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Contents

Editorial

Thomas P. Osborne

"... The ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat" (Gen 8:4) 2

Forum

Father Mark Sheridan, osb

The Bible as read by the Fathers of the Church 3

Prof. Dr. Thomas Söding

Exegesis as Theology, Doing Theology as Exegesis:
A Difficult but Necessary Alliance 15

Prof. Dr. Florian Wilk

Hermeneutics of the Bible from a Protestant Perspective 23

Projects and Experiences

Sr. Anna Damas SSPS

Experiences with Bibliodrama in Papua-New Guinea 34

Federation News

CBF Message to the Holy Father on the Occasion of His Election to the Papacy 36

Pope Francis' Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, N. 174-175 37

Message of the Executive Committee of the Catholic Biblical Federation 38

The CBF welcomes a new associate member from Peru! 48

New Subregional Coordinators for Central Europe and Southern and Western Europe 48

Father Jan Jacek Stefanów, SVD appointed new CBF General Secretary 49

Biblical Pastoral Publications

50

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Editorial

“... The ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat” (Gen 8:4)

Two and a half years after the Extraordinary Plenary Assembly held in Ariccia in June 2011, it is time to take stock of situation of the Catholic Biblical Federation. In this context, the story of the great flood and of Noah's ark might accompany and guide our reflection. A period of storm and turmoil in the life of the Federation has required that the CBF reflect on its origins and its mission, that it direct its efforts to saving the essentials and ensuring the protection of the necessary resources for survival and a renewed deployment. What are the essential elements that need to be preserved in the ark and rekindled in the offering after the reappearance of dry land? Above all, the Word of God itself which unites us beyond all differences and conflicts that might divide us. Then, our mutual trust, the humble confidence in each other that allows the CBF members, organs and officers to revitalize their common search for viable cooperation in the ministry of the Word. This can be rekindled only through renewed and respectful communication and through a fraternal commitment in solidarity with the common and oh so diverse efforts of all of us.



*Noah's ark on Mt. Ararat
Detail of the Portal of the Cathedral in Speyer*

The past year has produced much fruit in this regard. The life on the regional and subregional levels has grown in intensity. The Latin Ameri-

can congress in Peru in August, the BICAM triennial plenary assembly in Malawi in September, the subregional meetings in Warsaw in September and in Maynooth near Dublin, with the active presence of a delegate of the General Secretariat, witness to the renewed spirit of communication and solidarity within the Federation. The meeting of the Executive Committee in Rome in June/July and the feverish activity of the Administrative Board during the entire year have helped to restore the confidence of the funding agencies and of many member organizations and have allowed the elaboration of ambitious projects for the life of the Federation. The joint UBS-CBF meeting in Rome in October is helping to reestablish a basis for constructive partnership in biblical pastoral ministry. The revision of the CBF constitution is advancing well and the process of recruiting a full time General Secretary has reached a successful conclusion. We are happy to announce that Fr. Jan Stefanów svd, whom many of you know, shall assume this function in January 2014. Yes, the waters are receding, the ark has found a resting place and its doors shall soon be opened...

Before concluding my mandate as acting general secretary, I should like to explicitly thank the members of the Executive Committee and of the Administrative Boards with whom I have had the honor of working intensively during the past three years. Many CBF members and coordinators and the Benedictine community of Sankt Ottilien have been a continuing source of support and encouragement during periods of rough waters which threatened to submerge the fragile ark. My heartfelt gratitude goes in particular to the CBF President, Archbishop Paglia, and to the former treasurer, Prof. Simler, both of whom have contributed immeasurably to the survival of the CBF, even though their commitment and efforts did not always receive the recognition which they truly deserved.

Numerous challenges confront the Federation in the months and years to come in responding to its global task of sharing God's Word with all men and women of good will. The upcoming plenary assembly scheduled now for June 18-23, 2015 at Nemi near Rome will give the CBF the opportunity to celebrate the 50th anniversary of its birthright and look back on its ministry to God's Word. May all of us unite our forces, together with the CBF organs and officers and in particular with the new General Secretary, in responding to these challenges. And may God bless us and strengthen us as we courageously leave the ark, conscious of our responsibility as stewards of his good news for the world.

*Prof. Thomas P. Osborne
Acting General Secretary*

Forum

The Bible as Read by the Fathers of the Church**FR. MARK SHERIDAN, OSB***The beginnings*

In seeking to understand patristic interpretation, it is important to keep in mind how different their intellectual world was from ours. From our point of view, theirs was a very foreshortened view of the human past. At the beginning of his great work, *The Jewish Antiquities*, originally published in A.D. 93-94, the Jewish author Flavius Josephus notes that the sacred Scriptures "embrace the history of five thousand years" and that "our lawgiver," that is, Moses, "was born two thousand years ago, to which ancient date the poets never ventured to refer even the birth of their gods, much less the actions or the laws of mortals."¹ This chronological vision was destined to endure for well over another 1500 years. In the last 500 years tools of critical analysis have been developed, which were unavailable to ancient authors, and this has led to a process of historicization. There has been an irreversible development of historical consciousness, or growth of awareness of the process of development in history, that makes it impossible to apply many of the ancient presuppositions and rules today. But the world of ancient biblical interpretation was quite coherent within itself.

In the first 150 years after the Resurrection it is difficult to speak of a systematic or even consistent Christian approach to the Scriptures. We find a marked tendency to treat them as oracles and they were used selectively to the extent that they could provide material to interpret the figure of Jesus Christ or for moral exhortation. The limits of what would later be called the canon of Scripture were uncertain. At the beginning of course there were no specifically Christian Scriptures, only the law, the prophets and the other writings. The first Christian author, Paul of Tarsus, cites and alludes to the Law, many of the prophets, the psalms and other writings and his interpretations contributed decisively to the way in which the Scriptures would be read in the patristic period.²

By the end of this period in the last quarter of the second century, the situation was quite different. There were now Christian Scriptures recognized as such, even though some works were not accepted by all, and a growing body of other writings such as the Letter of Barnabas, the writings of Justin and then of Irenaeus, to cite but a few, in which there was extensive interpretation of what would be called the "old" Scriptures. The need to combat Marcion's innovations and the various Gnostic interpretations had contributed decisively to the formation of the new literature.

¹ *Jewish Antiquities* I,3 (Flavius Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, ed. H. St. J. Thackeray; Loeb Classical Library 242; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998 [1930]), pp. 7-9. Josephus wrote in Greek at Rome where he had taken the name Flavius in honor of his royal patrons, the Flavian emperors Vespasian and Titus. Josephus modeled the title of his work on an earlier work by Dionysius of Halicarnassus in 7 B.C. entitled *Roman Antiquities*. His purpose in doing so was certainly to stress the greater antiquity of Jewish history stretching, as it did in the Scriptures, back to creation. By way of comparison, however, one may note that Plato in the *Timaeus* (23E) has the history of Athens stretch back at least nine thousand years.

² See E. E. Ellis, *Paul's Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, 1981) and R. B. Hays, *The Conversion of the Imagination* (Grand Rapids 2005).

Clement of Alexandria

With Clement of Alexandria we find the first extensive theoretical approach to the nature of the Scriptures. For Clement, the Scriptures, like all sacred texts, are by their nature enigmatic.³ The Word of God is not in the first place the written Scriptures, but the divine Logos. It is he who by becoming himself the gospel "breaks the mystic silence of the prophetic enigmas."⁴ Thus Christ, the Word of God, is the hermeneutical key for all of the written Scriptures. The Logos acts in fact as hierophant who initiates his own into the truly sacred mysteries of the Father, an exegetical activity, as the divine mysteries are hidden in the Scriptures.⁵ The Scriptures must also be interpreted in a manner that is fitting to divinity, *theoprepeia*, a concept to which we shall return later. For Clement this *theoprepeia* has been is to be understood in terms of the divine *philanthropia*, God's love for the human race, revealed by the Logos.⁶

Origen of Alexandria

Origen of Alexandria, however, is by far the most important figure in the development of the patristic understanding of Scripture. His influence on later commentators is immeasurable. He is the first to produce running commentaries on most of the books of the Old and New Testament; the literary forms he employed, homilies following *lectio continua* of books read in the liturgy, formal commentaries (*tomoi*) and answers to disputed questions, were imitated by later writers in both the east and the west for many centuries. He was also the first to compose a formal treatise on the nature of the Scriptures and the rules to be employed in interpretation in the fourth book of his great work known as *Peri Archon* or *De Principiis*.

For Origen as for Clement, the word of God in the fullest sense is the divine Logos, the incarnate Son of God.⁷ However, the question of the unity of the Scriptures was a major concern for Origen as a result of the Gnostic and Marcionite challenge. Consequently he stresses that the entire Scriptures are the word of Christ and Christ is the key to understanding all of them. By "words of Christ" he means not only those words which formed his teaching after the incarnation, but also Moses and the prophets who were filled with the spirit of Christ. For it is the same Word of God that is found in the Scriptures before the Incarnation as the Word Incarnate⁸. The entire Scriptures are revelation of Christ, whether the Old Testament (the law and the prophets) or the New Testament (the gospel and the apostles). Christ himself, since he is the Logos, is the word of God and consequently Christ and the Scriptures are to be identified. Scripture is the perennial incarnation of the Logos. Thus Origen can identify the treasure hidden in the field (Matt 13:44) with both Christ and with Scripture⁹ and likewise compares the Word of God that is clothed with flesh through Mary with the Scripture that is covered with the veil of the literal sense.¹⁰ Only through a searching study of the Scriptures can we know Christ. The same concern for knowing Christ in the Scriptures and for the significance of every detail is reflected Origen's view that to preach the word of God is to preach Christ and is a process of revelation realized in the understanding created in the individual mind of the listener. The word preached and received in the heart and understanding of the individual constructs the tabernacle in which the

³ *Stromata* V, 4-10.

⁴ Prot 1.10.1. See Sean Keough, *Exegesis Worthy of God: The Development of Biblical Interpretation in Alexandria*, Diss. University of St. Michaels' College (Toronto 2007) pp. 139-140.

⁵ Prot 12.120.1.

⁶ Strom 7.1.3.6ff; Keough, p. 155-156.

⁷ M. Sheridan, "Old Testament," "Scripture" *The Westminster handbook to Origen* (ed. John Anthony McGuckin; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004) pp. 159-162, 197-201.

⁸ PArch 1, praef. 1; HomIs 1:5; SerMt 28:54.119; FragmJn 46.

⁹ ComMt 10,6.

¹⁰ HomLev 1,1.

Lord lives. The reception of the details of the word may be compared to the reception of the body of the Lord in the Eucharist.¹¹

Origen's approach to the Scriptures depends on certain presuppositions about their nature, the first and most important of which is that the text of Scripture is "divine writing," not human. Through an examination of the fulfillment of the "oracles" of Christ (Matt 24:14; 7:22) and of other prophetic utterances in the Scriptures (Gen 49:10; Hos 3:4), Origen demonstrates the divine nature of the Scriptures or, as he says, that they are "divine writings".¹² Origen accepts the common doctrine that the Holy Spirit inspired all the authors of Scripture, whether Moses or the Apostles, to such an extent that the Holy Spirit is to be considered the true author of the sacred texts.¹³ The corollary of this is that "the words which are believed by us to be from God are not the compositions of men,"¹⁴ a conclusion that has important consequences for the concept of "Scripture" and its interpretation. The same idea is restated further on: "the sacred books are not the works of men ... they were composed and have come down to us as a result of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit by the will of the Father of the universe through Jesus Christ".¹⁵

Building on the basic principle that Scripture contains an esoteric or cryptic sense,¹⁶ an assumption he shared with virtually all ancient interpreters, Origen cites Prov 22:20-21 to justify the idea of a threefold sense in the Scriptures, an idea supported also by comparison with the human composite of body, soul and spirit (1 Thes 5:23).¹⁷ This theoretical foundation allowed Origen to perceive at least two spiritual senses hidden beneath the veil of the letter, which also correspond to different degrees of spiritual initiation or progress: beginners, advanced and perfect (cf. 1 Cor 2:6), a progression found already in Philo.¹⁸ This progression can also be seen to correspond to the division of the law, the prophets and the gospel.¹⁹

Another basic assumption Origen shared with other ancient interpreters was that of the actuality of the Scriptures. He often cites 1 Cor 10, especially verses 6 and 11, to emphasize that the Scriptures were written "for us," and reach their fulfillment in the present time (the time of the church), which is also understood as the end of the ages. The text is often cited as an introduction to moral exhortation, which is indeed the original Pauline context of 1 Cor 10:1-11. Commenting on the expression "by mud and bricks" (Exod 1:14) Origen states: "These words were not written to instruct us in history, nor must we think that the divine books narrate the acts of the Egyptians. What has been written has been written for our instruction and admonition" and, in dealing with the command of the king of Egypt to the midwives to kill the male children of the Israelites, he observes that we "have learned that all things which are written are written not to relate ancient history, but for our discipline and use".²⁰ To this general idea of the actuality of the scriptures Paul had added the concept of the two ages (1 Cor 10:11) which considerably facilitates the possibility of allegorical comparisons between the two ages, then and now, such as is found in 1 Cor 10:1-11 and Gal 4:21-24. Since the text is "for us," it must also have a meaning that is "useful" to us, a criterion of interpretation that had already been developed by Philo and was suggested also by the affirmation that "all Scripture is useful"

¹¹ HomEx 13,3.

¹² theiōn grammaton (PArch 4,1,2-3).

¹³ PArch 1, praef. 4; PArch 1,3,1; 4,2,7; 4,3,14; CCels 3,3; 5,60; ComMt 14,4; HomGn 7,1; HomEx 2,1; HomNum 1,1; 2,1; HomJos 8,6; Hom 1R (1S) 5,4.

¹⁴ anthrōpōn suggrammata (PArch 4,1,6).

¹⁵ PArch 4,2,2.

¹⁶ PArch 1, praef. 8; 4,2,2.

¹⁷ PArch 4,2,4; HomNum 9,7; HomLev 5,1. This more organic concept of Scripture had been developed earlier by Philo of Alexandria, who had compared the Scriptures to a living being with body and soul (*De vita contemplativa* 78)

¹⁸ cf. also HomJos 6,1; ComMt 12,32.

¹⁹ HomLev 1,4.

²⁰ HomEx 1,5; other texts where Origen cites 1 Cor 10:6,11 include: HomEx 7,4; HomJos 5,2; HomJud 2,3; HomJer 12,3; 19,15; HomEz 12,2.

(2 Tim 3:16).²¹ "Useful" generally means that which is helpful for moral or spiritual nourishment.²²

Another presupposition about the nature of the text, which also becomes a criterion of interpretation, is that its real meaning must be "worthy of the divine majesty".²³ In this phrase we can perceive an ancient idea that goes back to the philosopher Xenophanes, an idea that had been used as a hermeneutical tool in the interpretation of Homer and then later by Philo in the interpretation of the Law of Moses where its most characteristic expression is found in the word *theoprepēs* meaning "fitting" or "appropriate" to God. The concept is formulated by Origen also in the context of the controversial principle of the missing literal sense (*defectus litterae*). He explains that certain stumbling-blocks and impossibilities have been inserted in the law and the history "in order that we may not be completely drawn away by the sheer attractiveness of the language, and so either reject the true doctrines absolutely, on the ground that we learn from the scriptures nothing worthy of God, or else by never moving away from the letter fail to learn anything of the more divine element." The more skillful and inquiring readers may thus "gain a sound conviction of the necessity of seeking in such instances a meaning worthy of God".²⁴ This principle as well as the accompanying ideas of illogical (*alogon*) and impossible (*adunaton*) things inserted into the text by the divine author in order to incite the reader to seek a suitable meaning are already used extensively by Philo of Alexandria.

These presuppositions produce a paradoxical situation: the text on the literal level may not be worthy of God, but, when it is given a spiritual interpretation, it can be seen to be divine and, viewed as a divine composition, it is superior to all other human texts. Origen remarks: "And he who approaches the prophetic words with care and attention will feel from his very reading a trace of their divine inspiration (*to entheon*) and will be convinced by his own feelings that the words which are believed by us to be from God are not the compositions of men." The reader is able to perceive the inspired nature (*to entheon*) of the Scripture through a kind of mystical transport or "enthusiasm" (*enthusiasmos*). It may be possible to perceive this even on the level of the literal text, but certainly not in the literal level of many or most texts of the Old Testament, for Origen says explicitly that it was not possible before the advent of Christ. What is perceived then is not the literal text but the "spiritual nature" or the "light" contained within the Law of Moses.²⁵



Moses and the Tablets of the Law
Detail of the Portal of the Cathedral in Speyer

²¹ See Hom 1R(1S) 5,2; PArch 4,1,7; 4,2,6; HomNum 27,1.

²² See M. Sheridan, "The Concept of the 'Useful' as an Exegetical Tool in Patristic Exegesis", *Studia Patristica*, Vol. XXXIX. *Papers presented at the Fourteenth International Conference on Patristic Studies held in Oxford 2003* (ed. F. Young, M. Edwards, P. Parvis; Leuven: Peeters, 2006) pp. 253-257.

²³ HomLev 7,5.

²⁴ PArch 4,2,9.

²⁵ PArch 4,1,6; see also ComJn 1,30 [33,205]; CCels 6,5.



"Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them" (Gen 15:5)
Detail from the Portal of the Cathedral in Speyer

Another consequence of the idea of the divine, not human, composition of Scripture is that God is the author of the text even in (what a modern writer might consider) its most insignificant details. Commenting on Gen 22:1 where God calls out "Abraham, Abraham," Origen exhorts his congregation, "Observe each detail which has been written. For, if one knows how to dig into the depth, he will find a treasure in the details, and perhaps also, the precious jewels of the mysteries lie hidden where they are not esteemed".²⁶ The phrase "a treasure in the details" could be taken as emblematic for a certain understanding of the nature of the biblical text itself. In this particular case Origen goes on to explain that nowhere had God ever called Abraham by the name Abram nor had he ever said "Abram, Abram." The reason why God never called Abraham by the name Abram is that he could not call him by a name that was to be abolished, but only by the name that he himself gave, the name that means "I have made you a father of many nations" (Gen 17:5). Similar details such as "the high land" (Gen 22:2 LXX), "the third day" (Gen 22:3) serve as a springboard for spiritual or Christological interpretations.²⁷ Thus details are given a high significance that they did not have in the original context of the narrative of the sacrifice of Isaac. This procedure may even run counter to the normal rules of rhetoric as in the case of Origen's interpretation of "the hand of Moses and Aaron" (Num 33:1 LXX) to represent two aspects of the spiritual life, the practical and the contemplative, inseparably united (one hand) even

²⁶ HomGn 8:1.

²⁷ HomGn 8, 3-4.

though this is a clear case of synecdoche (use of singular for plural), a well-known figure of speech.²⁸ Such procedures are possible because of the basic conception of the text as an oracular, encoded text, with an esoteric meaning, even if the text itself is public and widely diffused.

A result of this conception of the text is the devaluation of the historical or narrative character of the text. In another example of attention to details, Origen observes that the expressions "to go up" and "to go down" (Gen 13:1) are never employed in such a way that "anyone said to have gone down to an holy place nor is anyone related to have gone up to a blameworthy place." This demonstrates that Scripture was composed with care (attention to details) and not "in illiterate and uncultivated language," because Scripture is devoted not "so much to historical narratives as to things and ideas which are mystical".²⁹ The contrast between history and mystery, found many times in Origen, is part of his inheritance from Philo³⁰ and has its roots in the Greek view that neither history nor natural science can provide the truth that is really useful. What is really useful is perennially valid, whereas history is contingent and particular. Origen's Homily 27 on Numbers is an excellent example where the narrative of Israel's movements in the desert is made to reveal mystical truths about the economy of salvation and/or the journey of the soul. This means "seeking out the mysteries of the Scriptures with attentive exertions",³¹ that is, deciphering the letter in order to find the spiritual content. The term mystery had been employed extensively by Paul to indicate God's plan or dispensation revealed in Jesus Christ. Origen of course knows and cites these passages from Paul, but the idea of Scripture itself as containing or covering mysteries had already been developed extensively by Philo to whom, as already noted, Origen is deeply indebted.

In practice the meaning that is useful for us and fitting to God is often achieved through recourse to the principle of interpreting the Scriptures by means of the Scriptures, a principle of interpretation already developed in the interpretation of Homer and extensively employed by Philo of Alexandria. Origen uses the Pauline phrase "comparing spiritual things with spiritual things" (1 Cor 2:13) to legitimate the procedure,³² but he also sees the practice as a response to Jesus' command to "search the Scriptures" (Jn 5:39).³³ He relates a simile that he heard from a rabbi in which the Scriptures are compared to a house with a large number of locked rooms in which the keys have been mixed up and dispersed. We are able to understand obscure passages of Scripture when we take as a point of departure a similar passage from another portion of Scripture, because "the principle of interpretation has been dispersed among them".³⁴ For example, to explain Cant 2:9, in which the beloved is compared to a gazelle or young stag, Origen assembles all references to these animals in other books of Scripture.³⁵ This procedure of explaining Scripture by Scripture is based on the fundamental premise that the Holy Spirit is the true author of the whole Bible, already mentioned above, and that all that is written are words of the same God.³⁶

Later Patristic Commentators

These principles and presuppositions became the common heritage of later patristic commentators including Eusebius, Didymus, Cyrill, Ambrose and Augustine, to name but a few. In the second half of the fourth century there developed an ideological split between Alexandria and Antioch led by Diodorus of Tarsus, the teacher of both John Chrysostom and Theodore of Mopsuestia, who introduced a distinction between *theoria* and *allegoria*, a distinction previously

²⁸ HomNum 27,6.

²⁹ HomGn 15,1.

³⁰ E.g. Somn. 1,52-58; Cher. 42-49.

³¹ HomNum 27,8.

³² HomGn 2,6.

³³ PArch 4, 3,5.

³⁴ Philoc 2,3.

³⁵ ComCt 3.

³⁶ HomEz 1,4.

unknown in the exegetical tradition. According to Diodorus, allegory was equivalent to denial of the historical sense of the Scriptures, whereas *theoria* was a higher sense built on the foundation of the literal sense. Referring to Paul's use of the term allegory, he wrote: "Even the apostle did not discard history at any point although he could introduce *theoria* and call it allegory [cf. Gal. 4:28]. He was not ignorant of the term but was teaching us that, if the term "allegory" is judged by its conceptual content, it must be taken in the sense of *theoria*, not violating in any way the nature of the historical substance."³⁷ A little later John Chrysostom in his Commentary on Galatians indicated somewhat anachronistically that Paul had used the word allegory improperly for what is actually a prefiguration or *typos*.³⁸ Such a distinction cannot be found in the earlier tradition and should not obscure the fact that all ancient interpreters were agreed that the Scriptures had a hidden, that is, not literal, meaning, whether they called it higher or deeper.



The Tower of Babel (Gen 11:1-9)
Detail from the Portal of the Cathedral in Speyer

This belief is revealed also in their use of a common terminology to indicate such a meaning, the Greek word *ainittetai*, which means to hint or indicate obscurely. Its root is the same as the word *enigma*, defined by some in antiquity as particularly obscure allegory. The word was employed first in Homeric exegesis and precisely to indicate an allegorical meaning. In a manual of interpretation from the first century the writer states: "Homer, we discover is much the same in both epics, not telling disreputable tales of the gods, but giving enigmatic hints (*ainittomenon*) by means of the technique we have been studying."³⁹ The "hints" are generally to philosophical

³⁷ Diodore of Tarsus, *Commentary on the Psalms 1-51*, Preface.

³⁸ John Chrysostom, *Commentary on the Letter to the Galatians*, IV, 3-4.

³⁹ Donald A. Russell and David Konstan, *Heraclitus: Homeric Problems* (Writings from the Greco-Roman World 14; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005) p. 9. See also pp. 69-71, (ch. 39, 6, 3).

allegories. The same terminology can be found in Philo, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Eusebius, Didymus, Cyrill of Alexandria and the Antiochenes, Diodore, Chrysostom, Theodore and Theodoret. Thus, in commenting on Psalm 2:2 "The kings of the earth presented themselves, and the rulers came together in concert," Diodore has no difficulty in saying that the text is hinting at Herod and Pilate. Similarly, in explaining verse 8 of Psalm 30: "I shall cry to you, Lord, and make my petition to my God," Diodore says that David is hinting at the Father and the Son. Commenting on the phrase "Let them have control over the fishes of the sea" in Gen 1:26, John Chrysostom writes: "Evidently he is already revealing to us at this point some mystery lying hidden. Who are to have control? Quite clearly he has spoken this way to hint at the formation of woman. Do you see how there is nothing in Sacred Scripture which is contained there idly or to no purpose? Instead, even the chance word has treasure stored up in it."⁴⁰ The difference in basic assumptions about the nature of Scripture between Origen and Chrysostom is not great.

Much of the content that patristic commentators found in texts of the Old Testament was Christological or at least the texts were read in the light of the New Testament ones. However, there is another source for content that deserves mention, the Greek philosophical tradition. The latter enters into the tradition of Scriptural interpretation in a massive way with Philo of Alexandria, who described Moses as a philosopher and king, a combination clearly reminiscent of Plato.⁴¹ From now on the best of the philosophical tradition will be found in Sacred Scripture itself and transmitted through exegesis, chiefly of the allegorical type. This take-over, or absorption of philosophy into the interpretation of Scripture was rendered theoretically possible through the notion that Moses had preceded historically all the Greek philosophers, who had actually "borrowed" or found their valid teachings in the Jewish Scriptures. This idea can be found already in several second century Jewish writers such as Eupolemus, Pseudo-Eupolemus, Artapanes, and Aristobulus.⁴² The idea that Moses preceded and is the font of the philosophers is in turn a transposition of the idea that Homer was the source of the teachings of the philosophers, an idea already used to justify a philosophical exegesis of Homer.⁴³ Philo is fully aware of the idea of the "theft" of the Greeks.⁴⁴ This notion is repeated by early Christian writers such as Justin Martyr and Clement of Alexandria.⁴⁵

As is well known, much of Philo's thought was taken over by Origen, but with some significant changes. For Origen, it is not Moses but Solomon who is the philosopher, although he does not give him this title. One reason for this switch is, perhaps, due to the Pauline identification of Moses with the text of the Law in 2 Corinthians, where the face of Moses is said to be covered by a veil. In any case, according to Origen, Solomon is the author of three books, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Canticle, which represent "three general disciplines by which one attains

⁴⁰ Joannes Chrysostomus, *In Genesim (homiliae 1-67)*, Scr. Eccl.{2062.112} (A.D. 4-5), vol. 53, p. 85 line 37. St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis 1-17*, trad. R. C. Hill, Washington, DC: CUA Press, 1986.

⁴¹ ⁴¹ Philo, *De vita Mos.*, 2,2, (Plato, Republic, Book VII, 473c).

⁴² See Arthur J. Droge, *Homer or Moses?* (Hermeneutische Untersuchungen zur Theologie 26; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1989) pp. 14- 35 and John M.G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE - 117 CE)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 125-158.

⁴³ See in general F. Buffière, *Les mythes d'Homère et la pensée grecque* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1956) and more recently Luc Brisson, *How Philosophers Saved Myths. Allegorical Interpretation and Classical Mythology* (trans. by Catharine Tihanyi; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004). As the first century manual by Heraclitus states it: "As the originator of all wisdom, Homer has, by using allegory, passed down to his successors the power of drawing from him, piece by piece, all the philosophy he was the first to discover." (34.8). See Donald A. Russell and David Konstan, *Heraclitus: Homeric Problems* (Writings from the Greco-Roman World 14; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005) pp. 62-63.

⁴⁴ See Claudio Moreschini, *Storia della filosofia patristica* (Letteratura cristiana antica; Brescia: Morcelliana, 2004) p. 68. The idea is found, for example, in *De Somniis* II, 244; *De Mutat. Nom.* 167-168; *Quis Heres* 213-214.

⁴⁵ Justin Martyr, *Apology* 1,59-60; Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* I,150, 1-4; II,100,3-4; V,29,3-6.

knowledge of the universe.”⁴⁶ These, he says, correspond to what the Greeks call ethics, physics and epoptics, which we can call moral, natural, and contemplative.⁴⁷ Origen opines that in fact the Greeks took these ideas from Solomon, since he lived long before them and gave these teachings through the Spirit of God. The teaching is called “divine philosophy” and the three books of Solomon represent also three stages in the spiritual life, the purification of the soul, the discernment of natural things, and the contemplation of the Godhead. Origen also identifies this triple form of “divine philosophy” with the three patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Abraham expounds moral philosophy through his obedience. Isaac holds the place of natural philosophy, since he dug wells and explored the depths of things, while Jacob receives the subject of contemplation, “since he was named Israel because of the contemplation of divine things.”⁴⁸ This represents a variation on an interpretation of the patriarchs already developed by Philo. In this framework it is possible for Origen to make use of philosophical materials in expounding the books of Solomon, because what is of value in the philosophical tradition comes from Solomon anyway. On the whole Origen is less positive about the philosophical heritage than Philo and his Christian predecessors (Justin, Athenagoras, Clement) and more concerned about the error found in it.⁴⁹ However, he does use the word “philosophise” to indicate the allegorical interpretation of the Scriptures.⁵⁰ Later Christian writers continued to make use of philosophical categories to expound the content of Scripture. Thus, Ambrose, at the beginning of his explanation of Psalm 36, can make the following programmatic statement:

All Scripture is divine, whether natural, whether mystical, whether moral. In the Book of Genesis you have natural history; there you will find how heaven and earth were made, the sea, the land, and how this world of ours was put together. Mystical matters you will find in the Book of Leviticus; contained there is the whole mystery of priesthood. Morals are treated in Deuteronomy; within its pages human life is shaped in accordance with the precepts of the Law. Hence it is that out of the multitude of books written by Solomon, it would seem that three have been preserved: Ecclesiastes, which speaks of things that are natural; the Song of Songs which is mystical; and Proverbs which is moral.⁵¹

Ambrose goes on to explain that these three categories are also found in the book of Psalms, which is to be considered as a single work. The Psalter teaches about nature, about angels and powers, about the sun, the moon and the stars. It also teaches about mystical things, that is hidden things, which include prophecies about the coming of the Son of God, his death and resurrection, and the future transformation of all things. In other words it teaches about the economy of salvation and eschatology. Finally it teaches about morals, about virtues, vices, and the healing of the soul.⁵² Ambrose asserts that this Psalm (36) in particular abounds in moral teaching (*ethica*). We shall see that the term *ethica* is an important clue to tracing the origin of this conception.⁵³

⁴⁶ English translation from Rowan A. Greer, Origen. *An Exhortation to Martyrdom, Prayer, First Principles: Book IV, Prologue to the Commentary on the Song of Songs, Homily XXVII on Numbers* (Translation and introduction by Rowan A. Greer; Preface by Hans Urs von Balthasar; New York: Paulist Press, 1979) p. 231.

⁴⁷ In Cant. Cant., Prolog.: “Generales disciplinae. . . tres sunt quas Graeci ethicam, physicam, enopticen appellaverunt; has nos dicere possumus moralem, naturalem, inspectivam.” The final phrase is obviously the comment of Rufinus. *Origenes Werke* VIII, p. 75, l.6 (GCS; ed. W.A. Baehrens; Leipzig 1925). For “enopticen” read “epopticen”. See Origen, *Commentaire sur le Cantique des Cantiques* (SC 375-376; introduction, traduction et notes par Luc Brésard et Henri Couzel; avec la collaboration de Marcel Borret; Paris: Cerf, 1991-1992) Vol. 1:129-131, Vol. 2: 755.

⁴⁸ Greer, *Origen*, pp. 233-235.

⁴⁹ Malingrey, ‘*PHILOSOPHIA*’, pp.163-169.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 174. *Contra Celsum*, V, 58 (II, 61, 16-17).

⁵¹ Saint Ambrose, *Commentary on Twelve Psalms* (trans. Ide M. Ni Riain; Dublin: Halcyon Press, 2000) p. 53.

⁵² CSEL 64: *Sancti Ambrosii Opera*, 6: *Explanatio psalmorum XII*, Vindobonae, Hoelder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1919, p. ??.

⁵³ The term is used by Ambrose also several times in his commentary on Psalm 118. At the beginning of the prologue to this commentary he says that the prophet David sometimes speaks of mystical things, but he is a great master of moral teaching and excels in ethical teaching (*ethica*): 1. Licet mystice quoque uelut tubae increpuerit sono Dauid propheta, tamen moralium magnus magister, quantum in eo excellat ethica,

What this comprehensive overview of Scripture means is that all wisdom, human or divine, is to be found in the Scriptures in general and in the Psalms in particular. There is no distinction here between reason and revelation or faith and reason. These relatively modern distinctions are here completely blurred. What is valid in the philosophical tradition is taught in the Scriptures. The categories of “natural, mystical, and moral” (*naturalis uel mystica uel moralis*) come in fact from the Greek philosophical tradition, but Ambrose is asserting that Moses, Solomon and David taught this philosophical content as well as prophecies about the whole economy of salvation long before the Greek philosophers.

We have mentioned earlier the criterion of interpretation employed by Philo and Origen that the meaning of the text must be fitting to God (*theoprepes*) or worthy of the divine majesty. Although the patristic writers did not have at their disposition the modern tools of historical critical analysis, they did carry out an extensive theological critique of the Scriptures, especially of, but not limited to, the Old Testament. They would not have called it such, but that is, from a modern perspective, what in fact it was. The principal tool used in this critique was an understanding of God, of the divine nature, derived in part from the Greek philosophical tradition as regards the exclusion from the divine nature of anthropomorphic and anthropopathic traits, but also informed by the understanding of God as revealed by Jesus Christ, a chief aspect of which was the divine *philanthropia*. What did not conform to these essential traits had to be excluded from the real meaning of Scripture and the text had to be interpreted so as to provide a meaning that both conformed to the divine nature and was useful.

Two examples may help to illustrate this process. In Deut 7:1-2 the Israelites are commanded to annihilate seven nations in the land into which they are to enter, a command to engage in ethnic cleansing dutifully carried out in the Book of Joshua. But this command was very difficult to reconcile with the divine *philanthropia* revealed by Jesus Christ. In the early fifth century writings of John Cassian, the seven nations are interpreted together with Egypt as a figure for the eight principal vices against which we must all strive.⁵⁴ These we can seek to annihilate without scruple. This interpretation can be found already in Origen’s homilies on Joshua.⁵⁵ The text so interpreted not only becomes acceptable, but also a vehicle for useful moral teaching. Another example from Psalm 136(137): 9 may serve to illustrate this process. The closing verse of the Psalm expresses the pious wish directed against the Babylonian oppressors: “Happy shall he be who will grab your infants and dash them against the rock.” The interpretation of John Cassian reads:

It behooves us as well to destroy the sinners in our land – namely, our fleshly feelings – on the morning of their birth, as they emerge, and, while they are still young, to dash the children of Babylon against the rock. Unless they are killed at a very tender age they will, with our acquiescence, rise up to our harm as stronger adults, and they will certainly not be overcome without great pain and effort.⁵⁶

This interpretation of Ps 136:9 goes back to Origen, who had interpreted the infants of Babylon to mean “confused thoughts caused by evil”.⁵⁷ A variant of this interpretation is given by Origen in a homily on Joshua where the rock is interpreted to mean Christ (1 Cor 10:4).⁵⁸ Variants of this interpretation can be found in Eusebius, Hilary, Jerome and Evagrius of Pontus, and in the Rule of St. Benedict. The heads of the children become the *propatheiai* of the Stoic tradition. Many other such interpretations were necessary in order to make the Psalter into a Christian prayer book.

psalmi huius summa declarat gratia, siquidem cum suavis omnis doctrina moralis sit, tum maxime suauitate carminis et psallendi dulcedine delectat aures animum que demulcet. Expositio psalmi cxviii, Cl. 0141, prologus, par.: 1, CSEL 62 (M. Petschenig, 1913).

⁵⁴ John Cassian, *Conferences* V, 16-17.

⁵⁵ Origen, *Homilies on Joshua*, passim.

⁵⁶ Inst. 6, XIII, 2.

⁵⁷ C.Cels. 7,22.

⁵⁸ Hom. Jos. 15,3.

Conclusion

This is by no means a complete exposition of the presuppositions, principles and procedures used in patristic exegesis, but it is sufficient to indicate how different their intellectual world is from ours. Our enhanced historical consciousness, due in part to historical critical methodology developed over several centuries, renders many of these principles and procedures obsolete or inoperative. Those who understand the ancient rules and procedures can still appreciate and profit from the content of the patristic commentaries. However, there are two basic aspects of patristic interpretation that remain important today. The first is the conviction that the word of God in the fullest sense is Jesus Christ. In him alone do we find the fullness of revelation and all the previous writings must be measured in the light of this revelation, of the divine *philanthropia*, God's love for the human race. This fundamental conviction of patristic interpreters is echoed many times in the Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Benedict XVI, first of all in the assertion that "the Logos refers in the first place to the eternal Word, the only Son, begotten of the Father before all ages and consubstantial with him." He goes on to note that "while in the Church we greatly venerate the sacred Scriptures, the Christian faith is not a 'religion of the book': Christianity is the 'religion of the word of God', not of 'a written and mute word, but of the incarnate and living Word'."⁵⁹

The second aspect of patristic interpretation I wish to stress, which follows from the first, is the necessity of a theological critique of the Scriptures. The original historical meaning of the texts is not enough, especially in an era of rising fundamentalist reading even among Catholics. We must always ask how they can be understood by Christians and that involves theology, that is, the discourse about the nature of God.



Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden
Detail from the Portal of the Cathedral in Speyer

⁵⁹ Benedict XVI, *Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation Verbum Domini*, pp. 17-18.



Adam and Eve leaving the Garden of Eden
Detail from the Portal of the Cathedral in Speyer

Exegesis as Theology, Doing Theology as Exegesis A Difficult but Necessary Alliance

Prof. Dr. Thomas Söding,
Ruhr-University Bochum, Germany

Translated from the German by Leonard Maluf, S.S.L., S.T.D.

1. The Key Question

The lively discussions at the world synod of bishops in October, 2008, on “The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church” revolved around a hermeneutical center: How can the word of Holy Scripture in the Church be read, interpreted and celebrated as Word of God that was valid for its time, is valid for today and will be valid for tomorrow?¹

This question is absolutely central. The Bible is not the Word of God himself. But it is the record, or monument of faith. It is the witness of the salvation history of Israel, “written down for our instruction” (Rom 15:4); it is the book of memories of Jesus, indispensable for belief in his Messianic divine sonship (cf. Jn 20:30f); and it is the book of the new direction taken by the apostolic church to bring the Gospel to the world, an orientation that remains valid for the Church of all times (Acts 1-2).

In the Bible the term “Gospel” occurs only in the singular: as there is but one God for all time, there is also but one Word of God, which speaks to all people and touches every aspect of their lives. This one word, however, must be preached in a multiplicity of words: through human beings, in their own languages, at their own times and places. A complete Bible has approximately 1500 pages. How can this multiplicity and variety be discovered and communicated with the clarity of the Gospel? Without the many pages it has the Bible would be unable either to speak to the fullness of human life or to reflect the full richness of divine grace (cf. 1 Cor 13:12), and without the clear message it would be unable to bring to expression the reliability of the divine will to save.

In the Bible names of authors are given: Amos, Hosea, David, Solomon, Peter and James are but a few of many. Original life-situations are described: from the “highway of the fuller’s field” in Jerusalem, where the Prophet Isaiah confronted his king Ahaz of Judah (Is 7) to the prison in Rome or Ephesus, where Paul writes to the Philippians. Times are indicated: the “thirteenth year” of the reign of King Josiah (so about 628 B.C.) and the “eleventh year” of the reign of King Zedekiah (so about 586 B.C.) measure the time period in which the Prophet Jeremiah was publicly active. “On the Lord’s Day”, on the island of Patmos, the Prophet John receives his revelation (Rev 1:9), which is written down in the last book of the Christian Bible. The biblical nomenclature, chronology and topography is not to be compared to the terse localizations and dating of the individual suras of the Koran between Mecca and Medina. Even if critical scholarship cannot always confirm the data given in biblical texts, but speaks in terms of attribution, there is nevertheless a fine capillary system of historical references that runs through the Bible, without which the theological blood supply would clot. But how can the Word of God, which is “living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword” (Heb 4:12) resound in these very human words? How is it that in a word from the past and from a more or less great distance away in space can a word come into being that achieves validity *hic et nunc*? Without the human factor, the Gospel would be a divine charter, incompatible with the freedom of faith; the personal character of revelation would miss out if the concretion of life, which characterizes the Word of God not only retroactively, but from the very start. Without the uniquely new on-site presence in very different time zones and very different cultural realms the Bible would remain a book of world litera-

¹ Cf. PONTIFICIA COMMISSIONE BIBLICA, *L’interpretazione della Bibbia nella Chiesa*, Vatican 1993.

ture that belongs in the museum, but not in the Church, a book that would certainly continue to be of academic interest but that could hardly move the hearts of men and women, who want to hold together their love of God and neighbor. Of all times when we are reading the Bible itself, without this unique presence the promise written in it would not be fulfilled: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in their midst" (Matt 18:20).

2. The Central Problem Areas

At the world synod of bishops the central question as to how the reading of the Bible can achieve a true encounter with God and his Word, was discussed under great pressure. If you follow the analytical comments of the Bishops, in many places this pressure stems from what is called fundamentalism, which is very much in vogue because it promises an immediate access to the truth of faith in an immediate encounter with the Holy Scripture. Immediate means not only unfiltered by scientific criticism and untarnished by modern skepticism, but also not interfered with by ecclesial mediation. "Fundamentalism" is a tricky word. It is often employed as a weapon in the struggle for intellectual opinion leadership.² According to its claim it intends to stabilize the foundation of faith. In practice, however, fundamentalism is marked by a threefold *pro* and threefold *contra*: it is anti-Catholic, because it denies any role for the *magisterium* in the interpretation of Scripture; it is anti-academic, because it turns its back to biblical scholarship, and it is anti-modern, because it wishes to immunize the Bible from human criticism. Through this threefold "no" it intends to produce a threefold effect: it wishes to acquaint people with the Bible as a book of life; it wishes to understand the simple message of the Bible, and it wishes to hold fast to the truth of Gospel.

To connect the threefold "yes" with the threefold "no" is, however, precisely the dilemma of fundamentalism. For however much every Catholic, every Christian interpretation of Scripture wishes to concretize the existential, the catechetical and the spiritual meaning of the Bible, it is nevertheless precisely the Christian Bible of the Old and New Testaments itself which 1. establishes religion as enlightenment (cf. 1 Thess 5:1-11), 2. calls us to "always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope" (cf. 1 Pet 3:15) and 3. implicitly endorses a theological magisterium, because Scripture itself neither came into being nor is its challenge understood without the services of the apostles and of their successors.

The pressure under which the discussion about the Word of God and Holy Scripture was conducted at the synod also has as its cause, according to the votes of many bishops, the fact the Bible in the view of many believers is too remote from their lives: either because they do not know the Bible well or they do not expect much from it, or because in the churches and parishes there are no places and times for communities and clubs to read the Bible together and to appropriate its message as the good news of their own lives.

This anamnesis requires a systematic therapy, but not without careful diagnosis. What is the real reason for the great distance people perceive between the Bible and their lives? Is it the rampant illiteracy from which even the northern hemisphere suffers in matters of religion? Is it the lack of bibles, of bibles in print, and more importantly of bibles that are read? Is it the after-effect of reservations in the past that discouraged lay people from reading the Bible without expert guidance?

Probably questions of this kind do not go far enough. To be sure, they inspire literacy campaigns with the Bible in all parts of the world. But the experience of the distance is a consequence of a thoroughly correct intuition, even it is one that contains only half of the truth. The Bible is indeed a book of the past; it does contain "much that is difficult to understand", as the author of the Second Letter of Peter sighs with reference to the Epistles of Paul (2 Pet 3:15). More than this: it is incomparable in the intensity of its faith experience and in the quality of its faith witness. It breathes "the 'earthy odor' of the land of the Fathers" and allows the "voice of the beginning" to resound, wrote Joseph Ratzinger in 1967 in the German commentary on the *Dei*

² Sociological analyses are collected by CHRISTINE ABBT – DONATA SCHOELLER (ED.), *Im Zeichen der Religion. Gewalt und Friedfertigkeit in Christentum und Islam*, Frankfurt/M 2009.

Verbum.³ It is above those who read it; it is ahead of them; it shows them the way. If this were not the case, there would be no need to read it.

A barrier-free access into the house of the Bible is a good thing; but every trivialization is bad. How will a spiritual reading of Scripture beyond fundamentalism be possible? And how can biblical scholarship foster this *lectio divina*?

3. The Responsibility of Exegesis

At the Synod there was much hard criticism of historical-critical exegesis: it unsettles churchgoers and destroys their faith; it breaks the Bible into pieces and seems to regard its own ideas more highly than those of the Church's tradition. Finally, it bears responsibility for the fact that the faithful are alienated from the Bible and either slip into secularism or seek their salvation in fundamentalism. While one of the bishops was explaining that he owes a great deal to scientific exegesis and wouldn't want to see it go, spontaneous applause arose – from the bench of the experts. This small breach of the rules shows how great is the need for clarification here.

The fact is that the story of historical-critical exegesis⁴ is a story of great errors and elaborate hypotheses which have collapsed; but it is also a story of great discoveries and soaring flights of intellect, which have contributed in a decisive manner to the credibility of the Gospels in modern times. The discipline is not however capable, from its own resources alone, to fulfill the pastoral challenges that are posed if the Bible is to be read and understood today as a book of faith and of life. It must give account of the ways in which it unlocks the theological dimension of Holy Scripture which is constructed in the Bible itself.

Historical-critical exegesis arose after the renaissance within the pales of the Catholic Church. Later it embraced the *sola scriptura* of the reformers. Under pressure from the Enlightenment's critique of divine revelation it occasionally resorted to the science of religion. But it also always kept asking questions about the history of the writings themselves and about their original sense. With enormous energy it sought for answers that always had to pass the trial by fire of critical scholarship. The discipline is presently caught up in a transformation that offers great opportunities to bring Bible and Church into conversation in new ways.

The Holy Father brought considerable clarity to the discussion in a short intervention to the synod. From a novel standpoint he described the position that he had outlined in the foreword to the first volume of his Jesus book⁵ – not with the claim of infallibility, but with the invitation to critical dialogue, but with the theological argument of a hermeneutic that corresponds to the revelation concept of the Second Vatican Council, which for its part went back to the roots: back to the time of the Apostles and Prophets (Eph 2:20f).

In short summary form, this position goes as follows: Historical-critical exegesis is necessary, but not sufficient. It is necessary, because the Bible is an historical book and the Christian Faith does not live on timeless ideas, but rather on the preaching of the "great acts of God", as they are vividly presented to us by Peter, as the first apostle, in the Pentecost narrative (Acts 2:11, 14-36). Historical-critical exegesis is not however sufficient, for one thing because it is only able to read the Bible as a book of the past, rather than as one also of the present and the future, and because it is left to rely on categories of judgment formation that reckon with a perfect homogeneity of all events, rather than allowing for the incomparably new, which already in the Old Testament writings and still more in the Gospel of Jesus Christ are the very heartbeat of theology.

Historical-critical exegesis may not therefore be ignored, but it must be transcended. If it were ignored, theology would become a form of Gnosis. If it were not transcended it would remain science of religion that employs the Gospel merely as object of observation and not as spiritual source for theology, for reflected talk about God. But historical-critical exegesis opens itself

³ Kommentar zu Dei Verbum, in: *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche. Ergänzungsband 2* (1967), pp. 498-528. 571-581: 572.

⁴ For a critical overhaul of the Catholic biblical scholarship and a discussion of the alternatives, cf. TH. SÖDING (ED.) *Geist im Buchstaben? Neue Ansätze in der Exegese* (QD 225), Freiburg – Basel – Wien 2007.

⁵ *Jesus von Nazareth I: Von der Taufe im Jordan bis zur Verklärung*, Freiburg – Basel – Wien 2007, p. 14f.

as theology, if it seeks to hear the God question and to understand the answers that are posed and given in the biblical texts. By doing so it connects theology as a whole back to the witness of Holy Scripture.

In his intervention to the world synod of bishops of 2008 Pope Benedict XVI summarized and developed what the Second Vatican Council said about the task of exegesis.⁶ For the sake of the accountability of faith it ought to comply with the highest scientific standards; for the sake of the witness of Scripture it should serve the faith of God's people, as the Letter to the Ephesians in the spirit of the Apostle Paul puts it: "so that we may no longer be infants, tossed by waves and swept along by every wind of teaching. [...] Rather, living the truth in love, we should grow in every way into him who is the head, Christ" (Eph 4:14).

Dei Verbum 12, the decisive article⁷, has three parts. After the introduction, exegesis is challenged in a lengthy paragraph to critically engage its philological and historical competencies:

"To search out the intention of the sacred writers, attention should be given, among other things, to "literary forms" ...The interpreter must investigate what meaning the sacred writer intended to express and actually expressed in particular circumstances by using contemporary literary forms in accordance with the situation of his own time and culture. For the correct understanding of what the sacred author wanted to assert, due attention must be paid to the customary and characteristic styles of feeling, speaking and narrating which prevailed at the time of the sacred writer, and to the patterns men normally employed at that period in their everyday dealings with one another. "

This describes a work program which presents a full challenge to exegesis and which has been implemented in numerous books on method. It is a scientific program that has been applied in a manner that can only be described as *state of the art* and that must be carried forward. It is an ecumenical program that makes possible a substantial dialogue about Holy Scripture.

However, the conciliar fathers were not content to issue this task assignment. *Dei Verbum* 12 has a further clause:

But, since Holy Scripture must be read and interpreted in the sacred spirit in which it was written, (9) no less serious attention must be given to the content and unity of the whole of Scripture if the meaning of the sacred texts is to be correctly worked out. The living tradition of the whole Church must be taken into account along with the harmony which exists between elements of the faith.

But what weight this task has and how precisely it relates to the first, which holds fast to historical-critical differentiation, is by no means clear. In the years following the council, Catholic exegesis has devoted itself with great ardor to the first task; it had a lot of catching up to do after the numerous reprimands issued by the Pontifical Biblical Commission at the beginning of the 20th century⁸; it also put great stock in the idea that through the systematic distinction between Scripture and Tradition, which should rub off on the methodical distinction between exegesis and dogmatic theology, a great potential for the renewal of the Church could be unleashed.

In contrast to this, however, the second task of Catholic exegesis was virtually ignored for a long time. Some saw in this clause a relapse into the old times, others an attempt to micro-manage critical scholarship. But the *analogia fidei* is a Pauline criterion for distinguishing between true and false prophecy (Rom 12:6). The living tradition of the Church is that totality of

⁶ On the difficult genesis cf. GIUSEPPE ALBERIGO, *Storia del Concilio Vaticano II*, vol. I-V, Bologna 1995-2001.

⁷ Cf. HELMUT HOPING, Theologischer Kommentar zur dogmatischen Konstitution über die Göttliche Offenbarung, in: Peter Hünemann – Bernd Jochen Hilberath (eds.), *Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Vatikanum. II*, vol. III, Freiburg – Basel – Wien 2005, pp. 595-831. The reflections of contemporary witnesses remain important: cf. HENRI DE LUBAC, *La révélation divine. Commentaire du préambule et du chapitre I de la constitution "Dei Verbum" du Concile Vatican II*, Paris 1983; ALOIS GRILLMEIER, Kommentar zu Kapitel III, in *LThKE* 2 (1967) 523-558.

⁸ Cf. PONTIFICIA COMMISSIONE BIBLICA, *Atti della Giornata Celebrativa per il 100° Anniversario di Fondazione della Pontificia Commissione Biblica* (Collana Documenti Vaticani), Città del Vaticano 2003.

lived faith in which the New Testament was written and made into a canonical whole together with the Old Testament. The unity of the multi-faceted Scripture is a parameter for the work of the New Testament authors themselves in view of the Bible of Israel, and in view of the Gospel of Jesus Christ this unity is a benefit of the apostolic *koinonia* in which they wrote (1 Cor 15:1-11). For theological discernment and for the service of making the Bible relevant exegesis could make no substantial contribution if it did not keep in view the larger context of the Bible so as to determine the precise significance of individual texts and positions.

In the structure of *Dei Verbum* 12 it is apparent that the second part of the task description is not simply tagged onto the first in a rough and ready way, as a kind of afterthought, but was planned rather from the start. For the first clause of the article reads:

“However, since God speaks in Sacred Scripture through men in human fashion, (6) the interpreter of Sacred Scripture, in order to see clearly what God wanted to communicate to us, should carefully investigate what meaning the sacred writers really intended, and what God wanted to manifest by means of their words.”

Here the dialectic of unity and variety of expression is already set out, and indeed on the basis of the fact that the Bible, the book of books, is related to a dimension in light of which alone it can be understood in its unity and variety: the Word of God. This point is made with an allusion to Augustine. The complete reference is found in *De Civitate Dei* (XVII 6, 2)⁹:

Deus per hominem more hominum loquitur, quia et sic loquendo nos quaerit.

God speaks through men in a human manner, because by so speaking he seeks us.

Here is in great precision not only the fundamental idea of Christian revelation theology, which is ultimately grounded in Christology: that God takes the human way to reach human beings when it comes to speaking his word to them, the way of a pursuit of their hearts, to win them in freedom for the faith. Augustine also offered a key for recognizing the unity of Scripture: that it consists not in a complex of correct statements, but is rather an ongoing story, a story of seeking and finding, a story of denial and of self-offering, a story that begins at the very beginning, in Paradise, and because of human sin threatened to get lost from sight on the other side of Eden except that it did after all, contrary to all expectations, come to a *happy ending*, to the only one worthy of the name, because the “Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost”, as Jesus says in Lk 19:10, in the house of the chief tax-collector Zachaeus, at the lowest point on earth, in Jericho, just before he enters Jerusalem. When exegesis retells this story, which also puts together a great number of stories, it has discovered its theological charge.

For the sake of this theological accountability exegesis must be critical: it must differentiate. It must differentiate between the world that is opened up by the text and the world in which the text arose. It must differentiate between the end effect texts have provoked and the starting point that set the process in motion. It must differentiate between the different stories that play themselves out between the beginning and the end, between the earthly and the heavenly Jerusalem, between Babylon and Rome, between Israel and the nations, between the Church and the world. It must distinguish between the Old and New Testaments, between the Law, the Prophets and the Writings, between the Gospel and the Letters of the New Testament. And according to *Dei Verbum* 12, it cannot take the second step before it takes the first. If it were not critical in this way, exegesis could not pursue its effort to give a hearing to the many voices that find expression in the Bible. It is precisely the soft voices, the disturbing, the free voices that ought not be submerged in the great choir. As clear as the biblical message of salvation is, it is certainly not monotone. Who would be able to recognize this polyphony if not exegesis, which has a careful ear that can decipher ancient notes and does not only allow for the popular melodies.

But even if this is the true reason why exegesis must be both historical and critical, it should also try to help bring it about that “psalms, hymns and spiritual canticles” (Col 3:16) are truly sung. This means actually taking the second step after having taken the first. One could call this “canonical exegesis”, but should then see the canon not merely as a textbook, but as an “earthen vessel”, which conceals the “treasure” of the Gospel (cf. 2 Cor 4:7). The textbook of the entire Holy Scripture will be needed in order to be able to read the great story of the search of

⁹ Patrologia Latina 41, 537; Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 40, 2, 228.

God for human beings in all of its important features from the first to the last Adam, and within this story to bring in the many smaller stories, the commandments and prohibitions, prayers and directives, maxims and reflections of the Bible. But this story is not one that can be compressed inside of book covers but one that edges its way out into the open: the decisive theological reference point is the living Word of God, which became flesh in Jesus, the great exegete of God (Jn 1:1-18).



The Adoration of the Magi
Detail from the Portal of the Cathedral in Speyer

4. The Spirit of Holy Scripture

The council fathers of the Second Vatican Council had with reference to exegesis the expectation that the Bible be read in the same Spirit in which it was written. This Spirit is the Holy Spirit, who is the moving force behind salvation history and who pours the love of God into human hearts so that their hope may not expire (Rom 5:1-11).

The expectation that the Bible is to be read in the same Spirit in which it was written may appear to many to be an illusion. It is however an expression of a deep conviction, without which the Bible itself and the Church never would have come into being at all. It is the conviction that the Holy Spirit creates the possibility of communication. The Pentecost miracle can be repeated.

Men and women from very different times and places, from very different languages and cultures understand each other when they speak about just anything, but rather when their conversation is about the one and the same, the living God who gives his word to mankind. The written word may only be a necessary help, but it becomes a storehouse of past conversations, which have attained abiding significance, and a repository of future conversations that will acquire theological significance – after the image of the “scribe” from the parable of Jesus, who became “a disciple of the kingdom of heaven” and who “brings forth from his storeroom both the new and the old” (Matt 13:52). According to biblical theology itself, there are not only inspired texts and inspired authors but also inspired readers. The exegete-pope Gregory wrote in his commentary on Ezekiel (I 7,8)¹⁰:

Divina eloquia cum legente crescent.

The divine words grow with the reader.

And the idea is similarly expressed in the same author’s commentary on Job (20,1)¹¹:

Sacra Scriptura in aliquomodo cum legente crescit

Sacred Scripture grows in a certain way with the reader.

What is meant is that the biblical writings do not remain printed pages, but in the act of reading they experience an alertness, a vibrancy that causes them to come alive. Indeed they are written precisely to be read (cf. 1 Thess 5:27), and in the process of being read to create meaning. They would do nothing but collect dust if no one paid attention to them any more. The biblical hermeneutics of inspiration points beyond the modern theory, whose aim was to determine, to “fix” the original meaning (in the more precise sense of the word), and into the present, where the dynamics of communication, the creativity of interpretations, dialogue with the text are stressed, and thereby also the responsibility, the interest, the character of the reader.¹²

Hence the sentence must also be reversed. This occurs to be sure very much in the sense of Gregory: the readers grow with Holy Scripture; they grow with the divinely inspired word. They do not grow apart from each other, but they grow together: in the Body of Christ (Rom 12:4ff; 1 Cor 10:16f; 12:13-27; Eph 1:22f; 2:14-17; 4:4ff; Col 1:15-20, 24; 2:18f).

Exegesis, which works with scientific methods, fosters this growth through information and interpretation. It informs the Bible reader about the origin, the composition, and the intention of the Holy Scripture, in its various parts and as a whole. It interprets the biblical writings in their historical context and in their genuine theological perspectives. It need not be tied down to the *intentio auctoris*, but must also treat the *sensus textus* and the *receptio lectoris*. In this way it is conducive to a Christian spirituality that does not back away from criticism, but draws its inspiration from Paul who “in the church would rather speak five words with my mind, so as to instruct others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue” (Cor 14:19), and does not get mired in its own intellectual edification, but following the teaching of Jesus strives to fulfill the Law in the unity of love for God and neighbor (Mk 12:19-28 par.), and thus looks for God even in the poor (cf. Lk 10:25-37).

In the Acts of the Apostles Luke tells the story of how the Ethiopian came to be baptized (Acts 8:26-40). The story plays out precisely on the border between Africa, Asia and Europe. Central to the account is a dialogue. Philip observes that the devout traveler who is on his way from Jerusalem back to his own country is an enthusiastic reader.

The Spirit said to Philip, “Go and join up with that chariot.” Philip ran up and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and said, “Do you understand what you are reading?” He replied, “How can I, unless someone instructs me?” So he invited Philip to get in and sit with him. This was the scripture passage he was reading: ‘Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter, and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opened not his mouth. In (his)

¹⁰ Sources chrétiennes 327, p. 244.

¹¹ Cf. Gregorii Magni *Moralia in Ijob / Commento Morale a Giobbe* (1/1-4). A cura di Paolo Siniscalco, Roma 1992-2001.

¹² At the furthest this debate leads to where a rationality not only flirts with its own feebleness but again strives to reflect on its strengths, on the possibilities of narration and the accomplishments of memory; we are led very far along this way by PAUL RICŒUR, *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*, Paris 2000.

humiliation justice was denied him. Who will tell of his posterity? For his life is taken from the earth.' (Is 53:7f. LXX). Then the eunuch said to Philip in reply, "I beg you, about whom is the prophet saying this? About himself, or about someone else?" Then Philip opened his mouth and, beginning with this scripture passage, he proclaimed Jesus to him. It is not always that people on their life's journey have the good fortune to meet a Philip when they pick up the Bible. Unless and until they do, they must settle for the exegetes and for what they understand the Bible to be saying.



The Transfiguration: Jesus, with the Scriptures in His Hand, between Moses and Elijah
Detail of a Cross in the Church of Beaufort in Luxembourg

Hermeneutics of the Bible from a Protestant Perspective

Florian Wilk

Professor of New Testament Studies, University of Göttingen

Translated from the German by Leonard J. Maluf S.S.L., S.T.D. and revised by the author

I

“Protestant hermeneutics” – so goes the title of the article I was asked to contribute. This means that I am supposed to briefly explain how the task called “hermeneutics” is understood and practiced in the Protestant sphere. The task is one that I can fulfill only in a limited way. The title requires qualification in two respects.

If, following Schleiermacher, we take the term “hermeneutics” to mean first of all the “art” whose general aim is “the comprehensive understanding of a speech or written text”¹, then in the context of discussion regarding “Scripture in the life and mission of the Church” it would appear reasonable first of all to limit my task to the presentation of hermeneutics as applied to Holy Scripture. The fact that it is possible to understand hermeneutics above and beyond this meaning as a theory of the humanities in general remains unaffected by this limitation.

Secondly, it should be stated that there is no such thing as “the” Protestant hermeneutics of the Bible. The fact that in the 16th century all attempts to unify the Reformation movements ended in failure was not least a consequence of differences in the way Scripture was being interpreted or understood². Since that time the history of Protestantism has been marked by a hermeneutical debate, which has often led to sharp altercations³. Even the Leuenberg “Konkordie reformatorischer Kirchen in Europa” (Concordat of the Reformation Churches in Europe) of 1973 states in its final section: “The common understanding of the Gospel, on which the community of churches rests, needs to be studied in greater depth... It is the task of the churches to continue to work on the doctrinal differences that exist in and among the participating churches without amounting to issues that divide the churches. Among these differences are: hermeneutical questions in the understanding of Scripture, confession and Church ...”⁴ At the level of scientific publications too the question of hermeneutics in Protestant theology has been a matter of dispute till today.⁵

However, since 2007 there has existed within the framework of the “Community of Protestant Churches in Europe” (Gemeinschaft evangelischer Kirchen in Europa: GEKE) a doctrinal discussion group “Scripture – Confession – Church”.⁶ This group recently produced a writ-

¹ Cf. F. D. E. Schleiermacher, *Kurze Darstellung des theologischen Studiums*, ed. H. Scholz, Darmstadt 1969, 53.

² Cf. T. Kaufmann, Vorreformatrische Laienbibel und reformatorisches Evangelium, in: *ZThK* 101, 2004, 138–174, p. 165f.

³ P. Stuhlmacher, *Vom Verstehen des Neuen Testaments. Eine Hermeneutik*, GNT 6, Göttingen 1986, 109–221, offers a good overview.

⁴ Konkordie reformatorischer Kirchen in Europa (cited as: *Kirchliches Jahrbuch für die Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland*, 1973, 19–23), Section IV.2.b, Paragraph 38f (English translation L.M.) (see www.leuenberg.net/sites/default/files/media/pdf/Publications/Konkordie-en.pdf).

⁵ Cf. e.g. the *Congress volume Philosophical Hermeneutics and Biblical Exegesis*, eds. P. Pokorný and J. Roskovec, WUNT 153, Tübingen 2002, or the *Lexikon der Bibelhermeneutik. Begriffe – Methoden – Theorien – Konzepte*, ed. O. Wischmeyer, Berlin 2009.

⁶ See <http://www.leuenberg.net/node/726> (access on 20.12.2013).

ten interim report of its discussions, on which the member churches are currently being consulted.⁷ It is not yet possible to foresee what will come of this consultation process. Fully open is the question of how its results will be received by the remaining Churches and communities rooted in the Reformation. Nevertheless, this interim report is likely to constitute something like the first beginnings of an agreed-upon description of a Protestant hermeneutics of the Bible. Accordingly, I would like in the following paragraphs to introduce and critically comment on the text produced by the doctrinal discussion group.

I regard this as a meaningful exercise in this venue not least because that group described the ecclesial situation in which it has been working in terms very similar to the description given by the 12th Regular General Assembly of the Bishops' Synod of the Roman Curia in 2008, the results of which are taken up by the pontifical Exhortation "Verbum Domini" (published September 30, 2010). According to this description, it appears that the church is facing two ever-growing challenges: on the one hand, many people, both within and outside the Church, have serious doubts regarding the importance of the Bible for the present and for their own lives. On the other hand, many Christian movements, in a way that can only be described as fundamentalist, tend to equate the text of the Bible that has been handed down quite simply with the unchanging, ever-valid Word of God.⁸ Moreover, the definition of the relationship between Scripture and Church has repeatedly proven contentious in ecumenical dialogue.

In this context, it seems especially urgent to reach first of all an inner-Protestant agreement on the principles of a Scriptural interpretation in accord with the Gospel and on the role assigned in this connection to the confessions and doctrinal statements of the Churches. This is all the more true in view of the fact that the Protestant Churches of Europe are currently facing a variety of spiritual and ethical challenges that require commonly accepted statements. But in line with a Reformation insight, "the life and teaching [of the Church] are to be measured against the original and pure witness of the Gospel in Scripture".⁹ Accordingly, the binding character of such statements can only be made plausible for the Christians addressed by this document if they rest on an agreed-upon hermeneutics.

So, how does this doctrinal discussion group advance toward such a hermeneutics?¹⁰

II

In the first place its text, in section "2. Das sich selbst bezeugende Wort" (p. 4/4), presents *what it is* that the biblical writings, in the perspective of Christian faith, testify to, namely, God's "self-revelation" (p. 4/10). In accordance with his dia-logical essence, God comes out of himself to create the world through his word and begins to speak to human beings (cf. p. 4/19-40). God's word is clear in the call of Abraham and in the election of Israel (cf. p. 4/43f.); it reaches its final form in Jesus Christ (cf. p. 5/24f.). He "is the definitive Word of God" (p. 5/25f.) for the salvation

⁷ The document was released by the board of the GEKE for comment on Oct. 3, 2009. – The original version of the present article was made ready for publication in March 2011. In the meantime, the final version of the document above has been published: *Schrift – Bekenntnis – Kirche // Scripture – Confession – Church*, ed. M. Bünker, Leuenberger Texte 14, Leipzig 2013. Author's note: Since my paper was written und presented as a contribution to the discussion on the interim report, I have refrained from adjusting my quotations to the published text.

⁸ Cf. on the one hand *Schrift – Bekenntnis – Kirche*, Section 1: Die Herausforderung, esp. p. 2, lines 23–44; and on the other hand, Lineamenta zur o.g. Generalversammlung (see http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20070427_lineamenta-xii-assembly_ge.html [access on Jan. 28, 2011]), Einleitung, esp. paragraph 4, as well as T. Söding, Exegesis as Theology, Doing Theology as Exegesis: A Difficult but Necessary Alliance, Section 2: The Central Problem Areas, in this issue, p. 15–22.

⁹ *Leuenberger Konkordie* (see note 4), Section I.1, par. 4.

¹⁰ References to the document in the following paragraphs are to the relevant pages and lines in the primary text.

of humankind; for in him, in his self-offering and resurrection “God himself ... enters the world of sin and death and triumphs over the powers that ... separate human beings from him and from true life” (p. 5/30-32). It is thus that “the reality and saving presence of God” encounters men and women “in Jesus ... as his compassion and his faithfulness” (p. 5/19f.); in Jesus therefore “the story of God’s communication with humanity” finds “its fulfillment” (p. 5/2f.). This word, “witnessed to in a fundamental way by the word of the apostles and prophets in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments” (p. 5/37f.), gives itself as gift to the community of Jesus Christ in the context of worship “in a variety of verbal forms: ... in the spoken word of proclamation ..., in the visible word of the sacraments, ... in the response of believers” (p. 5/41-46) in prayer, praise and confession.

Then, in section 3, the text explains what is meant by the description of Holy Scripture as “witness of God’s spoken word” (p. 5/49). Inasmuch as the biblical writings testify to “the words and actions of God in the history of his people Israel and in the history of Jesus”, they do not merely document “the religious convictions” of Israel, of early Judaism and of the Jesus movement (cf. p. 5/50—6/2). Rather, Christians hear in the biblical words “the ever newly effective and abidingly living voice of God who speaks” (p. 6/3f.). Three things follow from this: a) The writings assembled in the canon give us “access to God’s original communication in the history of his people Israel, the fate of Jesus, and the mission of the Apostles” as well as in “the response of human beings” (cf. p. 6/5-20). In so doing they bear witness “to the saving will of God in a fundamental and adequate way” (p. 6/21f.). b) When we listen to the witness of Holy Scripture the Holy Spirit of God brings about faith, and this faith “hears in the human words of Scripture the word addressed to us by God here and now”. In this process “individuals are addressed”, to be sure; however, the “understanding of Scripture” that is given with this comes about “in the community” of those who hear and believe (cf. p. 6/25-34). c) Right understanding of Scripture occurs in the alignment with its “center” (“Mitte” in German); this cannot be separated from the witness of Scripture taken as a whole (cf. p. 6/35-38), but it serves as a “hermeneutical key ...”, which lends clear perspective to the interpretation of the great variety of biblical voices” (p. 6/48f.). In the view of Reformation theology this center is to be identified as “the witness of God’s reconciling action in Jesus Christ” (p. 6/43f.).

Next, in section “4. God’s Word as Encouragement and Challenge” (p. 7/1), the text shows how God continues to address human beings anew in a variety of situations. God “does this in a variety of ways and yet he always remains true to himself” (cf. p. 7/2-9). The “distinction between Law and Gospel” (p. 7/28) has a fundamental importance in this regard. The different emphases with which this distinction occurs in the churches of the Reformation the text accommodates as follows: on the one hand it depicts the Word of God as “gracious encouragement” and “challenge addressed to human beings” (p. 7/13-19), and on the other, it characterizes God’s Word as both “saving word” and simultaneously “word of judgment” (cf. p. 7/10--12.25): “The Gospel tells us that in Christ we are already judged and summoned to life” (p. 7/25f.). Thus understood, God’s word calls “for a re-sponse” (returned word) on the part of human beings (cf. p. 7/39). This takes place in faith – which the Gospel itself “creates” – and in the deed that emanates from faith; through this response in action we “live out” the reality “that took place for us in Christ” (cf. p. 7/43-50).

The fifth section is devoted to the procedure of the “interpretation of Holy Scripture” (p. 8/3). The starting-point here is the conviction that “the Word of God attested to in Scripture” by way of “interpretation” – through the “action of the Spirit” – enters “also into our here and now” (cf. p. 8/3-9). Three “hermeneutical rules” result from this insight (p. 8/12): Scriptural interpretation requires a) taking into account the “historically conditioned linguistic and literary form” of the biblical text, b) “carefully attending to the original message of the text”, without however limiting its “signification potential” to that message, and c) “opening oneself personally” to God who speaks, and also, as a community, “inquiring into the question of what God is saying to us today” (cf. p. 8/13-34).

Accordingly, a variety of approaches to Scripture must be held together: “historical-critical exegesis”, which corresponds to “the historical character of scripture” (and of God’s speaking to us); “the methods of scientific literary and linguistic analysis”, which illuminate the text charac-

ter of the biblical witnesses; a variety of approaches related “to the questions of our time”, each of which brings into the discussion a specific “aspect of human experience ... with biblical texts” (cf. p. 8/40—9/5). Only in the “dialogue” of different approaches can the biblical texts unfold their various dimensions of meaning “as they relate to context and hearers, or readers” (cf. p. 9/11-18).

The question as to “what promotes Christ” (“was Christum treibet”) serves as the “criterion, or rule for interpretation” (p. 9/22-25. 33f.). It applies to the whole Bible, and for the Old Testament it aims at an interpretation, which – following the apostles of Jesus and with appropriate respect for Jewish interpretation – recognizes “the action” of the Father of Jesus Christ “even in the witness of God’s journey with Israel” (cf. p. 9/25-34).

The theological character of a hermeneutics that corresponds to this criterion is described by means of the following statements: a) The biblical texts are bearers “of a message ... that can and should be understood by us”. In the process, they unfold thoroughly “new dimensions of meaning” in new situations and under the impetus of new questions that are put to them. But because of the historical character of God’s revelation to which these texts bear witness, “decisive weight continues to attach ... to the inquiry into [their] original intention” (cf. p. 10/3-20). b) In order “to understand the message of the Bible and to make it speak to us in the here and now, a high degree of knowledge and empathy” is required to get at the original sense of its ancient texts, as well as “a synthesizing creativity” that enables one to grasp what it can say to us today. But the fact that the biblical texts nevertheless “do speak to us today, and elicit belief is the work of the Holy Spirit” (cf. p. 10/21-31). c) Given the historical distance that exists between the biblical texts and the world of today the statements of Scripture must be examined in their “fundamental intention” which emerges “in the light of the center of Scripture”; only on this basis can they be related in a concrete and binding way to “vital contemporary questions” and “situations” (cf. p. 10/44—11/6).

In section 6 the text then treats the relationship between “Scripture, Church and Tradition” (p. 11/7). In Protestant understanding too, the interpretation of Scripture necessarily takes place within “the community of the Christian Church” – and is at the same time also related to Israel” (p. 11/8-17). In historical perspective, the ecclesial character of interpretation is realized in the orientation towards “tradition”. This tradition must, however, be ever again critically re-evaluated and newly appropriated on the basis of Scripture and its center (cf. p. 11/17-30). To be sure, the biblical canon is itself the product of a “tradition-formation by the early Church”; this means, however, that “it did finally take shape in a rather lengthy process”. “It can therefore be said that the canon is a product of divine action, and that it established itself in the Church through the working of the Holy Spirit” (cf. p. 11/31-40). Hence the distinction established in the Early Church “between the apostolic witness on which the Church is founded and the tradition by which that witness is carried forward” must be maintained. The latter is to be understood as “interpretation of the Scriptural witness to God and Christ”; this likewise holds true for the Creeds of the ancient Church that have “found universal ecclesial recognition” (cf. p. 11/41-48). Only on the basis of this distinction can tradition give orientation to the Church in fulfilling her mission to formulate the message of the Bible “ever anew in accordance with each situation and time” and to “bear steady witness in diverse historical situations” (cf. p. 12/4-17).

In section 7 the text goes on to describe “the authority of the ecclesial confessions” (cf. p. 12/18). In general, Christian confession, or creed represents an “existential interpretation of Scripture in a specific situation”; it manifests “before God and in a public manner how God’s word affects” one’s own life (cf. p. 12/19-22) – in worship, in public witness, in responsibility for others and in communal life (p. 12/23-38). Due to historical challenges, which involved the need for “the Gospel message to be clearly formulated”, such that “the witness of Scripture ... was spoken anew”, “ecclesial ‘confessions’ in written form” emerged time and time again (cf. p. 12/39-13/1). In Reformation understanding these creeds have been intended as “witness and

clarification of faith”¹¹ and accordingly as “guidance for right understanding of the Bible”; they are thus to be related and subordinated to Scripture as “norma normata” (cf. p. 13/20-29). Accordingly, the confessions have a twofold function: for the outside they serve to formulate “the understanding of the Gospel and its consequences in the particular concrete situation”; on the inside they enjoy “a relative authority, always subject to revision on the basis of Scripture, which makes them “a reference point for... spiritual governance in the church”. They must therefore be interpreted “from their center, i.e., on the basis of their fundament concern, which is to serve the Gospel” (cf. p. 13/39-49). The character of confessions as in principle revisable emerged clearly not least in the Leuenberg Concordat; indeed, the Concordat states that today a fundamental “agreement in the understanding of the Gospel”¹² exists between Lutherans and Reformed Christians, such that the old mutual condemnations no longer apply (cf. p. 14/4-12). Thus, the Concordat makes clear: “the *one* Gospel can come to expression in a variety of linguistic forms” (p.14/15f.)

In conclusion, the text recommends that the Protestant churches proceed on their “way of common confession” taken at Leuenberg (cf. 14/24-38). In section “8. Commitment and Obligation” (p. 14/39) the following criteria are named for this process: The “way of shared confession for today” should “be pursued” (p. 14/37f.)

- in accordance with “the center of the biblical witness, the Gospel of Jesus Christ”, which makes it possible to formulate anew for one’s own time the message of Scripture (cf. p. 14/40-46),
- in respect for the existing confessions, which rests on the fact that they are understood “to be different witnesses for the one Gospel”, and which accordingly conceives them as guidance toward “common witness and ... service in reconciled difference” (cf. p. 14/47-15/8),
- in the form of an ecclesial instruction, which takes place through Synodal decisions and Scriptural interpretation commissioned by the church and that is binding as “product of a ... process of consensus-building with an orientation to Holy Scripture and to the confessions”, since, and to the extent that in this process “the Holy Spirit is at work” (cf. p. 15/9-23),
- for the strengthening of the ecclesial community declared, which obligates the churches of the GEKE “to consult” with one another, “to give consideration to the ecumenical consequences” and “to think beyond their present boundaries” in their decision making (cf. p. 15/24-34).

III

It is worth the effort to think through in a fundamental way this attempt to formulate the essential features of a Protestant Scriptural hermeneutics. In the present paper I can only begin to fulfill that task. For this reason I will confine my remarks to identifying the points on which, from the perspective of a biblical scholar, I see a need for further reflection and clarification.

1) The text rightly takes as its starting point the confession, fundamental to Christianity, that – in accordance with the biblical witness – God has continuously been revealing himself to human beings since the beginning of creation and that he did so in a definitive way in Jesus Christ. The Old Testament bears witness to historical events in which Israel was brought together to form *one* people, saw herself as chosen to be the “People of God” (Lev 26:12 et al.), learned to understand herself as such and had to prove herself as such. The New Testament then an-

¹¹ Konkordienformel. Epitome Articulorum. Von dem summarischen Begriff, Regel und Richtschnur ..., Section 3, cited according to: *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*, Göttingen 1982, 768f., p. 769/30f.

¹² *Leuenberger Konkordie* (see note 4), Section IV., par. 29.

nounces events in which people from Israel and (soon also) from among the Gentiles identified Jesus as the messenger of the eschatological kingdom of God as well as the savior from sin and death, found themselves coming together to form the “church of God” (Acts 20:28 et al.) and sought to fulfill their mission as witnesses of Jesus Christ.¹³ Since Christianity understands these documents as Holy Scripture, she professes that God has revealed himself *in history*. But this confession would in my opinion have to be developed from the New Testament witness to Christ with greater consistency than has been achieved in the text of the GEKE’s doctrinal discussion group.

For one thing, it is important to emphasize the fundamental fact that the word of God “*never comes to us other than in human words*”.¹⁴ The incarnation of the Word of God attested to in the Johannine writings (Jn 1:14) has made this particularly clear. If, in other words, God and man are truly found together in the person of Jesus Christ, then human and divine action in history can neither be offset against each other nor separated from one another. And this applies to the reading and interpretation of the Bible as well.¹⁵

For another, we must understand the fulfillment of the history of God’s revelatory speaking in Christ itself as a *historical process*. The New Testament attests the expectation of an end-time fulfillment of the Christ event (e.g. 1 Cor 15:20-28). This expectation is an integral element of the relationship of Christians to God marked by faith, hope and love. The title “Christ” already points to this fact. It identifies Jesus as the eschatological representative of God, who fulfills God’s promises of salvation for Israel and the peoples of the world as they are given in the Old Testament. For this purpose, through the Gospel of Christ, God brings together the eschatological People of God from the Jews and the Gentiles for life in the new covenant. But this gathering is part of a redemption process that embraces the whole of creation and that will come to a conclusion only with the Parousia.¹⁶

2) Against this background, it would be well to further pursue the relevant references of the GEKE’s doctrinal discussion text to the unity of the Bible and the connection of the story of Jesus with the story of Israel.

The text rightly argues from this connection to the enduring *bond* of the Church *with Judaism*. The very language of God’s righteousness – so central to Protestant theology – sets the Gospel in the context of the enduring election of Israel (Rom 1:16f).¹⁷ Accordingly Paul sees the promises for Israel reinforced through the service of Christ (15:8) – and he is therefore certain, that although the majority of Israel has rejected the Gospel, she will have a share in the final redemption (11:25ff). Only the praises of God jointly sung by the peoples of the world and Israel together will bring to light what Christians believe: the identity of God as Father of Jesus Christ

¹³ Similar to the perspective outlined here on the relationship between the history (of Israel and of Jesus) and the writings (Old and New Testaments) are some observations by N. Walter, Neues Testament, in: U. Tworuschka (ed.), *Heilige Schriften. Eine Einführung*, Darmstadt 2000, 57–83, p. 79.

¹⁴ Cf. I. Baldermann, *Einführung in die Bibel*, UTB 1486, Göttingen 1993, 5 (italics F. W.).

¹⁵ Cf. R. Fernhout, The Bible as God’s Word. A Christological View, in: H. M. Vroom / J. D. Gort (eds.), *Holy Scriptures in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, Currents of encounter 12, Amsterdam/Atlanta 1997, 57–68, who from the „analogy between the Word of God become flesh and the Word of God become scripture“ (61) pointedly concludes: „The Bible has both a divine as well as human authors, but the relation between the divine and human activities cannot be defined without violation of one or the other of them.“ (62).

¹⁶ On the eschatological aspect of New Testament Christology, which derives (not least) from the connection of the „Christ“ title with the eschatological hope of Israel, cf. M. Karrer, *Jesus Christus im Neuen Testament*, GNT 11, Göttingen 1998, 157f.

¹⁷ On this, see F. Wilk, Gottesgerechtigkeit – Gesetzeswerke – eigene Gerechtigkeit. Überlegungen zur geschichtlichen Verwurzelung und theologischen Bedeutung paulinischer Rechtfertigungsaussagen im Anschluss an die „New Perspective“, *ThLZ* 135, 2010, 267–282, esp. 269f.276f.281f.

and God of Israel. Until that time their confession of Jesus as the “Christ” is as provisional as is the Jewish “no” to the Gospel.¹⁸

For this reason the text does well to treat the Old and New Testaments as a unity in tension. This takes place when the faithfulness of the Church to early Christian praxis in interpreting the Bible of Israel anew with Christ as its reference point¹⁹ is joined with a respect shown to a Jewish reading of Scripture. Actually, the New Testament witness suggests that the *relationship of the testaments*, though it has to be differentiated with respect to the different genres of Scriptural texts,²⁰ should be described as fundamentally dialogical. This is a logical consequence of the fact that precisely the forms of divine address in the Old Testament regarded by Christians as fundamental – the promise and the demand – take on a twofold significance in light of the New Testament: God’s commandments first make human beings aware of their sinfulness, but then for persons who believe in Christ they function also as instructions for life; God’s promises elicit first, with respect to Jesus’ actions and fate, the skeptical question: “Are you the one who is to come?” (Matt 11:2 par.), but they then go on to teach us to grasp the Christ event in the light of faith as the decisive beginning of the eschatological saving act of God (cf. Lk 24:45-47 et al.). So, the two Testaments of the Christian Bible stand in a process of mutual disclosure and interpretation.²¹

3) The text rightly describes Holy Scripture as the normative witness for the Church to God’s original utterance in the history of Israel and of Jesus Christ; it rightly defines the message of God’s reconciling act in Christ as its center; it rightly identifies the profound understanding of this message and that witness as faith, which in the human words of Scripture hears the address of God. All three statements correspond to the contents and the essence of the biblical canon as perceived from the perspective of the New Testament.²² They would of course require further in-depth study.

In order to hear God’s word in Scripture, one must consistently grasp it as human word. Doing so involves the recognition that here it is always human beings who are speaking, whether devotees of the God of Israel or followers of Jesus Christ. As such they speak of experiences²³ in which they have perceived God’s reality; they are, in other words, displaying their faith. The historical events and experiences to which they refer are therefore interpreted from the beginning in the light of God. Accordingly, every biblical text is to be understood as a “literary testimony of an historical faith experience”.²⁴ But it is precisely this character that qualifies biblical texts as media through which the Holy Spirit awakens faith anew. For faith originates where human be-

¹⁸ Cf. F. Wilk, Die paulinische Rede vom „Christus“ als Beitrag zu einer biblischen Theologie, in: K. Finsterbusch, *Bibel nach Plan? Biblische Theologie und schulischer Religionsunterricht*, Göttingen 2007, 133–151, p. 147f.

¹⁹ Cf. the fundamental work on this issue in N. Walter, Urchristliche Autoren als Leser der „Schriften“ Israels, *BThZ* 14, 1997, 59–77.

²⁰ On the primary significance of the variety of genres in Holy Scripture for its historical understanding cf. T. Baarda, Scripture and Historical Research, in: Vroom/Gort (eds.), *Holy Scriptures* (see above note 15), 113–121, p. 114.

²¹ Similarly M. Oeming, Biblische Theologie als Dauerreflexion im Raum des Kanons, in: C. Dohmen / T. Söding (ed.), *Eine Bibel – zwei Testamente. Positionen Biblischer Theologie*, Paderborn et al. 1995, 83–95, who defines “Dialogik” as the “essence of the canon” (89f.).

²² A narrative such as Act 8:26-40 illustrates this in exemplary fashion.

²³ Cf. U. Luz, Erwägungen zur sachgemäßen Interpretation neutestamentlicher Texte, *EvTh* 42, 1982, 493–518, here 502: „Es sind Ereignisse und Erfahrungen, die biblische Autoren zum Sprechen und Schreiben nötigen; und auf diese Erfahrungen hin wollen die Texte befragt und gehört werden.“

²⁴ Cf. T. Söding, Wissenschaftliche und kirchliche Schriftauslegung. Hermeneutische Überlegungen zur Verbindlichkeit der Heiligen Schrift, in: W. Pannenberg / T. Schneider (ed.), *Verbindliches Zeugnis II. Schriftauslegung – Lehramt – Rezeption*, Dialog der Kirchen 9, Freiburg/Göttingen 1995, 72–121, p. 97.

ings find themselves with their own experiences in the text of the Bible and are in their turn motivated through these texts to understand life in the light of God.²⁵

In this connection Christians can then also make sense of their canon. In fact, the canon has been de facto established – with certain variations in the different Christian churches – such that it is possible and imperative to interpret its shape theologically.²⁶ However the Protestant Churches have rightly refrained from codifying either its extension or its precise wording.²⁷ The canon is an historical phenomenon; so changes, for example in connection with new textual findings, are in principle possible on the basis of an ecclesial consensus. All the more important is it to be reassured ever anew with regard to the reliability of the canon. And this requires not only evidence that it contains the fundamental faith witness of Israel and of early Christianity; the Church must also be able to show that through these writings she receives orientation in questions concerning her own faith and life.²⁸

It is this very necessity that requires the identification of the center of the canon. Only starting from this center can the Church make plausible that the scriptures of the canon are able to serve as a basic faith witness that gives direction for the present. Of course the historical character of these writings is also to be noted. Both the original meaning of a text and its meaning for today grow out of its relationship to particular historical situations. The relationship between the multifaceted whole and the center of Scripture should therefore be described in the sense of a mutual influence: if it is certain that the total witness of Scripture is unified and focused through her center, it is equally certain that that center can only be perceived and developed in its full meaning, and so be brought to concrete expression in this or that way with the help of the many biblical voices.²⁹

4) Likewise with respect to the understanding and interpretation of Holy Scripture it seems to me advisable to describe in a more precise way what is outlined in the text of the GEKE doctrinal discussion group.

One would have to speak of *understanding* biblical texts in a twofold sense. Understanding takes place on the one hand where a text is read as a literary witness of historical faith experience, and on the other hand where a person hears the address of God to him that occurs through the text.

The first is the goal of a human effort to understand. One will come closer to that meaning of a specific text the better one knows its background and its context that enable us to grasp its literary profile, its historical reference and its original intention. It is therefore appropriate to

²⁵ On this, cf. Baldermann, *Einführung* (see note 14 above), 27: The biblical texts „sind nun einmal randvoll von Erfahrung mit dieser neuen, umwälzenden Wirklichkeit (sc. der Versöhnung und Erlösung etc.); sie sprechen eine Sprache, die davon geprägt ist, und sie wollen ja nichts anderes als Anteil geben an dieser Erfahrung und ihren Konsequenzen“.

²⁶ On this, cf. e.g. K.-W. Niebuhr, *Die Gestalt des neutestamentlichen Kanons. Anregungen zur Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, in: E. Ballhorn / G. Steins (eds.), *Der Bibelkanon in der Bibelauslegung. Methodenreflexion und Beispiele*, Stuttgart 2007, 95–109.

²⁷ Cf. O. Weber, *Grundlagen der Dogmatik*, Berlin 1983, 283: „Wir stehen vor der gewichtigen Tatsache, dass im 16. Jahrhundert die Kirche der ‚Tradition‘ den Schriftkanon *grundsätzlich* und *endgültig* festgelegt hat, während umgekehrt die Kirche des ‚Wortes‘ den Kanon als eine *offene* Größe behandelte, sich jedenfalls mit seiner *Tatsächlichkeit* im allgemeinen zufrieden gab.“

²⁸ On the necessary connection between the history of the interpretation (“Wirkungsgeschichte”) and historical grounding for the canonical significance of the biblical Scriptures cf. W. Joest, *Fundamentaltheologie. Theologische Grundlagen- und Methodenprobleme*, Theologische Wissenschaft 11, Stuttgart et al. 1974, 169–172.

²⁹ Cf. on this the simultaneous emphasis of (theological-historical) multiplicity and the unity of the New Testament (whether grounded in the preaching of Christ, or in the revelation witness of the New Testament writings) by E. Lohse (*Die Einheit des Neuen Testaments. Exegetische Studien zur Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, Göttingen 1973; *Die Vielfalt des Neuen Testaments. Exegetische Studien zur Theologie des Neuen Testaments 2*, Göttingen 1982) and F. Hahn (*Theologie des Neuen Testaments, Band I: Die Vielfalt des Neuen Testaments. Theologiegeschichte des Urchristentums; Band II: Die Einheit des Neuen Testaments. Thematische Darstellung*, Tübingen 2005).

pursue this effort at the scientific level;³⁰ this kind of effort is however by no means reserved to the biblical scholar.

But if God's voice is heard through the text in a way that relates to our present, that is the work of the Spirit which, in human beings, assumes the form of faith. Believers hereby appropriate the biblical witness, since they grasp it as a word that creates a bond between their life and the truth of God.³¹ No other condition underlies such an understanding on the human side than that of a careful listening to what is being said in the text.

The two modes of understanding are not necessarily connected. The significance of a biblical text for today is sometimes grasped intuitively, above all however in the wake of the *interpretation* of biblical texts which is assigned to the Church. "Interpretation" ("Auslegung") means that a biblical text is linked to the present life situation of those participating in the interpretation process, in such a way that a mutual illumination occurs between the text and the situation in question. This can take place in a variety of ways and with the help of diverse interpretative methods³² – and should of course be intelligible. But whether beyond this point the participants arrive at true understanding is a matter that does not lie within the power of interpretation.

At the same time interpretation requires instruction as well as critical review. Such a need flows necessarily from the circumstance that every interpretation takes place against the background of a long history of interpretation and within a community of interpreters often enough marked by strife and contradiction – and must therefore be made plausible in this twofold connection. As a measure for such instruction and review the text of the GEKE doctrinal discussion group with good reason names the question as to "what promotes Christ" ("was Christum treibet"). This criterion is particularly helpful if we take into account that the above question not only aims at consent to the Christian confession but also intends to introduce those who believe in Christ to the love of Jesus Christ and the promotion of unity in their community.³³ But this criterion is not sufficient. For in itself it is incapable of insuring that an interpretation "is adequately and respectfully keeping in view the biblical text as *given* reality"³⁴. It is therefore necessary for interpretation to have exegesis as its counterpart, whose aim is precisely this careful attention to the text.

To take the text as a reality given in advance means in the case of biblical texts above all two things: one must be aware of its character as conditioned by history, and therefore its foreignness, and one must appreciate its place in the canon. Inasmuch as exegesis, especially in its scientific form, pursues this as its agenda it is related to the interpretation of that text and is at its service. In this connection, it has a heuristic as well as a critical function.

With regard to a historically oriented exegesis this function can be described as follows: By showing how a particular biblical text in its time of origin explains historical experiences in the light of God and then gives expression to them as faith experiences, exegesis serves interpretation for the present both as a model and as criterion. The interpretation cannot of course simply repeat the message derived from exegesis – so certain it is that God's word enters ever anew

³⁰ Cf. e.g. the study of O. Wischmeyer: *Hermeneutik des Neuen Testaments. Ein Lehrbuch*, NET 8, Tübingen et al. 2004.

³¹ On this, cf. U. H. J. Körtner, *Der inspirierte Leser. Zentrale Aspekte biblischer Hermeneutik*, Göttingen 1994, 60: „Der Glaube ist ein Verstehen biblischer Texte, durch welches der Leser nicht nur in den Text gerät, um ihn zu vervollständigen, sondern durch welches er seinerseits verwandelt wird, indem er sich neu verstehen und so neu zu leben lernt.“

³² An overview on currently practiced interpretation methods is provided by M. Oeming, *Biblische Hermeneutik. Eine Einführung*, Darmstadt ³2010.

³³ On this see the combination of „theological“, „moral“ and „ecumenical considerations“ in the evaluation of different interpretations by C. H. Cosgrove, *Toward a Postmodern Hermeneutica Sacra: Guiding Considerations in Choosing between Competing Plausible Interpretations of Scripture*, in: idem (ed.), *The Meanings We Choose. Hermeneutical Ethics, Indeterminacy and the Conflict of Interpretations*, JSOT.S 411, London et al. 2004, 39–61.

³⁴ On this cf. S. Alkier, *Fremdes Verstehen – Überlegungen auf dem Weg zu einer Ethik der Interpretation biblischer Schriften. Eine Antwort an Laurence L. Welborn*, ZNT 11, 2003, 48–59, p. 52.

into history³⁵. However, since God remains true to himself the interpretation for the present must have a clear nexus with the original intention of the text. This will then be the case if it follows its “tendency of meaning”,³⁶ and thus enters into a relationship to present life reality which corresponds to the relationship of the original message and the situation it originally addressed.

On the other hand exegesis – to the extent that it stands in service to interpretation – must lay out what status pertains to a particular text when viewed in the context of the entire biblical canon; for it is only as part of this canon that the text has authoritative meaning for the interpreting community.³⁷ In order to fulfill this task, exegesis traces the inter-textual relationships that exist between the text in question and other parts of the canon. This means especially describing the historically demonstrable reception processes that characterize the history of the text’s origin and that of its effect on its readers (“Wirkungsgeschichte”), but then too establishing thematic connections within the canon that can be shown to be plausible beyond this process.³⁸ The demonstration of such relationships also qualifies exegesis to provide orientation to and to serve as a criterion for interpretation, just as the interpretation should for its part integrate the text into a comprehensive understanding of the biblical message that relates it to present realities.

Understanding and interpretation as well as interpretation and exegesis are then in each case so related to one another that the second is at the service of the first and the first grows out of the second, without being able to be generated from it. But common to all three procedures is the relationship of the biblical message to the life world of its hearers which is given, to be produced, or tracked down in the fundamental mode of faith experience.³⁹



Apostles with Scripture Scrolls in Hand
Detail of a Cross in the Church of Beaufort in Luxembourg

³⁵ On this cf. M. Luther, *De servo arbitrio*, WA 18, 600–787, p. 626/26f.: „Sermo enim Dei venit mutaturus et innovaturus orbem, quoties venit.“

³⁶ Cf. Luz, *Erwägungen* (see note 23), 504.

³⁷ On this see P. Ricoeur, *The Canon between the Text and the Community*, in: Pokorný/ Roskovec (eds.), *Hermeneutics* (see note 5), 7–26, esp. 13–15.23–26.

³⁸ S. Alkier has rightly differentiated between variations of intertextuality that are orientated towards production, towards reception and towards the text itself (cf. idem, *Zeichen der Erinnerung – Die Genealogie in Mt 1 als intertextuelle Disposition*, in: K.-M. Bull / E. Reinmuth [eds.], *Bekenntnis und Erinnerung. In honor of H.-F. Weiß*, Rostocker Theologische Studien 16, Münster 2004, 108–128). I am here applying this differentiation to inner-canonical references.

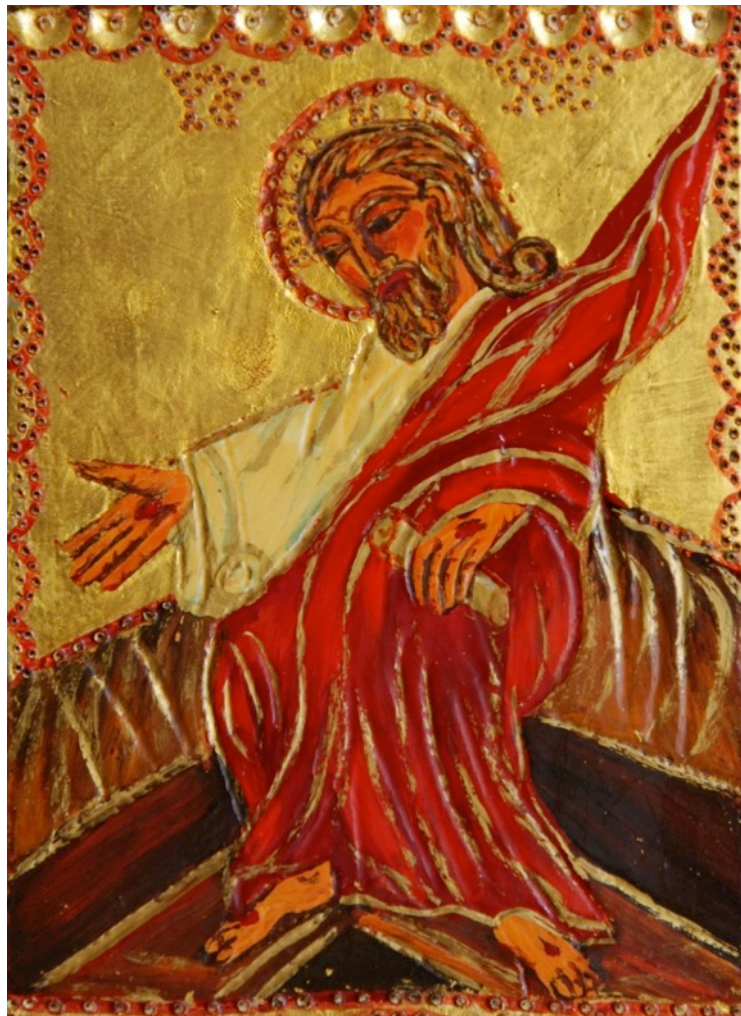
³⁹ That inquiring into such an experience characterizes both the analysis of the generative process of biblical texts and the perception of those texts realized in interpretative methods related to reception processes is nicely brought out by H.K. Berg, *Ein Wort wie Feuer, Wege lebendiger Bibelauslegung*, München/Stuttgart 1991, 420–422.

IV

The text of the GEKE doctrinal discussion group represents, in my opinion, a good beginning toward describing a Protestant hermeneutics of the Bible. This beginning should be carried forward in the spirit of the reflections outlined above. It would then become clear that Protestant hermeneutics

- emphasizes the historical character of biblical texts as well as their relationship to experience,
- underscores the dialogical unity of Holy Scripture, which consists of the Old and New Testaments, while recognizing the enduring election of Israel,
- brings out the necessary connection between the identification of the center of the canon and the acceptance of its variety, and
- establishes the differentiated connection between understanding a text in the light of faith, perceiving it adequately, interpreting it with regard to present reality, and exeging it within its historical context and in its biblical-canonical context.

It is precisely in this way that a Protestant hermeneutics would be able to serve ecumenical understanding – and come to see itself as a historical phenomenon. The latter might well be its greatest strength – and the characteristic that corresponds most closely with its object and its task.



The Risen Lord with the Scriptures in His Hand
Detail of a Cross in the Church of Beaufort in Luxembourg

Projects and Experiences

Experiences with Bibliodrama in Papua-New Guinea Sr. Anna Damas SSPS

In contrast to what the name suggests – bibliodrama is not the imitation of a biblical narrative as in a theatre piece or scenic play designed for a general audience. Rather, bibliodrama requires that one step into the role of a biblical personality so as to experience, or re-live the biblical story from his or her perspective. This inevitably brings into play certain feelings that mirror the faith and life experiences of the bibliodrama participant. In such a way the biblical narrative becomes a personal event lived by the participant in the here and now.

Since I have been living and working in Papua-New Guinea, I have become conscious that I am German. The encounter with a culture here that is so different from my own has made me aware of my own cultural origin: the „illuminated“, Western, individualistic society. My pastoral activity with the people in Papua-New Guinea confronted me with another world – a world full of spirits, myths and magic. The world-view of the people here is comparable with the pre-modern world-view in the Europe of the Middle Ages. Unfortunately the Middle Ages are often disparaged as a time of dark superstition. Actually it was a time of extreme cultural and spiritual creativity. As in the Europe of the Middle Ages, so also in New Guinea the world is not dismantled, de-mythologized and emptied of sensitivity to the spirit world. Everything is alive with spirit, everything is shot through with myth and transparent to a spiritual world. Narratives are not conceived of in temporal-lineal terms (as chains of events), but as stories. What was once upon a time is the mythical model for what now is and what will continue to unfold in new ways. So, for example, Christians in Papua-New Guinea see in the 12 tribes of Israel the original mythical pattern of their own tribes. Through the acceptance of the Christian faith they too have entered the family line of the people of God, Israel.

The culture of Papua-New Guinea is as it were made for bibliodrama. It is a highly oral culture and drawn to visual imagery. People tell each other stories. They love little scenic plays called „dramas“, which they compose and perform in an informal and spontaneous way. Speakers and street preachers draw their audiences in not merely by means of words but also with their very distinctive body language. While people in the western, technological societies tend to represent content in abstract terminology and concepts, the people in Papua New Guinea like to express themselves in proverbs and colorful imagery.

Because of this I was quite surprised that my first attempt at bibliodrama in Papua-New Guinea was a failure. Bibliodrama, as I knew it, didn't go down well with the people. The form of bibliodrama with which I was familiar is dependent on the laws of psychodrama. Participants reflect and focus intensively on their own center of consciousness with its feelings, moods, experiences and problems. In contrast, people in Papua-New Guinea are less focused on the self, and are primarily community oriented. Western participants in bibliodrama usually have no problem detaching themselves from the existing biblical narrative („Peter in the Bible behaves thus; but this is how *I* think and feel“). But people in Papua New Guinea prefer to remain faithful to the original biblical story and to play along with the characters. So as a bibliodrama leader I would often strike them as confusing and over-demanding in my attempts to lead them to a form of self-referential confrontation with the Bible narrative.



Gradually I was able to develop forms of bibliodrama that are better adapted to the culture of Papua-New Guinea. Body language is emphasized. Reflection is more likely to happen when it proceeds from action rather than as a result of a focus on personal feelings. The forms are also more strongly community oriented. For example, the roles of biblical personalities are not assigned to individuals; rather, they are represented by a group. This all does not mean that the participants do not reflect on their own persons and faith experience; only they arrive at this result through something outside of themselves, namely through the group and the action.

The Christians in Papua-New Guinea like to read and understand the Bible as allegory – something like the allegorical procedures known from the Church fathers. While for many parts of the Bible this is altogether helpful and appropriate (such as for the Book of Revelation), in other texts it obscures the dynamic of the stories; they become a static allegory outside the realms of time and place. In this case bibliodrama is very helpful in making the stories come back to life again as stories. The participants experience the stories as actual occurrences with real persons. And they experience the internal dynamism of the persons in the narrative who undergo a transformation. Just like the people in the stories the bibliodrama participants are different persons at the end of the story than at the beginning.

More than anything, bibliodrama is an outstanding educational medium. It took a lot of effort on my part to explain in a class for catechists who the Pharisees were and why they were so frequently in conflict with Jesus; but it remained difficult. This changed abruptly when we put on a Pharisee story (Mk 3:1-6). The groups that took on the role of the Pharisees so fully appropriated their way of thinking that they came to understand very well why Jesus for them was a law-breaker and a blasphemer. And they even recognized this same conflict in their own faith lives: what makes us good Christians? Following all the commandments to the letter? And as for following the spirit of the commandments, how does that work in practice?

For bibliodrama participants in Papua-New Guinea (and for me as their instructor too!) the exercise is a delightful faith experience. In bibliodrama the Word of God becomes what it is supposed to be: a living word in the here and now. Rather than simply a book of white missionaries, the Bible becomes the Word of God for simple people, a word that transcends all cultures and times in its ability to speak and to motivate.

Federation News

CBF Message to the Holy Father on the Occasion of His Election to the Papacy

Catholic Biblical Federation
Fédération Biblique Catholique
Federación Bíblica Católica
Katholische Bibelföderation



General Secretariat
D-86941 Sankt Ottilien

D-86941 Sankt Ottilien, March 28, 2013

His Holiness Pope Francis, Bishop of Rome
The Vatican

Your Holiness,

It is with profound joy and high esteem that, in the name of the Catholic Biblical Federation, we congratulate you and welcome you as our shepherd as you assume your ministry as Bishop of Rome and as *Servus servorum* of the Roman Catholic Church.

The Catholic Biblical Federation, with its some 300 member organizations across the world, is devoted to the implementation of Vatican II's Constitution *Dei Verbum* and in particular its chapter 6 on "The Word of God in the Life of the Church". Since its foundation in 1969 under the auspices of the then Secretariat for Christian Unity and with the explicit encouragement of His Holiness Pope Paul VI, the Catholic Biblical Federation has devoted its energies to making the Word of God widely accessible to all men and women, and this in the dynamics of the "Biblical Apostolate", the "Biblical Pastoral Ministry" and the "Biblical Inspiration of all Pastoral Ministry". Your venerable predecessor, His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI, confirmed the necessity of "*Biblica animatio totius actionis pastoralis*" for the renewal of the Church in *Verbum Domini* (73) and indeed provided us with a "road map" for our ministry. The recent Synod of Bishops recognized the careful study and the prayerful reading of the Scriptures as an essential foundation of the New Evangelization, rejoining Pope Benedict's appeal that he addressed to the Assembly of CELAM in Aparecida in 2007.

Your Holiness, we of the Catholic Biblical Federation are aware that we are "unprofitable Servants", only doing our duty (Lk 17:10) and that the fruit of our ministry depends not on us but on the power of God's Word. Nonetheless, we humbly pledge to intensify our efforts for sharing the Good News of God's Word with our fellow human beings in the various countries in which we live and minister, and this in profound communion with you as our supreme guide. Please be ensured of our profound respect and fervent prayers for you and your ministry.

+ Vincenzo Paglia

Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia
President of the Pontifical Council for the Family
President of the Catholic Biblical Federation

+ B. Haßlberger

Bishop Dr. Bernhard Haßlberger
Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Munich
and Freising
Chairman of the CBF Administrative Board

+ Telesphor Mkude

Bishop Telesphor Mkude
Bishop of the Diocese of Morogoro, Tanzania
Moderator of the CBF Executive Committee

Thomas P. Osborne, Jr.

Prof. Thomas P. Osborne
CBF Acting General Secretary

Pope Francis'
Apostolic Exhortation
Evangelii Gaudium
on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World
(extracts)

149. The preacher "ought first of all to develop a great personal familiarity with the word of God. Knowledge of its linguistic or exegetical aspects, though certainly necessary, is not enough. He needs to approach the word with a docile and prayerful heart so that it may deeply penetrate his thoughts and feelings and bring about a new outlook in him". It is good for us to renew our fervor each day and every Sunday as we prepare the homily, examining ourselves to see if we have grown in love for the word which we preach. Nor should we forget that "the greater or lesser degree of the holiness of the minister has a real effect on the proclamation of the word". As Saint Paul says, "we speak, not to please men, but to please God who tests our hearts" (1 Th 2:4). If we have a lively desire to be the first to hear the word which we must preach, this will surely be communicated to God's faithful people, for "out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks" (Mt 12:34). The Sunday readings will resonate in all their brilliance in the hearts of the faithful if they have first done so in the heart of their pastor.

...

174. Not only the homily has to be nourished by the word of God. All evangelization is based on that word, listened to, meditated upon, lived, celebrated and witnessed to. The sacred Scriptures are the very source of evangelization. Consequently, we need to be constantly trained in hearing the word. The Church does not evangelize unless she constantly lets herself be evangelized. It is indispensable that the word of God "be ever more fully at the heart of every ecclesial activity". God's word, listened to and celebrated, above all in the Eucharist, nourishes and inwardly strengthens Christians, enabling them to offer an authentic witness to the Gospel in daily life. We have long since moved beyond that old contraposition between word and sacrament. The preaching of the word, living and effective, prepares for the reception of the sacrament, and in the sacrament that word attains its maximum efficacy.

175. The study of the sacred Scriptures must be a door opened to every believer. It is essential that the revealed word radically enrich our catechesis and all our efforts to pass on the faith. Evangelization demands familiarity with God's word, which calls for dioceses, parishes and Catholic associations to provide for a serious, ongoing study of the Bible, while encouraging its prayerful individual and communal reading. We do not blindly seek God, or wait for him to speak to us first, for "God has already spoken, and there is nothing further that we need to know, which has not been revealed to us". Let us receive the sublime treasure of the revealed word.

Message of the Executive Committee of the Catholic Biblical Federation

1. We the members and member representatives of the Executive Committee of the Catholic Biblical Federation met in Rome in the offices of the Pontifical Council for the Family from June 30-July 2, 2013.

2. To our great joy all members of the Executive Committee were present: Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, CBF President; Bishop Telesphor Mkude, moderator FM representative (Africa); Msgr. Juan Usma Gómez, Representative of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity; Msgr. Dr. Bertram Meier (representative of Bishop Dr. Bernhard Haßlberger, chairman of the Administrative Board); Father Cesare Bissoli, vice moderator, AM representative; Fr. Guillermo Acero, FM representative (Latin America, CELAM-CEBIPAL); Fr. Giuseppe De Virgilio, FM representative (Europe-Middle East); Bishop Renato Mayugba, FM representative (Asia-Oceania, ECBA Philippines); Mrs. Teresa Wilsnagh, AM representative (Catholic Bible Foundation of South Africa), in addition to the Acting General Secretary, Prof. Thomas Osborne.

3. Encouraged by the letter sent by his Eminence Kurt Cardinal Koch, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and guided by Saint Paul's letter to the Galatians, chapter 5 and the prayer of Psalm 33, we experienced not only the joy of being together but also the sharing of our common responsibility for guiding the Catholic Biblical forward in consolidating its "new beginning". The celebration of the Eucharist in the Basilica of Saint Mary of Trastevere and our common prayer provided us with the spiritual nourishment and encouragement necessary for our deliberations.

4. The reports of the activities in the regions and subregions, as well as of the Administrative Board and of the Acting General Secretary were a source of joy for us, as they informed us of continuing life in the Federation at large and of the renewal of confidence in the Catholic Biblical Federation, from numerous members and both from long term and new funding organizations and indeed from the German Bishops' Conference. We are particularly grateful to Reinhard Cardinal Marx, archbishop of the Archdiocese of Munich and Freising who has largely contributed to the renewal of the Federation.

5. The intensive engagement of the Administrative Board, under the direction of Bishop Dr. Bernhard Haßlberger, has borne fruit in opening the way to a solid basis for the accomplishment of the fundamental CBF goals. At the present time the board is composed of Bishop Haßlberger (chairman) and Msgr. Bertram Meier (vice-chairman), Fr. Jan Stefanów SVD and Dr. Oliver Bludovsky, to whom the EC adjoined Prof. Dr. Sr. Margareta Gruber OSF (Prof. of New Testament Studies in Vallendar) and Abbot President Jeremias Schroeder OSB (President of the Missionary Benedictines). At this time, we express our sincere gratitude to Prof. Wolfgang Simler who has served as Treasurer of the CBF for the past four and a half years and contributed in an important manner to giving the CBF a solid financial basis for its future work.

6. The deliberations of the EC covered various aspects of the life of the Federation: the redefinition of the primary functions of a streamlined general secretariat; the organization of the Plenary scheduled for June 18-23, 2015 in Nemi at the Divine Word Missionaries' Centro "Ad gentes", at which occasion the CBF shall celebrate the 50th anniversary of Dei Verbum; the revision of the CBF constitution; the question of membership fees; the search process for a full time general secretary and for a president for the period beginning in 2015; the continuing efforts for the appointment of coordinators for all CBF subregions ...

7. We are deeply grateful for the openness and the common quest for succeeding the new beginning of the CBF that we experienced during this meeting. We are quite aware of the major challenges and of the favorable opportunities which await the CBF in the upcoming years. The reinforcement and support of the subregional and regional structures, the Biblical pastoral accompaniment of the World Family Day scheduled for Philadelphia in 2015, the development of formation programs for those responsible for the organization of BP programs in dioceses, religious orders, etc. are just a few of those major projects awaiting our concerted efforts in making God's saving and healing Word available to all men and women on this planet. Our sincere and humble hope is that the fellowship of the Catholic Biblical Federation reunite its resources and expertise, in mutual solidarity and respect, to meet these challenges, inspired by the promise of the Word and guided by the Spirit.



"God's Spirit swept over the waters" (Gen 1:2)
Detail from the Portal of the Cathedral in Speyer

Kurt Cardinal Koch, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, writes to the Executive Committee



PONTIFICIUM CONSILIUM
AD CHRISTIANORUM UNITATEM FOVENDAM

E. Civitate Vaticana, die 27 June 2013

PROT. N. 999/2013/e

Dear Archbishop Paglia,

I am writing to extend to you and the other participants in the Executive Committee meeting of the Catholic Biblical Federation (CBF) my best greetings and prayers for the success of your deliberations, of substantial importance for the future of the Federation. I am pleased to hear that all Executive Committee (EC) members and delegates will be present for this meeting. After some years of turmoil within the CBF I am most grateful to all who are contributing to making this new beginning possible.

It was of particular interest to me to learn that the revision of the CBF Constitution has advanced well and will be a specific point of discussion at the meeting. I trust that this revision, which my predecessor, Cardinal Walter Kasper, explicitly requested, can proceed towards its final approval by the Holy See and thus provide the CBF with a solid and clear basis of governance for the future.

I am confident that when the CBF celebrates its next Plenary Assembly scheduled in 2015, marking the 50th anniversary of its founding document, the Second Vatican Council's Constitution "Dei Verbum", it will be able to look back on these years of intensive and fruitful commitment to the spreading of the Word of God in today's world. I particularly welcome the project currently being developed by the CBF concerning the reading of the Scriptures in the family, since I am convinced that faith and love for the Word of God is transmitted primarily through the privileged channel of the "ecclesia domestica".

Please convey to those attending the EC meeting, as well as to the members of the Administrative Board and the Acting General Secretary, my gratitude for their commitment to the Federation and its work. Kindly convey my thanks and appreciation to all of the CBF members at large for their engagement in the biblical apostolate. I encourage them to deepen their love of the Scriptures, to commit themselves ever more fully to sharing this saving Word with each other and with all of their brothers and sisters across the world. Combine your efforts, not only to consolidate the "new beginning" of the CBF, but also to respond courageously and generously to the challenges of the next months and years.

With my sincere prayers that God bless you and your ministry.

Yours sincerely in Christ,

Cardinal Kurt Koch
President

Most Reverend Vincenzo Paglia
President of the Catholic Biblical Federation
General Secretariat
D-86941 ST OTILIE GERMANY

gensec@c-b-f.org; pcf@family.va

The CEBIPAL-FEBIC-LAC congress on the Biblical Animation of the pastoral activity of the Church in the light of Verbum Domini and the New Evangelization in Lima (Peru) (August 5-8, 2013)

The First Latin-American Congress on the Biblical Animation of the pastoral activity of the Church was at the same time the VI Meeting of the FEBIC-LAC. About 80 persons from 18 countries attended the event. The conferences of the Congress treated the main points of the Verbum Domini exhortation read in the context of Latin America and the Caribbean. The greeting letter of the Acting General Secretary of the CBF to the participants of the meeting was read during the plenary session. The full text of the conferences will be published by CEBIPAL in the near future. During the meeting sessions of the FEBIC-LAC, the new zonal coordinators were elected: Ricardo Guillén (Venezuela) for Países Bolivarianos, Gerardo García Helder (Argentina) for Cono Sur (Brasil was incorporated to these Zone) as well as the coordinators for Mexico/Central America and Antilles. A final message was presented at the conclusion of the meeting.

The Central European Subregional meeting was held in Warsaw (Poland) on September 1, 2013

Upon the initiative of the Acting General Secretary, Father Jan Stefanów svd informed the Central European CBF member representatives who had assembled for the annual encounter of those active in the biblical pastoral field in central Europe of the developments within the CBF since the Ariccia Plenary Assembly in 2011. In particular, the decision of the German Bishops' Conference to reactivate its membership in the CBF and resume its support of the Federation was welcomed by all the participants. In the future, this annual meeting should take place under the auspices of the CBF as such. The member delegates who were present proposed Mr. Wolfgang Baur from the Katholisches Bibelwerk in Germany for the office of subregional coordinator. The following days provided the participants with the opportunity of reporting on their activities during the past year.

The BICAM Plenary Assembly in Malawi (September 17-23, 2013)

Some 75 delegates coming from some 27 African countries representing six African subregions took part in the XIIIth BICAM plenary assembly. Placed under the theme of "Biblica animatio totius actionis pastoralis", 13 conferences treated fundamental biblical pastoral questions announced by Verbum Domini, addressed the socio-cultural-economic situation of African families and youth, the rise of political and fundamentalist Islam and shared experiences and good practices of the Biblical apostolate. A final message and a first draft of a strategic plan for the next three years were presented at the conclusion of the meeting.





The United Bible Societies-Catholic Biblical Federation Encounter in Rome (October 7-9, 2013)

The relationship between the UBS and the CBF dates back to the beginning of the existence of the CBF. Official agreements were signed in 1991 (Statement for the Central-Eastern and Eastern European Churches on Partnership in the Biblical Ministry among the (United) Bible Societies and the Catholic Biblical Federation) and in 2008 (Joint Statement on Partnership in Biblical Ministry).

Among the total of about fifty participants, some 21 CBF member delegates or “friends” from 18 countries were present at this first joint UBS-CBF partnership meeting. The goal of the encounter was, in the line of the UBS-CBF partnership agreement signed in 2008, to share good practices in Biblical pastoral ministry, particularly with regard to the Bible and Families, to work toward a better mutual understanding and to envisage new possibilities of collaboration. Since the UBS has, since 2008, gotten more involved in the publication and distribution not only of Bibles but of materials helping to “engage the Scriptures”, it was thought important to invite some Catholic publishers to speak also of their products. One of the CBF delegates presented the “Bíblia católica de la Familia” published in Spanish by Verbo Divino (Spain) on the basis of the “Catholic Faith and Family Bible” published by the Center for Ministry Development in the United States. Mr. Elías Pérez spoke of the editorial options behind this publication.



Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, President both of the Pontifical Council for the Family and of the Catholic Biblical Federation gave the keynote address on “La Bibbia nella famiglia”. The CBF participants had been requested to prepare a presentation of the situation of families in their countries and of the biblical pastoral initiatives taken in this regard, as well as a list of the Catholic publishers active in this field. This documentation assisted our discussions and shall provide the basis for further work on the Bible and the Family.



A high point of the UBS-CBF encounter was certainly the participation in the papal audience in Saint Peter's square. After Pope Francis' catechesis on the catholicity of the Church, delegates of the CBF and the UBS were able to present several editions of Bibles which they had published in their various cultural settings. Here the Holy Father receives the "Bíblia católica de la Familia". Pope Francis encouraged the efforts of the CBF and the UBS with the words: "Go ahead!"





The participants agreed to present the following recommendations to the governing bodies of the UBS and the CBF concerning the constitution of a UBS-CBF liaison group and a translation forum.

UBS-CBF Partnership Meeting 7-9 October 2013

- Recommendations -

The delegates of the first UBS-CBF Partnership Meeting 2013 have agreed to put forward the following recommendations.

1. To set up a UBS-CBF Liaison Group

The Liaison Group should, among other things, promote mutual understanding of each other's roles and purpose, provide a regular forum for the discussion of difficulties, develop proposals for future collaboration which will be submitted to the respective governance bodies. It should contribute to clarify the terms and conditions for effective inter-confessional (UBS-CBF-Catholic Church) collaboration and facilitate the dissemination of official decisions affecting activities of the two institutions.

The UBS and the CBF will each propose members of the group and the group will determine its *modus operandi*.

2. To create a Forum for Bible Translation

This forum should address issues including training and the identification of needs for new translations and/or of revisions, as well as addressing the needs of oral cultures. Agenda and procedures will be agreed upon by the UBS and the CBF.

These recommendations reflect some of the concerns and needs which were shared during this joint meeting that was placed under the auspices of the Pontifical Council for the Family and specifically addressed the question of the Bible and the Family: the possibilities and difficulties of cooperation between the UBS and the CBF, the national bible societies and the national or diocesan authorities within the Catholic Church; the need to know each other better and to identify each other's needs and expertise; the need for the CBF to reinforce its relationship with the Catholic publishers specifically as concerning Biblical pastoral materials; the need to reflect more specifically upon the possibilities, limits and conditions for "interconfessional" collaboration; the challenges revealed by the translation of the Bible into indigenous languages in respect of the oftentimes oral character of many cultures ... The Latin American Subregion (CEBIPAL and FEBIC-LAC) and the African Region (BICAM) are particularly interested in this Forum. Obviously,

the Executive Committee has to express its opinion on these recommendations and, if they are accepted, approve procedures for the designation of the members of the Liaison Group and of the Translation Forum.

In this context, it might be useful to establish an internal CBF commission on the CBF-UBS relations. This group should establish a compilation of elements of “good” and “less good” cooperation in the past, identify the issues at hand and work toward their clarification, while respecting the specificity of the two associations. A further CBF commission should be established in view of the specific challenges of translation and the desire of BICAM to open “a school of translation” and the intention of CEBIPAL to integrate “translation issues” into its training program for biblical pastoral animators.

The Southern and Western European Subregion Meeting in Maynooth (Ireland) (October 10-13, 2013)



Delegates from the Subregional members in France, Italy, Spain (FM) and Portugal and Switzerland (AM) gave reports of their Biblical pastoral activities. Two associations (one present at the meeting and one unable to attend) mentioned serious difficulties concerning their survival as institutions in the near future. Presentations of Biblical pastoral initiatives on the level of the Irish Bishops' Conference (Francis Cousins), in the archdiocese of Dublin (Jane Mellet and Kieran J. O'Mahoney) and in the diocese of Killaloe (Marie McNamara) allowed a good insight into the efforts of the Church of Ireland in this field. The CBF acting general secretary gave a brief presentation of recent developments in the life of the CBF since the Plenary Assembly in Ariccia and the delegates took certain decisions for the future of the subregion, including the proposition of a new subregional coordinator for the period leading up to 2015.



Saint Patrick Preaching to the Irish about the Holy Trinity
St. Patrick's College Chapel in Maynooth, Ireland

The CBF welcomes a new associate member from Columbia!

Corporación para la animación bíblica diocesana – Diócesis de Cúcuta, Columbia

Contact persons: Father Jairo Cardena Vega, Ms. Gloria Inés Bianco

Email: pastoralbibliacucuta@gmail.com

Website: www.pastoralbibliacucuta.googlepages.com

Subregion: Latin America

**New Subregional Coordinators
for Central Europe and Southern and Western Europe**

The Executive Committee has recently appointed Prof. Dr. Séamus O'Connell as coordinator for the Southern and Western European Subregion and Mr. Wolfgang Baur as coordinator for the Central European Subregion.



Wolfgang Baur



Séamus O'Connell

**Father Jan Jacek Stefanów, SVD
appointed new CBF General Secretary**

The CBF Executive Committee has recently appointed Fr. Jan Stefanów of the Divine Word Missionaries to the office of General Secretary of the Catholic Biblical Federation.

A total of seven candidates had submitted their applications in response to the opening announced by the CBF General Secretary Search Committee, composed of Bishop Dr. Bernhard Haßlberger (chairman of the Administrative Board), Msgr. Dr. Bertram Meier (vice-chairman of the Administrative Board), Father Cesare Bissoli SDB and Fr. Giuseppe De Virgilio (members of the Executive Committee). After the evaluation of the applications and the interviewing of those retained for a second round, the Search Committee submitted its unanimous recommendation to the Executive Committee which, in turn, voted in favor of Fr. Stefanów's appointment.

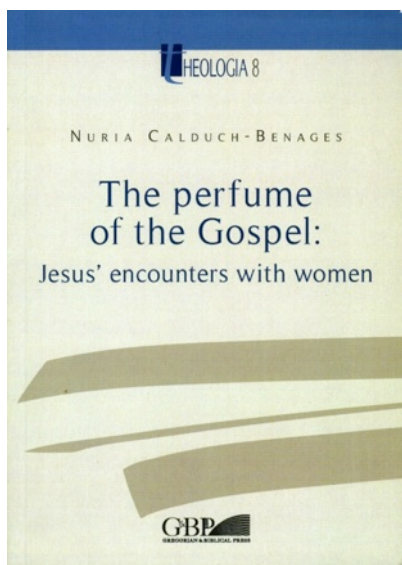
Fr. Stefanów was born on August 12, 1964 in Poland. He entered the Divine Word Missionaries in 1983, made his perpetual vows in 1990 and was ordained a priest in 1991 in Spain.

After the SVD Noviciate, Fr. Stefanów obtained diplomas in Philosophy (Nysa, 1986) and Theology (Madrid, 1990); after a propaedeutical year in the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome (1995-1996), he obtained the licentiate in Biblical Theology in the Gregorian University with a thesis on the theology of creation in Ben Sirach 16:24-17:14 (1998). He is now completing doctoral studies in missiology in Warsaw. His thesis shall treat "The effect of the reading of the Bible for strengthening and developing the cultural and ecclesial identity of Andean Indians".

His pastoral activity began as a youth minister in Spain and continued as a missionary parish priest in Ecuador. Over the years, he has been active in Biblical Pastoral Ministry in Ecuador (Centro Bíblico Verbo Divino in Quito), Spain (Casa de la Biblia) and Poland. He was director of the center in Quito and professor of Biblical Studies in the Quito section of the Pontifical University of Saint Thomas of Colombia from 2000 to 2003. From 2003 on, he was the Biblical coordinator of the SVD Polish Province; from 2006 to 2010, he was professor of Biblical Studies and Missiology in the Seminary in Bydgoszcz (Poland) and from 2006 to the present time professor in the Seminary in Pieniężno. Fr. Stefanów has served as SVD Biblical Area Zonal Coordinator for Europe since 2009.

Fr. Stefanów has been active in the CBF since 2000. He participated in the CBF Plenary Assemblies in Lebanon (2002), in Dar es Salaam (Tanzania) (2008) and in Ariccia (2011), as well as in the Dei Verbum Congress in Rome in 2005. He has been a member of the CBF Administrative Board since March, 2012 and is one of the Board members of the Dei Verbum Foundation.

Biblical Pastoral Publications



Nuria Calduch-Benages

The Perfume of the Gospel : Jesus' Encounters with Women / translation by Sr. Pascale-Dominique Nau ; revised by Francis M. Macatangay. – Rome: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2012. – 150 p. – (Theologia ; 8). – ISBN 978-88-7839-231-1. – 17,00 €.

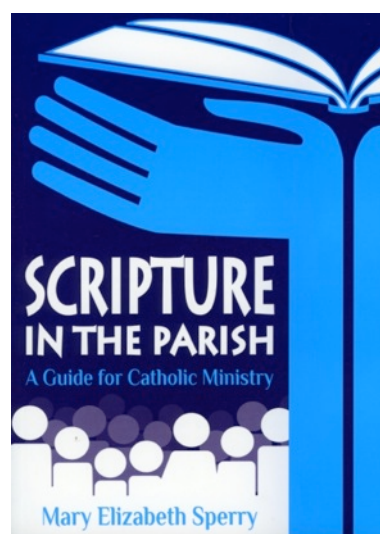
The Perfume of the Gospel seeks to present some of Jesus' encounters with women. As the title suggests, some of these are characterized by the presence of perfume, an element charged with connotations and a rich symbolic content, open to many interpretations depending on the context.

Women are the protagonists of this book. Jesus openly sides with them and, sharing both their bodily and spiritual pain, generates from within himself a new current of humanity. Thus, he changes the hierarchy of the values proposed by society and transcends cases of discrimination with his loving attitude and through his relations of solidarity and equality with people.

The book concludes with an original encounter—not between Jesus and a woman, but rather between Jesus and *Sophia*.

Nuria CALDUCH-BENAGES is Professor of Old Testament at the Pontifical Gregorian University of Rome, Italy. Since 2000 she is Book Review Editor of *Biblica* (Pontifical

Biblical Institute, Rome). Her main fields of research are Wisdom Literature, especially the book of Ben Sira and biblical anthropology. She has written extensively on wisdom books, especially on Sirach. She is member of the International Advisory Panel of the «International Society for the Study of Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature» (ISDCL).



Mary Elizabeth Sperry

Scripture in the Parish : A Guide for Catholic Ministry. – Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2013. – X, 94 p. – ISBN 978-0-8146-3520-9. – USD 9.95.

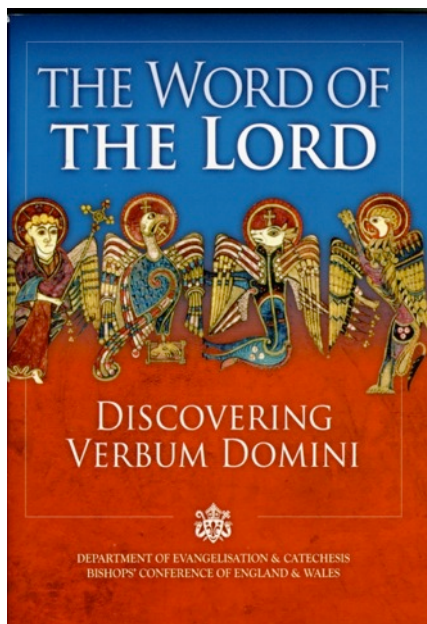
As a parish leader, you get questions all the time about God's word.

You don't have to be a Scripture scholar to answer questions about the Bible. With *Scripture in the Parish: A Guide for Catholic Ministry*, you will be able to confidently reply to the inquiries about the Bible you are likely to hear.

This book will help you dispel common myths about the Bible, understand how the Bible inspires church teaching, and enable you to interpret Scripture in a fully Catholic way. Each chapter includes "ministry spotlights"—specific examples of situations you have faced or are likely to, with possible solutions you can use right now.

Scripture in the Parish is not so much a book about the Bible, but about the ways the Bible is used in the life of the church today. This is the perfect guide for catechists, RCIA team members, liturgical ministers, prayer group leaders, and anyone who has a leadership role in the parish.

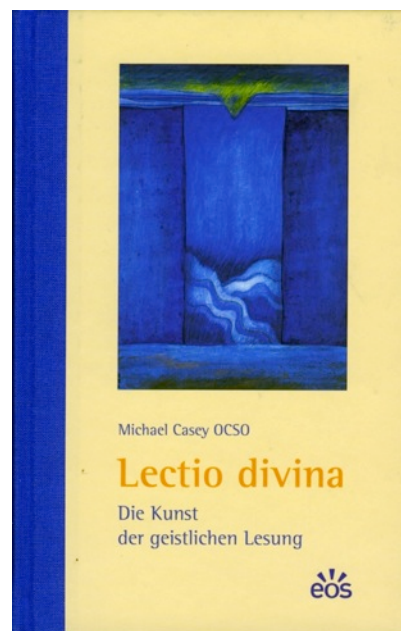
Mary Elizabeth Sperry holds a master's degree in liturgical studies from the Catholic University of America. She has worked for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops since 1994, in the Secretariat for the Liturgy, USCCB Publishing, and the Department of Communications. She is the author of *Bible Top Tens* and *Ten: How the Commandments Can Change Your Life* (both 2012).



The Word of the Lord: Discovering Verbum Domini / Department of Evangelisation & Catechesis – Bishops' Conference of England & Wales. – London: CTS, 2013. – 86 p. - ISBN 978-1-86082-851-5. – GBP 4.95.

This Verbum Domini study guide was prepared by the Department of Evangelisation & Catechesis of the Bishops' Conference of England & Wales in collaboration with the Bible Society in the context of the Year of Faith. Pope Benedict XVI's Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation is briefly presented, following the outline of the document: the Synod on the Word of God, the Word of God,

the word in the Church, the word for the world and the word and joy. A total of six propositions for group sessions have been developed, including Scripture readings, a selection of texts from Verbum Domini, some discussion questions and moments of prayer. The handy volume is recommended – by both Archbishop Vincent Nichols, president of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, and Bishop Kieran Conry, Chairman of the Department of Evangelisation and Catechesis – “to all those who yearn for a deeper understanding and love of Christ as they read the pages of Sacred Scripture”.



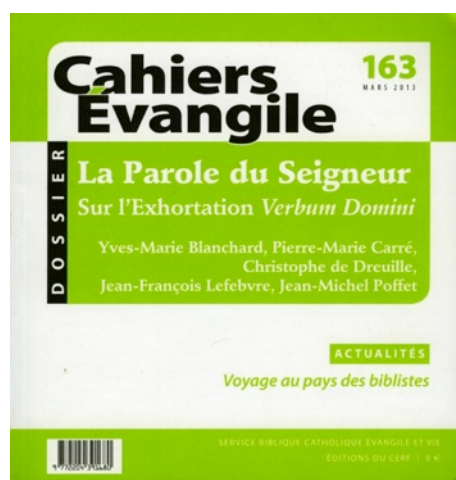
Michael Casey OCSO
Lectio divina : Die Kunst der geistlichen Lesung /aus dem Englischen von Adelrich Staub OSB. – 2., verbesserte Auflage. - Sankt Ottilien : EOS Verlag, 2010. – 204 p. – ISBN 978-3-8306-7335-4. – Original title: Sacred Reading : The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina (1996).

For those seeking to return to the sources of ancient Christian spiritual wisdom, Fr. Casey's book offers a valuable entry point. This work offers a bold and engaging examination of the Western tradition of the monastic *lectio divina*, the contemplative approach to sacred writings, notably the Bible and the spiritual classics.

Lectio divina is much more than a way to

grasp words on a page; it is a technique of reading from a devotional perspective. Michael Casey writes eloquently and with great learning about this ancient technique of prayer. Casey's fascinating insights, distilled from his deep acquaintance with the bible and with the ancient books of Western spirituality, clarify the ways meditative practices can be sustained and invigorated. This refreshing book shows how *lectio divina* leads to a deeper sense of the presence of God by expanding prayer into a comprehensive spiritual approach to living.

Michael Casey is a Cistercian monk and prior of Tarrawarra Abbey in Victoria, Australia.



La Parole du Seigneur : Sur l'exhortation Verbum Domini / Yves-Marie Blanchard et al. – Paris: Service Biblique Catholique Évangile et Vie : Éditions du Cerf, 2013. – (Cahiers Évangile ; 163 (March 2013)). –

Almost 50 years after the promulgation of the Vatican II constitution Dei Verbum, the question of the understanding of the relation between the Bible and the Word of God continues to be a subject of theological debate. In spite of a number of promising experiences in the reading of the Scriptures, we are certainly still at the beginning of what might be called the “Biblical inspiration of the entire pastoral life of the Church”. Pope Benedict XVI’ Apostolic Exhortation Verbum Domini, which grew out of the discussions of the 2008 bishops’ synod, took stock of the progress made and pointed out the path ahead ... The present issue of Ca-

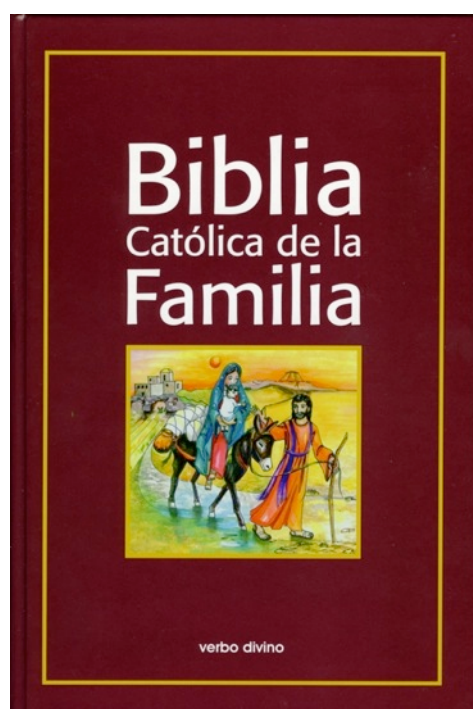
hiers Évangile has called upon well-known French theologians – Yves-Marie Blanchard, Pierre Marie Carré, Christophe de Dreuille, Jean-François Lefebvre and Jean-Michel Poffet – not only to present this important document but to enter into critical and programmatic dialogue with its far-reaching affirmations. Gérard Billon provided the editorial leadership which ensures the high quality and pertinence of such an undertaking for the Biblical Pastoral Ministry. In this same context, Cahiers Évangile 164 (June 2013) treated “Lectio divina: Un chemin pour prier la Parole de Dieu”. Christophe de Dreuille situates this “path for praying the Word of God” in its historical development and introduces the reader to the Lectio divina pedagogical process in its tradition four stages: lectio, meditation, oratio and contemplation.



Rudolf Voderholzer
Offenbarung, Tradition und Schriftauslegung : Bausteine zu einer christlichen Bibelhermeneutik [= Revelation, Tradition and Interpretation of Scripture: Building Blocks for Christian Biblical Hermeneutics]. – Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 2013. – 208 p. – ISBN 978-3-7919-2519-2.

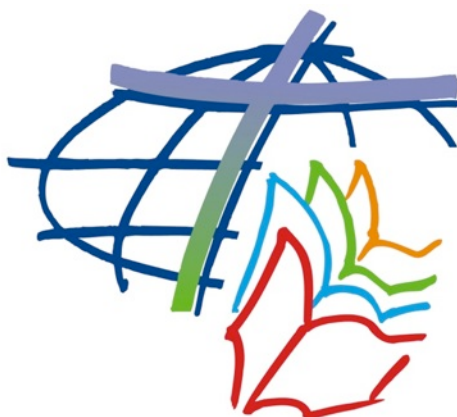
The systematic presentation of Christian Biblical hermeneutics remains on the “to do list” of theological research and teaching. What is the relation between Dogma and history, between revelation and exegesis? Is

Christianity a “book religion”? What is the difference between the Christian understanding of its Holy Scripture and the Islamic understanding of the Koran? These and many other questions concerning the reading and understanding of the Scriptures in the early and medieval Church, during the Second Vatican Council and in *Dei Verbum*, as well as in the writings of Henri de Lubac and of Joseph Ratzinger are addressed in this collection of mostly previously published articles. Rudolf Vorderholzer, Professor of Dogmatic Theology in Trier from 2005 to 2013, is now bishop of the diocese of Regensburg.



Biblia católica de la Familia / Center for Ministry Development y Editorial Verbo Divino. – Estella [España], 2013.

Published in English in 2010 by the Center for Ministry Development (Gig Harbor, Washington), the Catholic Faith and Family Bible was translated and adapted to the Spanish speaking readers in the United States and in Latin America. The Spanish edition, published by the Verbo Divino editions in Spain, makes use of the “El libro del Pueblo de Dios” translation, one of the recognized Spanish liturgical translations. It is destined to be read by families and in the family. The biblical text is accompanied by more than 600 articles aimed at helping the reader to understand the text, to take the text to heart, to act on the text, to get to know the Biblical characters and to pray the Word. Abundantly illustrated with drawings depicting individual biblical stories and with maps and other pedagogical material, this Bible is a welcome contribution to the efforts of the Church in favor of families, in particular in preparation for the Synod on the Family.



Catholic Biblical Federation
Fédération Biblique Catholique
Federación Bíblica Católica
Katholische Bibelföderation

The intrinsic link between the word and faith makes clear that authentic biblical hermeneutics can only be had within the faith of the Church, which has its paradigm in Mary's fiat. Saint Bonaventure states that without faith there is no key to throw open the sacred text: "This is the knowledge of Jesus Christ, from whom, as from a fountain, flow forth the certainty and the understanding of all sacred Scripture. Therefore it is impossible for anyone to attain to knowledge of that truth unless he first have infused faith in Christ, which is the lamp, the gate and the foundation of all Scripture". And Saint Thomas Aquinas, citing Saint Augustine, insists that "the letter, even that of the Gospel, would kill, were there not the inward grace of healing faith".

Here we can point to a fundamental criterion of biblical hermeneutics: the primary setting for scriptural interpretation is the life of the Church. This is not to uphold the ecclesial context as an extrinsic rule to which exegetes must submit, but rather is something demanded by the very nature of the Scriptures and the way they gradually came into being. "Faith traditions formed the living context for the literary activity of the authors of sacred Scripture. Their insertion into this context also involved a sharing in both the liturgical and external life of the communities, in their intellectual world, in their culture and in the ups and downs of their shared history. In like manner, the interpretation of sacred Scripture requires full participation on the part of exegetes in the life and faith of the believing community of their own time". Consequently, "since sacred Scripture must be read and interpreted in the light of the same Spirit through whom it was written", exegetes, theologians and the whole people of God must approach it as what it really is, the word of God conveyed to us through human words (cf. 1 Th 2:13). This is a constant datum implicit in the Bible itself: "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 1:20-21). Moreover, it is the faith of the Church that recognizes in the Bible the word of God; as Saint Augustine memorably put it: "I would not believe the Gospel, had not the authority of the Catholic Church led me to do so". The Holy Spirit, who gives life to the Church, enables us to interpret the Scriptures authoritatively. The Bible is the Church's book, and its essential place in the Church's life gives rise to its genuine interpretation (*Verbum Domini* 29).