seek him, and the more we seek, the more we receive of him. (DBW 15, 518)*

The Bible helps us to discover the true face of God, that of a father who does not cease to pursue man, as though he cannot do without him. And who could fail to understand how important it is to speak of this God to the men and women of today?

The Bible also reveals to the believer his own face. One who reads the pages of the Bible learns little by little to read himself and to discover himself within a larger story: that of the Lord with man, and of man with God. We can all find ourselves in the pages of Scripture: in the stories of sorrow, of death, of betrayal, of hatred, but also the stories of hope, of friendship, of healing, of compassion, of help, of transformation. The ancient rabbinic tradition said "Turn the Torah over and over, because everything may be found in it and even you yourself in the entirety of your being" (*Mishnah Pirkei Avot* 5,22). Everyone will find themselves in these pages: they will hear life stories that seem to speak of themselves, of their betrayals and of their hopes, of their anxieties and of their dreams, of their prayers and of their dramas, of their present and of their future. Gregory the Great said: "Sacred Scripture presents itself to the eyes of our soul as a mirror, in which we can contemplate our internal countenance."

The reading of the Bible broadens the walls of the heart and of the mind. And it manifests that primacy of the human person that permeates many contemporary cultures. Its words stand as the basis of the radical equality of all men and women, of the irrevocable dignity of every human person and of the indestructible universality of salvation, because it offers a God who is Father of all. Without the Bible the story of the world would be very different. And this is the foundation for the singular link that unites the Jewish people to Christians. The Bible helps us to understand our own roots and at the same time it gives us the task of dialogue with the other. For this reason, some – even in the lay world – have made the suggestion that the Bible be studied in all schools as a text that has sustained the history of so many peoples and that can also inspire the future of the planet.



### A new enthusiasm for the Word of God

Dear friends, what should we expect from this congress? It is a difficult question to answer. But one objective we should certainly set for ourselves. And I take it from the homily given by Blessed John XXIII when he took possession of Saint John Lateran as bishop of Rome: "If all the cares of pastoral ministry are dear to us and if we are aware of how urgent they all are, above all we feel it our duty, everywhere and with constancy of action, to arouse an enthusiasm for every manifestation of the divine book, which is made to illuminate our journey every step of the way, from infancy to our last years."

Dear friends, this "enthusiasm for every manifestation of the divine book" which Blessed John XXIII, the initiator of the Second Vatican Council, wished to arouse in his time, is exactly what we need today as well. It is our hope and prayer that this congress will help to arouse in us, and wherever we find ourselves, a new enthusiasm for the Word of God.

Welcome to you all! And buon lavoro!

(Transl.: L. Maluf)



FEATURE  
ARTICLE

## "Ut Dei Verbum currat"

### Opening Address of the Exhibition by the CBF General Secretary

Alexander M. Schweitzer



*Alexander M. Schweitzer has been General Secretary of the Catholic Biblical Federation since 2002.*

Your Beatitude, Eminences, Excellencies, honorable guests, dear friends:

I welcome you most cordially to this festive opening of the biblical exhibition which will accompany our congress. We have given this display the title "Ut Dei Verbum currat" and when we call it that, we are very conscious of the contradiction that may result from the rather stable character of an exhibition of ready-made products on the one hand and the dynamic quality of the theme "Ut Dei Verbum currat" – taken from Paul's Second Letter to the Thessalonians (2 Thess 3:1) – on the other.

In fact, the Constitution on Divine Revelation of the Second Vatican Council placed great emphasis on the

*dynamis*, the transforming power that inhabits the Word of God. "The force and power in the Word of God is so great that it stands as the support and energy of the Church, the strength of faith for her children, the food of the soul, the ... source of spiritual life. Consequently these words are perfectly applicable to Sacred Scripture: "For the word of God is living and active" (Heb 4:12)." (DV 21) This underlining of the Spirit-aspect, the "dynamic" quality of the Word of God was something new forty years ago – just as *Dei Verbum* as a whole represents a new attitude toward the Bible, a new role for Sacred Scripture in the life of the Church.

After 400 years of "hibernation" – as the period since the Counter-Reformation could be described with respect to the role of the Bible in the Church – the Word of God was "rediscovered". The question of the relationship between Scripture and tradition was thought through anew and adjustments were made. The indispensable place of the historical-critical methods in biblical exegesis in our time after the enlightenment was laid down. But above all the Bible was put back into the hands of the faithful; from now on Sacred Scripture was not only conveyed in liturgy, often in unintelligible Latin, but was



accessible in the mother tongue. Today the Bible is no longer consulted merely as a source of proof texts to bolster church dogmas; rather it is the starting point for our theological questioning and a standard of reference for our faith life.

The question of the relationship between Scripture and Tradition is once again coming to the fore these days with the discussion relative to *Liturgiam Authenticam*, an instruction of the Congregation for Divine Worship from the year 2001 which has in part also put some strains on ecumenical efforts. It would be worthwhile, therefore, to recall in this regard the statements of the Conciliar Constitution *Dei Verbum*. *Dei Verbum* invites us "to give a place of honor" to the Vulgate, the ancient Christian Bible translation of the Latin Church, which has profoundly marked her theology and liturgy for hundreds of years. The translation traditions of the non-Latin Churches were likewise to be held in honor as belonging to their traditions. For the translation of the Bible into modern languages, however, *Dei Verbum* clearly demands that we go back to the original text (DV 22) – common to all the denominations – and it thereby defines the relationship between Scripture and Tradition in a way that is quite new. This return to the original text brought not only strong impulses for interconfessional and ecumenical collaboration, but also sanctioned and empowered the efforts to make Sacred Scripture available to the people in the modern languages. In this way it helped to launch the translation boom of the last several decades.

And this brings us right to our exhibition. On many of the tables over there you will see examples of this translation activity, which cannot be praised highly enough. The ability to hold in one's hands a copy of Sacred Scripture in one's native language is the first prerequisite for an understanding, for a wide-ranging personal access to God's Word in Scripture. Numerous member institutions of the Catholic Biblical Federation are engaged in the area of translation, publication and distribution of the Bible. And the extent of the collaboration in this area that has taken place in the past decades with the Bible Societies cannot be emphasized enough. The General Secretary of the United Bible Societies, Reverend Miller Milloy, is about to catalogue for us the impressive number of already completed languages, but also those which still remain to be done. I will say only this much: the number of languages into which the Bible has yet to be translated is larger than that of the languages in which a translation already exists. I am delighted that Reverend Milloy has accepted our invitation to say a few words in connection with this festive opening. This will bring visibly to expression how significant has been the interconfessional collaboration in the realm of Bible translation in the past 40 years, but also, and even more so, how important it is in view of the tasks that still lie before us. This is moreover a collaboration that takes its mandate from *Dei Verbum* itself (DV

22) and that has received the stamp of approval and comes to expression in a number of other documents – as, for example, in the CBF Constitution or the Directory for Ecumenism (Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity: *Directory of the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, section "Common Bible Work", paragraphs 183-186, Rome, March 23, 1993).

Besides its clarifications regarding the role of historical-critical exegesis and the relationship between Scripture and Tradition, the new understanding of the Second Vatican Council in *re biblica* has above all brought with it profound changes for the area of pastoral ministry. And this was and is where the main emphasis of the work of the Catholic Biblical Federation, with its 323 member institutions (among them 92 Bishops' Conferences) in 127 countries, lies. Its *raison d'être* could be concisely expressed in terms of the demand of *Dei Verbum* for a broad, life-related access to Sacred Scripture for all believers (see. DV 22: "Aditus ad Sacram Scripturam Cristifidelibus late pateat oportet"). It is a question here of putting the Bible into people's hands and at the same time of offering them means and methods for the correct use of Sacred Scripture, such as suitable (pastoral) commentaries, methods of prayerful reading (*lectio divina*), models for education and ongoing-formation etc.; so that Sacred Scripture can become a source of spiritual life and the written word of the Bible, the living Word of God.

You will find numerous examples of this biblical pastoral engagement in the framework of this exhibition as well. They range from the various possibilities of translating the biblical message into appropriate picture language of a particular culture or group, to work material for Bible groups, Bible Weeks and Bible Months, pastoral commentaries on the biblical text which take into account the different social and cultural contexts, formation models with appropriate materials for lay people and clerics, biblically founded catechetical models, and even the various electronic media and digital formats in which the biblical message can be conveyed today.

The challenges that confront us today become visible and tangible here. We could think of the many people who are still unable to read, or of those who live in cultures in which there is no reading tradition. Hence, the communication of the Good News cannot rely on the printed word alone.

We could think of the temptations of fundamentalism, to which we Christians are not immune, and which has to do in the first place with the way how the Bible is used. Here the accompanying material, the commentaries, the teaching play an especially important role.

We could think of the hermeneutical challenges that result from the ever more rapid social developments



and multicultural realities in the age of globalization. The question by what means, in what formats, in what language the Good News – which remains ever the same – should be communicated or conveyed so as to provide the conditions for its understanding becomes increasingly important.

Nor can we ignore the economical factor. An “option for the poor” in our context must mean very concretely that the message of Sacred Scripture should be made widely available even to those who cannot afford to purchase an expensive Bible or who would have no possibility of attending Bible courses. And the majority of humanity actually belongs to this group.

And let us also not forget those who live with physical disabilities, such as blindness. Bible editions in Braille or audio-Bibles are indispensable aids here.

Finally, we should give some thought to the receptivity models and communication habits of the younger generations, which have grown up in the world of electronic communication. In this realm our work is just beginning, in spite of the numerous sample materials you will see at this exhibition.

The diversity of the exhibits and of the realms of ecclesial life to which they refer turns our attention to another fundamental challenge. A biblical pastoral ministry understood according to the intention of *Dei Verbum* no longer remains a special sector within the medley of the various fields of pastoral activity; rather, it means the biblical inspiration and animation of the whole realm of pastoral ministry. In some areas we have already come a long way toward a biblically grounded, organical pastoral ministry, in others our journey toward this goal is just starting.

The great variety of exhibits from all over the world points also in another direction, namely to the missionary and universal dimension of the Word of God. *Dei Verbum* underscores the self-effective power of the Word among mankind (DV 25), and it thus contributes to a renewal of the basic understanding of mission. “The Word of God is designed for human beings, and the service of the Word ... can therefore not restrict itself to inner-ecclesial reform. This service is ultimately directed to humanity as a whole. Not only the Church, but every human being in his inmost depths lives from the Word of God ...” (cf. J. Ratzinger, *Commentary on Dei Verbum* in *LThK*, 1967).

The world-encompassing diversity of this exhibition is in the last analysis also a witness to the fullness and the variety of approaches to the Bible, corresponding to the diversity of social, cultural and ecclesial contexts. The displays offer a panorama of the concrete Bible work in the various parts of our globe. They give a tiny impres-

sion of the *dynamis* that inhabits the Word of God (and thereby also justify the dynamic title of the exhibition). Many of the methods can, of course, only with difficulty or not at all be shown through materials and exhibits. In this connection I would like to take this opportunity to mention the forum “Creative ways of proclaiming the Word” that will take place tomorrow evening. This will provide a setting in which you will be able to concretely experience approaches to the Bible in action, such as e.g. bibliodrama.

And of course: this exhibition, with all its great variety, has definite limitations of its own. Not only the limits imposed by the available space; we could in fact easily have accepted double the number of exhibits. I am thinking rather of the limits beyond which efforts and “success” in the work in the Lord’s vineyard simply cannot be shown or grasped. And this is true regardless of the number of impressive statistics we could cite (of newly baptized, of Bible translations, etc.), and regardless of how interesting or exciting an exhibition we can put on. Ultimately, we must and we may leave the “final evaluation” in the hands of the Lord of the vineyard.

Dear congress participants, honorable guests, my wish is that this congress on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of *Dei Verbum* and this accompanying exhibition will give us new incentives, new inspiration and new encouragement for our work in the service of the Word of God. I would like to conclude with the words *Dei Verbum* makes its own, presenting them in its very last chapter as an outlook: “Finally, let us pray, brothers and sisters, that the word of the Lord may speed on and triumph.”

(Transl.: L. Maluf

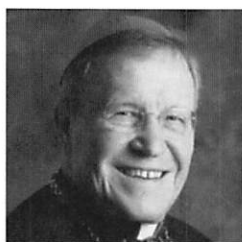
□



# “Dei Verbum audiens et proclamans”

## The Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*

Cardinal Walter Kasper



*Cardinal Walter Kasper was professor for dogmatic theology in Münster and Tübingen and Bishop of Rottenburg-Stuttgart from 1989 to 1999. In 1999 Cardinal Kasper was appointed secretary of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and president of same in 2001.*

### I. A memorable beginning

The discussion of the Dogmatic Constitution in the council hall began with a clash of drums. The schema proposed by the Theological Preparatory Commission was rejected by a large majority during the very first session. But since this vote failed by a narrow margin to achieve the necessary two-thirds majority, Pope John XXIII was compelled to intervene. He did so in a manner which elicited from a Protestant observer the comment that he was beginning to believe in Papal infallibility. In fact the Pope did nothing more than what we always do when we do not know how to proceed: we establish a commission. That is exactly what John XXIII did. In order to find a way out of the impasse he constituted a joint commission under the chairmanship of the two Cardinals who were adversarially engaged in the dispute, Ottaviani and Bea.<sup>1</sup>

In the course of this confrontation during the first session the Council arrived at a sense of self-assurance. When Pope Paul VI intervened once more at the end of the fourth session by making some amendments which would also enable the minority to give its assent, the Council had to recognise its limitations.

The clash of drums at the beginning of the Council has its counterpart in the tone of the content at the beginning of the text of the Constitution. There the Council circumscribes its own sense of itself and of the Church. The Constitution begins with the words “*Dei Verbum* religiose audiens et fideliter proclamans”: “Hearing the Word of God with reverence and proclaiming it with confidence”. It also affirms that the reverently heard and faithfully proclaimed Word of God is a *praeconium salutis*, a message of salvation and a word of life.

The *incipit*, i.e. the first words of a magisterial document normally indicates the overall thrust of the whole docu-

ment. Therefore the introductory formulation cited above can be considered the interpretive key to the whole Constitution. And that is not all. With the aid of this introductory formulation the Council intended to sum up the entire being of the Church “in the twofold gesture of hearing and proclaiming”. There can be no better expression than this of the “dominance of the Word of God, its sovereign primacy over all the words and deeds of the people of the Church”. While it could at times appear as though the Council was tending towards ecclesiological self-contemplation, revolving within its own orbit and becoming itself the central subject of its own proclamation, with this formulation “the whole existence of the Church is as it were thrust upward [becomes as it were open to the transcendent], its whole being is encompassed in the gesture of hearing, from which alone its speaking can proceed”.<sup>2</sup> Here the Church defines itself as the listening Church, and only as a listening Church can it be a proclaiming Church.

The Council was not always able to sustain the high standard of this magnificent formulation throughout the rest of the text. In order to achieve the end result of a definitive text which was able to be passed with only six contrary votes, some compromises had to be entered into in many places, and elsewhere some questions had to be left open. But even if the Constitution had uttered only this one sentence, it would have been more than worthwhile. This first sentence alone makes it a fundamental document of the Church’s understanding of itself.

### II. The burden of historical problems

The difficulties and tensions which were revealed during the recasting of the Constitution should not surprise us if one considers what problems had to be overcome, what historical burdens had to be cleared away, what was involved in the discussion, and what was at stake.

If we wish to do justice to the document and recognise its full significance, we need to refer back to the confrontations of the Reformation period. As early as in 1518 the dispute between Martin Luther and Cardinal Cajetan revolved around the competence of the teaching office in the interpretation of Scripture.<sup>3</sup> In one of



Luther's major reformist writings of 1529, *De captivitate Babylonica* we find the now classic formulation of the Church as *creatura verbi*.<sup>4</sup> In 1537 Luther finally, at the height of the confrontation, formulated it thus in the Schmalkald articles: "The Word of God shall establish articles of faith and no one else, not even an angel."<sup>5</sup> This statement was intended to be a challenge and a crushing critique. With the aid of the Word of God reigning supreme over the Church Luther wanted to – as he said – turn the papal Church upside down.

With theses like these Luther opened up a debate which did not merely revolve around the reforms that were doubtless urgently needed at the time; nor was it in the least simply a matter of social and political conflict. As much as all these factors played a role, the theological issue was the fundamental understanding of the Church in its relationship to the Word of God. Cajetan saw that clearly already in Augsburg and confronted Luther with it: "I call that establishing a new Church."<sup>6</sup>

The Fathers of the Council of Trent understood the challenge. They recognised the need for Church reform and ushered in a comprehensive reform with their reform decrees. The deeper dimensions of the problem were expressed already in the fourth conciliar session with the *Decretum de libris sacris et de traditionibus recipiendis* of 1546. There the Council itself spoke of the "puritas ipsa Evangelii", but it went on to speak of the "puritas ipsa Evangelii in Ecclesia". The words "in Ecclesia" give expression to the definitive difference. Of this phrase "Evangelium in Ecclesia" the Council Fathers were able to claim that it was the *one* source (*fons*; singular!) "omnis et salutaris veritatis et morum disciplinae" (of all saving truth and moral order; *DH* 1501).

Standing behind the formula "Evangelium in Ecclesia" is not a crass claim by the teaching office of the Church that it is able to administer the Gospel under its own direction; in the background we find instead a long tradition of pneumatologically determined ecclesiology. This can be traced back to the Second Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians. There Paul defines the church in Corinth as a letter which has not been written with ink, and has not been carved in stone like the old covenant, but has instead been inscribed in the hearts of the faithful by the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 3:2f).

The great Church father Irenaeus of Lyon took up this statement as early as the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, and thereby founded a long tradition.<sup>7</sup> Thomas Aquinas also knew that the *lex evangelii* was not an external law and not a book but the "gratia Spiritus Sancti, quae datur Christi fidelibus".<sup>8</sup> At the Council of Trent this pneumatological conception was taken up by the Council President Cervini. He explained: The Gospel is not written *in charta* but *in cordibus* by the Holy Spirit.<sup>9</sup>

If one takes this pneumatologically based relationship between the Gospel and the Church into account, the Council of Trent is far better than its general reputation. If one wants to do full justice to the Council, one must also take note of its unfortunately too little known disciplinary decrees, and recognize that the Council not only defended the teaching office and the sacraments against the Reformers but also made a vigorous attempt to promote preaching.<sup>10</sup> The Constitution *Dei Verbum* was able to refer back to this tradition, therefore it quoted extensively from the Trent Decree on the Scriptures and Tradition, deepening and expanding on it. (*DV* 7).

This new approach was necessary because post-Tridentine theology had not maintained the high standards of the theology on which the Council of Trent was grounded. Instead it had developed the theory of the two sources (plural!) of Scripture and Tradition and claimed they were only the more remote sources of faith, while the nearest and most immediate source was the teaching office of the Church. In the magisterium the Gospel was thought to be immediately present; the conviction prevailed that the teaching office in the final analysis was its own guarantor and quite self-sufficient. The Holy Scriptures were then more or less nothing more than a quarry for *a posteriori* proofs.<sup>11</sup> This unhistorical understanding of the Bible inevitably led to a second great debate which had to be fought out with historical biblical criticism, which had steadily gained predominance in modern humanism and in the Enlightenment. In the Catholic Church this crisis only erupted at a very late stage in the modernism crisis at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The modernists (to be fair one should in many cases rather speak of so-called modernists) wanted to give historical thinking – which had become definitive for modern culture – the right to a place within the Church and within theology, and make historical thinking useful and fruitful for the Church. For all that the criticism was in individual instances quite justified, we do have to acknowledge that even Alfred Loisy, who was considered an arch-modernist, was motivated by an apologetic interest. Even the young Angelo Roncalli was influenced by Ernesto Buonaiuti who was suspected of being a modernist. Presumably one can see there at least one motive for his later program of *aggiornamento*.<sup>12</sup>

The confrontation with modernism revolved around questions regarding the historical foundation of the Bible, the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture, the relationship between historical criticism and the teaching office of the Church, and the issue of the development of dogma. The often unpleasant debates led eventually, following the *Syllabus* (1864), the decree *Lamentabili* and the encyclical *Pascendi* (1907), the *Antimodernisteneid* [The oath against modernism; 1910] and many other outdated position statements of the



Pontifical Biblical Commission of the time, to unhelpful internal hardening and distortions within the Church.

The “all-clear” was not sounded until the biblical encyclical of Pius XII *Divino afflante Spiritu* (1943). Here for the first time the historical method was recognized, and attention to the literary genres was called for (DH 3825-31). The same tendency was evident in the encyclical *Humani generis* (1950) and various writings of the Pontifical Biblical Commission of 1948 and 1964 (DH 3862-64; 3866-89; 3999). These new position statements by the teaching office did not, however, prevent bitter confrontations in the period immediately before and even during the Council.<sup>13</sup> Thus it was inevitable that the debates in the council hall were conducted adversarially and then left their mark within the Constitution.

But in the period between the two World Wars the ecclesial situation had undergone a profound change. In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Bible Movement, like the Liturgical Movement, had become a spiritual force within the Church and could no longer be ignored. Bible circles, Bible studies and daily Bible reading revealed the pastoral and spiritual fruitfulness of the Word of God in Holy Scripture. In addition the Bible Movement had become fundamental to the Ecumenical Movement which had emerged at the same time, and the promotion of ecumenism was one of the main concerns of the Council (*Unitatis Redintegratio* 1).

On the basis of these developments within the Church the Council was able to confront the issues of historical criticism in a new, positive and constructive spirit. This occurred above all in the acknowledgement of the Biblical authors as “genuine authors” (DV 11); on the question of the inerrancy of Scripture the Council excluded purely scientific and other similar questions, and spoke of the truth which God intended to teach “for the sake of salvation” (ibid). The Council also urged attention to the original intention of the text as well as the literary genres of Scripture and indirectly recognized modern form and redaction criticism of the Gospels (DV 12). In contrast to Trent’s preference for the Latin Vulgate (DH 1508; cf 3006) the use of the original text was given precedence (DV 22).<sup>14</sup>

By taking the historicity of the Word of God in Holy Scripture seriously in this way, the Council was not in any sense making a concession to the spirit of the times but rather acknowledging the divine condescendence in history of the eternal wisdom of God which reached its apogee in the incarnation of the eternal *logos* (DV 13).

The goal of highlighting the original historical and above all pastoral intention of the biblical text gave rise to a third constellation of problems. The Trent Decree had affirmed that Scripture and Traditions are to be held fast “*pari pietatis affectu ac reverentia*” (DH 1502). This

statement inevitably led to the question of how this affirmation could be reconciled with the particular significance of Holy Scripture.

The Tübingen theologian of dogmatics, Josef Rupert Geiselmann, addressed this question immediately before the Council. In the course of his studies on the developmental history of the Tridentine text he came to the surprising conclusion that the Council of Trent had not in fact determined that the one source of revelation was *partim-partim*, contained partly in Scripture and partly in oral traditions. He demonstrated that the Council had dropped this *partim-partim* during the course of its discussions in order to replace it with the simple *et*, speaking merely of “Scripture and traditions”. According to Geiselmann’s thesis, the Council of Trent had thereby not decided the question of the relationship of the content of the two elements but had left it open. It was only in post-Tridentine theology and post-Tridentine catechisms that the *et* was interpreted in the sense of *partim-partim*.

According to Geiselmann another interpretation is also possible, according to which the one Gospel is contained entirely in Scripture and entirely in the Tradition. Tradition would thereby not be devalued but revalued: it is not an addendum to Scripture but contains the whole Gospel in its own right; according to Catholic understanding it is accorded constitutive significance for the exegesis of Scripture as *traditio interpretativa*.<sup>15</sup> Therefore these theses have nothing to do with the *sola scriptura* of the Reformation in the sense in which this axiom is generally understood and in which even Luther did not mean it to be understood.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless Geiselmann only narrowly escaped severe condemnation by the teaching office for his interpretation at that time. His theses led to a bitter discussion on the self-sufficiency of Scripture in regard to content which resonated powerfully in the council hall.

Fundamentally, Geiselmann arrived at the answer which the Second Vatican Council also arrived at after a good deal of debate. Like Trent, Vatican II also deliberately left open the question of sufficiency of content.<sup>17</sup> According to the Council Scripture and Tradition do not exist alongside one another as far as content is concerned but are intimately interwoven with and within one another (DV 10). Tradition is assigned an indispensable function of interpretation and above all of ascertainment in regard to Scripture. In this sense the Council states that the Church draws its certainty regarding all that which has been revealed not from Scripture alone (DV 9).

Subsequently the criticism was made that Geiselmann had posed the wrong question and thus steered the discussion in the wrong direction because he had not taken into consideration the pneumatological concept of Tradition on which the Council of Trent was grounded.<sup>18</sup>



As far as that is concerned he may well have in fact remained captive to post-Tridentine theology. But it is to his credit that he cleared the path for a way to be found out of this impasse, and for a foundation to be laid for a more comprehensive theology of the Word of God.

### III. Approaches to a theology of the Word of God

In *Dei Verbum* the Council honestly confronted the questions which had been suppressed for too long; it took up the ecumenical issue once more, eased the tension in the relationship between historical and ecclesial interpretation of Scripture and attained the right of domicile for historical interpretation within the Church. No doubt much was left open in all of these questions, and compromises were entered into. Nevertheless we should not speak of an unsatisfactory, unbalanced and contradictory text.<sup>19</sup> It would indeed be false to measure the significance of *Dei Verbum* according to internal theological questions. It can not be the duty of any Council to answer all the questions which theologians would like to have answered, or answered according to their own way of thinking.

The opening sentence of the Constitution makes it clear that the Council is concerned with much deeper and more comprehensive questions than those which are in dispute between theologians and which must be debated within that arena. The Council is concerned with the essence and significance of the Word of God understood as *praeconium salutis*, a message of salvation and of life. With this formulation the Council refers back to the first Epistle of John: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the word of life" (1 Jn 1:1).

It is striking that this quotation not only speaks of hearing but also of seeing and touching, and that means revelation not only through words but also through deeds. According to the Council too, God's word issues forth in word and deed, which reciprocally interpret one another (*DV* 2).<sup>20</sup> God's speaking is creative and therefore also always action. "Dicere Dei est facere" says Thomas Aquinas.<sup>21</sup> There he expresses exactly the original meaning of the Hebraic word *dabar*, which can mean both word and deed. The theology of the Church fathers as well as the theology of the early and the high Middle Ages therefore knew that revelation occurs as part of the history of salvation.<sup>22</sup> Only later was the history of salvation transported into an abstract doctrinal system or reduced to a personalistic and existential interpretation.

During the Council it was above all two Protestant theologians, Kristen E. Skydsgaard and Oscar Cullmann, who emphatically highlighted this salvatory character

and found a hearing above all from Pope Paul VI. Revelation is neither an unhistorical myth nor an abstract speculation, it takes place within history, which reaches its completion and its fulfillment in Jesus Christ (*DV* 2; 4; 7; 13).

This Christological intensification and concentration of course also makes clear another deeper dimension. Through word and deed God does not reveal something; he reveals himself. Referring to Eph. 1:9 and other Bible passages (Col 1:26; 1 Tim 3:16) the Council speaks of a "seipsum revelare et notum facere sacramentum voluntatis suae" ("to reveal himself and proclaim the mystery of his will"). With this statement the Council achieved a breakthrough from an understanding based on instruction theory – as Max Seckler defines it – to an understanding based on communication theory.<sup>23</sup> That means: the Word of God is not intended as instruction on some supernatural facts or doctrines to which mankind has no access through the intellect alone; it is instead a communicative process from person to person. In His revelation God speaks to us as friends out of the abundance of His love (*DV* 2; cf. Ex 33:11; Jn 15:14f).

The consequence of the personal understanding of revelation is the personal understanding of faith. Speaking of the "obedience of faith" (Rom 16:26) which mankind renders to the self-revealing God, the Council says: "Thereby man entrusts his whole self freely to God, offering the full submission of intellect and will to God who reveals and freely assenting to the truth revealed by Him" (*DV* 5). Ultimately faith relates neither to the heard word nor to the experience of the salvation event but solely to God who reveals Himself in word and deed.

Thomas Aquinas correctly comprehended this fundamental structure of faith. According to him the formal object of faith is God as the *prima veritas*, the material object too is God, and everything else insofar as it has a reference to God.<sup>24</sup> That excludes the idolisation of the word as well as of individual so-called facts of salvation. They have only a mediating significance – theologically speaking a sacramental-symbolic significance – in faith. In this sense faith does not exclude but rather includes concrete content, also doctrinal content. The Constitution wishes to hold fast to both aspects, although it must also be admitted that it did not succeed entirely in mediating the two aspects.<sup>25</sup>

In essence the process of revelation is a dialogic communication process. Communication both becomes and effects participation. The Word of God wants to cause that which it says to become present reality. It is an efficacious word (*verbum efficax*) which also effects and grants that which it says (Heb 4:12). Ultimately it does not give us "something", it gives us access to the Father (Eph 2:18) and allows us to participate in the



divine nature (2 Pet 1:4). That expresses the intention of the revelation process, quoting the 1<sup>st</sup> Epistle of John: "In order that you also may have fellowship with us, and that our fellowship may be with the Father, and with his son Jesus Christ" (1 Jn 1:3). The Word of God as *praeconium salutis* is therefore the message of communion, communion with God and with one another. As such it is the word of life (DV 1).

This message of salvation is directed at the whole world. Therefore the preface of *Dei Verbum* defines the aim of the whole document by quoting Augustine: "so that by hearing the message of salvation the whole world may believe; by believing it may hope; and by hoping it may love" (DV 1).<sup>26</sup> This universal goal orientation is taken up again later in the text, where the Constitution speaks of revelation in creation, and referring back to the First Vatican Council speaks of the possibility of acknowledging God by the natural light of reason through created realities (Rom 1:20) (DV 3,6). It is, however, indicative that the Second Vatican Council thereby clearly goes further than the First Vatican Council, in that it does not simply see creation as the natural order, but categorises it christologically. It speaks of the fact that God has created all things through the word (Jn 1:3), thus relating creation also to Christ and in Christ (1 Cor 8:6; Col 1:16f; Heb 1:2).<sup>27</sup>

Unfortunately the consequences of this important idea are not developed further in *Dei Verbum*. It was the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes* which succeeded in demonstrating that from Jesus Christ and his word light falls on the whole of reality, it is through Christ that the ultimate vocation of mankind, the meaning of his life, but also the riddle of pain and death is illuminated (GS 10; 22; 32; 45 et al). In a felicitous formulation the pastoral constitution says that God in his word not only reveals Himself but also "man to man himself" (GS 22). In this sense the theological explanation of the Word of God as the word of life and as *praeconium salutis* must also always be an existential interpretation and an interpretation of worldly reality, in which we and our world and our life must be at stake, naturally in such a way that eternal life and complete communion with God are not lost from view but remain fixed before our eyes as the true goal of mankind.<sup>28</sup>

The Word of God was poured out only once in history, once and for all time; it reached its fulfillment in Christ Jesus. Now as the Gospel it must be passed on to all peoples through the apostles and their successors, the bishops. Even though apostolic preaching has been expressed with particular clarity in Holy Scripture (DV 8) it is not intended to be understood as a book but as *viva vox evangelii*, which Luther was not the first to describe as "a sermon and a report concerning the grace and mercy of God".<sup>29</sup> The Scriptural commentaries of Thomas Aquinas point in the same direction.<sup>30</sup> This trans-

mission is accomplished, in a similar manner to revelation itself, by means of oral preaching, by example and by ordinances (DV 7). So we have the transmission not only of words but also of realities. The Council combines the two in the sentence: "So the Church, in her teaching, life and worship, perpetuates and hands on to all generations all that she herself is, all that she believes (DV 8).

This understanding of Tradition has evoked harsh criticism from Protestant theologians. They have seen in it the deification of Tradition and the Church, which they feel compelled to protest against in the sharpest terms.<sup>31</sup> The sentence just quoted would indeed be inadmissible if it were to equate the Church as it actually exists, and the whole concrete life of the Church, with the Gospel. That would be presumptuous, for there is no doubt that there is much within the Church which does not conform with the Gospel but clearly contradicts it. The Council wanted to preclude this misunderstanding and therefore spoke not only of what the Church is but of what it believes. One can, of course, only understand the cited sentence if one understands it against the pneumatological background which shines through the whole second chapter of the Constitution.

God's communication of Himself as constant presence within history takes place, according to the testimony of Scripture, in the Holy Spirit. Through Him the Word of God has been inscribed in the hearts of mankind (2 Cor 3:2f); God's Spirit constantly reminds us anew of the Word of God which has been imparted once and for all, but at the same time leads us deeper and deeper into all truth (Jn 16:13). Tradition is thus the perpetual and constantly new presence of God's Word in the Church through the Holy Spirit. Therefore it can be understood in the tradition of the Eastern Church as the *epiclesis* of the history of salvation.<sup>32</sup>

Through the Holy Spirit who was promised to the Church, the Word of God – imparted once and for all – constantly addresses us anew in the Church and becomes a constantly new event. In the words of the Council: "Thus God, who spoke of old, uninterruptedly converses with the bride of His beloved Son, and the Holy Spirit, through whom the living voice of the Gospel resounds in the Church, and through her in the world, leads unto all truth those who believe and makes the word of Christ dwell abundantly in them (cf. Col 3:16)" (DV 8). This statement makes it clear that an identification of the Word of God with the word and life of the Church is in no way intended. The Church can not administer the Word of God or take charge of it. Only as the Church which hears what the Spirit has to say to the congregations (Rev 2:7), can it be a proclaiming Church.

Correspondingly the Council says of the magisterium: "This teaching office is not above the Word of God, but



serves it, teaching only what has been handed on, listening to it devoutly, guarding it scrupulously, and explaining it faithfully by divine commission and with the help of the Holy Spirit; it draws from this one deposit of faith everything which it presents for belief as divinely revealed" (DV 10).

Unfortunately the Council neglected to develop the critical function of the Word of God in concrete terms; it merely mentioned it almost casually and quite timidly, by describing Scripture as a mirror in which the Church already now sees the hidden God (DV 7), in which she also – one could add – can and must always look at itself critically. But in the Council text we find no concrete criteria for discerning when God's Word is heard in the Church or when it is only a human, and under some circumstances even an ungodly, word. Joseph Ratzinger rightly emphasized that the Council thereby let slip an ecumenical opportunity.<sup>33</sup> As we will see, the Constitution does however at least suggest in which direction the answer is to be found, in the final section with its pastoral and spiritual orientation.

#### IV. Pastoral, spiritual and ecumenical significance of the *lectio divina*

The course set by *Dei Verbum* has borne many good fruits since the Council. It enabled a new departure in exegesis which has proved very fertile for the whole of theology and has been of inestimable value for the ecumenical dialogue; without the renewal of Biblical theology, post-conciliar ecumenical dialogue would have been simply unthinkable. Since the Council the theology of the Word of God has been powerfully transformed.<sup>34</sup> Here Catholic theology has also learned much from the great blueprints of 20<sup>th</sup> century Protestant theology.<sup>35</sup> The pastoral and spiritual significance of the Constitution has been at least as significant. This is discussed in the sixth chapter, on "Sacred Scripture in the Life of the Church".

This chapter is not a simple pious addendum but really the climax of the whole Constitution. It begins with the fundamental statement: "The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord, since from the table of both the Word of God and of the body of Christ she unceasingly receives and offers to the faithful the bread of life, especially in the sacred liturgy" (DV 21). That is the ancient tradition of the Fathers which reaches as far as Thomas a Kempis.<sup>36</sup> The Fathers go as far as defining the Scripture as incarnation of the *logos*.<sup>37</sup> According to them the Church draws life from the Scripture as from the eucharist. Both are the body of Christ and the nourishment of the soul; both combine to form one single mystery.<sup>38</sup> Both together build up the Church, which is in turn the body of Christ.<sup>39</sup>

Correspondingly the Council, following on from the biblical encyclicals of Popes Leo XIII (1893), Benedict XV (1920) and Pius XII (1943), emphasizes the particular significance of Holy Scripture, which in contrast to Tradition, is the inspired Word of God (DV 8). It determines that all proclamation of the Church must be nourished by and oriented towards Holy Scripture (DV 21; cf. 24) and that easy access to Scripture must be available to all the faithful (DV 22). It stresses the need for usable translations which should be primarily oriented toward the original text and wherever possible produced in ecumenical collaboration (DV 22). It considers Scripture "as it were the soul of sacred theology" (DV 24). It cites the Church father Hieronymus: "For ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ" (DV 25).

The Council drew practical consequences from this. It urged the faithful in general to read the Scriptures (DV 25), as well as priests (*Presbyterorum Ordinis* 13; 18), candidates for the priesthood (*Optatam Totius* 16), the religious (PC 6), and the laity (*Apostolicam Actuositatem* 32). The esteem accorded to holy scripture was of special significance for liturgical renewal (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 24; cf. 21; 51, 90; 92), and even for church music (SC 112; 121). These statements brought about a profound change and a positive re-shaping of the spiritual life and the practice of piety in the Church. In a word: the Constitution proved to be spiritually fruitful.

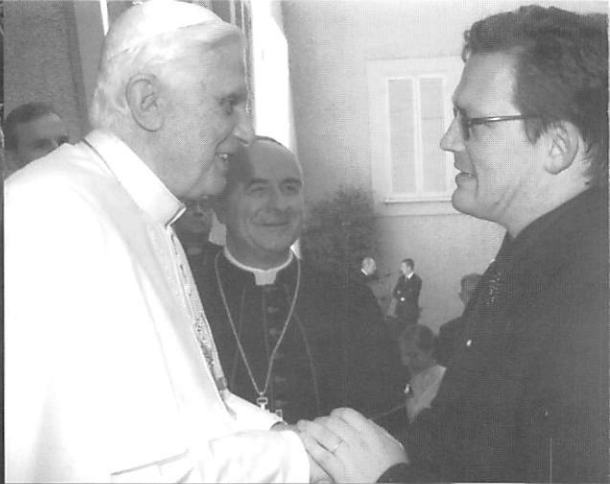
Unfortunately, the light is interspersed with shadows. Often the explanation of Scripture is taught so one-dimensionally, and has become so complicated and spiritually infertile, that it has once more become a fence around the Bible for ordinary believers, blocking their access to it rather than simplifying it. Many commentaries speak more of the intentions of the biblical authors and the various levels of the text than of God's message to us; God's Word has been replaced by many human words and theses. That has led to a disintegration of the Bible and to a loss of the inner unity of the canon. Fortunately a critical revision of modern Bible criticism has begun, with a tendency to revert to a theological rather than an anthropological perspective.<sup>40</sup>

In practical Bible study, methods of a more associative nature have become prevalent, which take their cue from subjective notions rather than objective understanding of the text and therefore tend to arrive at short-circuited actualizations. In many psychological explanations, exegetically peripheral aspects at times come to the fore while the actual intention of the text is overlooked. In the course of the – as such legitimate – confrontation of the text with contemporary experience, the latter is sometimes given more weight in the explanation and in part also for the critique of the text than the text is given for the critical interpretation of our experiences. Often the awareness is lost that in the Bible we are dealing with God's Word and God's reality.

cont. on p. 22



*Holy Mass in St Peter's Basilica preceded the private audience with Pope Benedict XVI*



*Cardinal Martini (on right) in conversation with CBF President, Bishop Paglia*



*The members of the organizational team came from seven different countries*

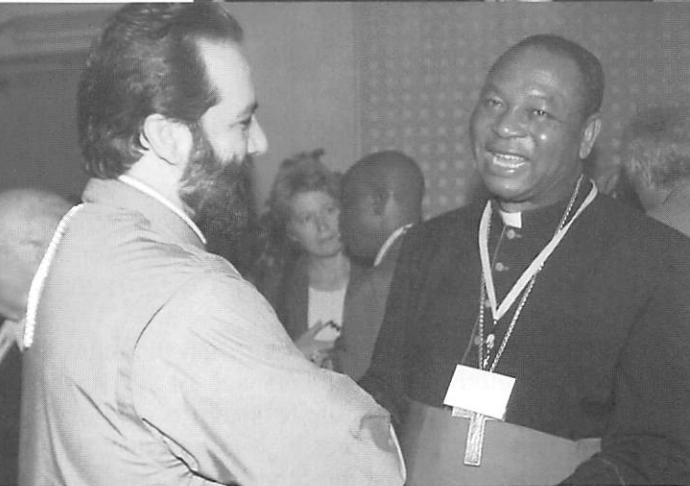




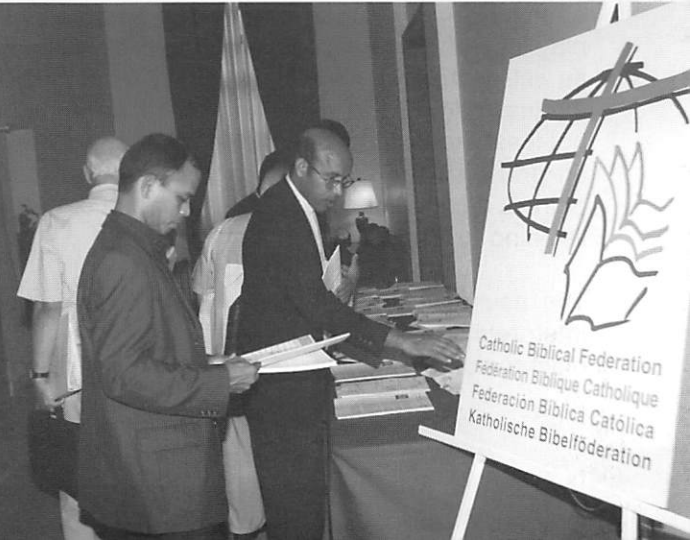
*CBF General Secretary, A. Schweitzer, in conversation with Cardinals Kasper (central) and Re (on left)*



*Displaying great involvement: former CBF President, Bishop Ablondi*



*Archbishop Onaiyekan, President of SECAM, was one of the three main speakers*





Therefore it seems to me that the most important practical consequence of *Dei Verbum* is the renewal of the biblical and patristic tradition of *lectio divina*.<sup>41</sup> That means the private or shared spiritual reading of Holy Scripture, accompanied by prayer; therein – says the Council – God approaches us in love and enters into conversation with us (*DV* 25); there Jesus Christ himself is present (*SC* 7).

Spiritual reading goes back to the tradition of Jewish worship in the synagogue and to Old and New Testament tradition (Neh 8:1-8; Lk 4:15-21; Acts 13:14f; 15:21). In the Church it corresponds to a tradition which reaches from the fathers to the high Middle Ages; in the Christendom of the Reformation it was held in high regard by Pietism in particular. Henri de Lubac has opened up this rich tradition for us anew.<sup>42</sup> Renewing it is an important pastoral task. Within Scripture Mary is regarded as the exemplary embodiment of such spiritual listening to the Word of God. She is wholly the listener to the word sent to her (Lk 1:38). She accepts it in faith and is called blessed because of her belief (Lk 1:45). She keeps and ponders everything that she has heard and seen in her heart (Lk 2:19,51).

Spiritual reading is of course not a panacea which will solve all problems at one stroke. It does not dispense us from the effort of exegesis. The Second Epistle of Peter already speaks of the effort of interpreting Scripture. At the same time it warned explicitly against the unauthorized interpretation of Scripture (2 Pet 1:21). The Bible was written for congregations; it was read in the assembled congregation and exchanged with other congregations; and the canon of Holy Scripture originated in the course of this complex reception process. Therefore *Dei Verbum* rightly emphasizes that Holy Scripture as the book of the Church is to be read and interpreted in the spirit of the Church (*DV* 12; cf. *DH* 1507; 3007).

The Word of God belongs to all; therefore it must be interpreted with the consensus of all.<sup>43</sup> In listening to Scripture it is essential to listen to all those who also endeavour to interpret it; it is essential to listen synchronically to what the others around us and diachronically to what others before us have heard. The correct exegesis of the Word of God can only result from an open collaboration in which all – but in a different way – play their part: the testimony of the office of the Church as well as the testimony of the laity and the theologians, the testimony of the saints and of the common people, not least the testimony of the liturgy, but also of church art and also the external prophecy of the world. The point is a catholic – in the original sense of that word – listening to God's Word.<sup>44</sup>

The ecumenical significance of spiritual reading and interpretation of Scripture while synchronically and diachronically listening to all others cannot easily be

overvalued. In reading and contemplating the original document of our shared belief, our shared heritage and the heritage of the others are brought into play and into discussion. It tells us not only what we already share in faith and what we can do together; it also tells us what we can do to allow the already existing but still partial ecclesial communion to ripen into full ecclesial communion.

For if it is true that through His word God gathers the Church from the four winds, and that God's word cannot be without God's people,<sup>45</sup> then today too God gathers His people in ecumenically shared *lectio divina*. In the *lectio divina* the ecumenically already existing yet incomplete unity becomes reality and at the same time prepares the way for unity. Ecumenical dialogue makes progress to the degree that it makes room for the dialogue of God with divided Christendom in shared spiritual study of the Word of God. Spiritual Scripture reading and scriptural exegesis is the answer to the ecumenical as well as the exegetical malaise.<sup>46</sup>

With the renewal of the *lectio divina* the Council did – without expressly taking it into account – at least point in the direction in which the answer to the then unanswered question of the critical function of Scripture can be found. For in spiritual reading the Word of God in Scripture again and again approaches us anew, critically admonishing as well as positively encouraging; here the Church holds up the mirror to itself again and again. To sum up in one sentence we can say: In spiritual reading the Word of God in the church confronts the Church. In it the Word of God can again and again call us to repentance and renewal, and thus it exercises its critical function in the *ecclesia semper purificando* (*LG* 8).

To sum up in conclusion, what takes place in *lectio divina* is precisely that which the introductory words of *Dei Verbum* expressed programmatically; in spiritual reading the "Verbum Dei religiose audiens" occurs; it calls to repentance and renewal; just so and only so it empowers the Church to *fideliter proclamans*, to a faithful and yet ever new proclamation, to *praeconium salutis*, to a witness responding to the needs of the times, thereby offering witness to the Word of God for the life of the world.

<sup>41</sup> On the history of the Council in general and the Constitution "Dei Verbum" in particular: Storia del Concilio Vaticano II, ed. G. Alberigo, Vol. 1-4, Bologna 1995-99; A. Marchetto, Il concilio ecumenico Vaticano II, Città del Vaticano 2005; On the theological interpretation of *Dei Verbum*: E. Stakemeier, Die Konzilskonstitution über die göttliche Offenbarung, Paderborn 1966; J. Ratzinger, Kommentar zur Dogmatischen Konstitution über die göttliche Offenbarung, in: LThK Vat. II, Bd. 2 (1967), 498-543; 571-583; H. de Lubac, La révélation divine. Commentaire du préambule et du chapitre I de la Constitution „Dei Verbum“ du Concile Vatican II, Paris 1983 (German: Die göttliche Offenbarung. Kommentar zum Vorwort und zum ersten Kapitel der Dogmatischen Konstitution „Dei Verbum“ des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils, Freiburg i. Br. 2001,



- 41-58); O. H. Pesch, *Das zweite Vatikanische Konzil. Vorgeschichte – Verlauf – Ergebnisse – Nachgeschichte*, Würzburg 1993, 271-290.
- <sup>2</sup> All citations from J. Ratzinger, *Kommentar*, 504.
- <sup>3</sup> Cf. O. H. Pesch, *Hinführung zu Luther*, Mainz 1982, 107-109. Similarly Luther's declaration of 1521 before the Diet in Worms: WA 7, 838; Luther before the Diet of Worms, *Luther's Works*, American edition v. 32 p 112f.
- <sup>4</sup> WA 6, 561; *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, *Luther's Works* v.36 p 107.
- <sup>5</sup> BSELK 421; *Smalcald Articles* Article 2 part 15.
- <sup>6</sup> O. H. Pesch, *Hinführung*, 105.
- <sup>7</sup> Irenäus of Lyon, *Adversus haereses* III, 4, 2; cf. 24,1. Further texts in H. de Lubac, *Geist aus der Geschichte. Das Schriftverständnis des Origenes*, Einsiedeln 1968, 233-290.
- <sup>8</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I/II q. 106 a. 1. Thomas gives an unusually detailed biblical reasoning for this. Interesting too is his commentary on 2. Corinthians c. 3 *lectio* 2.
- <sup>9</sup> Cf. Concilium Tridentinum, ed. the Goerresgesellschaft, Vol. V, 11; see J. Ratzinger, *Ein Versuch zur Frage des Traditionsbegriffs*, in: K. Rahner – J. Ratzinger, *Offenbarung und Überlieferung* (QD 25), Freiburg i. Br. 1965, 50-69.
- <sup>10</sup> Cf. the *Decretum super lectione et praedicatione* of the 5<sup>th</sup> session, in: *Conciliorum oecumenicorum Decreta*, ed. G. Alberigo et al., Freiburg i. Br. 1962, 643-646.
- <sup>11</sup> Cf. W. Kasper, *Die Lehre von der Tradition in der Römischen Schule*, Freiburg i. Br. 1962, 40-47; Y. Congar, *Je crois en l'Esprit saint*, Bd. 1, Paris 1979, 207-217.
- <sup>12</sup> Cf. M. Benigni – G. Zanchi, *Giovanni XXIII. Biografia ufficiale*, Milano 2000, 68-70.
- <sup>13</sup> A sensation was caused above all by the frontal attack by A. Romeo, *L'enciclica „Divino afflante Spiritu“ e le „opiones novae“*, in: *Divinitas* 4, 1960, 387-456, where he spoke of the "brume nordiche" which had gathered over otherwise sunny Rome.
- <sup>14</sup> On these questions see the commentary by A. Grillmeier, in: *LThK Vat. II*, Bd. 2, Freiburg i. Br. 1967, 544-559.
- <sup>15</sup> J. R. Geiselmann, *Das Konzil von Trient über das Verhältnis der Heiligen Schrift und der nicht geschriebenen Traditionen*, in: *Die mündliche Überlieferung*, ed. M. Schmaus, München 1957, 123-206; and *Die Heilige Schrift und die Tradition*, Freiburg i. Br. 1962. See also an earlier similar thesis in E. Ortigue, *Écriture et Traditions apostoliques*, in: *RSR* 36, 1949, 271-299. The sharpest rebuttal came from H. Lennerz, *Scriptura sola?*, in: *Gregorianum* 40, 1959, 38-53. A balanced overview by J. Beumer, *Die mündliche Überlieferung als Glaubensquelle* (*Handbuch der Dogmengeschichte* I/4) Freiburg i. Br. 1962. Developed further above all by Y. Congar, *La Tradition et les traditions*, I: *Essai historique*, Paris 1960; II: *Essai théologique*, Paris 1963.
- <sup>16</sup> G. Ebeling, *„Sola scriptura“ und das Problem der Tradition*, in: *Wort Gottes und Tradition*, Göttingen 1964, 91-143.
- <sup>17</sup> Cf. the *Relatio* by Archbishop H. Florit on 25. 9. 1964, partially reproduced in: J. Ch. Hampe, *Die Autorität der Freiheit*, Bd. 1, Munich 1967, 122-126.
- <sup>18</sup> See J. Ratzinger, *Kommentar*, 499.
- <sup>19</sup> In this sense, O.H. Pesch, *Das zweite Vatikanische Konzil*, 286-290.
- <sup>20</sup> See the commentary of H. de Lubac, *op. cit.* 62-91.
- <sup>21</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Super II ad Corinthios* c. 1 *lectio* 2 nr. 1.
- <sup>22</sup> Augustine, *De vera religione* VII,13 speaks of the "historia e prophetia dispensationis temporalis divinae providentiae pro salutis generis humani in aeternam vitam reformandi eatque reparandi."
- <sup>23</sup> M. Seckler, *Der Begriff der Offenbarung*, in: *Handbuch der Fundamentaltheologie*, ed. W. Kern et. al., Bd. 2, Freiburg i. Br. 1985, 64-67.
- <sup>24</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* II/II q. 1 a. 1.
- <sup>25</sup> J. Ratzinger rightly criticises this in his *Commentary*, 505. Important reflections on the relationship of act and content of the *doctrina* are found in Thomas Aquinas. Cf. Y. Congar, *„Traditio“ und „Sacra doctrina“* bei Thomas von Aquin, in: *Kirche und Überlieferung* (FS Geiselmann), ed. J. Betz and H. Fries, Freiburg i. Br. 1960, 170-210.
- <sup>26</sup> Augustine, *De catechizandis rudibus*, 4,8.
- <sup>27</sup> The foundation of this thought is already laid in Jewish theology, according to which the world is created according to the dimensions of the Torah. Cf. C. Thoma, *Das Messiasprojekt. Theologie jüdisch-christlicher Begegnung*, Augsburg 1994, 72-74.
- <sup>28</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *S. th.* II/II q. 1 a. 6 with reference to Heb 11:1: "fides principaliter est de his quae videnda speramus in patria."
- <sup>29</sup> Martin Luther, WA 12,259; *Sermon on the First Epistle of St Peter*, *Luther's Works* vol. 30 p 3. Cf. P. Althaus, *Die Theologie Martin Luthers*, Gütersloh 1962, 71f.
- <sup>30</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Super Romanos*, c. 1, *lectio* 1 defines the *evangelium* as *bona annunciatio*, whereby the pre-eminent good is Christ; Thomas also stresses the salvatory significance of the Gospel. (*lectio* 6). Cf. also *Super Galatas*, c. 1, *lectio* 2.
- <sup>31</sup> See K. Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik* I/2, 622-640 and many other Protestant theologians.
- <sup>32</sup> Thus the intervention of N. Edelby in the council hall, in: J. Ch. Hampe, *op.cit.* 119-122.
- <sup>33</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Kommentar*, 519-523.
- <sup>34</sup> H. U. von Balthasar, *Verbum caro*, Einsiedeln 1960; O. Semmelroth, *Wirkendes Wort*, Freiburg i. Br. 1962; L. Scheffczyk, *Von der Heilsmacht des Wortes*, München 1966; K. H. Menke, *Art. Wort Gottes*, III, in: *LThK X*, 2001, 1301f.
- <sup>35</sup> K. Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, Bd. I/1 and I/2, Zollikon-Zürich 1955. 1960; G. Ebeling, *Wort Gottes und Hermeneutik*, in: *Wort und Glaube*, Bd.1, Tübingen 1960, 319-348; E. Jüngel, *Gott als Geheimnis der Welt*, Tübingen 1977, 307-543; W. Pannenberg, *Systematische Theologie*, Bd. 1, Göttingen 1988, 251-281.
- <sup>36</sup> Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Kommentar*, 572 Note 1; Thomas a Kempis, *De imitatione Christi* IV, 11, 21f.
- <sup>37</sup> Found already in Ignatius of Antioch, *Philadelph.* 5,1; further references particularly by Origenes in H. de Lubac, *Geist aus der Geschichte*, 401-404; also Hieronymus, *In Psalm 147*, 14,4; 80,3.
- <sup>38</sup> H. de Lubac, *ibid.* 415f.
- <sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* 427. Concisely expressed by Thomas Aquinas: The church is constituted "*per fidem et fidei sacramenta*" (*S. th.* III q. 64, a. 2 ad 3).
- <sup>40</sup> U. Wilckens, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, Bd.1/1, Neukirchen 2002, 15-20; 59-119.
- <sup>41</sup> On the biblical and patristic roots: Article *Lectio divina*, in: *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, IX, 470-496; above all the now classic introduction by E. Bianchi, *Pregare la parola. Introduzione alla „Lectio divina“*, Milano 1973.
- <sup>42</sup> H. de Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale. Les quatre sens de l'Écriture*, Paris 1959-64 and *L'Écriture dans la tradition*, Paris 1966 (German selections in: *Typologie, Allegorie, geistlicher Sinn*, Einsiedeln 1999); *Historie et Esprit*, Paris 1950.



<sup>43</sup> The doctrine of the *consensus fidelium* "from the bishops to the last believing layperson" (LG 12) has its place here. Partial aspects are the doctrine of *consensus patrum* (DH 1507) and of *consensus theologorum*, which can of course not be established by the mechanical gathering of citations but only by the spiritual capacity of discernment.

<sup>44</sup> M. Seckler, Die ekklesiologische Bedeutung des Systems der *'loci theologici'*. Erkenntnistheoretische Katholizität und strukturelle Weisheit, in: Die schiefen Wände des Lehrhauses, Freiburg i. Br. 1988, 79-104.

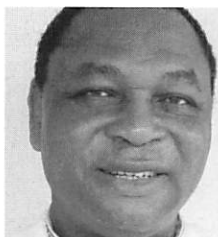
<sup>45</sup> Martin Luther, Von den Konziliis und Kirchen (1539), in: WA 50, 629 (On the Councils and the Church, in Luther's Works vol 41 p 150).

<sup>46</sup> See Y. Congar, Vraie et fausse réforme dans l'Église, Paris 1950; Groupe de Dombes, Pour la conversion des Églises, Paris 1991. ■



## From *Dei Verbum* to *Novo Millennio Ineunte* The Reception Process of *Dei Verbum* in the Light of the Change of Paradigm in the Past 40 Years

Msgr. John Onaiyekan



Archbishop John Onaiyekan of Abuja, Nigeria, is chairman of the Nigerian Episcopal Conference, and currently president of SECAM (Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar). Archbishop Onaiyekan was a member of the CBF Executive Committee from 1984 to 1990.

### Introduction

In the past year, we have been celebrating 40 years since the Vatican II Council. Each of the major documents of that Council merits special celebration. It is therefore right and fitting that we are gathered here these days for the International Congress on *Dei Verbum* (DV). I thank the organizers for giving me the great honour of addressing this prestigious audience. The programme specifies what is required of me, namely to trace the development within the life of the Church of the attitude to the Word of God in Scriptures, "From *Dei Verbum* to *Novo Millennio Ineunte* – the reception process of *Dei Verbum* in the light of the

change of paradigm in the past 40 years." Let me apologize in advance to those who may be looking forward to a coordinated academic treatise on this subject. This is because I have rather prepared a talk that is in the form of a commentary on different "snap shots" of the issue under discussion. But in the process, I hope that a general picture will emerge which will remind us of what has happened in the past 40 years. In particular, I hope that this will position us for the tasks that lie ahead.

In biblical terms, 40 is an important number for a time-frame. The people of Israel spent 40 years in the desert, during which time, they not only roamed about the wilderness but also forged themselves into a powerful worshipping community that was able to take over the promised land of Canaan (see the Books of Exodus, Numbers and Judges). We remember also that the Lord Jesus was in the desert for 40 days and 40 nights during which time he was tempted (Lk 4:2). The Lord risen in glory spent 40 days with his disciples before his ascension during which time he confirmed their faith in the resurrection and prepared them for the



reception of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:3). Forty years is the average period of a generation. From many references in Scripture, 40 is considered the age of maturity: (e.g. Gen, 25:20; 26:34; Acts 4:22). It is therefore appropriate that we celebrate 40 years of *Dei Verbum*, which is a document that has been the point of reference of the Church's attitude to Holy Scripture since the Second Vatican Council.

## 1. The Second Vatican Council

The Second Vatican Council, convoked by His Holiness Pope John XXIII, has now passed into history as the Council that has prepared the Church for the modern world. Among other labels, it has been described as the council of updating, the council of unity, and the council of renewal. In context of this international conference, it would be appropriate to call it also the council of the Bible. The message of *Dei Verbum* needs to be read within this general context.

### 1.1 The council of updating

It is said that the intention of Pope John XXIII was that the windows of the Church be thrown open. But this was not only so that the fresh air from outside can come in, but above all so that the Spirit of God, acting in the Church might come out and renew the face of the earth. It meant taking good note of the realities around us and reading carefully the signs of the time. This has been understood in different ways by different people, sometimes wrongly. The Italian word *aggiornamento*, or "bringing up to date" does not mean that the Church had to compromise or reconcile herself with every passing fashion of the world. Rather it is that the Church must position herself in such a way that she can carry out her mission more effectively in the world in which we are living. From this point of view, it can be said that the intentions of Pope John XXIII and the aims of the Council have been generally followed and to a large extent achieved under the leadership of the popes that have followed; Paul VI, John Paul I and especially John Paul II.

### 1.2 The council of unity

The Council has also become known as the council of unity. It set in motion a movement of unity which sought to break down the many barriers that separate humanity. Since "charity begins at home", it addressed the divisions and frictions within the Catholic Church. But in particular, it tackled the barriers that have separated Christian churches for centuries. Thus, it gave a great impetus to the ecumenical movement which has brought the different Christian traditions closer together. The same Council also started the action of the Church to reach out to other believers and even to those who claim to have no faith in God. All these have been given

concrete expression in the institutions created specifically to ensure that these laudable objectives are pursued with concrete programmes of action, and ever growing vigor. Thus we now have the Pontifical Councils for Promoting Christian Unity, for Inter-religious Dialogue, as well as for Culture.

The Council took place in the political context of a very divided world. Two world power blocks, East and West, Communist/Socialist and Capitalist were facing one another with dangerous weapons, menacing the very continued existence of our planet. To some extent, the seeds of the eventual collapse of Communism were sown at this Council. Looking back now, we can understand what great role the *Ostpolitik* of Paul VI played and how much the vigorous political and diplomatic activities under John Paul II have contributed to bringing about the major changes we are now witnessing on the political landscape of the world. A new world order has been emerging. Unfortunately, however, historic opportunities for forging a better world for all are being wasted through arrogance, and the inability or unwillingness to open out to others in a spirit of global solidarity.

Thus, there was another great division in the world at that time, the division between the rich and the poor. This unfortunately has hardly begun to heal. Indeed, it will appear that the gap between the rich and the poor has continued to widen. The rich have been taking giant strides in science and technology, leaving the poor countries behind. Our dear continent of Africa has become the forgotten continent of a world that is galloping ahead, with little or no concern for human solidarity, equity and even simple justice.<sup>1</sup> The spirit of Vatican II, expressed especially in the powerful passages of *Gaudium et Spes*: "On the Church in the Modern World" has offered the world clear guidance on how to ensure greater justice. The Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, established as a result of the Vatican Council II, has continued to carry out vigorous activities at all levels to ensure that the beautiful words of Catholic Social Doctrine do not remain in the air but that they be applied to the concrete realities of our complex modern world.<sup>2</sup>

### 1.3 The council of renewal

The Council has also been considered as the council of renewal. But this renewal movement did not just start out of a vacuum. It grew out of already existing waves of renewal movements. The ecumenical renewal movement, for example, was already making progress, although in rather restricted circles of both the Catholic and non-Catholic world. There was also already what can be considered a charismatic renewal movement which had begun in different parts of the Church but which as it were exploded after the Second Vatican Council.



Finally, and more relevant to our topic, there is the biblical renewal movement which had started in different segments of the Church, not only at the level of scientific exegeses but also on the lower level of pastoral use of the Bible for the spiritual development of the people of God. The Second Vatican Council has turned out to be God's own opportunity, the appointed time, the *kairos*. Since then, the action of the spirit has been moving with ever new vigour.

#### 1.4 The council of the Bible

All through the Council sessions, the Holy Bible was enthroned in the middle of the Basilica of St. Peter, which served as the Council hall, where all the plenary deliberations took place. That was a clear symbol of the central role of the Word of God in all the deliberations of the Council. This is also obvious in all the documents of the Council, as can be seen from the copious scripture quotations that effectively enriched them. The very first words of *Dei Verbum* are "Hearing the Word of God with reverence, and proclaiming it with faith, the sacred Synod assents to the words of St. John ..." thus bringing out very clearly the fact that the Council was gathered to listen with reverence to and proclaim with faith the Word of God. One can therefore describe the Second Vatican Council as the Council of the Bible.

The Council not only used copiously the Word of God. It also devoted a full document to it, *Dei Verbum*. This document was issued as a "dogmatic constitution", thus putting it on the highest level of conciliar teaching. No wonder Pope John Paul II once regretted that it had not received the level of attention that it deserved.<sup>3</sup>

But what was the main message of this document? Here we shall be brief because others will, I am sure, touch adequately on this point.<sup>4</sup> I will only recall here a few major elements of the message of this conciliar document.

Holy Scripture is placed within the context of revelation which in turn is presented in the context of the history of salvation. The written words of Scripture are linked organically with the revelation of God himself all through the ages and down to our days and to the end of time. The Word of God lasts forever. The written word in Scripture finds its place within the context of this revelation and takes its origin from the inspiration which the human authors enjoyed through the Holy Spirit. Connected with this one notes with admiration the sensitive and careful way in which the long debated relationship between Tradition and Scripture was worked out in the Council. Divine revelation is conserved in the Church through tradition. Scripture is the summary of this tradition but a very privileged summary since it is inspired by the Holy Spirit. The place of the Bible in the Church was thus clearly laid down.

Many issues of great controversy were handled in simple language but with profound truth. Thus we are reminded of the role of the Church even in determining what books are to be considered inspired. The Church is the final guarantor of the interpretation of the Bible. But at the same time, the Church is not independent of Scripture. Scripture remains a fundamental guide and rule of faith and of life of the Church. For this reason, the Church continues to celebrate the Word of God in Scripture with as much devotion and dedication as she celebrates the Word of God in the Holy Eucharist. These are powerful messages which have continued to influence the life and spirituality of the Catholic Church since the Second Vatican Council.

## 2. Forty Years of *Dei Verbum* in the Church

We shall now look at and highlight some specific areas with regard to the reception of *Dei Verbum* in the Church in the last 40 years.

The majority of Catholics living today are post Vatican II products. Those who knew and can still remember the Church as it was before 1965 are certainly in the minority, if not in this hall, certainly in the world out there. This is especially true in the new churches of Africa and Asia where the majority of Christians are young people. Because of this, we probably today tend to take for granted many of the great fruits of *Dei Verbum* in the life of the Church. It is therefore important to recall them here so that we may continue to appreciate the grace with which the Spirit has blessed the Church as a result of *Dei Verbum*:

### 2.1 The Bible: the Book of the Church

The Bible has become very much the book of the Church. There was a time when it would appear that Catholics were discouraged from reading the Bible. At least in my own experience as a child in Nigeria, this was to some extent true. Indeed to carry a Bible around was considered a Protestant thing to do. The Catholic went to church with his rosary and missal. He learnt about his faith through the Catechism and the famous "Bible History" books. The Protestant carried the Bible and perhaps also a hymn book to church and to Sunday school.

This attitude of "caution" about direct access to the biblical text was not without reason. There was a valid preoccupation about the danger of falling into doctrinal error through a wrong interpretation of the Bible. Did St. Peter himself not warn about the uninstructed who read the Bible to their own spiritual ruin? (2 Pet 3:16).

But since *Dei Verbum* a lot has changed in this regard. The Bible is now very much a Catholic Holy Book. The Council itself strongly recommended that there should



be an open access to the Bible for all the faithful (DV 22). As a result of this, a lot has been done to make available Catholic editions of the Bible, whether they be translations or new editions. Besides the text of the Bible itself, there has been an explosion of literature on Scripture at different levels, aimed at different categories of Christ's faithful. We all know, too, how much the Bible has been a characteristic of the new liturgical era. In particular, the new Lectionary has made available a wider range of readings from the Scriptures. Beyond the eucharistic liturgy, Bible services and celebrations have become the order of the day. For members of the different forms of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement, the love of the Bible is often as strong as the emphasis on the gifts of the Spirit. All this was not so before Vatican II and we must thank God for it.

## 2.2 Scripture as soul of theology

*Dei Verbum* insisted that Holy Scripture must be the soul of theology. Since Vatican II, Scripture has been at the centre of the whole range of theological study. Every branch of theology, following the recommendation of the Council document *Optatam Totius* on priestly formation (OT 16) now goes a long way to lay strong biblical foundations for whatever assertions are made. The result of this is that biblical studies have become vitally important in theology in general. The professors of Sacred Scriptures therefore occupy a vital position and play a central role in every theological institution, especially seminaries and institutes preparing pastors for the Church.

## 2.3 Flourishing scientific exegesis

Scientific exegesis has been highly encouraged not only by *Dei Verbum* but already by earlier encyclicals like *Divino Afflante Spiritu* and *Providentissimus Deus*. Scripture studies have been given a great boost not only in the famous Biblical Institute in Rome but in many other institutions of higher ecclesiastical studies all over the world. The old controversy over how far modern exegetical methods are compatible with the Catholic view of the Bible has long been resolved. Catholics are now in the forefront of modern exegesis. There is no more fear of courageous research into the interpretation of the Bible. High level biblical research institutes are springing up all over the world. Similarly, associations of scientific exegetes are also growing. The prestigious Pontifical Biblical Commission, under the supervision of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, has continued to be both a pacesetter and monitor for Catholic scientific exegesis. Publications and productions both literary and electronic are being widely distributed. Most significant, too, is the volume of material that has successfully popularized the fruits and the efforts of scientific exegetes, all for the good of the people of God and to the greater glory of God.

## 2.4 Ecumenical dimension

We must note especially the ecumenical dimension of the positive fruits of *Dei Verbum* in the last 40 years. The programme of the Catholic Church to reach out to other Christian communities has various ramifications. These are being pursued very vigorously by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. But much of this work has been made possible by the progress made in the understanding of the Bible through the movement unleashed on the Church by *Dei Verbum*. It is not an accident that this international congress is holding under the patronage of the same Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. This is in line with the arrangement whereby the over-all ecclesiastical supervision of the Catholic Biblical Federation, and consequently of the biblical apostolate of the Church in general, has been domiciled with the same Pontifical Council.

It is well known that one of the factors in the sad and tragic division within Christianity has been the different and often contrasting interpretations of the same Holy Scriptures. By the grace of the Holy Spirit, the Scriptures which have been the bone of contention have gradually become our common point of reference. *Dei Verbum* clearly encouraged an ecumenical approach to the Scriptures. This has been followed up with vigour and success. This is one area where the Second Vatican Council has had very great impact on our brothers and sisters of other Christian traditions. From the moment that scientific exegesis was able to devise commonly agreed objective criteria for arriving at what the Bible actually says, instead of biased interpretation based on pre-conceived theological positions, it became possible for all Christians to read the Bible and to use it in view of arriving at a common understanding of what Holy Scriptures say.

This has brought about a great revolution in the relationship between our different churches. It is this also which has made it possible for our Church to be fully involved in ecumenical and interdenominational translations, publication and distribution of the Bible. This is particularly important for mission lands where a lot of duplication of efforts has taken place in the past, as Catholics refused to use what was called "Protestant" translations of the Bible. Similarly, many of the scientific organizations that study the Scriptures are now ecumenical to the core. In those fora, Catholic and non-Catholic exegetes strive together to improve our common understanding of the Word of God as contained in the Scripture.

This has had its powerful positive impact on ecumenical theology. The divisions and frictions between Christian churches have often claimed to be based on doctrinal diversities which each Church claims to have no control over. But as a common reading of Scriptures



became progressively possible, it has also become possible to make a breakthrough in many doctrinal issues that for so many centuries had appeared intractable. A typical example is the agreement reached recently between the Catholic Church and the Lutheran tradition over the age-old controversy about justification. As we know, this issue divided not only Catholics and Lutherans, but also has had an impact on our relationship with most of the other Protestant bodies. Other issues of similar joint ecumenical reflection include the eucharist, mutual recognition of ministries and the primacy of the Roman Pontiff. More and more, when we examine the work of bilateral commissions in which theological issues that divide the Church are tabled for discussion, we often find that the division of theological opinions every now and again runs across our denominational boundaries. This is because in each tradition there is greater freedom to espouse a diversity of interpretation of the same text, provided that the diversity is compatible with our common faith. This has greatly reduced the reasons or even the excuses for our remaining divided.

Providence made it possible for me to have a fairly long experience of serving the Church in this apostolate of ecumenical discussions. First, I was involved on the bilateral level with the Methodist Church (1982-92). More recently, I worked on the multilateral level as a Catholic member of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches (1993 till date). From this experience, I have arrived at the strong conviction that the actual hard nuts of theological issues that still divide us are very few indeed. I also believe that even those issues which still seem to divide us may well not be impossible to accommodate, with the necessary good will on all sides, and in obedience to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. We have found on the other hand that what now keep churches divided have more to do with our history and the political baggage of the past. The Faith and Order Commission has been working recently on a very interesting study on ethnic and national factors in church division and church unity agenda.<sup>5</sup> The result of the study is very interesting indeed and one hopes that it will be taken into serious consideration. In our world full of dangerous divisions, ecumenism has become all the more crucial. We can no longer delay. If the followers of the Lord Jesus and the bearers of his message cannot speak with a common voice, how will the world believe? The role of Holy Scripture in this whole enterprise is obvious and *Dei Verbum* has set the pace and indicated the direction that we need to follow if we are to make appreciable progress.

## 2.5 The Jewish scriptures

*Dei Verbum* speaks very clearly on the ever abiding importance of the Jewish scriptures, which we call the "Old Testament", but which for the Jew is simply "the

scriptures". It affirms the unity of both the Old and New Testaments. The role of the people of Israel as the providential recipients and carriers of the Old Testament revelation is clearly acknowledged. All this provided a firm biblical foundation for the significant statements which the Council made about the attitude of the Church to the people of Israel and their permanently valid role in the one history of salvation (see *Nostra Aetate*). Not long ago, the Pontifical Biblical Commission published an authoritative study on this issue, a study that has been received with positive echoes in both Christian and Jewish circles.<sup>6</sup>

Since the promulgation of *Dei Verbum*, there has been a not so loud but nevertheless sustained and significant dialogue between the Catholic Church and the representatives of various strands of contemporary Jewish religious community. These contacts and common discussions, some official, some less so, have built on the foundations laid by *Dei Verbum*.

It is significant that the office for this dialogue is not in the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, which deals with non-Christian believers, but rather in that for Promoting Christian Unity. The message is clear: with the Jews, we are at least cousins, if not brothers and sisters in the faith. This positive development is likely to continue and accelerate under Pope Benedict XVI, who has already had high-level meetings with Jewish leaders, the first being straight after his installation as Pope, and more recently in Cologne, Germany during the World Youth Day celebrations. Right now, as we are gathered here for this congress, the Pope is meeting two Chief Rabbis from Jerusalem.

This brings us to a few further reflections on what lies ahead.

## 3. Looking ahead

Forty years is a long time in the life of a single individual but it is a short period in the life of the Church. From the point of view of the time frame of the Church of God that is 2000 years old, 40 years is only the beginning of the reception of the Second Vatican Council and consequently of *Dei Verbum*. Therefore, we need to be patient with ourselves even if we seem not to have fully achieved all the aims and objectives of *Dei Verbum*. Rather we ought to thank God for the progress made in such a relatively short time. It is from this point of view that we look at a few areas that can be considered our agenda for the years that lie ahead.

### 3.1 Consolidating our gains

First, we have to stress that we need to consolidate the gains that are already made. This sounds obvious but it



is not always acknowledged. There is need to watch out against every attempt to roll back the progress already made. The danger of this will grow the farther away we get from the days of *Dei Verbum*. The positive results that we have mentioned a while ago must be kept in mind and sustained with all our efforts.

### 3.2 Vigilance for balance

There is need for great vigilance for balance in a few areas of the way we handle Scripture in the Church. *Dei Verbum* was very careful in the way it presents the relationship between Scripture and Tradition. This balance must be maintained with similar care and attention. Our experience in the past 40 years has been that this has not always been easy. There are of course those who, carried away by the new wave of biblical enthusiasm, have almost turned to biblical fundamentalism. These are those who practically demand that whatever we do must be supported and justified by a concrete text of Scripture. In my country, for example, the question "Where is it in the Bible?" is always thrown at us Catholics. We need to be able to give a reasoned and balanced reaction to such challenges. On the other hand, there is the opposite reaction of those who still believe that emphasis on the Bible is somehow giving in to Protestantism, as if the Bible does not belong to the Catholic Church. And so, we see the tendency to want to fall back only on tradition, and a tradition that is quoted over and against Scripture. Among those who hold this tendency are some who seem to consider the Second Vatican Council as a tragic mistake. Some of them, in addition, invoke all kinds of presumed messages from visions and apparitions, to which they ascribe dogmatic authority. Fortunately, they are in the minority and they should not in any way be encouraged.

Similarly, the delicate balance between Sacred Scripture and Church doctrine has to be maintained. On the one hand, Scripture remains the soul of theology and the rule of faith in the sense that the Church cannot teach anything that contradicts Scripture properly understood. On the other hand, since the Church has received the truth of the Gospel through the Lord Jesus even before Sacred Scripture, it must be clear that the foundation for its faith cannot be based on Scripture alone. Therefore, we need to avoid unnecessary and futile controversies on matters of this nature. We need not be ashamed to admit that some of our doctrines, e.g. the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary may not be easy to establish on the basis of Scripture alone, especially for people not disposed to accept it.

### 3.3 Scientific exegesis for all

The world of our days is unfortunately divided very much between the rich and the poor. There are those who have all the means of modern technology and those who don't have them. This division in the world is

reflected also in the area of scientific exegesis. In many parts of the world especially the poor countries, which are also mainly mission lands, facilities for scientific exegesis are very limited, whether in terms of institutions or of publications and support for research. In this regard, we must at this point express our deep appreciation to the Congregation for the Propagation of Faith in Rome, as well as the Pontifical Mission Societies in many countries that have constantly been supporting the poorer churches in the training of exegetes to the highest level of professional competence. Many, including myself, have enjoyed this privilege of studying in the best institutions abroad whether in the *Biblicum* here in Rome or in similar institutions elsewhere. We are also grateful for the contributions being made to encourage the work we are trying to do in our different countries, setting up programmes and projects of scientific institutions in our cultural and ecclesial environments. But a lot still needs to be done in this regard. In particular, more still needs to be done to set up Theological Faculties that will have provisions for scientific exegetical programmes. Many of our exegetes, highly trained and equipped, come home and are handicapped by lack of adequate facilities, including even books and simple journals.

An organization called the Panafrican Association of Catholic Exegetes (PACE) has existed for more than twenty years now. It has simply been struggling to survive, largely due to lack of adequate and regular funding. This organization brings together as many Catholic exegetes as possible from all over Africa, in order to reflect together, against the African cultural background, over various themes of the Scriptures. Its last meeting took place only last week in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo. Much of its work has been published but a lot is still waiting to be taken care of. In particular, there is always a lot of difficulties raising the funds to hold meetings. These problems will continue for as long as our churches live in lands that are poor and impoverished. We hope that this international congress will offer suggestions on issues of this nature.

There is, however, a different range of problems that is more prevalent in the rich lands. Here scientific exegesis has become so professional that it can go off on its own, not only independent of the Church but totally oblivious to the concerns of the Christian community. This is all the more a danger where scientific exegesis becomes simply an academic subject in a secular university completely out of the control of the Church. Scientific freedom can easily become license to say anything. In an academic world where very often authors sell not because they have told the truth but because they have said something that seems controversial, the temptation to write "for the galleries" and make good money is often difficult to resist. Part of the



solution for this could be that the Church pays as much attention as possible to her own institutions of scientific exegesis. She should fund them well enough to retain and maintain competent exegetes who can put into the market of ideas and publications the Word of Life in a most scientific way. If indeed we say that Scripture is the soul of theology and that exegesis is most important in the life of the Church, then this ought to be reflected in the budget of the Church.

### 3.4 Wide access to Scripture

"The poor has the gospels preached to them". (Mt 11:5) This is a quotation from Isaias which Jesus read and declared fulfilled in the Synagogue of Nazareth. This was one of the signs of the arrival of the Messiah. Indeed it is true that the poor are often more receptive of the Gospel than those who are rich in the goods of this world and so feel self-sufficient. If that is true, then the Gospel must be made available to the poor. *Dei Verbum* stated very clearly that access to Sacred Scripture must be wide open to all categories of Christ's faithful. (DV 22) This strong recommendation: wide open access of Scripture to everybody, is still to be fully implemented, especially in poor countries. Starting from the mere availability of the sacred text, in many places, the cost of the Bible is beyond the reach of the average Catholic. This is generally also because very often, the so-called "Catholic Bibles" are imported from abroad and are much more expensive than the highly subsidized Protestant Bibles.

In this connection, we should acknowledge the great contribution being made by many towards making available cheap editions of the Catholic Bible to mission and poor lands. The Catholic Biblical Federation has been involved in this project for many decades. In particular the Society of St. Paul, both male and female institutes, as well as the Society of the Divine Word (SVD), have a very enviable track record in this regard.<sup>7</sup> But much more still needs to be done.

The obstacle to access to Scripture is not only economic in terms of text at affordable price. There is also the linguistic barrier where translations into the local languages are not available. Especially in Africa and the poor countries where illiteracy rate is very high, the importance of translations in local languages cannot be over-emphasized. The illiterate may not be able to read the Bible on their own. But they can have access to the Word of God, if they own a Bible that can be read to them by others who can read. When I was a young boy, even at the age of six and seven, my father used to ask me to read various sections of the Bible in our local language to the family, as we gathered in the evening after supper to share the Word of God. If there were no Bible in our local language, it would have been a different matter reading in English and having to translate simul-

taneously. This is unfortunately what is happening in many places even today.

Generally, Protestants have been working very hard in Bible translations. From my own experience, I can say that we have not been doing so well. In my country Nigeria, I happen to be the current chairman of the translations committee of the Bible Society of Nigeria. We have difficulties getting Catholics to be fully involved in the projects of translations into our various local languages. And yet the Bible Society members, most of whom are Protestants, constantly admit that the Catholic priests are far better prepared, theologically and scientifically for Bible translation than the average Protestant pastor. This is sometimes part of the reluctance that still lingers on as regards cooperating with Protestants in Bible translation, a reluctance which by now should no longer be there. The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, in collaboration with the United Bible Society (UBS), issued many years ago a very useful guideline for inter-denominational translations, which has been found very useful and acceptable both to us Catholics and the interdenominational Bible Societies.<sup>8</sup> We are therefore not left without firm guidance.

I believe that we need to stress more and more the need for more translations. Often, we restrict our efforts to the so-called "major languages". The result is that many people are still condemned to hearing the Scriptures in a second or even third language, with which they are not very familiar. Again here, the Protestants have gone ahead of us, insisting that even if there are only ten thousand people speaking a particular language, they deserve to have the Bible in their own tongue. As we can see, we have a long way to go.

Access to Sacred Scripture will require also that we put up programmes that will promote the love of Sacred Scripture among our people. This has to be done through Catechesis but also through provision of attractive forms of the presentation of the Word of God. Again, here in particular, it is necessary to produce Bibles that will reach different categories of readers, for example Bible for children, Bible for the aged, even Bible for the visually handicapped and so on. Some effort has gone in this direction but we believe more should be done.

*Dei Verbum* made a very interesting recommendation, namely, that effort should be made to produce Bibles geared towards non-Christian readers (DV 25). I have not seen much effort in this direction. It seems to be a sentence of *Dei Verbum* that many people have never read. And yet, I believe that where the effort is made, it does make its impact. Behind this is the theological conviction that the Word of God is "sharper than a two-edged sword" (Heb 4:12) which can pierce through the



heart and reach people even when and where we least expect it. It has been reported, for example, that some desert dwellers in the Sahara who are Muslims but who listened to Bible programmes on the radio are becoming Christians without ever meeting any Christian preacher. Here we can see the power of the Word of God working independently of our own efforts. In Nigeria, we have already the Bible in Hausa, the language which is spoken by a large majority of our Muslims. However, we have a tentative programme to produce a version of the Hausa Bible using Arabic scripts. This is because many of our Muslims read more easily the Arabic script than the Western alphabet, even if they may not understand Arabic texts. The project had met with the opposition of some sectors among fanatical Muslims. They claimed that the project was trying to cleverly deceive Muslims into reading the Bible thinking that they are reading the Koran. Of course this was not the intention. Unfortunately, the project is not getting much support from the Christian community either. This congress might look again at this recommendation. In the years ahead, what more effort could be made in the direction of producing special editions of the Bible for non-Christians of different religions?

### 3.5 The challenge of new technologies

There is the whole area of the new communications technology. If the Word of God is God's communication to humanity, then it cannot but make full use of the modern means of communication. Already Pope Paul VI warned that God Himself would not forgive the Church if we fail to make full use of the modern means of communication which are God's own blessings on our generation. Between 1965 and today, a lot has happened in this area. Radio and television are no longer what they were in those days. Instant and satellite and cable television have taken over. Computer and the internet are now the order of the day. We cannot lag behind in this area. I remember about twenty years ago when computers and internet began to make their appearance, Bro. Ferdinand Poswick, a Benedictine monk of the Abbey of Maredsous, active in the Catholic Biblical Federation in those days, and still very active even today, kept talking to us about Bible and computers, and that this would be the direction for the future. We did not quite understand what he was saying at that time. Now it is very clear. The communications highway is now practically taken over either by secular messages or even pornographic and criminal materials. The Word of God must find its way also on to the same highway, so that the world may believe. In this area of radio, television and internet, again the Protestants seem to be doing a lot of work. We will do well to link hands with them wherever possible. We should also have our own Catholic initiatives. I believe this is an area where the Catholic Biblical Federation ought to encourage the Church worldwide to take more vigorous action.

We note here that the modern information technology somehow has a way of bridging the gap between the rich and the poor. It is now possible even in the poorest village of Africa to set up a computer system with internet, relying only on solar energy and satellite communication. This was not possible twenty years ago and certainly not in 1965. It means therefore that new frontiers can be opened and more people reached using the new technology. In the years ahead, we have to take this into serious consideration. This is an area where amateurism is just not good enough. We need to bring in the contribution of experts and high level technicians. I imagine the financial outlay may appear at first high. But the results in the long run will be well worth the investment.

Here is definitely an area where there is a crying need for world-wide solidarity. Those who have been supporting the missionary activities of the Church in the poorer nations should have this as a high priority. It is good and fitting to continue helping to build churches. But a well prepared radio programme may reach far more people with the message of the gospel, especially those who may never come to our churches.

### 3.6 A call for an Ordinary Synod on the Word of God

Permit me to conclude these reflections with a call and indeed an appeal, which I strongly suggest for this august assembly to approve and endorse: namely to request that the Holy Father convokes as soon as possible an Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on "The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church".<sup>9</sup> As we all know, synods have now become an important feature of the post-Vatican II Church. Pope John Paul II, during his long pontificate, made it a powerful and effective instrument of collegiality and pastoral solidarity. He has also used it to promote urgent Church concerns.

Looking back, we can now see that synods have served to confirm and re-launch many themes of the Vatican II magisterium. Here are some examples of synod themes that can be linked with specific Council documents:

- a. Evangelization – *Ad Gentes*
- b. Justice and Peace – *Gaudium et Spes*
- c. Laity – *Apostolicam Actuositatem*
- d. Priestly Formation – *Presbyterorum Ordinis* and *Optatam Totius*
- e. Consecrated Life – *Perfectae Caritatis*
- f. Bishops – *Christus Dominus*

It is about time to look at *Dei Verbum*, especially the issues raised in chapter six of the document. As already mentioned earlier, in a private audience granted to the Executive Committee of the Catholic Biblical Federation in 1986, Pope John Paul II remarked with



regret that *Dei Verbum* had been “too much neglected”. I do not think that the situation has improved very much since then.

We are now about to celebrate a General Ordinary Synod on the Eucharist, which will certainly evoke much of the themes of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. It would indeed be theologically logical to follow it up with a synod on the Word of God. After all, DV 21 declares that: “The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures as she venerated the Body of the Lord.” It goes further to state that “in the sacred liturgy (the Church) never ceases ... to partake of the bread of life and to offer it to the faithful from the one table of the Word of God and the Body of Christ”. It is clear that on this “one table”, the Word of God and the Body of Christ go together.

We recall that as from the 1980s, we spoke often of a “New Era of Evangelization ... towards the year 2000”. That “magical” year 2000 has now come and gone and there is a danger that the enthusiasm for a New Evangelization may be waning. A synod on the Bible would be a most effective way to carry the zeal for a New Evangelization beyond the year 2000. These concerns were addressed by Pope John Paul II in his programmatic encyclical *Novo Millennio Ineunte*. A synod on the Word of God would give a fresh boost and impetus to this plan of action.

## Conclusion

The Vatican Council has been a gift of God to the world of our days. It prepared the Church for the great upheavals that have rocked our world in recent times. *Dei Verbum* is one of the main pillars of that Council. The Church of God has seen a lot of changes and improvement as a result of the messages of the Second Vatican Council, especially that of *Dei Verbum*. As we start our new millennium, we cannot fully implement the programme which Pope John Paul II laid out in the *Novo Millennio Ineunte* unless we once again rededicate ourselves to a strong emphasis on the Scripture in the life of the Church and in the world of our days. As *Dei Verbum* rightly states, God our heavenly Father continues to talk to us in our daily experiences, and in the lives of those who went before us. But above all, He speaks to us in Sacred Scripture, inspired by the Spirit for our salvation. May the Word of God dwell in our hearts both now and forever.

<sup>1</sup> The African Synod regretted the fact that Africa was becoming like “an irrelevant appendix” in the world of our days. *Ecclesia in Africa* n. 40.

<sup>2</sup> A recent significant initiative of this Council in pursuit of its mandate is the publication of the *Compendium of the Social Teachings of the Church* soon to be available in many languages.

<sup>3</sup> The Pope made this remark during an audience he granted to the Executive Committee of the Catholic Biblical Federation in 1986.

<sup>4</sup> For a more detailed outline of the content of *Dei Verbum*, apart from the many commentaries, see also Onaiyekan, John: “The Constitution *Dei Verbum* 25 years after its publication” in: *Bulletin Dei Verbum*, n. 17 (4/1990).

<sup>5</sup> This study by the Faith and Order Commission is still on-going.

<sup>6</sup> *The Jewish People and their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible*, published by the Pontifical Biblical Commission in 2001.

<sup>7</sup> We acknowledge here the very successful “*Verbum Bible*” projects of the SVD and the more recent *African Bible* of the Pauline Sisters, as well as the *Catholic Community Bible* brought to Africa through the Claretians Missionaries.

<sup>8</sup> I am referring here to the *Guidelines for Interconfessional Cooperation in Translating the Bible* first published in 1968 and revised in 1987, and still relevant today.

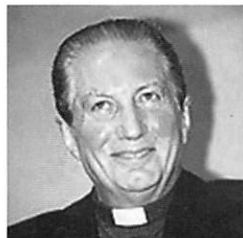
<sup>9</sup> Such call for a Synod on the Word of God has been made even in the synod hall itself, e.g. my own intervention during the Synod on Priestly formation in 1990, and that of Bishop Cornelius Esua of Kumbo, Cameroon, during the African Synod in 1994. We should also note that this was a major recommendation of the 1986 Bangalore Plenary Assembly of the Catholic Biblical Federation. □



# The Central Role of the Word of God in the Life of the Church

## Biblical Animation of the Entire Pastoral Ministry

Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini, sj



Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini, sj was rector of the Biblical Institute from 1969 to 1978 when he was appointed chancellor of the Pontifical Gregorian University. He was nominated Archbishop of Milan in 1979 and has been archbishop emeritus of Milan since 2002.

The title that was assigned to me as a description of my topic is complex. It consists of two parts (role of the Word in the Church and biblical animation of pastoral ministry) whose connection, though given as evident, is not so easy to spell out with scientific rigor.

This fact could be brought to light by re-formulating the title in terms of a series of questions, such as, for example: What is the role of the Word of God in the Church? Why is this place described as central (and why is this not an obstacle to other central realities, particularly that of Christ himself)? What is the relationship between this centrality of the Word and the place of Scripture in the Church? How are we to go about the task of animating with Scripture the daily lives of the faithful in their dedication to the Kingdom of God? And again: what is the relationship of all of this with revelation, a concept that supplies the title for the document whose fortieth anniversary we are celebrating?

It should be obvious that I cannot delve deeply into every one of these questions, which were already present to the speakers who preceded me. But I have placed them here at the beginning so as to highlight the complexity and the vastness of the topic. I will limit myself to underscoring a few practical aspects relating especially to the biblical animation of pastoral ministry. Obviously, the basic reference text for this treatment is the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum* of Vatican Council II. This Constitution has already been presented in its theological aspects by Cardinal Kasper and in as to its reception throughout the last forty years by Bishop Onaiyekan. I will limit myself therefore to highlighting the following points:

1. I should like to begin with a personal recollection and with a testimonial of the recently deceased beloved Pope John Paul II.

2. What were the open questions at the time of *Dei Verbum*?
3. How were they confronted by the Council?
4. What can be said of the presence of Scripture in the life of the Church at the time of the Council?
5. What contribution was made by *Dei Verbum* to the presence of Scripture in the Church?
6. What are the consequences for the biblical animation of pastoral practice, especially with regard to the *lectio divina* of the faithful?

### 1. Personal recollection and testimonial of Pope John Paul II

I am happy to begin my talk with a recollection of the dear deceased Pope John Paul II. It is a recollection that touches me personally, since in his penultimate book, entitled *Alzatevi, Andiamo!* (Rise, let us go!), the Pope speaks of the bishop as a "sower" and "servant of the word" and comments (p. 36):

*The task of the bishop, in fact, is to make himself the servant of the word. Just like any teacher the bishop sits on his chair, that chair which has its symbolic setting in the church called 'Cathedral'. He sits there to preach, to proclaim and to expound the Word of God.*

The Pope goes on to note that there are obviously a variety of collaborators of the Bishop in the proclamation of the Word: the priests, the deacons, the catechists, the teachers, the professors of theology, and an increasing number of well-educated lay people who are faithful to the Gospel.

But I continue (and here is where the Pope's words touch me personally):

*However, no one can substitute for the presence of the bishop who sits on his cathedra or presents himself at the ambo of his episcopal church and personally expounds the Word of God to those he has assembled about him. Like the scribe who became a disciple of the kingdom, he, too, is like the head of the household who brings forth from his treasure things new and old. I am happy to mention here Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini, emeritus archbishop of Milan, whose catecheses in the cathedral of his city drew large crowds of people, to whom he unveiled*



*the treasury of God's Word. His is only one of numerous examples that demonstrate how great a hunger for the Word of God exists among the people. How important it is that this hunger be satisfied! I have always harbored the conviction that if I wish to satisfy this hunger in others I must follow the example of Mary in becoming first of all myself one who listens to the Word of God and meditates on it in my heart".*

I cited this page because I vividly recall some beautiful moments experienced in the Milan Cathedral, particularly in the company of thousands and thousands of young people listening in silence to the word of God. I cited it also by way of honoring the memory of John Paul II, who was kind enough to mention me in this his penultimate book. But with this citation I wish to make the further point that the opportunity we have today to abundantly satisfy the hunger so many people have for the Word of God is also the fruit and the merit of the conciliar document whose fortieth anniversary we are celebrating, namely *Dei Verbum*.

## **2. What were the open questions with respect to Scripture at the time of the Council?**

I limit myself here to a few remarks, sufficient to highlight the topic with which we are concerned. In fact, a cursory review of the published reports of the time readily reveals that there were at least three burning issues in the realm of biblical studies and with reference to the presence of Scripture in the Church.

1. The relationship between Tradition and Scripture. This topic was especially vibrant in the world of Europe and the North, in the context of the dialogue between Protestants and Catholics. At issue was the question of whether the Church derived its dogmas from Sacred Scripture alone or also from an oral tradition containing things not said by Scripture.

The Council of Trent, four centuries earlier, had already discussed the issue and had discarded the formula that had been proposed, namely, that revealed truth is found "*partim in libris scriptis et partim in sine scripto traditionibus*" in favor of a formula that would not pre-judge the issue, that is: revealed truth is found "*in libris scriptis et sine scripto traditionibus*": thus, not *partim* – *partim* but *et* – *et*.

The problem presented itself now in raw form, in the aftermath of heated discussions on the part of recent scholars, Catholic and Protestant. The Council treated the question in some depth. But it is not my task to reconstruct here the history of the discussion. I will mention below only the solution that was ultimately arrived at.

2. The application of the historical critical method to Sacred Scripture and the related problem of the

inerrancy of the sacred books. Some progress had been made with respect to the very rigid doctrine of the past. Identifying literary genres was recognized as a valid procedure, and this thanks to the Encyclical *Divino afflante Spiritu* of 1943. But the question still remained pending, and the whole issue had resulted in a sharp controversy at the end of the 1950s. The primary target of this controversy was the teaching of the Pontifical Biblical Institute, which was accused of not taking into account the traditional truth of the inerrancy of the sacred books. The problem affected not only the interpretation of Scripture, but also the daily relationship of the faithful with the Bible. If the faithful were obligated to a quasi-fundamentalistic interpretation of the sacred books, many of them, especially the more highly educated, would simply have walked away.

3. Another very lively theme, particularly relevant to the topic of this paper, was that of the "biblical movement", which for over fifty years had been favoring a new familiarity with the sacred texts and a more spiritual approach to Scripture, understood as a source of prayer and inspiration for life. But the practices in question were somewhat elitist in their appeal, and had also been the object of suspicion and criticism. It was important to officially recognize what was good in this movement, to regulate this new blossoming of practices, to give them a place in the Church, and where necessary to correct them, giving serious attention to the dangers of deviation that continue to be found today with respect to this reading of the Bible on the part of the laity.

These are then the great themes that stirred the minds of the conciliar Fathers. On the other hand, the concept of revelation, which was later to prove decisive for the shaping of the entire Constitution, was not at issue at the opening of the Council.

## **3. How then, in the context of the Council, did the process of clarification come about with respect to these themes, and especially with respect to the third, that of Sacred Scripture in the life of the Church?**

The preparatory draft on these questions, entrusted to the appropriate commission, was presented to the Fathers on November 14, 1962 under the title: *Constitutio de fontibus revelationis* (Constitution on the Sources of Revelation)".

That first session was stormy. Cardinal Liénart said simply: "*Hoc schema mihi non placet*" (I don't like this draft). Cardinals Frings, Léger, Koenig, Alfrinck, Ritter and Bea would likewise express strong criticisms of the draft. Other Fathers however took the opposite position. It was thus that the conciliar Fathers arrived, with hard work and considerable tension, at the vote of November 20,



where the decision to continue the discussion of the proposed scheme prevailed, to the great displeasure of many. Except that Pope John XXIII intervened with a very wise gesture, insisting that the draft be withdrawn and entrusted to a new commission to be re-written.

Then began a prolonged effort which, through a series of ups and downs, would produce numerous text forms, the last of which was finally accepted on September 22, 1965. But "modi" (modifications) continued to be proposed. They were examined and inserted in the text, which was subjected to a vote on October 20, 1965. And so it was that the Council arrived at the final vote of the following November, which registered 2.344 votes in favor and 6 opposed.

What were the major points clarified by the new draft, to which was given the title of *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*, or *Dei Verbum*, from its opening words, which were inserted thanks to a proposal made in the final discussion (September 1965)? I recall five.

1. The concept of "revelation", which, as I said, was not in question at the beginning of the Council, but which was then clarified gradually in the course of the discussions and the re-writings of the text, till it came to be expressed as it now stands in n. 2 of the Constitution, was no longer spoken of with reference to truths, but primarily with reference to God's self-communication: In his goodness and wisdom God chose to reveal Himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of His will by which through Christ, the Word made flesh, man might in the Holy Spirit have access to the Father and come to share in the divine nature (DV n. 2)". This clarification on the nature of revelation had a positive effect on the entire text, and helped to insure a favorable reception of the document.

2. A broad concept of Tradition. With respect to what had been the usual way of speaking in the past, the Council offered, in the final text of the Constitution, a broad concept of Tradition, which was expressed as follows: The Church, in her teaching, life and worship, perpetuates and hands on to all generations all that she herself is, all that she believes (n. 8). The unity of Tradition and Scripture was thus also affirmed, against any attempt at separation: "Hence there exists a close connection and communication between sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture. For both of them, flowing from the same divine wellspring, in a certain way merge into a unity and tend toward the same end. For Sacred Scripture is the word of God inasmuch as it is consigned to writing under the inspiration of the divine Spirit" (n. 9).

In the following section the relationship between the three concepts: Tradition, Scripture and Word of God is described: "Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture

form one sacred deposit of the Word of God, committed to the Church" (n. 10).

With respect to discussions on the interpretation of Scripture, and especially on the absence of any error in it, the Council proposed a broad concept of inerrancy in its final formulation. The first preparatory scheme had talked about an inerrancy "in qualibet re religiosa et profana". The final text (n. 11) affirms that "the books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching solidly, faithfully and without error that truth which God wanted put into sacred writings for the sake of our salvation". This formulation silenced many empty debates of the past on this issue.

But what interests us most of all here is the work the Council devoted to the importance and centrality of Sacred Scripture in the life of the Church. In its final draft, the document makes its own the fundamental concerns of the biblical movement and promotes a prayerful familiarity of all the faithful with all of Scripture. The Council worked on this theme throughout all the sessions, right up to the last, with continuous re-writings of the text, proposals and last-minute amendments which make the history of this chapter very complex and difficult to describe. I will limit myself to the fundamental points, beginning with the consideration of the place held by Scripture in the Catholic Church at the time of Vatican II.

#### **4. What can be said of the presence of Scripture in the life of the Church at the time of Vatican II?**

The situation up until toward the beginning of the twentieth century was once described with the words of Paul Claudel, who affirmed: "There is an unbounded respect toward Sacred Scripture (on the part of the faithful): it is shown above all by the way people stay away from it!" (cf. *L'Ecriture Sainte*, in *La Vie intellectuelle* 16 [1948] 10). There may be some exaggeration here; it is true, however, that among Catholics, and above all among the laity, a certain distance was indeed maintained with respect to the text of Scripture (even if indirect ways of reaching its contents were many). There are many explanations of this situation, not least of which the fact that until the eighteenth century only a minority of the world's population was literate. But the main reason was that of a certain diffidence of ecclesiastical authorities toward the reading of the Bible on the part of the laity. This diffidence was born primarily in the aftermath of the Protestant Reformation and of other movements in force since the Middle Ages, which promoted direct contact of the laity with Scripture, but in effect divorced its reading from an ecclesial context.

Up until the Middle Ages, in fact, no evidence exists of provisions aimed at limiting access to Scripture, even if the prohibitive cost of manuscripts would have largely



inhibited direct usage of the texts by the faithful. The information we have regarding clear-cut restrictions appears for the first time in the records of a few regional Councils, for example that of Tolosa of 1229, on the occasion of the struggle against the Albigensians and the Council of Oxford of 1408, in the aftermath of Wycliffe. Other prohibitions will follow in England, in France and elsewhere. Paul IV in 1559 and Pius IV in 1564, in promulgating the index of prohibited books, also forbid the printing and the possession of Bibles in the vernacular without a special permission. This meant that many lay people would be practically impeded from access to the entire Bible in their native language. In fact, the practice of printing only the Vulgate Latin version continued. For example, in Italy, after a first Italian translation prior to the Council of Trent, that of 1471 (the so-called Malermi Bible) one had to wait till 1700, that is to the translation of Antonio Martini, to have a Bible translated into Italian for Catholics. In fact, in 1757 a general permission was granted for vernacular editions translated from the Vulgate, provided they were approved by competent authorities and were furnished with notes. The Bible of Martini was based on the same Vulgate Latin version, while the first Catholic translations made from the original texts did not appear in Italy till the first half of the twentieth century.

In contrast, the biblical movement warmly supported a direct contact with the Bible and a prayerful familiarity on the part of all the faithful with the entire text of Scripture, in the language of the people, translated from the original texts. In its most mature forms, the movement wanted this reading to take place in the framework of the tradition of the Church, understood in very much the same sense as *Dei Verbum* was to describe it, that is the totality of what the Church transmits in its life, in its worship, in its prayer and in its teaching. It did not want to be a movement only for a few elites. For this reason it had to face a significant amount of opposition and misunderstanding, which have not altogether disappeared even today.

### 5. What contribution did the Council make to the presence of Scripture in the Church?

Vatican II treats this topic above all in chapter 6 of *Dei Verbum*, which has the title "Sacred Scripture in the Life of the Church". From the start it enunciates a fundamental principle (n. 21): "Like the Christian religion itself, all the preaching of the Church must be nourished and regulated by Sacred Scripture". After this affirmation the chapter applies the principle in question to translations into modern languages and to the need for a profound study of the sacred texts on the part of exegetes. It underlines the importance of Sacred Scripture in theology and finally it recommends the reading of the Bible to all the faithful. Indeed, after having recommended the

reading of Scripture to all clerics, and in the first place to priests, deacons and catechists, it continues as follows (n. 25): "The sacred synod also earnestly and especially urges all the Christian faithful, especially Religious, to learn by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures the 'excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ'". This urgent exhortation to all the faithful, which was fundamental for the biblical movement, was in response to the request of many conciliar Fathers. A pointed statement of Saint Jerome was also added: "For ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ". The Council then recommends that all the faithful "should gladly put themselves in touch with the sacred text itself, whether it be through the liturgy ... or through devotional reading [today it is usually called *lectio divina*, and we will return to this]. The text then goes on to say that "prayer should accompany the reading of Sacred Scripture, so that God and man may talk together; for (and here Saint Ambrose is cited) 'we speak to Him when we pray, we hear Him when we read the divine saying'" (Saint Ambrose, *De officiis ministrorum*, I, 20, 88).

It is a question then of a reading that we could call "spiritual", that is, done under the impulse of the Holy Spirit, thanks to whom "all Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:16). It is a reading that takes its guidance from that Spirit of truth that leads "into all the truth" (Jn 16:13) and that "searches everything even the depths of God" (1 Cor 2:10). It intends then to be a reading done in the Church, in the footprints of the great ecclesial tradition, in the context of all the truths of faith and in communion with the pastors of the Church.

### 6. What are the consequences for the biblical animation of pastoral practice, above all with respect to the *lectio divina* of the faithful?

In my experience as Bishop of Milan for over 22 years I had occasion to witness concretely the fruits of such prayer made on the basis of Scripture, above all as realized in an enormous number of young people and in many adults who found in this familiarity with the Bible the capacity to orientate their lives according to the will of God even in the large modern city and in secularized surroundings.

Many committed members of the faithful and many priests found in the prayerful reading of Scripture a way to insure a vital unity in the context of a life often fragmented and torn apart by a thousand different exigencies, in the midst of which it was essential to find a firm point of reference. In fact, the plan of God presented to us by the Scriptures, which has its highpoint in Jesus Christ, does allow us to unify our lives within the framework of His salvation plan.



Moreover, a prayerful familiarity with the Bible helps us to confront one of the greatest challenges of our time, that of living together as diverse people, not only in terms of our ethnicity but also in terms of our culture, without destroying one another and also without ignoring one another, respecting each other and providing a mutual stimulus to one another toward a greater authenticity in life.

This holds true also for every ecumenical journey and also for the encounter between the great religions, which should lead neither to conflict nor to the erection of fences, but rather should drive sincerely religious men and women to an understanding of the treasures of others and to help them to understand their own, such that everyone is invited to arrive at a greater truth and transparency before God and before his calls.

If I ask myself about the roots of this experience, I find them principally in the fact that before the Word through which "all things were made" and without which "nothing that exists was made" (Jn 1:3) and in which we "have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God" (1 Pet 1:23) we recognize each other in our common origin, in our dignity fundamentally as brothers and sisters, beyond all the further divisions.

The concrete ways in which the biblical animation of pastoral ministry can take place are obviously many. It is a question of leaving room for the creative energy of pastors and of the faithful. I could mention many of these experiences, such as the week of evening meditations in the Cathedral or in the parishes on a character of the Bible or on a biblical book; the catecheses on radio or on television where I spoke in the diocese to an audience of hundreds of thousands of persons. Even the so-called "Cattedra dei non credenti" (Chair of non-believers), which allowed people in search of faith to come together, had its own kind of reference to the text of Scripture.

Here I would like above all to mention the proper *lectio divina* experience, which in a sense is the most fundamental and gives the basic method for the whole animation that follows from it. The Council recommends this kind of *lectio divina* to all the faithful. What is meant is obviously a spiritual and meditative experience that is not strictly exegetical. The idea is to approach the text with a simple explanation, one that captures its fundamental meanings and permanent message and that can challenge the one who reads and meditates and move him to pray on the basis of the text he has before him. In fact the Bible is to be seen not only in its contents and in its affirmations, like a text that says something to someone, but also as though it were a Someone who speaks to the one reading it and stirs in

him a dialogue of faith and of hope, of repentance, of intercession, of self-offering ... Such was the traditional *lectio divina* in the first millennium of the Christian era, like that which appeared as a prevalent method in the biblical homilies of the Fathers of the Church (I think of the biblical explanations of Saint Ambrose in Milan or those of Augustine at Hippo): a reading ordered to an encounter with the Author of the Word, a reading that has the capacity to fashion and to orientate a human life.

Personally I have always tried to make even the most simple among the faithful practice this type of reading of the Bible, without too many methodical complications. It was not by accident that I promoted in the Cathedral at Milan the schools of the Word, which taught thousands of young people to approach the sacred text simply and prayerfully. There are in fact many ways of doing *lectio*, but personally I am convinced that people need to be taught a simple method that can be easily remembered, which I express with the triad: *lectio, meditatio, contemplatio*.

By *lectio* I mean the reading and re-reading of the text before us (ideally, that of the liturgy of the day) seeking to discover its scansion (the structure), the key words, the characters, the actions and their qualifiers, placing it in the context of the biblical book to which the passage belongs and in the context either of the whole of Scripture or of one's own time (we read this text "today"! ). This moment is often neglected because people have the impression that the text is already known, that they may even have read it or heard it read many times before. But the text should be read each time as though for the first time and if it is analyzed in a simple way it will reveal aspects that have thus far remained hidden or implicit. It is substantially a matter of responding to the question: what is this text saying?

By *meditatio* I mean reflection on the message of the text, on the permanent values it conveys to us, on the coordinates of the divine activity it makes known to us. It amounts to a response to the question: what is this text saying to us? What messages and what values does it communicate to us?

By *contemplatio* or *oratio* I mean the most personal moment of the *lectio divina*, that in which I enter into dialogue with the One who is speaking to me through this text and through the whole of Scripture.

It seems evident to me from this description that such an exercise of biblical reading brings everyone back to that Word in which we find our unity and at the same time it causes our hearts to thaw in a way that resembles what happened when the two disciples were listening to the words of Jesus on the road to Emmaus:



"Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" (Lk 24:32).

It is along this line of fervor of heart focused on the Word that it is possible to hope for a renewal of the Church beyond what can be accomplished by discussions and consultations. It is our fervent wish therefore that what Vatican Council II proposed in the *Dei Verbum* be truly implemented as a pastoral method in all Christian communities and with all the faithful – namely, that such a method of meditation and prayer based on Scripture become a practice common to all Christians. This, also because it would constitute an effective antidote to the practical atheism of our society, especially in the West, and a leaven of communion even in relation to the great religions of the East of our planet. This emphatic insistence of the Church on *lectio divina* has continued even after the Council. The *Dei Verbum* was in fact followed by a variety of important official documents which underscored and deepened some aspects of the Constitution. I will recall a few of these: with regard to the interpretation of Scripture (cf. chapter 3 of the Constitution) the document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission entitled *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* of 1993. For the relationship between the two Testaments (cf. chapters 3 and 4) the document of the same Biblical Commission *The Jewish People and their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible* of 2001.

Then on numerous occasions the point has been emphasized that Sacred Scripture must have the central place that is its due in the life of the Church. In this connection exhortations to *lectio divina* have continued to multiply. The instruction of the Pontifical Biblical Commission of 1993 spoke of *lectio* as of a prayer that is born of a reading of the Bible under the action of the Holy Spirit. In the programmatic document for the third millennium *Novo Millennio Ineunte* the Pope underscores the necessity (n. 39) "that the hearing of the Word become a vital encounter, in the ancient and still valid tradition of *lectio divina*, which enables us to draw from the biblical text the living word that challenges, orientates and forms our lives." We would then have to add the document of the Congregation for the consecrated life (*Ripartire da Cristo*) and other similar documents of the various Roman Congregations and the documents of the Episcopal Conferences of the various countries (for example the C.E.I.). This shows then to what extent even at the official level the footprints left on the ground of the Church by the *Dei Verbum* have continued to flourish.

We should also mention those aspects that have received more in depth consideration by theologians and exegetes. I recall in particular the theme of the relationship between revelation as divine communication

and Scripture. On this topic, a theologian expressed himself in a recent work as follows: "The impression of a certain abstraction that can result today from an integral reading of the *Dei Verbum* ... derives from the fact that chapter 6 on 'Sacred Scripture in the Life of the Church' does not structure the whole of the Constitution or even really the concept of revelation in a profound way. And nevertheless it is precisely in this chapter that the pastoral principle assigned as programmatic for the Council by John XXIII is arrived at. Here we encounter one of the principal problems of the reception of the Council, which must take into account the fact that this principle was not maintained in its full depth in all the documents and that, because of their delayed promulgation, some fundamental and very controversial texts, such as the *Dei Verbum*, could not sufficiently influence the writing of the ecclesiological documents previously adopted". (Christof Theobald, *Il Regno*, 2004, p. 790)

This is why new areas of research are opening up even forty years after the publication of the *Dei Verbum*, in view of a more organic penetration of the themes evoked by this conciliar text and above all in view of a pastoral action that would truly bring out the primacy of Scripture in the daily lives of the faithful, in the parishes and in the communities. The future of the Constitution is therefore in our hands, but above all in the hands of the Holy Spirit who, having guided the conciliar Fathers over a delicate and difficult terrain, will also direct us all today and tomorrow to nourish ourselves on the Word and to conform our lives to it.

(Transl.: L. Maluf)



The Catholic Biblical Federation (CBF) is a world-wide association of Catholic organizations committed to the ministry of the Word of God. At the present time, the CBF membership includes 92 full members and 231 associate members coming from a total of 127 countries.

The activities of these organizations include the preparation of Catholic and interconfessional Bible translations, the propagation of Bibles and in general the promotion of a deeper understanding of Holy Scripture.

The CBF promotes the biblical pastoral activities of these organizations, provides a forum for the world-wide sharing of experiences in this field, searches for new ways of bringing the joy of God's Word to the faithful throughout the world. It seeks collaboration with the representatives of biblical scholarship as well as with Bible Societies of various confessions.

In particular, the CBF works towards the promotion of the reading of the Bible within the context of concrete life situations and the training of ministers of the Word in this direction.

At the beginning of the third millennium Holy Scripture can be viewed as the great textbook of humanity. Especially in times like this the reading of the Bible not only helps the Christian community to grow in faith and love, but it can and should also offer to the whole world those words of brotherhood and of human wisdom that it so desperately needs. This is the great challenge that the Catholic Biblical Federation sets for itself.

“ The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord, since, especially in the sacred liturgy, she unceasingly receives and offers to the faithful the bread of life from the table both of God’s word and of Christ’s body. She has always maintained them, and continues to do so, together with sacred tradition, as the supreme rule of faith, since, as inspired by God and committed once and for all to writing, they impart the word of God Himself without change, and make the voice of the Holy Spirit resound in the words of the prophets and Apostles. Therefore, like the Christian religion itself, all the preaching of the Church must be nourished and regulated by Sacred Scripture. ”

*Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation Dei Verbum, paragraph 21*



The Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum*, whose drafting I witnessed in person, taking part as a young theologian in the lively discussions that accompanied it, opens with an expression of profound significance: “*Dei Verbum religiose audiens et fideliter proclamans, Sacrosancta Synodus ...*”.

By employing this expression, the Council indicates an aspect of the Church that qualifies it in its essence: it is a community that listens to and proclaims the Word of God. The Church does not live from itself but from the Gospel, and from the Gospel it draws direction for its journey ever and anew. This is a qualifying note that all Christians should accept and apply to themselves: only those who adopt the position of listeners to the Word can then become its announcers. Such persons should not in fact be teaching their own wisdom, but the wisdom of God, which often appears as foolishness to the eyes of the world (cf. 1 Cor 1:23).

*Pope Benedict XVI to the participants of the International Dei Verbum Congress on September 16, 2005*