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Catholic Biblical Federation

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**“That they may all be one”**

Sacred Scripture and  
Christian Unity



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## Dear Readers:



When I first visited the Anastasis in Jerusalem – the church of the burial and resurrection of Jesus – some twenty years ago, I was surprised and appalled to see how bitterly the different Christian denominations represented there defended their traditional rights, often in mutual competition, and even while Mass was being

celebrated. How can this locale, which belongs to the holiest places of Christendom, make such a contentious impression, I asked myself? Should not this world religion be offering a sign of unity and good will right here at the place where the central faith confession of Christendom “the Lord is risen, He is risen indeed!” had its historical origin?

The difficult and stirring question regarding the unity of Christians is the central theme of this issue of the *Bulletin Dei Verbum*. Since the beginning of Christianity its unity has been an issue time and time again, and in the course of history events have often occurred that led to painful divisions.

But there were also always thinkers who were ahead of their time and who kept the goal of unity firmly in sight. Such a prophetic figure in the 15<sup>th</sup> century was the bishop and polymath, Nicholas of Cusa (with the Latin name Cusanus). His time was not unlike our own. The threshold between the Middle Ages and modern times in Europe was after all a time of radical change and uncertainty, of world transforming opportunities as well as challenges that could appear threatening.

The overcoming of divisions between the Churches of the East and West was a special concern of Cusanus. He therefore made every effort to overcome these divisions not only through ecclesiastical politics but above all at the level of theological reflection. A central idea of his thought was the insight that differences, yes, even conflicts, need not divide or destroy; rather they offer an opportunity for unity. Unity and difference, unity in diversity, were for him not contradictions, but golden oppor-

tunities to arrive at consensus through conflict. Formulas such as “reconciled diversity” and “one religion in a diversity of rites” (*una religio in rituum varietate*) express this. (Moreover, Nicholas of Cusa was one of the first Christians of his time who concerned himself intensively with the Koran).

The articles of this issue, which were originally presented as papers during the international Dei Verbum Congress in Rome, 2005, treat the theme of the unity of Christians of different confessional perspective and take up in the process above all the question of what role Holy Scripture can play in the ecumenical sphere and in interconfessional dialogue. They offer a critical assessment of the present state of affairs and at the same time point to realistic perspectives for the future.

Back again to Jerusalem: my feelings about the Anastasis church have long since changed. Does not this church building reflect in an honest and unvarnished way the situation of the one Church of Jesus Christ? This state of affairs is as much now as it ever was a scandal (in the literal sense of the term), a stumbling stone. But more than this it is an incentive and a warning not to lose sight of the continuing divisions and splits – and to be ready ever again to take the risk for unity, – “that they may all be one” (Jn 17:21).

So I send you a warm greeting from the General Secretariat and wish you much pleasure as you read through this issue!

Claudio Ettl



## Sacred Scripture and Christian Unity: Reflections from a Roman Catholic Point of View

Adelbert Denaux



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### The ideal: Bible, source of unity

It is a common assumption among ecumenists, even among most Christians, that the Bible is a way *par excellence* to advance the unity of the divided Christians and Christian Churches. The history of the ecumenical movement shows that its promoters were convinced that a return to Scripture would allow divided Christians to transcend age-long controversies and to find a common biblical language in which to articulate the apostolic doctrines. This prominence of Scripture in finding a common way is mentioned regularly and explicitly in Common Statements. The ratio for this belief is the unique status of the Bible, which is believed to be God's Word itself, written down in human words, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and hence a rule of faith for all Christians. Vatican II (*Dei Verbum* 21) puts it in these terms: "all the preaching of the Church must be nourished and regulated by Sacred Scripture. For in the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven meets His children with great love and speaks with them; and the force and power in the word of God is so great that it stands as the support and energy of the Church, the strength of faith for her sons, the food of the soul, the pure and everlasting source of spiritual life. Consequently these words are perfectly applicable to Sacred Scripture: 'For the Word of God is living and active' (Heb 4:12), and 'it has power to build you up [*oikodomēsa*] and give you your heritage among all those who are sanctified' (Ac 20:32; cf. 1 Th. 2:13)". The Sacred Scriptures, as the written Word of God, have the power to build up the Church of Christ in the unity of faith, hope and love.

### The facts: Bible, source of division

The history of our disunity teaches us, however, that the Bible has also been a source of controversy and division. On almost all aspects of Christian doctrine and practice, Christians have given different interpretations of the same biblical data. It suffices to recall the contro-

versies on the primacy of the Bishop of Rome and the interpretation of the Petrine texts of the New Testament, the controversies on justification and original sin in Trent and its scriptural basis in the Pauline letters, the hesitation of Reformed Christians as to whether the Roman Catholic doctrines of the immaculate conception and the assumption of Mary are in accordance with Scripture, etc. Moreover, the polemics between Christian Churches and communities in the past have been at the origin of unilateral or biased interpretations of biblical texts, which are so to speak fixed in the collective memory of the faithful. Maybe the fact that the Bible has also been a source of division and controversy should not surprise us so much, because Scripture itself teaches us that God's Word is vulnerable, open to different, sometimes contradictory interpretations. According to John's Gospel, Jesus' words called for opposite reactions: some, like the Samaritan woman, concluded from those words that Jesus must be a prophet, the Son of God, the Saviour of the world; others concluded that Jesus was a blasphemer of the one God, who challenged the essential features of Jewish religion, such as monotheism, the role of the Torah, etc. If this was the fate of Jesus Christ himself, the eternal Word made flesh, how could it be different for the written Word of God itself?

### The biblical canon: which unity and which diversity?

Moreover, the biblical canon itself poses the problem of unity and diversity. Different writings, each presenting a different era, culture or (local) Church, are collected in one book in the conviction that there is something which unites this great diversity, namely the person of Jesus Christ and his salvific mission. Unity in diversity is an essential feature of the one Bible. Unity in diversity is also an essential feature of the Church that is described in the Bible, between local churches and the Church as a universal reality.<sup>1</sup> Some biblical scholars, however, understand the diversity of the NT as a biblical foundation for the diversity and legitimacy of Christian confessions and denominations.<sup>2</sup> Hence the fundamental question arises: does the biblical canon itself allow for a denominational diversity, which makes the search for an organic unity between Christians almost an obsolete enterprise? In other words, what kind of unity in diversity is 'in accordance with Scripture' and what kind is not? Linked to this question is another one: is it true that each denomination is based on a canon within the canon,



and that even Early Catholic orthodoxy, which the Roman Catholic Church finally pretends to continue, is also based on a canon within the canon?<sup>3</sup> Or should we say that the apostolic Tradition which is transmitted in the Church of Christ finds its expression and unity in the biblical canon as a whole, so that the choice of a canon within the canon necessarily leads to a denominational reduction of the full apostolic Tradition?

### **The task: reconciliation in the interpretation of Sacred Scriptures**

We should not be surprised, then, that most of the issues which the ecumenical dialogue has to confront are related in some way to the interpretation of biblical texts and thus aim at reconciling different or even contradictory interpretations of Scripture within and among the Churches. "Some of the issues are theological: eschatology, the structure of the Church, primacy and collegiality, marriage and divorce, the admission of women to the ministerial priesthood, and so forth. Others are of a canonical and juridical nature: they concern the administration of the universal Church and of local Churches. There are others, finally, that are strictly biblical: the list of the canonical books, certain hermeneutical questions, etc." (*The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* IV, C, 4 = CB, 1976)<sup>4</sup>

What is at stake here is the question of hermeneutics of the interpretation of Scripture, more precisely the question of interplay between the aspects or actors implied and operating in the process of interpretation taking place within the Church of God, such as the Holy Spirit, the Tradition, the entire people of God, the role of authority (the Magisterium, teaching office) and the role of theology (resp. exegetical scholarship). The decree *Unitatis Redintegratio* has put the finger on an essential difference between Protestants and Roman Catholics concerning the role of the teaching office: "But while the Christians who are separated from us hold the divine authority of the Sacred Books, they differ from ours – some in one way, some in another – regarding the relationship between Scripture and the Church. For, according to Catholic belief, the authentic teaching authority of the Church has a special place in the interpretation and preaching of the written word of God." (*UR* 21) In the extremely important paragraph 10 of the Constitution *Dei Verbum*, the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council have described how Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture, which make up a single deposit of the Word of God, have been entrusted to the whole people of the Church, which remains faithful to it under the guidance of the living teaching office of the Church, the latter having received the task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God.<sup>5</sup> This indispensable interconnection between Tradition, Scripture and the Magisterium within the living reality of the whole Church has been well expressed in the document *The Interpre-*

*tation of the Bible in the Church*, published by the Pontifical Biblical Commission (1993): "It is the believing community that provides a truly adequate context for interpreting canonical texts. In this context faith and the Holy Spirit enrich exegesis; Church authority, exercised as a service of the community, must see to it that this interpretation remains faithful to the great Tradition which has produced the texts" (cf. *Dei Verbum* 10"); (*IBC* I, C, 1 = *CB*, 1761).

### **Some criteria for an authentic ecumenical use of Scripture**

To conclude, I would like to formulate a set of principles which might serve as hermeneutical criteria for advancing a more ecumenical interpretation of Scripture and to let Scripture fully play its role as *canon fidei* in ecumenical dialogue. They are put in the form of short theses, which are open to discussion.

1. Coming to an agreement on the list of canonical books remains an essential task of ecumenical dialogue. As long as there is no unity about the biblical canon, there can be no full unity between Christians.
2. The biblical canon does not legitimize the existence of different Christian confessions. Putting a canon within a canon cannot provide a legitimate basis for ecumenical dialogue and finally results in resignation to and acceptance of the status quo of ecclesial divisions. Each Christian Church should have the courage to examine whether it does not, de facto, consciously or unconsciously, operate with a canon within the canon and thus hinder ecumenical progress.
3. The Bible as a whole forms the "canon" for the life and unity of the Church of Christ. This unity finds its expression in the diversity of cultures, languages, traditions, and local or regional churches. Jesus Christ, the risen Lord, is the centre and ultimately forms the hermeneutical key of the Sacred Scriptures.
4. From a historical point of view, the Apostolic Tradition precedes Scripture. Scripture is the normative expression of Tradition. Both make up a single deposit of the Word of God. The *sola scriptura* principle or the notion of the "sufficiency" of Scripture<sup>6</sup> should be interpreted and/or modified in the light of this criterion.
5. A careful distinction should be made between (apostolic) Tradition and traditions. Traditions are varied expressions of the apostolic Tradition in time and space. Scripture should be used as norm and criterion to evaluate or assess traditions.
6. The separation or division among Christian Churches and/or denominations has affected their interpretation of Sacred Scripture: "polemical" or "denominational" readings hinder these Churches from grasping the full meaning of Scripture. Even the Roman Catho-



lic Church is not free from this "limitation" in reading Scripture. Churches need each other to fully discover God's will in Scripture.

7. There is still need of a consensus among Christians about the role of the teaching office in interpreting the Word of God (whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition) and in the promulgation of doctrines, drawn from this single deposit of faith, as divinely revealed.
8. The rise and spread of what may be called a "fundamentalist" reading of the Bible in different Christian circles is seriously putting into danger the openness needed for ecumenical dialogue (cf. *IBC I F = CB*, 1809-1818).
9. The awareness that the text of Scripture can have different "senses" may be helpful to overcome discussions about the "scriptural" character or the lack thereof in certain doctrines. Historical-critical exegesis adopted the thesis of one single meaning (the *intentio auctoris*). Modern theories of language and of philosophical hermeneutics now affirm that written texts are open to a plurality of meaning. It would be desirable to take up again the ancient wisdom concerning the different levels of meaning of biblical texts. The Pontifical Biblical Commission most usefully speaks about the literal sense, the spiritual sense, and the fuller sense (*sensus plenior*; *IBC II, B = CB* 1830-1848). Such approach has rich ecumenical potentialities.
10. Biblical scholarship/exegesis has made an important contribution to the advancement of the ecumenical dialogue and will remain indispensable in the future (*IBC* Introduction, A = *BC*, 1709; *IBC IV, B = BC*, 1977). In particular, a historical-critical approach can be helpful in reading biblical texts in their historical context. It also helps to avoid making historical formulations of doctrinal definitions absolute or interpreting doctrinal affirmations as historical events.<sup>7</sup>
11. Ecumenical dialogue is best served by an ecclesial and ecumenical reading of Scripture, which seeks to integrate what is valuable from the different approaches in the past and present, in scholarly and non-scholarly circles, and to consider each passage under study in the context of the New Testament as a whole, against the background of the Old, and in the light of the common Tradition.<sup>8</sup>
12. Ecumenical translations of the Bible should be encouraged, since having a common text greatly assists a common reading and understanding and so contributes towards achieving the conversion of heart and sanctity of life which, aided by the prayer for the unity of Christians, constitute the soul of the entire ecumenical movement (*IBC IV, B, 4 = CB*, 1979).

<sup>1</sup> See Pontifical Biblical Commission, *Unity and Diversity in the Church* (1988), in: Dennis J. Murphy (ed.), *The Church and the Bible. Official Documents of the Catholic Church*, Bangalore, 2000, pp. 594-626, quoted as *CB*, and the number of the paragraphs; here, *CB*, 1454ff.

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., Erich Käsemann, *The Canon of the New Testament and the Unity of the Church*, in: id., *Essays on New Testament Themes*, London, 1964, p. 103: "The New Testament canon does not, as such, constitute the foundation of the unity of the Church. On the contrary, as such (that is, in its accessibility to the historian) it provides the basis for the multiplicity of the confessions"; in his *Das neue Testament als Kanon* (Göttingen 1970, p. 402), he puts the point more sharply still: the canon "also legitimises as such more or less all sects and false teaching".

<sup>3</sup> So James D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament*, London, 1977, p. 375: "It is not too much of an oversimplification to say that (until recently) the effective NT canon for Roman Catholic ecclesiology had been Mt 16:17-19 and the Pastoral Epistles; the canon for Protestant theology has clearly been the (earlier) letters of Paul (for many Lutherans indeed 'justification by faith' is the real canon within the canon); Eastern Orthodoxy and the mystical tradition within Western Christianity draw their principal NT inspiration from the Johannine writings; while Pentecostalism looks for its authentication to Acts. Or again, the canon for nineteenth-century Liberal Protestantism was the (so-called) historical Jesus, whereas after the first World War the focus of authority for many Christian theologians became 'the kerygma', while more recently others have sought to orient themselves in relation to the apostolic witness. Perhaps most arresting of all, we must remind ourselves that since Early Catholicism was only one strand within the NT, consequently orthodoxy itself was based on a canon within the canon, where the lack of charity of a Paul or a John (cf. 2 P 3,15f.) has been interpreted into a conformity with that single strand".

<sup>4</sup> Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* 1993, IV, C, 4 (quoted as *IBC*, followed by the part and sub-parts).

<sup>5</sup> *DV* 10: "Sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture form one sacred deposit of the word of God, committed to the Church. Holding fast to this deposit the entire holy people united with their shepherds remain always steadfast in the teaching of the Apostles, in the common life, in the breaking of the bread and in prayers (see Acts 2, 42, Greek text), so that holding to, practising and professing the heritage of the faith, it becomes on the part of the bishops and faithful a single common effort. But the task of authentically interpreting the word of God, whether written or handed on, has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office of the Church, whose authority is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ. This teaching office is not above the word of God, but serves it, teaching only what has been handed on, listening to it devoutly, guarding it scrupulously and explaining it faithfully in accord with a divine commission and with the help of the Holy Spirit, it draws from this one deposit of faith everything which it presents for belief as divinely revealed. It is clear, therefore, that sacred tradition, Sacred Scripture and the teaching authority of the Church, in accord with God's most wise design, are so linked and joined together that one cannot stand without the others, and that all together and each in its own way under the action of the one Holy Spirit contribute effectively to the salvation of souls."

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, the formulation of Articles of Religion VI (Church of England): "*Of the Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures for salvation. Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation*". All Christian Confessions accept that a doctrine should ultimately be founded upon the Scriptures as the expression of God's revealed truth. That means, new doctrines cannot be received by the faithful unless it is clear that they are an expression in one way or another of the divine



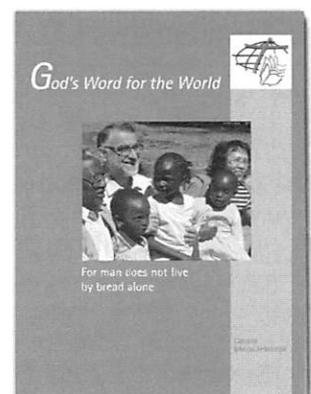
revelation which is contained in a normative way in the Holy Scriptures. However, there are different possibilities of thinking of the scriptural "foundation" of doctrines: (i) A doctrine can be explicitly formulated in Scriptures (e.g. the divinity of Jesus Christ). (ii) It is possible that a doctrine is not explicitly expressed in the Holy Scriptures although it is recognised as being founded in the Bible (e.g. the doctrine of Mary as *theotokos* is implicitly present in Scripture). (iii) There are doctrines which, according to some, are not against Scripture and in that sense ultimately founded in Scripture; such doctrines have grown in the course of history in different forms (popular piety, liturgical tradition, theological reflection, Church teaching, etc.); they are not explicitly mentioned in the Bible, but their content is implied in and coherent with other doctrines that are attested in Scripture.

<sup>7</sup> An example may clarify what we mean by this. In its judgment on the statements of Final Report of ARCIC about the Petrine Office, the Roman Catholic Church judged that the description of ARCIC I did not express the fullness of the Catholic faith, which "sees in the primacy of the successors of Peter something positively intended by God and deriving from the will and institution of Jesus Christ", from whom Peter 'immediately and directly' received his primacy (DS 3055; Catholic Response, 18 in Christopher Hill & Edward J. Yarnold (eds.), *Anglicans and Roman Catholics: The Search for Unity*, London 1994). The *Catholic Response* alludes here to the definition of Vatican I, but does not make a distinction between the "content" and the "formulation" of the definition, and thus understands the second part of the definition in a strictly historical sense. The conception, however, that Peter received his primacy "immediately and directly" from Christ, is part of the historically conditioned *formulation* of Vatican I. The Fathers of the Council were not aware of the problems that arose acutely afterwards, as a consequence of a historical-critical reading of the Petrine texts. But the *meaning intended* by this formulation, that is, that the primacy goes back to Christ (a larger notion than the "historical Jesus") and is, in that sense, positively intended by God, is certainly not excluded by the reading of ARCIC II. That the primacy is positively intended by God, was affirmed already by ARCIC I when it stated that this primacy comes forth from divine providence (*providentia divina*; Authority II, 13-15). This conviction is reaffirmed by ARCIC II, when it speaks about the primacy as a "gift of God" that is needed for the unity of the universal Church, for which Christ has prayed (Gift, 46, 60). In that line of thought, one can say that "it is derived from the will and institution of Jesus Christ", even when one does not understand this expression in a literal-historical sense (Authority II, 11).

<sup>8</sup> This thesis is inspired by paragraph 7 the recent document of ARCIC, *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ* (Seattle Statement), 2005: "In the following paragraphs, our use of Scripture seeks to draw upon the whole tradition of the Church, in which rich and varied readings have been employed. In the New Testament, the Old Testament is commonly interpreted typologically: events and images are understood with specific reference to Christ. This approach is further developed by the Fathers and by medieval preachers and authors. The Reformers stressed the clarity and sufficiency of Scripture, and called for a return to the centrality of the Gospel message. Historical-critical approaches attempted to discern the meaning intended by the biblical authors, and to account for texts' origins. Each of these readings has its limitations, and may give rise to exaggerations or imbalances: typology can become extravagant, Reformation emphasizes reductionist, and critical methods overly historicist. More recent approaches to Scripture point to the range of possible readings of a text, notably its narrative, rhetorical and sociological dimensions. In this statement, we seek to integrate what is valuable from each of these approaches, as both correcting and contributing to our use of Scripture. Further, we recognise that no reading of a text is neutral, but each is shaped by the context and interest of its readers. Our reading has taken place within the context of our dialogue in Christ, for the sake of that communion which is his will. It is thus an ecclesial and ecumenical reading, seeking to consider each passage about Mary in the context of the New Testament as a whole, against the background of the Old, and in the light of Tradition."

## New CBF Publicity Materials

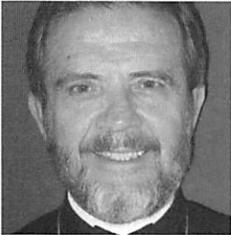
One of the concerns of the Federation in recent times has been to make suitable publicity materials available, and last year this was brought to fruition in the form of two informative publications: a flyer ("CBF-info-flyer") and a large-sized brochure ("God's Word for the World"). Both publications introduce the reader to the Federation and its multifarious tasks and goals, offer information on what is going on in the biblical pastoral field in various regions and present the reader with a few select projects. The flyer is published in German, and the brochure "God's Word for the World" in English and in German at present, but soon to be published in Spanish, French and Italian also. Both publications can be obtained from the General Secretariat.





## Holy Scripture and Christian Unity: Reflections from an Orthodox Point of View

Theodore G. Stylianopoulos



Theodore G. Stylianopoulos, a Greek Orthodox priest, is professor of Orthodox Theology and of New Testament at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology in Brookline, Ma., USA. For many years he served as a member of the Roman Catholic-Orthodox Consultation in the U.S. and of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches.

I am delighted and honored to take part in this international congress commemorating the fortieth anniversary of the dogmatic decree by Vatican II on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*. The topic for this contribution calls for examination of those attributes of Holy Scripture which promote the principle of unity. Insofar as I can determine, and also discern in the text of *Dei Verbum*, there are three fundamental characteristics of Scripture that define its very nature and call for Christian unity. These are 1) the primacy, 2) the ecclesial character, and 3) the theological witness of Scripture. These basic characteristics, inseparably intertwined, forever beckon God's people to unity. However, Christian unity has never been uniformity but has always included plurality and diversity. In particular, biblical and historical studies of the past century have cast indisputable light on the amazing development and variety of forms in language, concepts, teachings, practices, patterns of order, and methods of interpretation associated with the biblical tradition in both Judaism and Christianity. Discussion about unity must therefore also engage the question of legitimate diversity. Today, in view of the plurality and long-established traditions of the various churches, talk of Christian unity can be realistic to the extent that allowable diversity is given its due. The question of how unity and plurality are to be properly managed is, of course, a related major theological and hermeneutical issue at the center both of the life of the Church and the ecumenical task itself.

### 1. The primacy of Scripture

The term "primacy" as such does not occur in the text of *Dei Verbum*, probably out of caution for several reasons. In Roman Catholicism primacy has been associated with the office of the Pope. In Protestantism it has often served as a code word for the emphasis on *sola scriptura* – Scripture alone as the singular standard for faith and life. In Orthodoxy primacy is accorded to the life of

the Church in its fullness of clergy and laity. Perhaps the most immediate reason for the omission of the term is the distinct concern of *Dei Verbum* not to detract from the role of tradition and the authority of the Church in the interpretation of Scripture, issues of indispensable importance to both the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches.

But *Dei Verbum* leaves no doubt about the normative status and priority of Scripture as divine revelation. Scripture makes manifest God's personal self-disclosure and the revelation of God's eternal will for the salvation of all (*Dei Verbum* 2, 6). The Gospel is "the source of all saving truth and moral teaching" (*DV* 7). Scripture is the "soul of sacred theology" and its "primary and perpetual foundation" (*DV* 24). The Church has always regarded the Scriptures as "the supreme rule of faith" (*DV* 21) and will ever do so. The primacy of the Bible is thus powerfully promulgated, yet with a significant qualification pertaining to tradition and the authority of the Church. Scripture is primary and supreme, but "together with Sacred Tradition" (*DV* 21, 24). The point is subtle but clear; it is not *Sacred Tradition* that is primary and supreme *together with Scripture*, but the other way around.<sup>1</sup> Primacy yes, exclusivity no, because Scripture and Tradition belong together, issuing from the same reality of God's personal presence and saving activity. As we know, Vatican II took a bold step forward by its declaration in *Dei Verbum* that there is one source of revelation, "one sacred deposit of the Word of God" (*DV* 10), made manifest through an integral unity between Scripture and Tradition. The decree was also careful to state that that sacred deposit was committed to the Church, and its interpretation entrusted "exclusively to the living teaching office of the Church" (*DV* 10). These matters of course continue to be crucial topics in the ecumenical discussion.

The greatest boon to the spirit of Christian unity in the twentieth century has been the biblical renewal in the Roman Catholic Church, a renewal that has impacted all aspects of its life, theology, and ministries. The virtual "rediscovery" of the Bible in Roman Catholicism is, of course, both presupposed and advanced by Vatican II. It was long in preparation through the remarkable revival and flowering of Roman Catholic biblical studies in interaction with the prevailing Protestant biblical scholarship



in the twentieth century.<sup>2</sup> Notwithstanding the tensions and problems involved, especially with regard to the proper use of the methods of biblical criticism, the overall benefit has been immense and timely. Timely in the sense that, just as the World Council of Churches as the chief ecumenical body and forum of innumerable Churches seemed to be losing energy during the past decades,<sup>3</sup> the Roman Catholic Church took up the task through bilateral dialogs and seems now to have become the strongest voice for Christian unity highlighted by the ecumenical efforts and world wide witness of Pope John Paul II himself.<sup>4</sup> The overall benefit is also immense in the sense that, in a world of rampant secularism and religious pluralism, those who labor to keep alive the hope of Christian unity, striving to overcome the utterly shameful and self-destructive Christian divisions, perform a most precious and holy service to Christ who calls us to unity. At the center of this unexpected ecumenical role of the Roman Catholic Church is in large measure the commitment to the principle of the primacy of the Bible. In other words, the inspirational force and ecumenical outreach of the Roman Catholic Church is connected to the acknowledgment and application of Holy Scripture for what Scripture truly is, the supreme record of God's revelation and saving truth for the people of God. Future hope and effective initiatives toward unity will depend on the common obedience of all Churches to the truth claims of Scripture as the revelation of God's Word for the healing and unity of all humanity.

From the Orthodox side the teaching of *Dei Verbum* on the primacy of Scripture is welcome in almost its entirety. The divine origins and centrality of the Bible are clearly set forth. The bond between Scripture and Tradition is affirmed. The teaching authority of the Church in service to and not above the Word of God, as *Dei Verbum* states (DV 10), is properly invoked.<sup>5</sup> About the only significant point of debate is the nature of the teaching authority of the Church, the one side locating it in the ministry of the Pope, the other side finding it in the ministry of the shared episcopate expressed through councils. This issue has been the subject of dispute for centuries between the Roman Catholics and the Orthodox.<sup>6</sup> For the Orthodox, pertaining to Christian unity today, the great challenge is the question of biblical renewal. It is a paradox that, while Orthodox worship and theology are saturated with the language and verities of Scripture, the actual life of the Orthodox people is not sufficiently stirred by the evangelical message of the Bible. Orthodox biblical studies for various reasons have been largely confined to the academic classroom, without significant impact either on contemporary Orthodox theology or the set ways of thought and action of most clergy and lay leaders.<sup>7</sup> Thus the often formally invoked and celebrated witness of the Church Fathers regarding the centrality and primacy of the Bible is not adequately actualized at the level of the Church's ongoing life. The

prophetic and evangelical message of Scripture seems to be unnecessarily overlaid by centuries of institutional aspects and habits that need to be renewed and enlivened by the power of God's living Word.<sup>8</sup> I can say all these things, of course, because I am Orthodox and love Mother Church. My main point, however, is this: the gifts and contributions of Orthodoxy to the cause of Christian unity today and in the future, if this be taken truly in earnest for the sake of Christ, cannot be fully actualized without an authentic biblical renewal through the encouragement of biblical studies and the application of the principle of the primacy of Scripture to all levels and aspects of Church life.

On the Protestant side the first thing to be said is a word of gratitude for steadfastly keeping the advocacy of the primacy of the Scriptures in the forefront. Polemics and prejudice ought not to diminish profound appreciation of the Reformation accents on grace, Gospel, personal faith, personal obedience to God's Word, lay ministries, evangelism, and mission. And much remains to be learned from our Protestant brothers and sisters. With regard to Christian unity, however, things are very difficult. The sheer pluralism of Protestantism offers, at least in human terms, few hopes for substantive steps toward ecclesial unity. The paradox here is that the very Churches that proclaim the primacy of the Bible are themselves chaotically divided, clinging to their own particular traditions. There can hardly be stronger evidence for the fact that the principle of the primacy of Scripture, however true and definitive, does not of itself suffice for Christian unity. Real unity cannot be achieved without reference to the question of the normative interpretation of Scripture, just as *Dei Verbum* teaches, that is, the whole issue of the role of Church and Tradition in the formation, transmission, and interpretation of the Scriptures. Can more Protestants forthrightly redefine *sola scriptura* no longer as a polemical slogan but for what it truly intends, namely, the primacy of the Scriptures, taught of old by the Church Fathers and powerfully retrieved by the Reformers?<sup>9</sup> Can more Protestants look to the classic Tradition of the universal Church as a required reference for the theological interpretation of Scripture and a step toward Christian unity?<sup>10</sup> Can more Protestants move toward a Catholic understanding of the faith just as Catholics and Orthodox seek to move toward an evangelical understanding of the faith?<sup>11</sup> Only the positive answers to these and other such questions can gradually establish broad currents of shared theological thought and thus a wide communal consensus among the Churches for substantive discussions and by God's grace significant progress toward unity.

## 2. The ecclesial character of Scripture

By "ecclesial" I mean communal, that is, issuing from the life of the Church, belonging to the Church, and thus both attesting to and promoting the well-being and unity



of the Church. I have already mentioned the teaching of *Dei Verbum* regarding the single source of revelation, “the one sacred deposit of the Word of God” (DV 10), received, transmitted, and authoritatively interpreted in the living Tradition of the Church. Here I wish to underline that the authority of Church and Tradition, closely bonded with the authority of Scripture, is not merely an official and legal matter as one might suppose from the canonization of the Scriptures. The terms “ecclesial” and “canonical”, although related, can be distinguished.<sup>12</sup> “Canon” and “canonical” were applied to the biblical writings in the third (Origen) and mainly the fourth century, long after the bulk of these documents had already attained the status of Holy Scripture in the Christian tradition. Even then the term “canonical” implied something intrinsically authentic and true, something fully to be trusted and followed as a standard of faith and life. To be sure Episcopal decisions and decrees of councils played a role in the canonization process. Nevertheless, a legal understanding of the formation of the biblical canon, as might be insinuated by any kind of biblical or ecclesial fundamentalism, would be a distortion of the true nature of Scripture.

Far from a legal process, the origins and formation of the Bible may be likened more to the process of birth, issuing from the very “womb” of the communal life of God’s people. The story of the formation of the Bible, in parallel to the witness of the individual books themselves, is the same story of God’s people wrestling with God’s Word, whether oral or written, seeking to sustain and advance the community’s life, identity, unity, and mission. When the faith community is perceived as a living organism nourished and guided by God’s Spirit and not merely as an institution of laws, customs, and councils, then the full significance of the ecclesial character of Scripture is clearly seen as part of the work of the Spirit and the charismatic life of God’s people. In the striking imagery of *Dei Verbum*, the one reality of God’s Word in Scripture and Tradition, enlivened by the Holy Spirit, is like a “mirror” in which the Church on its part beholds the face of God and God on His part ceaselessly converses with the Bride of His beloved Son (II.7-8). Thus, according to *Dei Verbum* 8, “the living voice of the gospel resounds in the Church, and through her, in the world, leads unto all truth those who believe and makes the Word of Christ dwell abundantly in them” (cf. Col 3:16). Two examples may illustrate this integral ecclesial character of Scripture.

Among God’s gifts to Israel – the election, the covenants, the worship, the promises, and the Messiah – the Apostle Paul highlights also the law, the Torah, which he calls “the oracles of God” (Rm 3:2; 9:4-5). Paul and other New Testament authors invoke as well the authority of the larger corpus of sacred writings, “the law and the prophets” (e.g., Mt 5:17; Lk 16:16; Jh 1:45; Rm 3:21). The Evangelist Luke mentions all three categories

of the emerging corpus of the Jewish Scriptures when he refers to “the law and the prophets and the writings” (Lk 24:44). During the first century, however, the formation of the Scriptures was yet far from completion in either Judaism or Christianity. The choices of books for inclusion and the communal dynamics were fluid and diverse as various groups, Sadducees, Pharisees, Essenes, and Christians, were defining and interpreting their own versions of the Scriptures. Despite their differences, however, all parties equally shared the common convictions that a) a corpus of sacred documents existed that were inspired by God and expressed His will, and b) that these sacred texts belonged to God’s covenant community whose identity, unity, and life they nourished and guided. As Paul put it: “whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope” (Rm 15:4).

Some hundred years later St. Irenaeus was the first to raise the question of the relationship between Scripture, Tradition, and Church to the level of conscious theological and hermeneutical reflection.<sup>13</sup> In the face of competing alternatives by Marcionites, Valentinians, and other Gnostics, Irenaeus contended that the Scriptures belonged only to the universal Church, to those who from the beginning lived by the true *hypothesis* (governing sense or subject matter<sup>14</sup>) of the Scriptures, that is, the rule of faith. For Irenaeus, the rule of faith comprehended none other than the basic truths of the Gospel, rooted in the Jewish Scriptures, and centered on the redemption through Jesus Christ, crucified and risen. These Gospel truths were now being wildly distorted as various groups rejected the true creator God and Father of Jesus Christ, cut their moorings with the Jewish heritage, proposed a hierarchy of deities, and denied the reality of Jesus’ incarnation and death. The Marcionites had their New Testament Bible comprised of Luke’s Gospel and ten Pauline letters, expurgated of all things thought by Marcion to be Jewish. The Valentinians and others produced a plethora of new revelation books to serve their bizarre speculations. Later the Montanists claimed new revelations equal or even superior to that of Christ. But the faith and life of the apostolic community was not at the mercy of the winds. The universal Church claimed to be apostolic precisely because it could demonstrate faithfulness to the apostolic preaching and teaching. It could point to a network of leaders and congregations, such as Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, and Polycarp of Smyrna, communicating and sharing a unified vision of the apostolic Gospel and practice. Finally, the apostolic community could appeal to its own Christian Bible of the Old and New Testaments, now substantially in place, in coherence with the whole stream of its apostolic tradition and functioning as a definitive part of the authoritative standards and boundary marks of the Church.



Today, thanks to modern biblical and historical studies, we know that the origins and formation of the Bible were extremely complex. Multiple oral traditions with their own growth and ongoing adaptation preceded the composition of biblical documents by decades and even centuries. Not infrequently the documents themselves, such as the Pentateuch and the Gospels, passed through a process of redaction, shaped and reshaped according to the needs of the faith community and the perspectives of their authors. These documents gained authority within the communal tradition only gradually, and chiefly through selection and continued usage, and not without disputes within the broader community itself. Eventually the biblical canon, developing variously in diverse localities,<sup>15</sup> came to include writings as different as Leviticus and Daniel in the Old Testament, and as the Gospel of John and the Epistle of James in the New.

However, the phenomena of historical complexity and diversity of themselves underscore the powerful unifying force of religious tradition and of the faith community. There is no other explanation for the incorporation of such a rich variety and diversity of books, theological perspectives, and practices in the Scriptures, than the all-embracing influence of the Church and its Tradition. Protestant scholars now freely concede this "organic relationship" between Scripture, Tradition and Church, and that "to acknowledge the authority of the canon is to acknowledge the authority of the Tradition which gave rise to it."<sup>16</sup> Scripture, Tradition, and Church are part of the same stream of God's dealing with His people and can no longer be played off against one another as alternative authorities or alternative starting points. Scripture cannot be opposed to the Church and its Tradition because the Word of God itself establishes community with visible footprints in history.

On the other hand the Church cannot be said to be over the Scriptures because, although the Church's tradition of faith was the touchstone of the acknowledgment of biblical authority, yet the Church is always accountable and obedient to God's revealed Word made manifest in the Scriptures. Scripture and Tradition are interdependent and mutually supportive.<sup>17</sup> The old polemical dichotomy of Scripture versus Tradition has essentially been overcome. There is no question of one being set above the other. Just as Scripture in worship and teaching molded the rule of faith, so also the rule of faith was a decisive factor in the selection of the scriptural writings. Thus the biblical principle of the primacy of Scripture is inseparably connected to the ecclesial principle of the constitutive role of the Church. These two principles together, the biblical and the ecclesial, grounded in the worship and teaching of the Church, have always intended "to establish unity for the Church, but not a unity involving uniformity."<sup>18</sup> Put another way, the double achievement in the ancient universal Church

of the formation both of the biblical canon and the interpretative theological tradition that accompanied it, while allowing for remarkable creativity and variety, provides the classic paradigm and the historic standard in the quest of Christian unity for all generations.

### 3. The theological witness of Scripture

By "theological" I do not mean something separate from the "historical" but rather that which is ultimately significant within history, i.e., what Christians know and confess to be saving experiences, saving convictions and truths of the revealed yet hidden mystery of the Triune God. The biblical and ecclesial principles for which I have argued above already establish theological positions grounded in the witness of Scripture itself. Those who hold to the Bible and the Church with the seriousness and commitment that the Scriptures themselves teach ought to be able to achieve a consensus in broad terms.<sup>19</sup> The burning questions about Christian unity, however, involve additional specific issues such as the understanding of redemption in Christ, the relationship between Word and sacrament, the nature of authority and order in the Church, the ministry of the Pope, and not least the long disputed question of the *filioque* between Western and Eastern Christians.<sup>20</sup> These and other issues will continue to engage various forms of ecumenical dialog. The publication of the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* in 1999 by Catholics and Lutherans is a bold and encouraging example of ecumenical growth. Of course much remains to be done and it must be done with discernment, patience and prayer as we grow in unity of hearts and minds. What I wish here to suggest is a perspective on the theological witness of Scripture that can serve as helpful context for the discussion of the more specific disputed issues.

What is the central purpose of the Bible? It is to proclaim and celebrate God's self-giving to the world, and together with that message to call women and men to share in God's life of love and holiness. The text of *Dei Verbum* eloquently states the case. On the one hand God "in His goodness and wisdom ... and out of the abundance of His love, speaks to men as friends and lives among them, so that He may invite and take them into fellowship with Himself" (*DV*2). On the other hand God's people gratefully respond to God with obedience of faith, entrusting themselves wholly to God, sharing fellowship with God and each other through the reverent hearing and confident proclaiming of God's Word, in order that "the whole world may believe; by believing, it may hope; and by hoping, it may love" (*DV* Preface and 5).

Theological discourse invariably spirals into abstraction. Participants often lose sight of the difference between the trees and the forest. Allow me to state the obvious: Christian existence is first of all a way of life with God, a



way of personal encounter with Christ, a way of communal life with others in the Spirit, with prayer, worship, holiness, righteousness, and service in witness to God and His kingdom. From this perspective nothing is more authoritative and effective, nothing more accessible and inspiring, than the use and application of the Scriptures for the spiritual vitality and moral guidance of God's people.<sup>21</sup> But here, too, in profound repentance and love of Christ, in renewal of hearts and lives, lies the deepest hope for Christian unity. The Church Fathers have taught us that the reading of Scripture is to be accompanied through genuine repentance, fervent prayer, purity of heart, and the life of virtue. The essence of the matter is not mere knowledge of the Bible but the Bible's very enactment and embodiment in corporate and personal life.<sup>22</sup> Without this level of living faith, of devoted discipleship, of love of the brothers and sisters, of spiritual renewal and prayerful accountability to God, there can only exist yawning ecclesial gaps that no amount of doctrinal discussion and ecumenical wisdom can ever bridge.

The theological perspective of Scripture is summed up in the Christian Good News – the Gospel of Christ and salvation in His name. Jesus in His person and ministry did not only proclaim but also embodied and enacted the active presence and power of God's rule. He exorcized the demons, healed the sick, forgave the sinners, inviting all to the banquet of God's love. The early Christians, after the events of Jesus' cross and resurrection, placed Christ Himself at the center of their proclamation. The Apostle Paul declared that the Gospel does not merely tell about but rather that it *is* the revelation of God's righteousness and power for salvation to all who believe (Rm 1:16-17). Both the message of Jesus about God's kingdom and the apostolic Gospel about the redemption in Christ were not just new theological teachings but the pronouncement of actual blessings manifest in the transformed life of those who joined the Jesus movement. Thus the overall purpose of the Bible, as well as the intent of the Gospel, both drive believers to unity through shared participation in God's victory over the evil powers, God's gift of new life in Christ and the Spirit, God's inauguration of God's new world where love, mercy, justice, peace, and joy take hold and reign. To take this life-giving message joyfully to heart and put a shoulder to the task of manifesting God's rule in the world is to exemplify and witness to the living message of Scripture as a call to faith, reconciliation, and unity. Men and women themselves become "living bibles" (*empsychoi bibloi*) in the striking image by the Church Fathers.

The Gospel is the indisputable core message of the Bible, the center of the entire biblical story. The Gospel is God's active Word of life. But it is also a message that carries truth claims. Focus on the truth claims of the Gospel sheds light in all directions.

For example the proclamation that Jesus is Lord and that no one can confess this truth apart from God's Spirit (1 Co 12:3; cf. 8:6), both presupposes a deepening experience of God as Father, Son, and Spirit, and leads over several centuries to the articulation of the historic Trinitarian doctrine. In this manner, through the explication of the doctrinal tradition of the Church, the biblical confession in the living and true God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit becomes the foundation of the universal Church and the touchstone of Christian unity. In a closely related way the Gospel as God's Word, far from being a kind of disembodied and free-floating oracle, addresses concrete persons "from faith to faith" (Rm 1:17) and creates a historical community, the reality of the Church as the body of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit. The very meaning of covenant underlines the unity between God and His people in the Old Testament on the one hand, and Christ and the Church in the New on the other. All these elements of revelation, God, God's Word and deed, and covenant community, form a seamless unity and constitute a mandate for Christian unity to which the book of Ephesians gives eloquent and powerful expression: "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all" (Ep 4:4-6).

To give another example, the Gospel as the criterion of truth bridges the Old and the New Testaments, and also the past, present, and future of God's Church. With regard to the Old Testament, it is the Gospel that announces its fulfillment in Christ and the Gospel's doctrinal implications that provide the standard of its interpretation as Christian Scripture. With regard to the Church, it is the Gospel that connects the new life in Christ with the Jewish heritage and establishes the doctrinal perspective pertaining to faith and morals by which the Church lives and securely passes on the blessings and truths received from God. I have already referred to the Gospel as the basis of the rule of faith by which the Church stood firm over against astonishingly distorted teachings about God, the Old Testament, and the incarnation and death of Christ by Marcion and other Gnostics. It was through the same doctrinal sense resident in the Gospel and clarified by the rule of faith as circumstances required, that the New Testament Scriptures themselves were in decisive part selected and gathered into a sacred canon, becoming the primary standard of Christian life and thought. In all these cases, however, the Church and its Tradition played a constitutive role, not apart from the Gospel but in the interpretation and application of the Gospel. Scripture is always interpreted Scripture.<sup>23</sup> In this sense those who earnestly work for Christian unity may come to agree with the qualification in *Dei Verbum* that "it is not from Sacred Scripture alone that the Church draws her certainty about everything which has been revealed" (DV 9).



Today a number of voices, claiming scholarly legitimacy, advocate ideas as radical and revisionist as any coming from the second century Gnostics. We hear that the apostles themselves somehow got it all wrong. The Apostle Paul allegedly erred when he declared that there was but one apostolic Gospel (1 Co 15:1-11; Ga 1:6-9) because there were supposedly several Gospels, and virtually all of them different from the true intent and message of the "historical" Jesus, who is yet to be defined by any discernible consensus among those voices. We hear that early Christianity was in utter disarray, the so-called "proto-orthodox" being one small group among many in the second century, but yet eventually becoming dominant through cruel suppression of legitimate or even better options by oppressive bishops and rigid church rules. This is a case where the interface with modern and post-modern culture, just as in the case of the interface with Hellenistic culture, turns theology into an ideology gone wild. The unequivocal answer to those contentions can only be the same as that given in Christian antiquity: the truth of the apostolic Gospel, the rule of faith, and the witness of the historic Church, requiring faithfulness and unity, for without these there is no Gospel and no future for the Church.<sup>24</sup>

The Sacred Scriptures indeed contain an astonishing diversity of theological, cultural, and historical traditions. The canonization of the Scriptures does not by any means imply that all traditions and teachings in the Bible are equally true and valid.<sup>25</sup> The New Testament itself demonstrates a rich variety of Christological titles, images of the Church, and theological perspectives. That various New Testament traditions may accent the teachings of Jesus or His healing powers, or that some traditions stress Jesus' cross and resurrection, while others His humiliation and exaltation, or His descent and ascent, does not necessarily signify divergent Gospels and divergent communities, but rather different and enriching aspects of the same Gospel in the broad tradition of the Church. The variety and diversity find their unity in their common convergence on Christ, the core good news, as well as the overall story of Scripture. The blessings of the Gospel itself, of which heart is Christ and His saving work, are variously interpreted by the Apostle Paul as justification, expiation, redemption, reconciliation, new creation, and glorification. There is no need either to isolate or much less to oppose the meaning of these key concepts. Both the forensic and transformational categories of thought are both present in Paul as they are in Athanasius.<sup>26</sup> Through discerning dialog the Orthodox may learn to read the story of salvation not only in the perspective of *theosis* (deification) but also in that of justification, while Protestants and Catholics may be open to learning the reverse.

In like manner, the diversity and struggles attested in the early Church do not necessarily cancel out the framework of Church unity around Christ, the Gospel, and

fundamental elements of Church order. The Apostle Paul had to swallow his pride to leave behind a successful mission and go up to Jerusalem to meet in council with James, Peter and others for the sake of the unity of Christ's body. The vision of the early Church was wide enough to include in its canon the Gospels of Matthew and John, but not the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas and the Gospel of Truth. Justin Martyr testifies that the Church in the second century was broad enough to include Jewish Christians, who preserved obedience to the Mosaic Law while being faithful to the Gospel of the incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ, but not broad enough to include the Ebionites, the Valentinians, and the Marcionites.<sup>27</sup> Further, the network of leaders, communications, and mutual help between the Christian congregations in Jerusalem, Caesarea, Antioch, Corinth, Ephesus, Smyrna, Rome, and Lyons provide strong evidence for the unity of universal Church which is both a gift and an achievement in the vicissitudes of history.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, without appropriate trust, communications, order, and discipline, even creeds do not suffice for unity.<sup>29</sup> The apostolic Gospel, the rule of faith, and the witness and order of the historic Church can serve as touchstones for Christian unity today in the great task of reclaiming the fullness of both Scripture and Church in our times.

<sup>1</sup> Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Scripture, the Soul of Theology*, New York 1994, pp. 79-80, interprets *Dei Verbum* more sharply on this point: "Scripture may be regarded as the *norma normans non normata*, the norm that norms (but is) not normed, because it is unmanipulable (*unverfuegbar*) by either the Tradition or the magisterium ... Tradition, however, is the *norma normata* (the normed norm), i.e., it is normed by Scripture. Thus related to Tradition, Scripture is the source of the life of faith in the Christian community, and hence the wellspring of theology."

<sup>2</sup> This story and its attendant controversies is told by many, including Joseph A. Fitzmyer (see above, note 1) and Raymond E. Brown, especially in his *New Testament Essays*, Garden City 1968 and *Biblical Exegesis & Church Doctrine*, New York 1985.

<sup>3</sup> This is by no means to disparage the permanently valuable work of the World Council of Churches through its Faith & Order Conferences and its theological documents, above all *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Geneva 1982, which has received the widest possible circulation among churches throughout the world. See also *Apostolic Faith Today* ed. Hans-Georg Link, Geneva 1985 and *Confessing the One Faith*, Geneva 1991.

<sup>4</sup> A notable example is the papal encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* (That They May Be One) by which John Paul II invited all churches and theologians to offer constructive critiques of the Petrine ministry as an instrument of ecumenical unity.

<sup>5</sup> The authoritative Orthodox perspective on these topics is found in numerous articles by Georges Florovsky collected in: *Bible, Church, Tradition: An Eastern Orthodox View*, Vol. One, *The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky*, Belmont 1972.



- <sup>6</sup> A standard Orthodox statement is by Kallistos Timothy Ware, *Primacy, Collegiality, and the People of God*, in: *Orthodoxy: Life and Freedom, Essays in Honour of Archbishop Iakovos*, ed. Angelos J. Philippou, Oxford 1973, pp. 116-129. See also the recent essays on the Petrine ministry by Orthodox and Roman Catholic theologians in *Il ministero petrino: cattolici e ortodossi in dialogo*, ed. Walter Kasper, Rome 2004.
- <sup>7</sup> Because of language barriers, it is hard to know what is exactly happening in various Orthodox countries. As far as Greece is concerned, in a candid and insightful article on Scripture and Orthodox Theology in the periodical *Theologia* 56 (3, 1985), pp. 504-18), Savas Agourides, the dean of Greek New Testament scholars, places Greek biblical studies in the context of the socio-political dynamics of modern Greece struggling toward modernization amidst cross-currents of Byzantine traditionalism and the Enlightenment. In this ambiguous and uncertain social context, according to Agourides, biblical scholarship retreated into safe academics, being intimidated by Byzantine traditionalism falsely claiming the spirit of the great Church Fathers, and failing to work toward a renewal among the Greek people by integrating Scripture and the Church's worship life. Further on Orthodox biblical studies and bibliography, see Theodore G. Stylianopoulos, *The New Testament: An Orthodox Perspective*, Brookline 1997. Holy Cross Press is about to publish numerous conference papers (October 2003) on scriptural interpretation by Orthodox scholars through *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 47 (1-4, 2002, delayed issue) and in a separate volume under the title *Sacred Text and Interpretation: Perspectives in Orthodox Biblical Studies, Papers in Honor of Savas Agourides*, edited by the present writer.
- <sup>8</sup> At the hierarchical level, Metropolitan Chrysostomos of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, offers a mild call for changes in the Church pertaining to the rejuvenation of lay ministries, marriage after ordination for deacons, and fasting adaptations in a piece *Ekklesia gerasmene? (An Aged Church?)* appearing in *Episkepsis*, February 1, 1991, a bulletin of the Orthodox Center of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Geneva. However, given the overwhelming authority of tradition in the Orthodox consciousness, which includes heavy clericalism, the Metropolitan has to speak guardedly and justify even the activation of the laity as a legitimate and permissible task. At the popular level, over the last several decades, the strong and persistent, if also at times strident, call for renewal in the Orthodox Church by Eusebius Stephanou, a Greek Orthodox priest and former professor at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, who has been rather marginalized as a "protestantizer" (while critics offer little positively), has impacted the lives of relatively few North American Orthodox Christians, whereas otherwise Stephanou's has largely been a voice in the wilderness. Among his books are *Desolation and Restoration in the Orthodox Church*, Fort Wayne 1977, *Pathway to Orthodox Renewal*, Fort Wayne 1978, and *Sacramentalized But Not Evangelized*, Destin 2005.
- <sup>9</sup> Paul R. Hinlicky, *The Lutheran Dilemma*, *Pro Ecclesia* 8 (4, 1999), pp. 394-95, argues that the polemical principle of *sola scriptura*, based on the notion that the Bible is self-interpreting, self-destructs by reason of the ever increasing divergent interpretations, and that the classical standard is *prima scriptura*, not *sola scriptura* which would put into doubt the Trinitarian doctrine itself.
- <sup>10</sup> Here it is necessary to note as well the startling loss of biblical authority in the Protestant mainline churches, brought about by acculturation and secularization in modern and post-modern times, especially over such issues as doctrine, gender, and sexuality. Prominent Protestant scholars, lamenting the "chaos and devastation" in the mainline churches in America, call for a reversal and efforts to "reclaim" the Bible for the Church, not only at the level of theological scholarship but above all in the hearts and minds of believers themselves. See *Reclaiming the Bible for the Church*, eds. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, Grand Rapids 1995.
- <sup>11</sup> In the United States, the Center for Catholic and Evangelical Theology, directed by Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, which has been publishing the journal *Pro Ecclesia* since 1992 and some fifteen books, has served as an influential forum for the convergence of evangelical and catholic traditions. See for example *Reclaiming the Bible for the Church*. The Orthodox generally find it more difficult to converse with Evangelicals. See *Three Views on Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry, Grand Rapids 2004.
- <sup>12</sup> Harry Gamble, *The Formation of the New Testament Canon and Its Significance for the History of Biblical Interpretation*, in: *A History of Biblical Interpretation*, Vol. 1, *The Ancient Period*, eds. Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson, Grand Rapids 2003, pp. 418-421, points out that the formation of the Bible was essentially the outcome of Christian worship and preaching rather than canonical decisions whether episcopal or conciliar. He writes that Scripture was received as both authoritative and coherent on the basis of its overall story and central message, and not by its numerically determined outer limits.
- <sup>13</sup> See most recently John J. O'Keefe and Russell R. Reno, *Sanctified Vision: An Introduction to Early Christian Interpretation of the Bible*, Baltimore 2005, pp. 33-44.
- <sup>14</sup> So Harry Gamble, *The Formation of the New Testament Canon*, p. 420.
- <sup>15</sup> It is interesting that the ancient Syriac Church included only 22 books in its canon of the New Testament, indicating that the value in the canonization of the Scriptures is in its corpus as a whole and not the exact numerical limits.
- <sup>16</sup> Harry Gamble, *Canon: New Testament*, in: *the Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 1, ed. David N. Freedman, New York 1992, pp. 858-59.
- <sup>17</sup> By tradition I understand those beliefs and practices associated with the rule of faith, that is, the doctrinal sense resident in the larger tradition of the Church. All churches have valuable traditions by which they live, but not all traditions can be set up as absolutes for Christian unity. The distinction between traditions with a small "t" and Tradition with a capital "T" is useful and valid, but still leaves the discussion open about its concrete application. Moreover, just as in the case of Scripture, there is no "fundamentalism" of tradition to be claimed because the living tradition of the Church always included creativity and not mere commitment to stifling dogmatism and denial of freedom to think. See Alister E. McGrath, *Reclaiming Our Roots and Vision: Scripture and the Stability of the Christian Church*, *Reclaiming the Bible for the Church*, p. 85, who cites approvingly Jaroslav Pelikan's *The Vindication of Tradition*, New Haven 1984. See also Georges Florovsky, *Bible, Church, Tradition*, known for his emphasis on acquiring the mind of Scripture and of the Fathers, and not citing them in slavish way.
- <sup>18</sup> Rowan Greer, *Biblical Authority in the Early Church*, in: *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 1. pp. 1026f.
- <sup>19</sup> One of the merits of modern biblical study, according to Raymond R. Brown, *New Testament Essays*, p. 38, is that it "has pinpointed how many of the traditional divisions among Christians really flow from the Bible and how many are the products of post-biblical theological development." In other words, the Bible, approached through balanced historical critical studies, provides common ground for overcoming the traditionally divisive issues.
- <sup>20</sup> A theological solution to this issue is at hand, thanks to the work of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches, but its reception by the churches is understandably extremely slow for lack of pastoral preparation as a base for sound ecumenical moves. See *Spirit of God, Spirit of Christ: Ecumenical Reflections on the Filioque Controversy*, ed. Lukas Vischer, Geneva 1981)



and Theodore G. Stylianopoulos, *The Filioque: Dogma, Theologoumenon, or Error?* in: id., *The Good News of Christ*, Brookline 1989, pp. 196-232.

<sup>21</sup> One of the striking marks of *Dei Verbum*, along with its theological grounding, is its emphasis on the accessibility of the Bible and the encouragement for its reading on the part of clergy, the religious, and lay people, equating ignorance of the Scriptures with ignorance of Christ (*DV* 25).

<sup>22</sup> James C. Howell, *Christ Was like St. Francis*, in: *The Art of Reading Scripture*, eds. Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays, Grand Rapids 2003, pp. 101-103.

<sup>23</sup> The issue of hermeneutics is huge and cannot be taken up here. I have tried to deal with this issue in *The New Testament: An Orthodox Perspective*. Suffice it to say that variety in interpretation is undisputed in the Jewish and Christian tradition as part of their richness. Scholarship, too, plays a valuable role in the Church's use, interpretation, and application of the Bible. Difficulties arise when scholarship completely loses its ecclesial moorings, its regard for theological truth, and its loss of biblical authority. The result is an academic artificiality in scholarship itself and a uselessness of its findings for the life and mission of the Church. The chief problem in biblical scholarship lies not in its methods but the Enlightenment philosophical presuppositions that stain the results.

<sup>24</sup> Such theological defense permits, of course, no escape from the task of historical demonstration through balanced and sound scholarship. See Luke Timothy Johnson and William S. Kurz, *The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship*, Grand Rapids 2002. Johnson, pp. 19-24, severely critiques the historiographical perspectives of radical scholars whose analyses and reconstructions end up trivializing both God's Word and the reality of the Church.

<sup>25</sup> Already the Apostle Paul, on the basis of the Gospel, set aside the comprehensive cultic and legal traditions of Old Testament as criteria of salvation for Christian Gentiles. The Greek Church Fathers themselves showed no small reservations about the literal teaching of predestination and a millennial kingdom in the apocalyptic traditions of the New Testament. For most of us today it is equally clear that the institution of slavery and the subordination of women, which can be supported from a literal reading of the Old and New Testaments, are not expressions of God's eternal will.

<sup>26</sup> For the Orthodox, Athanasius' brilliant essay *On the Incarnation* is the standard patristic reference for the teaching on *theosis*, the understanding of salvation as freedom from the power of corruption and transformation in Christ and the Spirit. However, it is often not noted that in the same work Athanasius speaks of Christ's death on the cross as "the center of faith" (*On the Incarnation*, 19), that Christ "died on behalf of all" and in "exchange for all" (8-10), and that He "bore the curse laid on us" in order "to settle man's account" and free humanity from "the primal transgression" (25). On the other hand, Lutherans discuss the theme of union with Christ in Luther and find the doctrine of justification in the Seven Ecumenical Councils! See Georg Kretschmar, *The Lutheran Doctrine of Justification and the Seven Ecumenical Councils*, Lutheran Forum, Summer 2000, pp. 112-119, and Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, eds. *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther*, Grand Rapids 1998.

<sup>27</sup> *Dialogue with Trypho*, 35.6; 47.3.

<sup>28</sup> The Orthodox patristic scholar John Behr, *Scripture, the Gospel, and Orthodoxy*, *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 43 (3-4, 1999), pp. 223-48, strongly argues for doctrinal unity based on the Gospel in the early Church over against Walter Bauer's *Orthodoxy and Heresy* (1934) but concedes that the Gospel "has never been perfectly manifest or realized within any community" and that there is no "lost golden age of theological or ecclesial purity," p. 225. Behr sees that the rule of faith is a working out of the doctrinal implica-

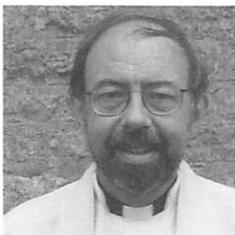
tions of the Gospel, but ends up declaring there is "no such thing as dogmatic development ... but ever new, more detailed and comprehensive explanations elaborated in defense of one and the same faith," p. 248, indicating the difficulty of the Orthodox to countenance the historical nature of the Christian faith. One could, of course, argue that "dogmatic development" pertains not to the immanent mystery of the God as Trinity but precisely the "detailed explanations" of that mystery revealed and understood in both Scripture and tradition, with decisive new elements of understanding and explication on the way.

<sup>29</sup> For the ecumenical necessity of church discipline today, see Ephraim Radner, *To Desire Rightly*, in: *Nicene Christianity: The Future for a New Ecumenism*, ed. Christopher R. Seitz, Grand Rapids 2001), pp. 213-228, who among other things writes that "the self-ordering of the church is evangelically essential, not only functionally supportive", because ecclesial disorder "is destructive of the reality of the Gospel", p. 226.



## Sacred Scripture and Christian Unity: Reflections from an Anglican Point of View

John Muddiman



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As an Anglican member of the second Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC), I was delighted and privileged to be asked to participate in the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of *Dei Verbum*. It was and still remains a remarkable document which laid the foundations for the resurgence of Catholic biblical scholarship, which in turn has had such an important and positive impact on the ecumenical work of the Church. What I will offer in this short paper is first some notes of appreciation of the document itself; second, a comment or two on what forty years later one might want to add; and third, some observations drawn from the most recent agreed ARCIC statement *Mary Grace and Hope in Christ*, to illustrate the method of ecumenical hermeneutics and the assistance that biblical studies has given to ecumenical dialogue.

1. So first some notes of appreciation. The proportions of the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation should not go unnoticed. Scripture is the explicit subject in four of its six chapters and is frequently quoted in the first two on revelation itself and its transmission. It was not at all obvious that a Catholic text on this theme should be so sharply focussed on Scripture with only the occasional passing reference to natural theology or post-biblical development.

Two years before *Dei Verbum* was promulgated, the Fourth World Conference of Faith and Order at Montreal had issued its famous statement on *Scripture, Tradition and the traditions*, which rejected the polemical polarization of Scripture over and against Tradition. *Dei Verbum* did the same from the Catholic side. There is one source of revelation, that God Himself, and – I quote from section 9 of *Dei Verbum* – “both of them [Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture] flowing from the same divine wellspring, in a certain way merge into a unity and tend towards the same end.” The fundamental unity of Scripture and Tradition allows both the reforming principle of conformity to Scripture as a criterion for testing

what is authentic to the apostolic tradition, and also the hermeneutical principle of reading Scripture in the light of what can and must be lived out in the faith, worship and life of Christians. Exciting new possibilities of dialogue between the confessions was opened by this brief but highly significant statement.

Tradition develops, according to section 8, in believers through their own study and contemplation, and the whole of chapter 6 is devoted to encouraging the Catholic faithful to read the Bible in new vernacular translations based on the original languages. Thus, the open Bible is put back into the hands of the whole People of God. It is only then that other agencies of development are mentioned including preaching and the Church’s teaching office which includes the work of biblical scholars (sections 12 and 23) as well as the deliberations of the bishops. There is in other words running right through this document a profound spirit of humility, the conviction that authority in the Church is not coercion but a gracious gift from God. Lastly, I would just draw attention to the wise words in *Dei Verbum* on the subject of inspiration. This does not annul the human abilities of the authors (section 12) so that their original intention and their use of different literary forms need to be taken into account. In the Old Testament Scriptures some things are incomplete and temporary (section 15) but remain vital as a source of divine pedagogy. [One can learn from one’s mistakes, after all!] And special pre-eminence is afforded to the Gospels (section 18) which, while basically reliable as history, also contain hindsight from the Church’s faith in the Risen Christ and her experience of instruction by the Holy Spirit. Although the piety may be somewhat foreign to the world of academic biblical studies, the content of this statement, a reasoned critical stance, is intellectually defensible. It has been spelt out in more detail recently the text issued by the Pontifical Biblical Commission, entitled *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, than which there is, I believe, no better short introduction to biblical studies at university level. Ecumenical dialogue is in my experience always polite and often cordial: the same cannot be said of the other dialogue that cuts across it, the dialogue between the Church and the Academy. But *Dei Verbum* opened a new chapter of constructive collaboration, with historical criticism playing a necessary, though not by itself a sufficient, role in biblical interpretation.



2. The second part of this paper concerns what we now might want to add. Even infallible teaching like that of an ecumenical council is not infallible in what it does not say, and in the 40 years that have passed since, other concerns have come to the fore which might be added as footnotes to the text. Out of many possible footnotes, I have chosen just two. First, the recognition that the Hebrew Bible is Sacred Scripture for Jews as well as Christians, and while we read the Old Testament in the light of Jesus Christ, we are morally obliged and intellectually benefited to conduct that reading in interfaith dialogue with our fellow believers in the God of Abraham. This entails among other things a sensitive reformulation of the argument from messianic prophecy, which moves away from proof texts to the larger images of hope generated by the Old Testament. In the case of the New Testament, the challenge is even greater. The canonical documents were composed in the second half of the first century of the common era, a period characterised by the often painful partings of the ways between Torah-centred and Christ-centred forms of Judaism. Mutual polemic has left its mark on the text. But when these Jewish texts were read later by a predominantly Gentile Church they inadvertently fuelled a latent anti-Semitism, which all the recent Popes have resoundingly condemned. Biblical Studies today are characterised by a renewed fraternal dialogue between Jews and Christians.

The second footnote would concern the application of the methods of the social sciences to the study of Sacred Scripture. It is not only the literary forms used by the inspired writers, but also their social contexts that need to be taken into account. And although sociology was at first viewed with suspicion as a godless and reductionist discipline, its application to the biblical documents has proved valuable in throwing light on the meaning of the text. A thoroughly incarnate and materialist creed like Christianity ought to welcome this assistance, for it has demonstrated how, from the earliest Hebrew prophets to the Prophet of Nazareth, the concern for social justice is inextricably related to the concern for true faith. The biblical emphasis on the Good News for the poor has been highlighted by such studies. I mention this because issues of social ethics rarely figure in ecumenical debate. That is not because they are unimportant. It is because they are mainly not in dispute among us. And all the recent Popes have emphasized such issues in their teaching.

3. In the final part, and as I tribute to the influence of *Dei Verbum*, I want to say something about the ecumenical interpretation of Scripture and in particular the recent work of ARCIC.

Christians have the Bible in common: that is one of the defining characteristics of what it means to be a Christian. But they have nurtured different interpreta-

tions of the Bible, so that it has become a source of division as well as a basis of unity. We will not get full agreement on the meaning of Scripture until we live together in full visible unity. In the meantime, we need to practice the art of what we call in ARCIC, ecumenical hermeneutics. This is an exercise in the imagination, a projection forward into God's future. Of any particular text, we need to ask not only what it originally meant, not only what it currently means according to my own ecclesial tradition, but also what it will mean when we are finally one in Christ.

When my friend, Adelbert Denaux, and I were appointed to the Commission we had few illusions as to what was expected of us as biblical specialists: what I call "the pepper-pot" approach to the ecumenical use of the Bible. We were to sprinkle agreed statements with a suitable number of reassuring biblical references, especially where the text was dense or contentious. The serious work would lie with the experts on dogmatics and moral theology. But already in *The Gift of Authority*, the Bible played a more significant role with the Pauline theme of God's Yes to humanity in Christ and our responsive Amen to God in him. In the most recent document on Mary, we came into our own. For the disagreement between Catholics and Anglicans on the Marian dogmas is basically a matter of the interpretation of Scripture, i.e. whether belief in the Immaculate Conception or Bodily Assumption can or cannot be said to be in conformity to Scripture. Neither belief is explicitly affirmed in the Bible, but nor is either belief explicitly denied. There is an absence of historical testimony, but in the case of the Immaculate Conception at least, it is difficult to imagine how any historical testimony of such a fact could possibly have been available to apostolic witnesses. The issue before us, therefore, was not whether there are obscure verses which by *plenior sensus* can be taken to imply these doctrines but whether they conform in their general tenor to the biblical pattern of grace and hope in Christ. We began our work with an ecumenical re-reading of Scripture and joyfully discovered how much we were in agreement – the result, surely, of a whole generation of convergence in biblical studies set in train by *Dei Verbum*. Already in the New Testament especially in the works of Luke and John, the Mother of the Lord plays a key role in the Incarnation and at the Passion, symbolizing expectant Israel and the new creation, brought into being at the foot of the Cross and on the day of Pentecost. The ecclesiological and eschatological emphases of the teaching of the Second Vatican Council were confirmed by our re-reading. On Christology also there was full agreement between us. Catholics and Anglicans together affirm that a necessary corollary of right belief in the Incarnation is that Mary is to be called *theotokos*, and they have sought to express that faith liturgically. We noted that the calendars of many Anglican provinces have restored August 15 as a major feast of Mary. While modern theologians



may want to question certain anthropological and philosophical preconceptions in the form of the Marian dogmas, we concluded that their actual content was essentially theological, intimately related to the doctrines of Christ, salvation and the Church. The gracious sanctification and glorification of Mary are the supreme instances of “anticipated eschatology”, that is the experience in the present of the hope of holiness and glory to come, which is at the very heart of the message of the Bible.

The inspiration mediated by the Second Vatican Council in its several constitutions, and above all in *Dei Verbum* has borne fruit in 40 years of ecumenical dialogue, and despite obstacles and disappointments, the ever closer agreement between Christians on the faith that we share. ■

FEATURE  
ARTICLE

## Sacred Scripture and Christian Unity: Reflections from a Methodist Point of View

Frances Young



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### Introduction

Scripture is one thing commonly affirmed by the major streams of Christianity: Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant and Pentecostal. Yet it is now also divisive, the divisions being *within* the major denominations, and more deeply and passionately felt than the fault-lines of the historic divisions. Acknowledging this reality, I offer comments on three key elements of the Vatican II statement from the perspective of a New Testament and Patristic scholar whose churchmanship is in the Wesleyan tradition. In the process I develop an argument for accepting pluralism in interpretation, multiple readings being contained within creedal parameters.

### 1. Attending to Scripture itself

Vatican II's *Constitutio dogmatica de divina revelatione* states that “God chose men and while employed by Him they made use of their powers and abilities, so that with Him acting in them and through them, they, as true authors, consigned to writing everything and only those things which He wanted” (DV 11). So the interpreter

“should carefully investigate what meaning the sacred writers really intended” (DV 12). Thus the statement, which also proceeds to endorse the need to attend to literary genres and social conventions of the time, embraces the so-called “historical-critical method”. Those engaged in biblical studies are given encouragement, and indeed the contribution of Roman Catholic scholars to professional scholarship has since been extensive and marked.

This now common approach releases Scripture from the straightjacket of inherited interpretations, with two outcomes: the first is the challenge of its strangeness to current cultures and societies, and the second is the realisation of its potential to act as a mirror, as analogies are drawn between then and now which recognise both the similarities and differences of the human, historical settings in which Christians seek to follow Christ. To clarify this I offer an example relevant to the theme of Church unity.

At the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order, held at Santiago de Compostela in 1993, I was asked to provide Bible studies by working through the epistle to the Galatians. Now Galatians makes it possible to overhear the early Church engaging in a major dispute over what was then a particularly significant issue of principle and identity but which is no longer directly relevant to our situation. It is hardly a classic ecumenical passage, arising as it does out of a contentious situation; and indeed study of it proved contentious in the context of the con-



ference. It was so much the more important for the ecumenical movement to face up to the realities of this epistle – for it proved to be a mirror in which the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for the ecumenical movement could be reflected. Some of the principal points emerging from the study included the following observations:

- ❑ The rhetorical dynamic of Galatians is towards unity – its aim is to persuade the recipients not to be seduced into exclusive or sectarian readings of Scripture.
- ❑ The premiss of the epistle's argument is respect for the differing identities of Jew and Gentile.
- ❑ Scripture and its interpretation is already the decisive issue in Galatians; Scripture and Tradition take on a new level of meaning because of the new situation, and that new reading is inclusive not exclusive – it demands that Jews and Gentiles discover the possibility of fellowship despite difference, appealing behind Moses to Abraham, and pointing to Jeremiah's call to the *ethne* (nations, but usually referring to Gentiles in the New Testament).
- ❑ We only know by hindsight that Paul was the true apostle as Jeremiah had been the true prophet. So ecumenicity demands the ability to hold the dangerous radicals within the tradition, but also hear the dangerous radicals, the prophets who come to stir up the Church and provoke new understandings of the ways of God.
- ❑ The argumentation suggests that ecumenicity cannot be bland, lowest common denominator toleration – rather it may involve confrontation, and a response of painful listening to those who differ.
- ❑ Integrity is non-negotiable, but does not exclude the possibility of change.
- ❑ Controversy for the follower of Christ is not to be the vehicle for conceit, competition and envy – rather it is the necessary precondition for reconciliation, for discovering how we bear one another's burdens. Might it not be the case that the brokenness of the Church is a precondition for being a model of reconciliation in our fractured world?
- ❑ Exclusive identity is challenged in such a way that we are invited to consider whether we are provoked to look beyond inner-Christian ecumenism to an ecumenism with other faiths – for Scripture points us also to the “book of Creation” as revelatory of God, and if God is Creator of all, how can we be exclusive of any?

In the light of this, it is worth observing that the historical-critical method alerts us to the fact that all the clas-

sic passages about Church unity (such as Jn 17, 1 Co 10-13, especially chapter 12, Rm 12, etc.) were in fact penned against a background of dissension and possible fragmentation. They present an ideal that was hardly realised even then. Indeed, the New Testament, studied by this method, alerts us to the pen-ultimacy of the Church militant here on earth. What we are to be is both “now” and “not yet”. This is a profound challenge to ecclesiastical ideology. The Churches, as we know them, are institutions with the same socio-cultural characteristics as other institutions, sometimes stuck in a time-warp with characteristics inherited from earlier societies, sometimes consciously or unconsciously taking on those of contemporary institutions. Attending to Scripture itself illuminates our struggles as much as ideals. So my first point is a welcome to Vatican II's acceptance of biblical criticism, together with a challenge to allow it to shape ecclesiology, and so ecumenical possibilities.

## 2. Attending to Tradition

My second point challenges Protestants to accept the importance of Tradition. The Vatican II statement declares that it is by Tradition that the Church came to know the full canon of biblical books, and by Tradition Scripture comes to be more profoundly understood. Scripture and Tradition are bound together in a close and reciprocal relationship, and both are to be accepted and honoured with like devotion and reverence. Protestants, recognising here a classic re-statement of the position taken by Catholics over against the Reformation's watchword, *sola scriptura*, may react cautiously. Nevertheless I want to urge the importance of this position for all Christian interpretation of Scripture.

Recent decades have seen a reaction against the historical-critical method on a number of counts. Some have suggested it yields merely “archaeological” readings, distancing Scripture from us and our needs. Others have objected to the way its analyses lead to the fragmentation of Scripture. Attempts to respond to these objections have been much influenced by post-modern hermeneutics, but one movement which may seem to have more immediately Christian roots is canon-criticism. The argument here is that the books should be read as belonging to one Book, and instead of focusing on Scripture as a library containing books with a multiplicity of historical backgrounds, and often a multiplicity of prior sources, the canonical meaning should be sought by reading passages in the context of the Bible as a whole.

This approach, I suggest, despite its obvious attractiveness for Christian reading, is simply not adequate. The canon does not offer a key to its own interpretation. The collection is diffuse and in some ways contradictory.



Granted the books which make up this collection often betray a deep consciousness of their own “intertextuality”, nevertheless it is only by conceiving some kind of overarching schema or framework that any overall perspective can be reached in the light of which particular passages may be interpreted. What I want to suggest is that the most appropriate external framework for Christian reading lies not in any of the 20<sup>th</sup> century frameworks, such as “progressive revelation” or “salvation-history”, but in the classic creeds.

The grounds for this claim are to be found in the situation and contribution of St. Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons towards the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. Anyone who pays attention to this is immediately alerted to the weaknesses of the Protestant position with regard to Tradition. Irenaeus was struggling against Gnostics, people who in his eyes selected texts that suited their purposes and interpreting them according to their own overarching scheme. As yet there was no agreed canon of Scripture, and no agreed criteria of interpretation. It was through this struggle that both began to be established. For Irenaeus the only possibility was to appeal to Tradition – to custom and usage with respect to the list of books read in church, and to the Rule of Faith as the framework for ensuring a proper Christian reading of that canon. Without paying attention to this Tradition, it was possible, as Irenaeus suggested, to rearrange the pieces of the mosaic to produce a fox rather than the portrait of a king (cf. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, 1.8.1). Irenaeus recognised that Christian reading depends on a Tradition that embraces the Scripture, and that the canon of Scripture alone is not enough to ensure that it is read aright.

The Rule of Faith, or Canon of Truth, can be regarded as in some sense the precursor of the creeds. Without having yet a fixed form, it speaks of a single drama with three characters: the Father and Creator of all, whose purposes are being worked out in the overarching story; the Son of God who became incarnate for us and our salvation; and the Holy Spirit who foreshadowed what was to come in the inspired Scriptures. The historical-critical method outlaws a doctrinal reading of Scripture as anachronistic; yet Christian interpretation requires a Trinitarian reading. Canon-criticism on its own cannot ensure that; if it finds it, it subconsciously imports Tradition. Better, surely, that it is claimed explicitly. The notion that everything should be subjected to the test of Scripture is important, yet meaning is not confined to what is actually there – there is no single identifiable meaning, whether described as literal, plain or historical. The doctrinal superstructure of Christianity was built ON Scripture, not simply OUT OF it; and it is vital to recognise that the plenitude of Scripture’s meaning belongs to its future, not its historical origins. The riches of revelation are released by the traditional framework which enables Scripture to be read Christianly.

### 3. Attending to the point of Scripture

The Vatican II statement declares, “God chose to reveal Himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of His will (see Eph 1:9) by which through Christ, the Word made flesh, man might in the Holy Spirit have access to the Father and come to share in the divine nature (see Eph. 2:18; 2 P 1:4). Through this revelation, therefore, the invisible God (see Col 1:15, 1 Tim 1:17) out of the abundance of His love speaks to men as friends (see Ex 33:11; Jn 15:14-15) and lives among them (see Bar 3:38), so that He may invite and take them into fellowship with Himself.” (*DV 2*), adding a string of Scripture references to support this statement. It affirms that easy access to Holy Scripture should be available to all the Christian faithful and translations are encouraged in collaboration with Christians of other denominations. The word of Scripture, it says, is a source of healthy nourishment and holy vitality for the ministry of the Word. The point of Scripture as the conversion of minds and hearts, and indeed communities, is thus accepted, a point deeply enshrined in the approach of my own Wesleyan tradition, as well as the patristic literature. If Scripture is to convert hearts in many different ages and cultures it must be open to all, it must speak “for us and our salvation” in many and various ways in order to address our different conditions, and so inevitably it must be plurivocal – there must be many ways of reading oneself into the text, so as to be convicted and transformed.

Recent literary criticism has emphasized the importance of interpretative communities – the way that texts may be read variously in various contexts and differing traditions of interpretation are thus formed. If we look at the history of exegesis, or ponder the disputes about the meaning of Scripture in our own world, we can see this happening. It is vital then that we learn respect through dialogue – even fundamentalists may have something to teach us! We need to find the humility not to pin Scripture down. The canon itself invites us to ponder the fact that there are four Gospels, not one, and an Old and a New Testament, which are not the same but interpret each other. As the Fathers never tired of pointing out, you need the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to read Scripture. Augustine insisted that Scripture can only be interpreted in and through love. The Fathers also reflected theologically on the fact it is only because God accommodated the divine self to human limitations that we have received any revelation.

Ephrem the Syrian almost speaks of a double incarnation – in flesh and in language. The Word clothed himself in our metaphors, types and symbols in order to communicate with us. Gregory of Nyssa likewise explores the inadequacies of human language for expressing the divine, recognising that human language has to be stretched beyond itself to produce anything like the truth, and even then our comprehension of the



divine is limited – for God is infinite and cannot be reduced to the size of our own minds. Scripture constantly points beyond itself, and there are layers of meaning through which to progress. Ephrem speaks of Scripture being an inexhaustible fountain, and no-one should imagine that the single one of its riches he has found is the only one there is: “a thirsty person rejoices because he has drunk: he is not grieved because he proved incapable of drinking the fountain dry”. It is no wonder that the Fathers found multiple meanings in any given text.

If we are to attend to the point of Scripture, however, the most important interpreters must be those who have learned to live the Gospel authentically. Scripture is not meant to be a scientific or even doctrinal textbook – its point is the creation of saints who live out its meaning in a variety of different callings. So embodied exegesis is the most important of all. Someone once defined a saint as a person who makes you feel ten times taller and better than you really are – that kind of humility, respect and love embodies the point of Scripture, while allowing for many and various ways in which it speaks effectively for the transformation of the fallen.

### Conclusion

The Vatican II statement is headed *de divina revelatione*. Its opening paragraphs emphasize the priority of God. It concludes by hoping that the Church’s “spiritual life will receive a new impulse from increased devotion to the Word of God, which ‘abides for ever’ (Is 40:8; 1 P 1:23-25)”. The reading of Scripture needs to be both ecumenical and for God’s sake, not our own. The Bible is easily turned into a weapon with which to attack others; when it is, it becomes a tool for self-justification, or its reading becomes defensive and distorted. Because of its focus on God the Vatican II statement contains the ingredients for a rapprochement over Scripture, at least between the historic streams of Christianity so long divided by issues that now belong to the past. May we find ways of turning those ingredients into food for the future!

To do that requires

- ❑ intensive scholarship – for the origins of Scripture in historical circumstances cannot be gainsaid and its reading is refreshed by disciplined attention to this reality
- ❑ acceptance of the traditions of doctrinal reading – for Scripture cannot stand alone, the canon being itself the product of Tradition, and Tradition providing the over-arching framework within which Christian reading takes place
- ❑ commitment to live as believers and believing communities according to the ways set out in the Word of God in whatever circumstances we find ourselves.

Thus we need to accept pluralism in interpretation while insisting that multiple readings are contained within creedal parameters. Vatican II points the way. ❑



## Life of the Federation

### Germany: Joint Meeting of the Executive Committee and of the CBF Coordinators

From October 5 to 10, 2006 the members of the Executive Committee and the regional and subregional coordinators of the CBF met at the Archabbey of the Missionary Benedictines of St. Ottilien, Germany, to discuss and to decide on the theme, date and questions of program outline of the upcoming Plenary Assembly. Moreover the Executive Committee (EC) met separately for its fourth session since its election in 2002 to treat topics specific to the EC. Finally, a separate meeting of the coordinators took up the discussion of the previous coordinators' meeting held in Nairobi, Kenya in February, 2004.

The coordinators and the General Secretary took this opportunity to evaluate the work that has been done since the meeting in Nairobi. At the center of attention was the intensification of networking within the subregions, in the regions and in contacts with the General Secretariat. A well-functioning sharing and reporting system is a central tool for this. All were agreed that the measures decided on in Nairobi were fully appropriate, but that they required more intensive implementation. This observation pertained not least to the reporting praxis of a number of member institutions of the CBF as well.



Very positive notice was taken of the various measures aimed at the intensification of exchange of information, experiences and resources in the different subregions. To cite here but three examples: in the region of Africa and Madagascar the trilingual BICAM Newsletter is contributing to sharing of experience among biblical pastoral institutions; also, good consideration is being given to a number of publications that deal with important topics of biblical pastoral ministry. The Southeast Asian subregion has witnessed the birth of an electronic newsletter to which an increasing number of its members are actively contributing. This is a very suitable means of communication precisely in regions where regular meetings are difficult to hold in view of geographical and economic conditions. Finally, within the Central European subregion a collaborative project is in the works in three language groups; this, too, is a good response to the concrete local conditions.

To make the upcoming Plenary Assembly a significant and formative event for the entire Federation the General Secretariat set in motion a preparatory procedure at the beginning of this year and invited, first of all, the office-holders of the CBF and the national coordinators for biblical pastoral ministry of the countries of Africa to a brainstorming process. Last August the General Secretariat then sent to all members the results, in systematized form, of this first round of reflections with the request that they submit their own concrete suggestions for a theme. The goal was to take into account as comprehensively as possible the experiences and needs of the entire Federation in connection with the selection of a theme.

After in-depth consultation the members of the Executive Committee and the CBF coordinators decided on the theme: "Word of God – Source of Reconciliation, Justice and Peace". This is to be supplemented by the biblical motto: "Deus caritas est – God is love" (1 Jn 4:8, 16). This theme takes into account the particular context of Africa and at the same time takes up currently relevant challenges of the biblical pastoral ministry throughout the world. Openness to reconciliation, the striving for justice and the yearning for peace are central aspects of Christian faith and activity, which in the final analysis are grounded in the love of God toward human beings and toward His creation. This theme was also chosen with a view to the second African Bishops' Synod that will take place after 2008 and that will concern



itself with the theme: "The Church in Africa in service to reconciliation, justice and peace". Finally, with its allusion to the first Encyclical of Pope Benedict XVI, the biblical motto "God is love" from the First Epistle of John also highlights the social dimension of the Christian faith.

It was decided that the Plenary Assembly should take place from June 24 to July 3, 2008 in Dar es Salam, Tanzania. With the announcement of the theme of the upcoming Plenary Assembly the invitation is going out to all member institutions of the Catholic Biblical Federation to start working in a concrete manner on the theme "Word of God – Source of Reconciliation, Justice and Peace" in their own area of concern, and against the background of their own concrete activities, and in the social and religious context of their countries and their regions. The upcoming Plenary Assembly should give considerable space to regional aspects of the theme and to the experiences of CBF members.

It was not least the inspiring environment of the Archabbey of the Missionary Benedictines of St. Ottilien that contributed to the smooth sailing of the five-day intensive work meeting. The combination of down-to-earth spirituality, material and spiritual productivity, contemplative orientation to the Word of God, apostolic openness and a world-church perspective which characterizes St. Ottilien provided the background inspiration for CBF's work. This is the second time now that CBF boards have enjoyed this Benedictine hospitality; profound thanks for this!

### **Vatican City: Twelfth Ordinary Synod of Bishops on the Word of God**

On October 6, 2006 Pope Benedict XVI announced that the next Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops will be devoted to the theme "The Word of God in the life and mission of the Church". The Synod will take place from October 5 to 26, 2008 at the Vatican.

This means that a longstanding, profound wish of the CBF is soon to become a reality. Since its Plenary Assembly in Bangalore in 1984 the CBF has repeatedly expressed its desire for a Bishops' Synod on the Word of God. The recent congress on the occasion of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Dei Verbum*, with the attention it provoked, with the numerous meetings it made possible, and through the various initiatives that flowed from it may have had a decisive catalytic effect here.

The role that the Word of God plays or should play today at every level of Church life deserves to be considered anew on the highest Church level. On a day to day basis, as we in the CBF know only too well, it is the combination of elements that is important: individual commitment and competence in the work done at grassroot level, and at the same time also the interest, the support and the biblical pastoral competence "from above". In member-structure and in concrete networking efforts the CBF brings the two together. "In the service of the Bishops" and "working at grass-root level" – these are major characteristics of our Federation. This all-embracing experience will undoubtedly also make the CBF a good collaborator in the upcoming Bishops' Synod.

It is fairly evident that the 12<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Synod of Bishops on the Word of God can be seen as a logical and theological consequence of the previous Synod on the Eucharist. The "equality", the inseparable unity of the "table of the Word" and the "table of the bread" which *Dei Verbum* underscores ("The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord, since ... she unceasingly receives and offers to the faithful the bread of life from the table both of God's word and of Christ's body", *DV21*), finds concrete expression in this "Synod planning". This theological fact alone yields a first challenge and task for the Bishops' Synod. However, we are also hoping from the Synod for concrete impulses for the biblical pastoral ministry worldwide.

### **Special thanks go to the following persons and institutions for their photos:**

Adelbert Denaux (p. 4), John Muddiman (p. 19), Gabriel Naranjo Salazar, cm (p. 26), Österreichisches Katholisches Bibelwerk (p. 29), Theodore G. Stylianopoulos (p. 8), Frances Young (p. 19); all other photos: CBF archives.



## AFRICA

### Ghana: 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Biblical Pastoral Ministry in Kumasi

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*Yes, as the rain and the snow come down from the heavens and do not return without watering the earth, making it yield and giving growth to provide seed for the sower and bread for the eating, so the word that goes from my mouth does not return to me empty, without carrying out my will and succeeding in what it was sent to do.* This passage from the Book of Isaiah (Is 55:10-11) constitutes the motto for the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations of the biblical apostolate ministry in Kumasi which took place in January, 2006.

It was a strong reason that drove the bishop of Kumasi in 1980 to become actively engaged in biblical pastoral ministry: the problems that Catholic religious teachers saw confronting them as a result of the increasing success of Christian fundamentalist groups were becoming ever more pressing. For this reason, Bishop Sarpong started an initiative that would



supply teachers with practical aids that would help them to interest their students in the Bible and motivate them to consciously responsible ways of using Scripture.

From this initial action there quickly developed a series of biblical pastoral courses, with a broad range of specializations, designed not only for school instruction, but soon for almost every realm of ecclesial ministry – child and youth work, as well as Bible work in families and Small Christian Communities or the training of catechists and priests. The essential part is the so-called “Basic Bible Course”, an intensive, multi-year course in biblical pastoral ministry. It is designed for women and men, lay persons and clerics who are active in the most varied areas of Bible work. For two whole years they meet every third weekend in the month for a two-day period. During this time they receive a well-grounded biblical and biblical pastoral training – from an introduction to the Bible and its books to the learning of pastoral and didactic methods, and on to a discussion of questions of personal faith. Moreover, they commit themselves, in tandem with their course work, to helping out in their communities with biblical pastoral ministry, e.g., by leading Bible circles, monitoring youth groups, offering instruction to people applying for baptism, and much more. They receive a graduate certificate only after passing a final examination and receiving a positive report from their home parish regarding the community work they have accomplished.

More than three hundred women and men have completed this program since its inception. For this reason an ongoing education course was added as a second module a few years ago. It offers the graduates of the basic course the opportunity to meet once a month to exchange experiences, to deepen their knowledge of the Bible, or to receive new ideas and tips. For a long time now the participants have been coming no longer only from the archdiocese of Kumasi but from the whole of Ghana; and many religious communities send their novices or postulants to take the course.

What makes this training program so successful? Fr. Gabriel Acheampong, the diocesan coordinator for biblical pastoral ministry, names as a reason the training team, which develops the course contents and organizes the monthly meetings. It consists of about twenty women and men who have themselves completed the course and who now conduct it for the benefit of the “new ones”. They see this as continuing education for themselves which at the same time allows them to constantly improve the course offerings; they care for the participants and make themselves available even for their personal questions; and they make



sure that a suitable substitute person is found in the event that a member takes leave of the team. All of this insures that the functioning of the courses is not, as so often happens, made to depend on a single individual – whose departure can then quickly bring everything to a standstill –, but rather will have the support of a whole team, which will guarantee continuity and an invariably high-quality product.

Alongside this model training program, which a number of other dioceses have since also adopted, there are numerous other activities and course offerings which help to bring Sacred Scripture and its message of hope to men and women in the archdiocese of Kumasi. Among these could be mentioned, for example, the celebration of a Bible Week as well as the organization of the Bible quiz or other such contests for schools and in communities. Moreover, Fr. Gabriel and his team strive to have biblical course offerings included in the curricula of colleges and other educational establishments with an ecclesial connection.

*(Report: Claudio Ettl)*

## AMERICAS

### Panama: Fifth Biblical Pastoral Meeting of FEBIC LAC

The fifth biblical pastoral meeting of the subregion of Latin America and the Caribbean (FEBIC LAC) took place in Panama from July 11 to 15, 2006. Fifty-two representatives of CBF member institutions of the subregion, zonal coordinators and representatives of the Council of the Latin American Bishops' Conferences (CELAM) from 15 countries dealt in lectures, discussions and study groups with the theme "The Word of God in the Life of the Church: discipleship, pastoral ministry and mission".

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Under the direction of the new subregional coordinator, Fr. Gabriel Naranjo, cm, the meeting also undertook the task of setting priorities for the V. General Conference of CELAM to be held in May 2007, in Aparecida, Brazil. The General Conference of CELAM stands under the theme "Disciples and emissaries of Jesus Christ, so that our peoples may have life in him"; the biblical motto reads: "I am the way, the truth and the life" (Jn 14:6).



Fr. Gabriel Naranjo, cm, writes on this in his report:

"This theme was processed according to the method See – Judge – Act and its biblical references:

See: 'I am the way'	–	Our people	=	Reality	–	Past
Judge: 'the truth'	–	Disciples	=	Convictions	–	Present
Act: 'the life'	–	Missionaries	=	Commitment	–	Future

These thematic blocks structured the three main work days, which in turn were framed pedagogically by an introduction and a conclusion."

Further important concerns of the subregional meeting were the follow-up work on the Dei Verbum Conference in Rome in 2005 and working out suggestions related to the thematic preparations for CBF's seventh Plenary Assembly.



The following are excerpts from the final declaration of the fifth biblical pastoral meeting:

At this moment of our history, in which globalization is opening up numerous possibilities, while poverty and alienation appear to be ever more marked, a time in which our native peoples and cultures are becoming aware of their identity, a time of political and social crisis, in which democratization is on the advance, even as new authoritarian tendencies appear, in a time of lamentable destruction of the natural environment and diminishing chances for a dignified life, the Church seeks to accompany the Latin American peoples along the path of life, with its proclamation of God's Word as a source of hope.

As a fruit of our reflections and by way of conclusions we propose the following perspectives or commitments:

1. To deepen biblical spirituality as a capacity to hear God's Word with wonder and to see his saving work in our own history; the response to the action of God led by the Spirit is unconditional, obedient faith.
2. To actively embrace the Word of God as a source of the Church's entire life as well as her pastoral ministry, particularly catechesis and liturgy.
3. To make the education of disciple-missionaries a top priority of biblical pastoral ministry, representing discipleship as a way of continuing encounter and conversion, of an ever growing love and fascination for Jesus, the manifestation of the Father, who is the moving force behind our witness and our mission.
4. In accordance with the *Dei Verbum* and the teaching of the Church's Magisterium, to place particular emphasis on the continuing biblical formation of all who are active in pastoral ministry: bishops and priests, seminarians and deacons, religious and engaged laity; to promote centers of biblical formation for beginners as well as more advanced levels.
5. To strengthen and deepen the role of the female disciple in all areas of Church life; to move forward with the work of a gender-related hermeneutic, rediscovering in particular the figures of feminine discipleship.
6. With the help of Holy Scripture to illuminate the roots and expressions of our culture and our popular religiosity, so that our people can hear the call to conversion and commit themselves to the following of the Lord.
7. To promote the prayerful and communal reading of the Word of God as a vital event of contemporary disciples.
8. To promote the ministry of the Word and to insist that homilies be adequately prepared and, attentive to the proclaimed word, illuminate the mystery that is being celebrated and so nourish the faith of God's people and encourage them to committed action for the common good.
9. To give vibrant witness in our communities to the fact that the Word of God and the Eucharist, the marginalized and history itself are signs of the presence of Jesus among us and provide basic nourishment for the spirituality of disciples and missionaries.
10. To continue our openness to ecumenical dialogue, making the Word of God a privileged place of fraternal encounter and a path toward the unity willed by Jesus.
11. To promote the reading of the Bible from the perspective of the disadvantaged: the poor disadvantaged country folk and the natives, women and children, migrants and blacks.

The report by Fr. Gabriel Naranjo and the final statement can be found on the CBF Website. The drafting of documentation is planned and will be obtainable through the General Secretariat.



## EUROPE / MIDDLE EAST

### Slovakia: Directors' Conference of the Central European Subregion in Marianka

The CBF Central European subregion held its Directors' Conference from September 5 to 8 in Marianka, near Bratislava. Representatives from ten countries took part.

At the beginning of the meeting, the opportunity presented itself for exchanges between two representatives of the project group Biblia, above all on the topic of ongoing as well as future possibilities of cooperation. An important place was then given to the reports from the individual Biblical Associations of the different countries and to the report presented by Claudio Ettl from the CBF General Secretariat. These reports brought out how varied the activities of the individual members are; they range from time-tested offers such as Bible camps for children and for the youth (e.g., in Romania and in Slovakia) and ongoing Bible translation projects (the Romanes Bible) through current projects, such as various publications and Internet offerings such as commentaries to the Sunday readings or helps for lectors, to new offerings such as basic courses in biblical pastoral ministry.

In addition, the participants gave special consideration to the future orientation and priority setting of the work of the subregion. Thus, the executive committee was elected in accordance with the usual rotation; for the coming three years committee members will include the subregional coordinator, Anton Tyrol (Slovakia), as well as Dieter Bauer (Switzerland), Theo Kersten (Netherlands), Rudi Konciliija (Slovenia) and Bela Tarjanyi (Hungary). At the same time important directions for the future were set: thus the subregion is to receive a comprehensive Internet presence on the page of the Slovakian Biblical Association ([www.kbd.sk](http://www.kbd.sk)) and planning is being done on projects that transcend country borders (as, for example, common Bible camps for youth between Romania and Germany and between Slovakia and Germany). Moreover, some thought is being given to offering online publications and Internet courses, but also colloquiums for the various language groups, so as to be able to reach specific target groups.



The meeting was rounded off by three other program items: a meeting with the president of the Slovakian Bishops' Conference, Bishop Frantisek Tondra, who emphasized the central importance of biblical pastoral ministry and who encouraged the participants not to flag in their engagement; a lecture by Dr. Norbert Höslinger, the pioneer of Central and Eastern European biblical pastoral ministry, who gave a paper on the biblical and liturgical activity of Pius Parsch; and finally a guided tour of the city in Bratislava, which brought out in vivid terms the rich Jewish and Christian heritage of this metropolis on the Danube.

(Report: Anton Tyrol) ■

### Austria: 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Catholic Biblical Association and 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Journal *Bibel und Liturgie*

On October 21, 2006 the Austrian Catholic Biblical Association (ÖKB) met in the monastery of Klosterneuburg for a festive event celebrating a double anniversary: the founding of the Biblical Association itself forty years ago and the first appearance of the journal *Bibel und Liturgie* eighty years ago.

In the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council many Catholic Biblical Association were coming into existence. The Austrian Catholic Biblical Association Klosterneuburg was established already on September 1, 1966 by Cardinal Dr. Franz König, one year after the

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end of the Council, as a fruit of the Austrian Bishops' Conference. It was established at Klosterneuburg, because the Augustinian canon Pius Parsch already before the Second Vatican Council had founded in addition to the "popular liturgical apostolate" the "Klosterneuburg Biblical Apostolate", and through both of these had launched a biblical and liturgical movement. The journal *Bibel und Liturgie* which still appears today was founded by Pius Parsch already in 1926.

With the establishment of the Austrian Catholic Biblical Association a clear signal was given by the Austrian Bishops that the diffusion of the Holy Scripture was a special concern of theirs, to which a special ecclesial institution should be devoted, since God's Word is of such vital necessity for the Church and for all baptized believers. For this reason the Biblical Association disseminates the Holy Scripture in a variety of editions and strives in many ways to explain the Bible to people. This is one of the tasks of those working in biblical pastoral ministry in Austrian dioceses, carried out in manifold ways.

In order to enable access to biblical and religious literature to many people, even those who live far from any bookstore, the Austrian Catholic Biblical Association have established a mail order business and an Internet shop, through which any available book can be ordered. This kind of book business and the sale of biblical journals, as well as the distribution of the Bible as a school-book constitute the financial basis for the work of the Biblical Association. Initiatives aimed at arousing interest in the Word of God, recalling its importance and getting people excited about it do, after all, require substantial financial commitment. Because of the declining number of people who go to mass and of students who take part in religious instruction new ways must be found to bring God's word to people. And this, too, is something the Biblical Association can do. Besides this the Austrian Catholic Biblical Association sponsors meetings of people who are working or doing scholarly research on the Bible at the biblical institutes of Austrian universities; it maintains contacts with the Catholic Biblical Association of neighboring countries and with the Catholic Biblical Federation, as well as with the world Church and the media.

A thanksgiving mass in the abbey church and a closing ceremony constituted the highpoint of the anniversary celebrations. The main address for the celebration was given by Bishop Wilhelm Egger of Bolzano-Brixen, former President of the Catholic Biblical Federation; the theme was: "The Word of God for the third millennium – the Bible in ecclesial, ecumenical, interreligious and intercultural dialogue". In his talk, Bishop Egger made a plea for a dialogical use of the Holy Scriptures of the various religions – a way of reading that remains open to dialogue. This procedure, however, presupposes that the participants maintain their own identity. "Only through strong dialogue partners," the Bishop insisted, "can dialogue bear fruit"; for Christians this means "that they should have a strong biblical identity".



### Malta: Annual Meeting of the Subregion of Southern and Western Europe

The annual meeting of the Southern and Western European subregion took place from September 14 to 17, 2006. Besides the usual exchange of information (reports on the activities of the member organizations, report by the General Secretary) questions pertaining to preparations for the seventh Plenary Assembly of the CBF stood on the agenda.

The thematic emphasis of the meeting was the reading of individual biblical books "from beginning to end". In many countries this method of an "integral" Bible-reading that sees and interprets each book of the Bible as a self-standing whole is being practiced. The for-

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mer subregional coordinator, Thomas Osborne, who had launched a discussion of these methods in *Bulletin Dei Verbum* 66/67, was invited to take part as a consultant for this topic. In Asia, Africa and Latin America these methods already number among the common forms of Bible-reading; in Europe, on the other hand, its use in biblical pastoral ministry is rather new.

### **Italy: Annual Meeting of the Rome Subregion**

The annual meeting of the Rome subregion took place under the direction of the new subregional coordinator, Fr. Corrado Pastore, sdb, on November 30, 2006. The exchange of information and sharing of experiences of the Roman members of the CBF proved very fruitful and the participants reported on a variety of interesting initiatives. Among these number – to name but two – a new biblical catechetical handbook in Italian (*Manuale di catechesi biblica*) and a newly established specialized study in the realm of pastoral theology with an emphasis on Bible and liturgy, at the Pontifical University of the Salesians in Rome. More information on these two initiatives may be obtained through the General Secretariat.

The participants agreed to push for an important task of the Roman subregion in 2007: they plan to pursue contact with the Roman universities and in collaboration with the General Secretariat to inform the students in these institutions about the concerns, the work and the structures of the CBF worldwide and at local Church level. These students, who are usually staying in Rome for a course of special studies and who assume highly responsible tasks in their local churches, are important potential promoters and resource persons for the CBF. Pending an extraordinary meeting of the subregion in March, 2007 on this topic the corresponding preparations are to be accomplished.

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## Obituary for Dom Bernard Orchard, osb (1910–2006)



Dom Bernard Orchard, a Benedictine monk, schoolmaster and biblical scholar who died on November 28, 2006 at Ealing Abbey, England, served the Catholic Biblical Federation as its second General Secretary.

Long before the Second Vatican Council Dom Orchard was engaged in historical-critical Bible studies. He travelled extensively the countries of the Bible and he was initiator and editor of the first single-volume Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture in English. This commentary was published in 1953 and was considered for many years one of the most important reference books for Catholic biblical studies in English-speaking countries. From 1952 Dom Orchard was actively engaged as co-editor of the Catholic edition of the Revised Standard Version which was published in English in 1966, the first which Catholics and Protestants could share. And last, but not least, Dom Orchard's name is associated with the "Two-Gospel Hypothesis" claiming that the Gospel of Matthew was the first to be written. The fact that he was also the man to call the Catholic Biblical Association to life in Great Britain goes to show that not only was he committed to biblical studies but not less to the biblical pastoral ministry.

As second General Secretary of the Catholic Biblical Federation (then named World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate) Dom Orchard was one of the mainstays at CBF's developing stage between 1970 and 1972. Shortly after its founding in 1969 the CBF was about to establish its position in the Church; this was a period of search – the search for members and for an establishment of viable administrative structures, the search for suitable permanent headquarters (by that time the CBF General Secretariat was based in Rome) and, of course, the search for dependable financial income. Under these circumstances Dom Orchard's biblical and organizational talents proved themselves a great bonus, not forgetting the pioneer spirit which accompanied him throughout his life. The Catholic Biblical Federation received numerous dynamic impulses for its further development resulting from the first biblical pastoral seminar held at Rocca di Papa in 1971 which was organized by Dom Orchard and which saw a gathering of all the main personalities associated with the biblical apostolate at the time, and from its first Plenary Assembly held in Vienna in 1972.

Although his service as General Secretary was limited to this short period, partially because of the many difficulties of these early years but also due to the change of headquarters from Rome to Stuttgart in 1973, Dom Orchard succeeded in setting many wheels in motion with his endeavours in the cause of the Federation. From a handful of members mainly in European countries the Federation's membership has gone from strength to strength, meanwhile numbering 320 institutions in 127 countries around the globe – a truly worldwide Church organization. Dom Orchard's passing offers us the opportunity to look back in great gratitude, and to remember that many of the seeds of the fruits we now harvest were sown by our esteemed predecessors.

The Catholic Biblical Federation will hold the memory of its second General Secretary Dom Bernard Orchard, osb in honour. May the Lord God grant him eternal life. R.I.P.

Alexander M. Schweitzer  
CBF General Secretary



## Theme and Date of the Next CBF Plenary Assembly, Tanzania, 2008

Every six years the CBF members meet for their Plenary Assembly. These regular meetings are highpoints in the life of the Federation, and they do offer a unique place of encounter and exchange among people engaged in biblical pastoral ministry from all over the world. During a Plenary Assembly people not only pray together and reflect together on the Word of God, but new ideas are also presented, materials and experiences exchanged and new initiatives developed, which often transcend national as well as continental borders. The Plenary Assemblies are important stages along the way to the goal of the Federation, to make God's Word available to as many people as possible.

A short time ago the date, the place and theme of the next, the seventh Plenary Assembly of the CBF were decided upon. From June 24 to July 3, 2008 Africa will for the first time host the CBF family, or more precisely: Tanzania, and its capital city Dar es Salaam.



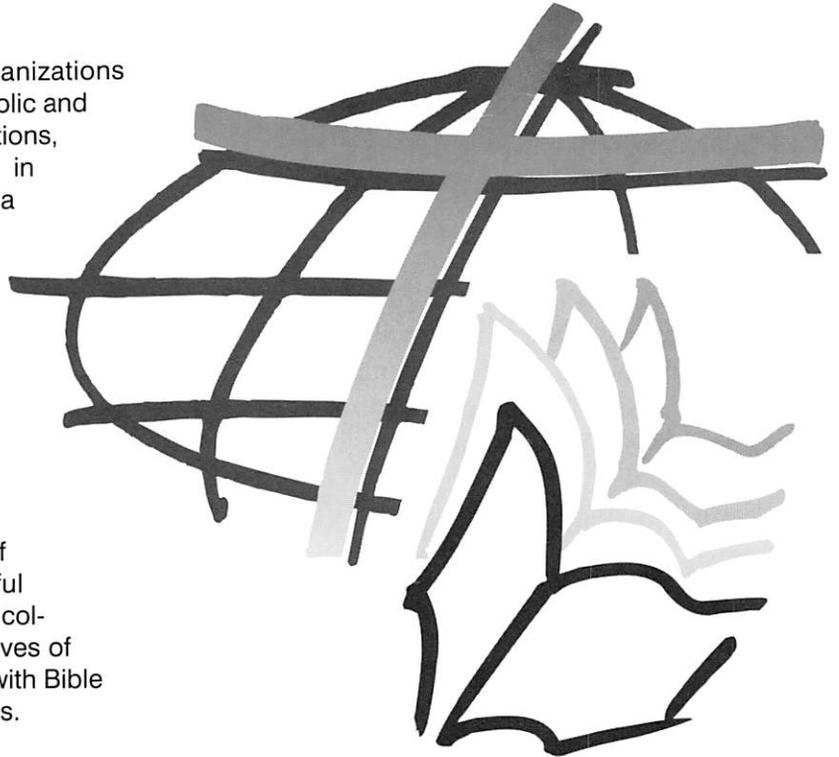
The theme of the Seventh Plenary Assembly is "Word of God: Source of Reconciliation, Justice and Peace" and it will be supplemented by the biblical motto "Deus caritas est – God is love" (1 Jn 4:8, 16).

We will keep you informed of the developments and preparations for this Assembly with lots of background information, too; this can all be found in the upcoming issues of *Bulletin Dei Verbum*. ■

The Catholic Biblical Federation (CBF) is a world-wide association of Catholic organizations committed to the ministry of the Word of God. At the present time, the CBF membership includes 92 full members and 232 associate members coming from a total of 127 countries.

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

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



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

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

**Vincenzo Paglia, Bishop of Terni-Narni-Amelia, Italy, President of the CBF**