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**Exegesis and  
Biblical Pastoral Ministry**



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## Dear Readers:



"If only you working in the pastoral field would finally take to heart the results of exegesis and put them into practice!" – "If only you exegetes would present your findings in a way we could all understand them and stop making the biblical texts so complicated!" These or similar expressions of frustration

are heard over and over again. They testify to the fact that even 40 years or more after *Dei Verbum* relations between biblical pastoral ministry and scientific study of the Bible require clarification. Indeed, it is not uncommon to hear talk of a gulf, or even a chasm, between these two realms that has yet to be bridged.

Both of these areas, biblical scholarship and biblical pastoral ministry, have as their aim to contribute to the right understanding of the Bible and to bring its message to as many people as possible by unlocking its meaning. So both have the same goal – and yet they employ different methods and set different priorities and emphases.

That this should be so lies in the nature of things: For as Word of God, authored *by* human beings, the Bible possesses an historical dimension which can be more closely examined through critical scholarship and which is indispensable for the understanding of the texts. As Word of God that was spoken *for* human beings, however, the Bible is also more than a mere record of the past; it is a dialogue partner for the present and part of a living and ongoing communication of God with humankind.

These two aspects of the Word were already insistently highlighted by *Dei Verbum*, and Pope Benedict, too, has stressed this time and time again, most recently in his book *Jesus of Nazareth* which has just appeared. The two dimensions cannot be separated from each other; rather, they belong together like the two parts of a double door – that gate that leads us to the understanding of the biblical message.

The present issue of the *Bulletin Dei Verbum* seeks to approach from various perspectives this question of the relationship between biblical pastoral ministry and biblical scholarship which is so important for the way we see our work. For this purpose we have assembled as diverse as possible a medley of contributions: three articles (by Massimo Grilli, Ralf Huning and Fernando Segovia) come from the Dei Verbum Congress of 2005 which devoted itself extensively to this topic; they are supplemented by an article by Georg Steins and a contribution to the discussion by James Swetnam.

Moreover, you will once again find in this issue some interesting news from the life of the Federation. And we look ahead in particular to two great events of the coming year: under the rubric "On the way to Dar es Salaam" we will increasingly be publishing articles in the coming issues on preparations for the Seventh Plenary Assembly of the CBF. But we will also be keeping track of the Bishops' Synod on the Word of God in the Bulletin, this time with a message of the Holy Father.

*From exegesis to pastoral ministry – from pastoral ministry to exegesis:* This somewhat free adaptation of the biblical pastoral principle established by Carlos Mesters could serve as a motto for this issue of the *Bulletin*. Perhaps, in some small way, it will promote and advance the necessary dialogue between the two realms. In any case, we would be delighted to learn of your opinions and experiences in this matter!

So, I wish you all stimulating reading, very much in the sense of the German poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: "I am convinced that the Bible becomes ever more precious the better it is understood".

Claudio Ettl



## To Read is To Enter a Dialogue

### Scientific Exegesis and Pastoral Reading of the Bible

Massimo Grilli



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human intelligence, but that might also have a meaning for daily life? Is it possible to combine a seriousness of research and of thought with the vitality and warmth of a Word that does not return to God without having worked its wonders? My article is an attempt to offer a few lines of methodological reflection aimed at integrating scientific exegesis and pastoral reading.

#### Introduction

At the heart of the problem that is the difficult relationship between a scientific and a pastoral reading of the Bible stand a variety of complex factors, but above all a fact which is commonly recognized today: scientific exegesis, as it has been developed on the basis of the historical-critical method, has become ever more impermeable to hermeneutics. So the biblical text has become essentially “mute for the present”,<sup>1</sup> and of steadily declining relevancy for human lives. It is as though the *logos* had not become *flesh*, but only *idea*, closed off in the hyper-uranium of circumscribed intellectual circles and without any genuine impact on the real world. Under the guise of “doing science” reflections on the Bible have assumed an abstract and intellectualistic character, far removed from spiritual experience, from pastoral ministry and from preaching, all of which are deemed second-rate – because lacking in scientific rigor.

Equally as remote from man and from the ecclesial community as is the official Catholic or Protestant exegesis stands another reading that follows paths diametrically opposed to those just described, but is more harmful still. I am speaking of the fundamentalist reading of Scripture which – in radical contrast to the historical critical approach – altogether rejects thought and critical research as ways of understanding the biblical text. Fundamentalism offers direct and immediate responses to problems, uncritically discovered in the sacred text, which therefore does not need to be “interpreted”, but only followed “to the letter”. The Pontifical Biblical Commission is right in affirming in its document, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, that “without saying as much in so many words, fundamentalism actually invites people to a kind of intellectual suicide”.<sup>2</sup>

So the question dramatically posed today is this: is it possible to find a reading of the text which does not kill

#### 1. Hermeneutics: in search of a face

By way of introducing my idea about a right relationship between scientific exegesis and pastoral reading I would like to begin with a metaphor: the human face. The Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas,<sup>3</sup> in one of his writings entitled *Éthique et Infini*, published in 1982, reflects on “face” with this statement: “we call face the way in which the Other presents himself, which overcomes *the idea of the Other in me*”.<sup>4</sup> To say *face*, therefore, means presence and nearness, to be sure, because the face reveals the self of the woman and the man, but it also means otherness, irreducibility. In the face not everything is already given, not everything is predictable, and still less is everything controllable. As human beings we are tempted to see the Other as part of an already assimilated whole, instead of recognizing that the Other, as outsider, exists before any initiative, any power on my part. The *face* is a mystery that is beyond our power. That is why in a biblical tradition it is affirmed that man cannot see the Face of God.

This beautiful metaphor of the face takes us back to our discussion on the Word of God deposited in a text, because reading the Word is like reading a face. When we stand before the Word of God we observe an immediate affinity of thoughts, of patterns, of global comprehension. In this sense the Word is near to man. Bultmann affirmed that man, before being situated “culturally” is situated “existentially”; before belonging to a particular culture, man is “existence”. This is why man is never left unprovided for by the biblical text, because the Bible offers man an authentic understanding of his existence: it tells him that he truly is, beyond all appearances, beyond all true and false propositions.

And nevertheless, this certainty of the nearness of the Word, must also take into account its distance, its “otherness”, its irreducibility to human categories. In the



presence of a biblical text we cannot behave like a child playing with building blocks, who constructs and remodels as he sees fit. We must respect the Bible's otherness. Hermeneutics becomes, then, an exhausting search, a labor-intensive approach to a *face* which does not primarily belong to us and which is not at our disposal. It has been said that the hermeneutical exercise is a journey from prejudice to pre-comprehension, because if prejudice means being closed before a person who is speaking to me, if it means always bringing his thought back to what I already know and accept, pre-comprehension is instead a listening attitude, an openness to mystery. And the mystery – the mystery of the *face* as well as the mystery of the Word – is that which cannot be subjected to calculation and to manipulation.

And so, how can we accomplish this transition from prejudice to pre-comprehension, or again to borrow the categories of Lévinas, from “the same to the other”, from a closed and self-sufficient subjectivity to an open and receptive one? How are we to enter into a communication that reduces the distance and enables the reader to enter into the horizon of the “other” in an authentic relationship of communion that consists of presence and respect? How can we, readers of our age, compete in an adequate relationship of collaboration with the author of the biblical text, such that this movement from the text to me and from me to the text – which is called, after all, the “hermeneutical circle” – might be a genuine and fruitful procedure even for the present?

## 2. The functions of language

After having recalled one of the fundamental presuppositions of our faith, namely that “[it is] God [who] speaks in Sacred Scripture”, *Dei Verbum* adds that God has spoken “through men in human fashion” (DV 12), which is why “the words of God (...) have been made like human discourse, just as the word of the eternal Father, when He took to Himself the flesh of human weakness, was in every way made like men” (DV 13). We can therefore say that the itinerary of salvation is that of the word,<sup>5</sup> according to the laws of human language. The fact is that in order to communicate people employ language, which of course is not only verbal. Movements, body language and gestures (...) amount to so many languages, but the language that is verbal – composed of words – is the richest and the most “pliable” of all. Through the word man takes ownership of himself; he places himself in dialogue with the other and opens himself to the world of God. It is language therefore that makes possible communication, and it is of this human language that God made use when He wished to communicate His life and His salvific will in our regard.

If God adapted himself to human language in order to speak of His mystery, then man should take this lan-

guage as his starting point to reach the mystery of God, because the Face of God has decided to reveal itself in human form through the laws of the human word. The study of the world of the word is therefore indispensable if we wish to approach the Face of God, and the question of the mechanisms human language obeys constitutes an important presupposition for a correct biblical hermeneutic as it does for any other interpretive act.

What happens, then, when we communicate by means of the word? To simplify matters as far as possible, I would say that we perform – more or less consciously – a series of operations which could, however, be reduced essentially to three: these are the three essential functions of the word.

### 2.1 The word is information

The first thing the word does is to inform regarding facts and events, regarding man and his story. This informative aspect is important, because it places truth and knowledge before the human mind. What would communication be if we were unable to recount what happens, objectify existence and make it accessible to others? It is, of course, true that information is never neutral, but this informative function of the word is certainly the most “objective” of all and it is likewise part and parcel of biblical revelation, which has historiographical contents to put before us, facts to recount, visions of the world to offer. Nevertheless, we can easily see how the Word of God would be very impoverished if it were reduced to a purely informational event. Sometimes biblical scholarship has privileged this dimension, losing sight of the richness of other functions of the word and seeking a “scientific” objectivity that runs the risk, however, of stifling the message. Because the word is not merely information.

### 2.2 The Word is revelation

The second function of the word is that it reveals “the self” that pronounces it. In the word man makes a personal confession, expresses himself and reveals himself to himself, manifests his ego and takes possession of it.

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

(Dei Verbum 12)



Man needs the word to reveal himself to others and to reveal himself to himself. A story is not simply a cold expounding of things or events; the story allows man to resume possession of himself, to rediscover his own roots and his own limits, to reinvent himself in the marvel of the mystery that surrounds every human life. In the today of the word one finds the past and the present, memory, fidelity, with its bundle of marvels and miseries. By revealing himself to others, man re-appropriates his truth, enters into his world and into the universe that forged him. The word enables him to bring to light nebulous elements that have been deposited deep inside himself along the way, to make them re-emerge, but it allows him also to tell them, to bring them out of the darkness to the light of the Face. To do this it is not always necessary to have a professional psychologist before us. Sometimes all we need is someone who knows how to listen. A Jewish proverb says that when two Jews meet and one of them has a problem the other becomes a rabbi. The word expresses to oneself and to others one's own story and the story of the fathers. But the biography of the Word does not stop here. Beyond the function of informing about the world, beyond that of expressing one's own world, the word seeks a "you": this is the third function of the word, the "appellative" function.

### 2.3 The word is call

The human and divine word is essentially a search for the other. To become an "I" it needs a "you," because we carry in our hearts the nostalgia for a Face. Adam realizes himself only when he encounters someone *who stands before him* (Gen 2:18).<sup>6</sup> In order to live man needs someone to address a word to him that says: you exist. It is possible to bear the burden that every human life involves only when one is heard. Without a you there is no I. We can also say that life is a journey toward the "you" or, perhaps better, a pilgrimage toward the "you". In order to be who he is, therefore, man must undertake a journey and the word is the escort to cover the distance, to satisfy the nostalgia. The word seeks encounter. Or perhaps it is better to say that the authentic word does not live shut up inside, obsessively preoccupied with self, but seeks the other, assuming responsibility for the other. The true word provokes, puts in motion, opens to hope and to intention. An authentic word cannot lose its eschatological perspective. It is above all a word that liberates from the prison of the ephemeral, that restores confidence for the present and hope in the future. Linguistic scholars speak of the *pragmatic*<sup>7</sup> dynamism of the word, in the sense of a shock force that belongs to the human word. The word addresses itself to someone and expects a response from that person. Those on the receiving end dispose themselves to confront an irreducible otherness, running the risk of becoming different at the hearing of a word that can never be fully possessed.<sup>8</sup> I have read that the pigmies of the Congo have great confidence in the for-

est, and also in darkness, because if the forest is good, the darkness of the forest must also be so. And when one of them suffers or dies, and it becomes dark all around, they think that the forest has fallen asleep. Then they come together around the fire and sing songs to wake the forest and make it happy again.<sup>9</sup> This little story is a splendid metaphor of the pragmatic force of the word. In the darkness of the forest the word enables people to call to one another so that they will not go astray, striving to live – as one writer puts it: "like the innocent people of the forest (...) in a world created by such a benevolent God that if there are sufferings, it will be because he has fallen asleep. And – like the Hassidim – precisely when life is most heavy with sorrow and pain – that will be the moment when we will dance and sing together, to wake the sleeping God of our lost hope".<sup>10</sup>

### 3. Reading is being in dialogue with the other

We thus arrive at our final point. What does all this mean for a reader who finds himself before a biblical text (I speak in the singular, but it is obvious that the same would hold for a community of readers)? To return to the initial remarks of my paper: how are we to arrive at an understanding of the Word of God incarnate in a human language – an understanding that would not be closed off in the ivory tower of a pure intellectualism, but that would also not be a reductionistic search for immediate answers that cannot get beyond prejudice? In short, how are we to respect the Incarnation of the Word, who deliberately chose the ways of human communication?

There is an outline of a response – it seems to me – in the description of the communicative process that I have just put forward: we all, whether exegete, catechist or preacher, must be disposed to understand the proper relationship with the biblical text in terms of a "dialogue", which is, always and everywhere, a dialogue with the "Other". In other words, both scientific exegesis and pastoral interpretation must respect the three functions that characterize language; the Word of God must be respected in its nature as a Word that informs, reveals and calls.

To be sure, the exegete – like every believer – has an obligation to understand the data of the biblical text on the basis of the hermeneutical horizon in which the text was generated. Goethe affirmed that to know a poet one must know his country. Not to take into account historical and cultural aspects that gave birth to the text means depriving the encounter of its roots. Failure to know where the text is coming from means running the great risk of using it to construct the most convenient meaning, thereby doing violence to the word. The text has something to say to me today, but this presupposes that I recognize its unique identity and strive to overcome the historical, geographical and cultural distance – that sepa-



**To search out the intention of the sacred writers, attention should be given, among other things, to "literary forms". For truth is set forth and expressed differently in texts which are variously historical, prophetic, poetic, or of other forms of discourse. The interpreter must investigate what meaning the sacred writer intended to express and actually expressed in particular circumstances by using contemporary literary forms in accordance with the situation of his own time and culture. (7) For the correct understanding of what the sacred author wanted to assert, due attention must be paid to the customary and characteristic styles of feeling, speaking and narrating which prevailed at the time of the sacred writer, and to the patterns men normally employed at that period in their everyday dealings with one another.**

**(Dei Verbum 12)**

rates me from it.

However, having said this, I must forcefully reaffirm that it is not possible to arrive at the truth of the biblical text if it has been deprived of that pragmatic force that it has for the reader of every age. This means that the Bible cannot be reduced to a mere supplier of information. The truth of the Bible is not the neutral explanation of things. In friendship and in love even informative precision loses weight when compared with other possibilities which the relationship of friendship offers to the subjects involved. The Word of God is "true" not only because it gives "true" information, but because it opens the doors to authentic relationship. The very biblical term "truth" (*emet*) includes within its signification a life project and a fidelity that is not an exact equivalent to the Greek concept of *aletheia*. The "truth" of a biblical text is only fully grasped when one has also uncovered its involving polarity as a word that summons, provokes and awaits a response. In a biblical text, therefore, it is not just a past story that is delineated, but also the present story; the text targets not only a reader of an historical time – that in which the text was written – but also that of today. A hearing is demanded of today's reader, as much as of yesterday's, and it is a hearing in the strong sense of the word conveyed by the Hebrew root *shama*.

This, then, is the task – and the hard work – of interpretation (which is then the same task and the same hard work that is involved in any relationship): I – a man of this century – go to the Word with my expectations, my preoccupations, my needs (...) and I discover distance. A distance, however, which is not only an obstacle to overcome, but is also growth in vision, perspective, multiplicity of meanings. And thus, after having overcome the distance, through the journey from me to the text, I discover that the Word has reached me, making itself present to my present. The truth is uncovered in that dialogical character of me to the text and of the text to me. Thus is realized the "communion of faces", in which everyone discovers himself in the profound fragility of his own being, and lets go. In the "communion of faces" there is no desire to be irresistible at any cost so as to acquire and conquer; in the "communion of faces" fear

to, is overcome, the fear that makes a person run and hide (cf. Gen 3:8). The "communion of faces" is an expression of the agape (love), which is not motivated by the desire to possess, but to belong, and accept the other in his freedom. At the end of the day, it is precisely *agape* that is the hermeneutical place of the Word, the appropriate place for any authentic relationship.

(Translation: L. Maluf)

- <sup>1</sup> U. Luz, *Erwägungen zur sachgemäßen Interpretation neutestamentlicher Texte*, in: *Evangelische Theologie* 42 (1982), p. 515.
- <sup>2</sup> Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, Rome 1993, I.F.
- <sup>3</sup> Born in Lithuania in 1905 by parents who belonged to the small Jewish bourgeoisie.
- <sup>4</sup> E. Lévinas, *Éthique et Infini. Dialogues avec Philippe Nemo*, Paris 1982; English translation: *Ethics and Infinity: Dialogues with Philippe Nemo*, Pittsburgh, PA 1985.
- <sup>5</sup> Heb 1:1f. offers a beautiful synthesis of the story of salvation in terms of *communication*: "In times past, God spoke in partial and various ways to our ancestors through the prophets; in these last days, he spoke to us through a son ..."
- <sup>6</sup> This is a translation that better renders the Hebrew *knegdo*.
- <sup>7</sup> From the Greek *pragma* (action): language does not merely say something; rather, it *effects, acts*.
- <sup>8</sup> J. Delorme, *Analyse sémiotique du discours et étude de la Bible*, in: *Sémiotique et Bible* 66 (1992) p. 41.
- <sup>9</sup> C.M. Turnbull, *The Forest People. A Study of the Pygmies of the Congo*, New York 1968, p. 3.
- <sup>10</sup> S. B. Kopp, *Se incontri Buddha per la strada uccidilo. Il pellegrinaggio del paziente nella psicoterapia*, Palo Alto 1972, p. 190. English translation: *If You Meet the Buddha on the Road, Kill Him! The Pilgrimage of Psychotherapy Patients*, New York 1976.



## Between Text, Life Situation and Faith

### Biblical Studies and Biblical Pastoral Ministry

Ralf Huning, svd

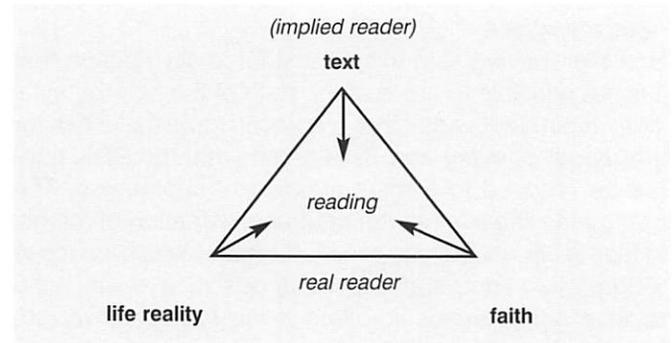


Ralf Huning, svd, studied philosophy and Catholic theology and earned his doctoral degree in 2004. He has done biblical pastoral work in Nicaragua, Germany and the Netherlands. He is coordinator for biblical pastoral ministry in the SVD's European Zone, coordinator for biblical pastoral ministry and spirituality in the North German province of the SVD and author of several books and articles on biblical pastoral themes.

"Easy access to Sacred Scripture should be provided for all the Christian faithful" (*Dei Verbum* 22) the Constitution on Divine Revelation demands. The Catholic Biblical Federation sees it as its chief task to contribute to the implementation of this demand.<sup>1</sup> This is important for one thing because all members of the Church need Holy Scripture as a primary medium for hearing the Word of God. In this sense the Pontifical Biblical Commission in its 1993 Document *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* describes as the goal of biblical pastoral ministry (here called the biblical apostolate) "to make known the Bible as the Word of God and source of life."<sup>2</sup> But access to Sacred Scripture should not be denied to any believer also because the Church needs the Bible-reading of all its members. The Pontifical Biblical Commission rightly stressed the fact that "all the members of the Church have a role in the interpretation of Scripture."<sup>3</sup> It should therefore be the task of biblical pastoral ministry, besides seeing to the diffusion of the Bible, to insure that no part of the Church monopolizes the Bible.

On the basis of this twofold objective one can also define the relationship of biblical pastoral ministry to biblical studies: biblical pastoral ministry should make clear to all members of the Church the importance of biblical scholarship and should pass on to them its results. It should also, however, help to warn against a monopoly on the part of biblical studies by making clear the need for a liturgical, theological and experience-oriented reading of the Bible and by conveying the results of these readings to biblical scholarship. Biblical studies have thus far not sufficiently appreciated the fact that this field not only has something to give to biblical pastoral ministry but should also be receiving something from it. Biblical scholarship that is self-sufficient and that stands in no living relationship to other Bible readers in the Church is in danger of producing irrelevant or even harmful knowledge.<sup>4</sup>

A faith-inspired Bible-reading in the Catholic Church will take place within an energy field powered by three forces: text, life situation and a faith communicated and practiced in community.<sup>5</sup>



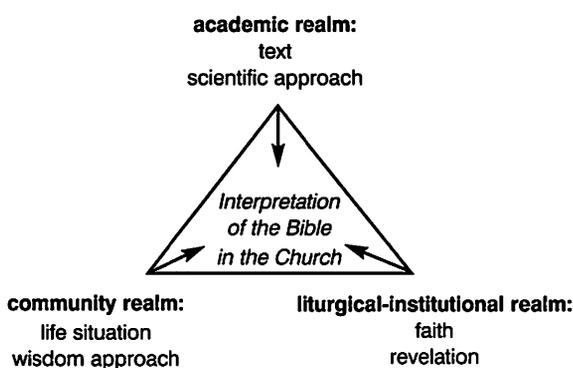
This energy field already influenced the production of the biblical text itself. These texts were not composed for their own sake, but in order to give new impulses for action where there is conflict between faith and reality. They were written for people for whom, in a particular historical situation, faith expressions and faith practices that arose in other contexts no longer sufficed as guidelines for action. The active transmission of these texts suggests that they were helping people in evident ways to acquire new insights into their world and to adapt their faith understanding and their religious practices to this transformed reality in such a way that they could be brought ever anew into vital contact with God. But changes in faith and world realities also led to ever-new re-readings of texts (*relecture*), which were being written into these new situations over a long period of time. After the canonization of the biblical books these re-readings entered into the treasury of the Church's tradition and they have here become an important frame of reference for the interpretation of the Bible in the Church.

Modern hermeneutics has shown that an objective and neutral reading of texts is not possible.<sup>6</sup> Readings are always marked by the culture and the context of the interpreter and his worldview, which is also always mediated through community. To the three elements of the energy field in which the interpretation of the Bible as Holy Scripture takes place also correspond different approaches to the text. The scientific approach, which has become dominant in many countries of the northern hemisphere since the enlightenment, corresponds to the "text" element. Science has become a way of life in these



countries.<sup>7</sup> Access to the Bible through the lens of divine revelation, whose justification the Church defends over against the objections of secular science, corresponds to the "faith" element. Access through experience and praxis corresponds to the element "life reality". In biblical terms this would be a kind of wisdom knowledge. This approach fell largely into oblivion in the societies marked by the enlightenment and was rediscovered only a few decades ago. The situation is somewhat different with respect to countries of the southern hemisphere; for millions of poor people who lack a formal education the wisdom approach of life-related knowledge is the only available approach to the truth of their world and to the Bible. Many people, who are rightly regarded as uneducated according to the criteria of a scientifically sophisticated society, have reached a high level of education in terms of a wisdom-related understanding.

To the three elements of the energy field in which a faith-inspired Bible-reading takes place correspond three hermeneutical spaces, or realms of Bible-reading in the Catholic Church. A hermeneutical realm or space "is that institutional *place* where a specific interpretive *subject* gets its identity, proper to that place and different from any other subject. This space makes a certain interpretation of the Bible proper to that place and different from those other interpretations made in other hermeneutic *places*."<sup>8</sup> The Catholic Church has a liturgical-institutional space, where the transmitted faith is the key to biblical interpretation, an academic space, where the interpretation concentrates primarily on the text, its origin and its structures, and a community space, where the life and faith experiences of interpreters are the key to the understanding of the text.



No one can be a primary subject in all three of these spaces, because it is not possible to be an equally competent expert in all three of these knowledge modalities. Bible-reading in the Church must therefore take place in dialogue between different ecclesial constituencies, each of which has its own charisma to bring to the Church for the benefit of the whole, without absolutizing its own knowledge angle. A glance at Church history shows, however, that there is always a danger of overemphasizing the importance of a particular

hermeneutical space. Thus for a long time in the Catholic Church it was almost exclusively the need for a liturgical-institutional space that was emphasized. This can be understood in part as a reaction to the exaggerated emphasis on the individualistic Bible reading of believers in the Reformation. It was a long learning process, and a painful one for all involved, to arrive at the recognition of the need and justification of an academic space in the Catholic Church. Since the time of its full recognition by the conciliar Constitution *Dei Verbum*, however, there has been a notable tendency within biblical scholarship to set itself up as an absolute. The significance of the community space was not yet explicitly put forward in the *Dei Verbum*. In the past decades, however, especially in the young Churches of the southern hemisphere, the importance of approaches related to wisdom has been rediscovered. The learning process with reference to the recognition of the importance, as well as the limits, of the community space is an ongoing one.

The 1993 document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, is an important milestone with respect to the question of acknowledging the interpretive competency of the poor. In this document the point is made that we may rightly "rejoice in seeing the Bible in the hands of people of lowly condition and of the poor; they can bring to its interpretation and to its actualization a light more penetrating, from the spiritual and existential point of view, than that which comes from a learning that relies upon its own resources alone (cf. Matt 11:25)."<sup>9</sup> This statement, particularly in communities in which scientific methods have become a way of life, amounts to a radical questioning of the normally accepted hierarchy of the educated and the uneducated. Further efforts will be needed to clarify the necessity of this community space over against the subjects of liturgical-institutional and academic spaces of the interpretive endeavor. This is particularly important in view of the fact that mastery in the approaches of liturgical-institutional and academic spaces is oftentimes won at the price of an estrangement with respect to wisdom approaches. In my opinion it should be one of the primary tasks of biblical pastoral ministry in the Catholic Church to highlight the significance of the community space for the Church. Beyond this, biblical pastoral ministry should also concern itself with an effort of mediation between the three hermeneutical spaces, in order that the interpretation of the Bible in the Church can thus become ever more a dialogical process.

I would now just like to expand a bit on what has been said thus far.<sup>10</sup> The indispensable characters of the liturgical-institutional space in the Catholic Church is deduced from the assumption that the Bible is the Holy Scripture, through which God enters into communication with humanity (cf. DV 21). This Holy Scripture owes its origin to the Church and has a close relationship to it.



The principal subjects of biblical reading in liturgical-institutional space are the official proclaimers of the Word, supported by scientific theology. The interpretation of Scripture takes place according to the rules of systematic theology and liturgy. In this space it is evident that the Word of God for believers is something fixed in advance and not entirely at our disposal. It cannot be "produced" like magic through the reading of the text, but is rather a free gift of God conveyed through the ministry of the Church. Attention to the diachronic tradition warns us not to precipitously identify the meaning of the biblical text as subjectively interpreted with the Word of God. The doctrinal tradition of the Church does not determine the sense of the Bible down to the last detail, but it does mark the limits of interpretation.

The necessity of the academic space was finally recognized in *Dei Verbum*. It was grounded in the fact that "God speaks in Sacred Scripture through men in human fashion" (*DV 12*). This implies that the Word of God cannot simply be extracted from the human text; rather it is intimately interwoven with the texts. The unity of the Divine Word and the human word is comparable to the hypostatic union of the two natures in Christ.<sup>11</sup> Since human beings cannot compose texts that transcend time and particular historical contexts, Bible readers today require the translation services of scientific scholarship in order to learn to understand the biblical texts in their proper literary forms and against the background of their historical and cultural contexts. The primary subjects in the academic space are scholars; a critical, methodological approach guides interpretation here.

The significance of the community realm is derived by Church doctrine from the doctrine of the *sensus fidelium* (cf. *Lumen Gentium 12*), which has become the subject of intensive theological reflection since the Council. The judgment of the Church is revealed not only in the statements of the Magisterium or of theologians, but also in the faith-sense of believers.<sup>12</sup> In many places, Bible-reading proves to be an outstanding medium for verbalizing the *sensus fidelium*. The subjects of Bible-reading in the community realm are all the faithful; access to the truth attested to in Holy Scripture takes place here through intuition, experience and practical life-wisdom

As has already been pointed out with reference to the history of the Church, the subjects of the three hermeneutical spaces are always in danger of cutting themselves off from the other hermeneutical realms or even assuming an absolute monopoly. If the Word of God could be clearly distinguished from the human word, then one could in fact leave to the liturgical-institutional realm the knowledge and preaching of the Word of God, to the academic realm the knowledge of the literal sense of the texts and to the community realm the task of faith-inspired application. But since the divine and human in Scripture constitute an inseparable unity, a

mutual interdependence among the three hermeneutical realms is required. Their individual insights acquire a relevancy for the Church as a whole only when they have been won in dialogical relationship to the other hermeneutical spaces.

Thus, the preaching of the Word of God located in the liturgical-institutional realm ought not stand in complete contradiction to the insights won through scientific investigation of the Bible. Likewise Christian instruction should take its point of departure from the contemporary experience of the faithful, which is the only way it can be understood and received by them at all, though the official teaching is not thereby simply identified with that experience.

The isolation of the academic realm takes place only at the price of a loss of relevancy. The insights that have been won through scientific theory in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have enabled it to be seen more clearly that the acceptance of an ecclesial preconception of the Bible as Holy Scripture as a referential framework for a scientific reading of the Bible does not call into question its scientific status. Science is not practiced in a neutral space; rather it is always directed by particular paradigms and interests.<sup>13</sup> Scientific investigations then achieve higher relevancy for recipients in the other hermeneutical spaces when their guiding hypotheses are derived from the faith questions of the Church or from actual life problems of people. The recognition that biblical texts do not merely inform, but above all intend to effect something in the readers leads to the conclusion that the reader side must be part of the equation from the beginning with the scientific investigation of the Bible. Ecclesial tradition, but also the practical life-wisdom of "simple believers" can moreover clarify blind spots in the awareness of scholars and can help them to avoid negative effects of the science they produce (e.g. anti-Judaism, justification of patriarchalism, racism or the oppression of the poor).<sup>14</sup>

Finally, in the community space, a knowledge of the doctrinal tradition of the Church can protect from a subjectivistic appropriation of the Bible. It serves as a prophylactic against the ideological bias of small communities and opens the eye to the whole Church as interpreting community. Scientific knowledge serves a better understanding of the texts, helps to critically question one's own prejudices and to take the text seriously in its foreignness.

From a reading of the Bible in the three spaces grows the judgment of the Church. It is the task of the Magisterium to verbalize this judgment (cf. *DV 12*). It serves then as a frame of reference for further readings. This frame of reference however is never completed, but requires ever-new readings. Magisterial statements serve the understanding of the Word of God, but do not become a



substitute for it. They remain, as the Pontifical Biblical Commission wrote in 1983, ever a kind of “auxiliary language”, and do not have for faith the same value as the “actual referential language of the inspired authors”.<sup>15</sup> In DV 12 the significance of preliminary scientific work for the judgment of the Church was stressed. One consequence of the insight into the importance of the community realm that has since emerged would be a complementary statement to the effect that all believers have a contribution to make to the judgment of the Church. This was not yet expressed with sufficient clarity in the document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission of 1993.<sup>16</sup>

The task of the biblical pastoral ministry is often casually understood as performing a pastoral service for the community. In my opinion biblical pastoral ministry also has a mission in reference to the two other hermeneutical spaces in the Catholic Church. Together with practical theology it should communicate to the liturgical-institutional and the academic spaces the life and faith experiences of believers that come to expression through Bible-reading, so that the Church can take these into consideration in formulating her judgments. But it should be noted here that the three hermeneutical realms do not relate to each other on an equal footing. Special efforts are required to insure that all believers, and among them especially the poor, are able to bring into the interpreting community of the Church the fruits of their experience-related Bible-reading over against the impressive formulations of biblical studies and the imposing treasury of the ecclesial dogmatic tradition. The insight of the Pontifical Biblical Commission that the poor can bring to the “interpretation and actualization” of Holy Scripture “a light more penetrating, from the spiritual and existential point of view, than that which comes from a learning that relies upon its own resources alone” should become an ethical imperative. Biblical pastoral ministry should see it as its task to bring scientific exegesis into living contact with this realm. It should encourage biblical scholarship to engage its various methodological tools to point out the limits of scientific knowledge and to make clear for the whole Church the value of Bible-readings in the community space.

In sum, I would like to highlight the fact that biblical pastoral ministry should not be subordinated to a single hermeneutical space, but should rather stand in vital relationship to all three spaces. Its task should therefore not be limited either to the catechetical handing on of Church teaching (absolutizing of the liturgical-institutional space), nor only to communicating a vulgarized version of scientific biblical knowledge (absolutizing of the academic space), nor exclusively to the animation of community Bible-reading and the verbalization of the text meaning acknowledged as relevant in the community space. By taking all of these tasks into account, biblical pastoral ministry can perform an important service of mediation between the three hermeneutical realms. It

can thus help the Church to take seriously Holy Scripture as “God’s Word in the human word” and lead it to a twofold devotion: devotion to the Word of God (through unadulterated transmission) and devotion to human beings (as tradents and recipients of the Word of God; cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 4).

Such a biblical pastoral ministry will require helpers who have a capacity to communicate with the primary subjects of all three hermeneutical realms. This requires a fundamental education in the characteristic knowledge ways of each of the three spaces: they must know the Church’s teaching and be capable of following theological argumentation, and they must at the same time understand the technical language of biblical scholarship, as well as the languages of simple people. Biblical pastoral ministry thus proves to be a challenging task, which is no less important than the role of scientific scholarship.

(Translation: L. Maluf)

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Bylaws of the Catholic Biblical Federation (1996), Art. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, Rome 1993, IV, C, 3.

<sup>3</sup> *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (see above, note 2), III, B, 3.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. R. Huning, *Bibelwissenschaft im Dienste populärer Bibellektüre. Bausteine einer Theorie der Bibellektüre aus dem Werk von Carlos Mesters* (SBB 54), Stuttgart 2005.

<sup>5</sup> This has been pointed out especially by Carlos Mesters; cf. C. Mesters, *Flor sem defesa. Uma explicação da Bíblia a partir do povo*, Petrópolis 1983, p. 140-154; R. Huning, *Bibelwissenschaft* (see above, note 4), p. 202-224.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (see above, note 2), II, A, 2.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. J. Mittelstraß, *Wissenschaft als Lebensform* (stw 376), Frankfurt a.M. 1982.

<sup>8</sup> P. Richard, *Word of God – Source of Life and Hope for the New Millennium*, in *Bulletin Dei Verbum* 50 (1999), p. 4-10, here: p. 6.

<sup>9</sup> *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (see above, note 2), IV, C, 3; cf. *ibid.* III, 3; cf. on this R. Huning, *Bibelwissenschaft* (see above, note 4), esp. p. 81-87.

<sup>10</sup> For a full discussion, see R. Huning, *Bibelwissenschaft* (see above, note 4), p. 306-319.

<sup>11</sup> See DV 13; cf. John Paul II, Address on the Interpretation of the Bible in the Church, April 23, 1993, Num. 6-8.

<sup>12</sup> This is also noted in *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (see above, note 2), III, B, 3.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. R. Huning, *Bibelwissenschaft* (see above, note 4), p. 33-52.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. R. Huning, *Bibelwissenschaft* (see above, note 4), esp. p. 393f.

<sup>15</sup> Pontifical Biblical Commission, *Bible and Christology*, Rome 1983, 1.2.1.1.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. R. Huning, *Bibelwissenschaft* (see above, note 4), p. 68-71.

<sup>17</sup> *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (see above, note 2), IV, C, 3.



## Exegesis and Biblical Pastoral Ministry in Light of Vatican II and in Context of the World of Today

*Fernando F. Segovia*



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I shall approach the relationship between biblical criticism and biblical pastoral ministry with a look backward as well as forward – in light of the II Vatican Council and its Constitution on Divine Revelation and in view of our postmodern world of today and the foreseeable future. This I shall do in three steps: I will start by recalling the significance of the Constitution for this relationship in the context of the 1960s; I will continue by tracing the path of biblical criticism since the mid-1970s through the present and thus in the aftermath of the Council and the Constitution; and I shall conclude with a contemporary vision for this relationship in the wake of such developments within Biblical Studies and in the face of a different historical context.

It is hard to believe that more than forty years have elapsed since the conclusion of the Council and the promulgation of such decrees as the Constitution on Divine Revelation in its final session of 1965. In retrospect, the Constitution stands as a splendid achievement, worthy indeed of such commemoration as the present one. Its influence on biblical criticism within the Catholic tradition was profound and far-reaching.

### **Institutionalization of academic criticism**

The Constitution solidified in no small measure a trend in biblical interpretation already very much underway at the time. In effect, it provided full backing for a shift in paradigm in biblical interpretation from a dogmatic-ecclesial model, in which the writings functioned in rather unmediated fashion as sources for Church thought and life, toward an academic-disciplinary model, in which the writings were approached as

sources from another time and place and hence in need of contextualization within their original social and cultural settings in order to secure their original meaning before application to Church life and thought. This historicizing development was by no means new in the study of Christian origins.

By the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, among Protestant scholarly circles in northern Europe, Biblical Studies had established itself as a discipline within the context of the university. It was one of several academic disciplines whose formation took place in the wake of the French Revolution, a time of ferment in the West. Within the academy, it drew directly on another incipient discipline, Historical Studies, for grounding and direction in its task of contextualizing the texts that constituted its object of study. In other words, as biblical criticism sought to address the basic questions of dating and location, authorship and genre, literary history and technique, community concerns and aims, sociocultural context and socioreligious comparison, Biblical Studies turned to the methodological and theoretical apparatus of that field of studies whose task it was to raise such questions of historical texts – historiography. This development gave rise to that critical approach that would eventually rule the field for approximately a hundred and fifty years – historical criticism.

To be sure, the historical critical paradigm was not without opposition, both inside and outside the halls of the academy. In Protestant circles, for example, both fundamentalism and pentecostalism offered severe critiques and opted for different paths: while the former emphasized the literal understanding of Scripture and the principle of inerrancy, the latter highlighted the role of the Spirit as the ultimate arbiter in interpretation. Within the academic tradition of mainline Protestantism, moreover, opposition to the project of contextualization emerged from quarters holding on to a dogmatic-ecclesial paradigm, pursuing “lower” criticism and avoiding “higher” criticism. In Catholic circles, meanwhile, the path of historical criticism proved a bumpy one indeed,

*Easy access to Sacred Scripture should be provided for all the Christian faithful. (Dei Verbum 22)*



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

***It is the task of exegetes to work according to these rules toward a better understanding and explanation of the meaning of Sacred Scripture, so that through preparatory study the judgement of the Church may mature.***

**(Dei Verbum 12)**

both inside and outside academic circles, given its relationship to modernism and its espousal of rationalism. While Catholic piety and devotions stayed away, by and large, from the use of the Bible, recourse to historical criticism within the Catholic academic tradition long remained under the shadow of suspicion and the threat of condemnation. Toward the middle of the twentieth century, however, steady acceptance and ascendancy within the Church was evident, a position soundly confirmed by the Constitution of 1965. Moreover, the Council further urged close study of the Bible among the People of God, placing the biblical writings at the center of Catholic devotions and piety.

As a result, biblical interpretation would proceed henceforth, unquestioned and undisturbed, according to the tenets of historical criticism in seminary and doctoral programs alike. Such was the training that I received, during my years of ministerial training in the early 1970s, in Old Testament and New Testament. Questions having to do with revelation and inspiration, canonicity and authority, were approached as a propaedeutic to interpretation and addressed in an introductory course to the discipline of Biblical Studies as a whole. Questions involving theological reflection and practical application were pursued as ramifications of interpretation and raised in their respective areas of the curriculum. Within the biblical curriculum itself, historical contextualization was the norm.

Within this framework, the relationship between biblical criticism and pastoral ministry can be readily ascertained. Historical criticism, it should be recalled, was, for the most part and for all practical purposes, envisioned as a "scientific" enterprise: its conception of "history" was objectivist – the reconstruction of Christian antiquity, within the limits established by the historical evidence available; its lens on "history" was detached – a decontextualized gaze, above and beyond social and cultural realities; and its entry into "history" was neutral – impartial analysis, beyond ideological concerns and aims. Within such a framework,

therefore, critical interpretation functioned as "exegetis", a foundational and indispensable exercise in mediation between the texts of biblical antiquity and the readers/hearers of present-day Christianity. In this exercise, moreover, the biblical critic, ideally conceptualized as a member of a circle of progressive and complementary scholarship, reigned supreme as mediating agent. Consequently, in approaching the biblical texts, all theological reflection and practical application would have to proceed with due attention to the findings and discussions of biblical criticism in mind.

Biblical pastoral ministry was no exception in this regard. The logic is obvious. If criticism establishes, again within the limited possibilities afforded by the extant historical evidence, the reconstruction of biblical life and thought, any recourse to or impartation of such thought and life, at any level of ecclesial activity, would have to be done in keeping with the tenets of such empiricist, universalizing, and disinterested research. Any departure from such established boundaries would be perceived as raising the dreaded specter of violating the historical divide between past and present and hence introducing the mortal danger of "eisegesis", of reading the present into the past, in such communication and pedagogy. In sum, a well-founded biblical pastoral ministry had to be anchored in biblical scholarship. This remained the operative model through the late 1960s through the 1970s, in the wake of Vatican II.

#### **Subsequent developments in academic criticism**

In the wake of the 1960s, a time of ferment not only for the West but for the non-Western world as well, all academic disciplines, whether in the social sciences or the human sciences, witnessed a period of profound rethinking and reorientation, as modernism gave way to postmodernism. Such a crisis eventually reached Theological Studies in general and Biblical Studies in particular. Biblical criticism would no longer be the same. Its conceptualization and practice underwent drastic changes as a result of internal and external developments. I shall mention four such influences.



First, the long-standing ties to historical criticism were significantly affected as the discipline reached beyond Historical Studies to Literary Studies and Sociocultural Studies for grounding and guidance. Questions involving both textual dynamics and contextual configurations, it was felt, could no longer be answered adequately by traditional historiography. Consequently, the historical-critical method was dislodged as the exclusive mode of interpretation in academic circles, as literary criticism and sociocultural criticism were incorporated into the discipline. This twofold development began in the mid-1970s, expanded rapidly through the 1980s, and has continued unabated into the present.

Second, the traditional claims of historical criticism to detachment and impartiality were called into question from two different quarters, both consisting of newcomers to the field: within the West, an expanding number of women scholars turned to feminist criticism, foregrounding the issue of gender construction and relations in interpretation; outside the West, beginning in Latin America, an expanding number of non-Western critics introduced liberation criticism, highlighting the question of political economy and class relations in interpretation. The stance of scientific decontextualization, it was argued from both sides, could no longer be considered valid in historiography. The result was the beginnings of ideological criticism, with its focus on differential relations of power, which came to the fore in the 1970s as well and expanded in different directions through the 1980s and beyond, including minority criticism and postcolonial criticism.

Third, the flow of historical criticism from text through critic to application in thought and life was ruptured by liberation criticism through its turn to popular ecclesial communities as its base and its appropriation of the classic model of "seeing, acting, and judging" as its *modus operandi*. The site of criticism, it was envisioned, would switch from the privileged confines of the academy to the struggles of the oppressed. Interpretation would begin with a critical analysis of contemporary society and culture, proceed to theological analysis in light of the biblical writings as the Word

of God, and conclude with a concrete plan of action in the world. In this process, moreover, critics would function as allied and committed facilitators, providing direction when requested or deemed necessary. Such emphasis on social location and real readers came to the fore in the 1970s and received sustained theorization in the new literary, sociocultural, and ideological paradigms of interpretation.

Finally, the close links between historical criticism and modernism were radically revisited in the aftermath of postmodernist thought. From the point of view of poststructuralist thought, the concepts of textual indeterminacy, plurality of meanings, and agency of readers entered the idiom of biblical criticism. From the point of view of ideological critique, the focus on unequal relationships of power in culture and society became an integral part of biblical criticism as well. The age of Cultural Studies had arrived, therefore, with its twofold focus on the problematic and politics of meaning as well as representation; beginning in the 1980s, it has grown steadily more sophisticated through today.

Such ferment in biblical criticism cannot but have a profound impact on the working model of pastoral biblical ministry adopted under the aegis of historical criticism. Gone now was that unshakeable sense of scientific mediation provided by traditional historiography between the past of the biblical world and the now of contemporary Christianity. Interpretation now called for a very different set of qualifications: expertise in a variety of methods and theories, including literary and sociocultural approaches; problematization of social location and angle of vision in texts and interpretations alike; attention to real readers and power relations, whether inside or outside the academy, including the marginalized and the dispossessed; sensitivity to issues of diversity and conflict in texts and interpretation alike. In the last thirty years, then, since the mid-1970s, biblical criticism has developed in directions beyond all imagination at the time of Vatican II, in the early 1960s. Such develop-

***Therefore, all the clergy must hold fast to the Sacred Scriptures through diligent sacred reading and careful study, especially the priests of Christ and others, such as deacons and catechists who are legitimately active in the ministry of the word. This is to be done so that none of them will become "an empty preacher of the word of God outwardly, who is not a listener to it inwardly" (Augustinus) since they must share the abundant wealth of the divine word with the faithful committed to them, especially in the sacred liturgy. The sacred synod also earnestly and especially urges all the Christian faithful, especially Religious, to learn by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures the "excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ" (Phil 3:8). (Dei Verbum 25)***



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

**(Dei Verbum 21)**

ments call for a vigorous revisioning and reorientation of biblical pastoral ministry, its role and parameters, in the present and future Church.

#### **Envisioning a biblical pastoral ministry for the future**

By way of conclusion, I should like to offer a few pointers in this regard. This I do in the spirit of Vatican II, with a view of a Church that opens its arms, resolute and unafraid, to the world of postmodernity, and the élan of the Constitution on Divine Revelation, with its view of human agency very much at work in the composition of the biblical writings.

First, the insight of Liberation Theology regarding the need for a thorough critical analysis of society and culture as point of departure in interpretation should, I believe, be treasured most highly. If biblical pastoral ministry is to speak authoritatively and effectively to the world of postmodernity, it must develop a sharp understanding of it, in all of its complexity. Toward this end, critical reflection must address such issues as the following: globalization as a further stage in the development of capitalism; the utter demise and bankruptcy of "real" socialism and the character of a postsocialist world; the new imperial-colonial framework in place as the result of the emergence of the United States as a global hyperpower; a globalized world marked by growing disparity between haves and have-nots and massive migration from the non-West into the West; the rise of global Christianity, including Catholicism, leading to a shift in its center of gravity away from Western Christendom and an expanded consciousness of inter-

religious life and dialogue. One could go on. Biblical pastoral ministry cannot take place in a social or cultural vacuum. At the same time, given the radical change in circumstances and the critical distance afforded by the passage of time, such critical analysis of society and culture cannot be undertaken in the same key as did Liberation Theology decades ago.

Second, no longer bound by the hierarchical model of texts-critics-readers and its corresponding vision of the critic as mediating agent, biblical pastoral ministry stands to benefit, I should think, from a broader examination of the use of biblical texts in reading traditions beyond academic criticism. Attention to the invocation and deployment of biblical terms and concepts in a variety of social and cultural arenas is now in order – the political and the economic, the literary and the artistic, the popular and the devotional, the ecclesial and the missionary. Within this vision, academic criticism would be approached as one among many reading traditions. Such a wider horizon of interest would not only expand the scope of theological reflection and practical application but also further the task of engaging postmodern society and culture at large.

Third, given the switch from a modernist (empiricist; universalizing; disinterested) to a postmodernist (constructed; contextual; perspectival) understanding of historiography and interpretation, biblical pastoral ministry should, it seems to me, keep the following questions in mind throughout with respect to both texts and interpretation: the social location and angle of vision at work; the problematic and politics of meaning and representation, with special emphasis on interpretive diversity as well as relations of power; the ethical and political ramifications of texts and interpretations for Church and world alike. In so doing, biblical pastoral ministry assumes, in self-conscious fashion, the role of responsible critique – sensitive to previous and ongoing uses of the biblical texts, to the representations of different groups in texts and interpretations, and to the consequences of such uses and representations.

Finally, no longer dependent on a traditional historicist vision of a faithful translation of the biblical texts –

***All of what has been said about the way of interpreting Scripture is subject finally to the judgement of the Church, which carries out the divine commission and ministry of guarding and interpreting the word of God.***

**(Dei Verbum 12)**



through the mediation of learned critics – for theological reflection and practical application, biblical pastoral ministry should develop, I would hope, a driving vision of its task in the world of postmodernity. Such a vision, grounded in the Christian tradition and nurtured within the Catholic tradition, could serve as a much-needed and indefatigable advocate for human and social rights in a world of dislocation and devastation – a prophetic and unceasing voice on behalf of justice and freedom, dignity and wellbeing, for all.

This vision of biblical pastoral ministry would, I submit, be in fundamental accord not only with the élan of the Constitution on Divine Revelation, given its expanded view of the composition and deployment of the biblical writings in this world of ours, but also with the spirit of Vatican II in general and the Constitution of the Church in the Modern World in particular, given its updated vision of a Church calling for a Christian vision of a better world for all as it opens its arms, determined and undaunted, to the postmodern world.

#### **Epilogue: anticipating and dreaming**

That early sense of excitement so palpable in 1959, given the great expectations attached to the Second Vatican Council, was based on a vision of *aggiornamento*, of reaching out to the world of modernity, with confidence and resolve, from within the radical uncertainties of the Cold War. The future, to be sure, would

prove ambiguous. The Church would enter a glorious period of ecclesial renewal, ecumenical relations, and theological vitality. Now, decades later, it is beset by a host of severe challenges, none sharper than the crisis

of sexual abuse on the part of the clergy. Yet, as I look to the future now, that early vision of *aggiornamento*, its sense of excitement admittedly much less vibrant now, comes to haunt me: the need and duty to reach out to the world of postmodernity, with similar resolve and confidence, from within not only ecclesial and political crises but also the radical uncertainties of globalization. That would be the greatest homage one could render to Vatican II, and, toward this end, a properly rethought and reoriented biblical pastoral ministry would constitute a most appropriate homage as well to its Constitution on Divine Revelation.

***For ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ.” (Hieronymus) Therefore, they should gladly put themselves in touch with the sacred text itself, whether it be through the liturgy, rich in the divine word, or through devotional reading, or through instructions suitable for the purpose and other aids which, in our time, with approval and active support of the shepherds of the Church, are commendably spread everywhere. And let them remember that prayer should accompany the reading of Sacred Scripture, so that God and man may talk together; for “we speak to Him when we pray; we hear Him when we read the divine saying (Ambrosius).***

**(Dei Verbum 25)**



## “The Word of God Grows with the Reading” A Consequential Reflection on Current Biblical Exegesis

Georg Steins



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“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.” (*Dei Verbum* 21)

The Second Vatican Council of four decades ago indicated pathways into a new age which today either have yet to be discovered and made known or must be courageously held open against forces of resistance on the part of influential “barrier groups”. Many statements of the Council on the significance of Holy Scripture in the life of the Church are among those insights which after all this time are still far from having had sufficient impact in the lives of Christians. The relationship between Bible and Church is expressed in the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation in terms of the attractive idea that God is lovingly disposed to his people and has begun a conversation with them, which is ongoing. The image of the “conversation” occurs frequently; the Constitution employs it as a lead metaphor, which can trigger a number of secondary reflections.

“And thus God, who spoke of old, uninterruptedly converses with the bride of His beloved Son; and the Holy Spirit, through whom the living voice of the Gospel resounds in the Church, and through her, in the world, leads unto all truth those who believe and makes the word of Christ dwell abundantly in them” (*Dei Verbum* 8; see also 25).

This image of the Bible as a medium of conversation between God and His people that is carried on by the Holy Spirit, is at once both appealing and foreign. Appealing it is, because it does not get hung up on one of the often misleading dichotomies between (“dead”) Bible-book and (“live”) God-Spirit, but brings the two

together in such a way that they become an effervescent source of spiritual life for the whole Church. The image is foreign, in the sense that it has had so little resonance in the praxis of scientific Bible interpretation, and this also had, and continues to have serious consequences for the use of the Bible in the Church.

The consequential lack of resonance is, however, to be observed already in the Constitution of the Council itself: the poetic thrust that can be felt in the passages that speak of the dialogue of the “heavenly Father with his children” and the theological depth of these expressions get lost when the document comes to discuss the question of the exegetical craft. For one thing an effort is made here to adopt, at least in its main lines, the exegetical methodology that was developed in the enlightenment and in the era of historicism. What we have then is a procedure of interpretation focused entirely on the “sacred authors”, the authors of the biblical books and on the history of the origins of the biblical writings. The idea is to study the intention of the biblical authors, using scientific means to reconstruct the horizons of their thought and the literary forms in which their words and writings appear (cf. *Dei Verbum* 1-4). In these remarks of the Conciliar Constitution Catholic exegesis finds a connection with modern biblical scholarship, and to a certain extent it is beginning to catch up with Protestant theology in this regard.

There is something to be gained, however, by reading further into the text, where we will discover that the Council fathers were not fully satisfied with this “modern” concept of exegesis. From their two-thousand-year tradition they are attuned to the claim of a distinctly theological interpretation of the Bible, which is far from being realized with the hypothetical reconstruction of what the author of individual texts may possibly have once meant or intended. The meaning and significance of Holy Scripture among the people of God go far beyond the historical or original meaning. If biblical interpretation is to be more than a backward glance in history, if God should be still interested today in carrying on a conversation with His people through the medium of the Bible, exegesis must be something more than “historical science” and biblical theology something other than a report on theological conceptions that were current in the biblical era. In the conciliar text, this more comprehensive view is clearly taken into account; in the



reception of the conciliar text such a perspective has been (and still is) all too often forgotten.

So what we find in *Dei Verbum* 12, the “method paragraph” of the Constitution on Divine Revelation, is a juxtaposition of two programmatic statements. After the cited remarks on reconstructing the intention of the sacred authors, the second programmatic statement reads as follows: “but if the meaning of the sacred texts is to be correctly worked out”, which obviously is still far from being fully accomplished with the reconstruction of the authors’ intention, it is necessary, the Council insists, that “no less serious attention (...) be given to the content and unity of the whole of Scripture”, and that the “living tradition of the whole Church” along with the analogy of faith, “the harmony which exists between elements of the faith”, be taken into account.

In this passage the Council raises a series of questions which conceal a number of unresolved problems of method: what is the relationship between the scholarly investigation of (individual and situation-specific) authorial intentions to the faith witness that emerges from the unity of Scripture and the living interpretation of the Church as a whole? Is the authors’ intention the necessary foundation, perhaps even the decisive criterion for all later “ecclesial” interpretations? Can the Bible only be understood by one who reads it as a trained historian? In hindsight, the Council looks strangely helpless here in that it simply lets stand side by side the modern view of the Bible, with its focus on the human author, and the traditional, ecclesial praxis of interpretation, with its focus on the unity of the Bible. It leaves open the question of how these two different approaches can come together. In *Dei Verbum* 12 one finds nothing that can bridge the gap between these two methodologically different programs. This is understandable, because at the time of the Council such a marriage between “modern” exegesis and the traditional Bible reading of the Church was simply not contemplated.

### Significant rediscoveries

The Council now lies four decades behind us. For about the last two of these decades the problem not yet addressed by the Council of the relationship between “historical-critical” and “ecclesial” exegesis has begun to appear in a new light. What laid the groundwork for this new understanding was a number of momentous (re-)discoveries, which have brought to light the limits of “modern” Bible interpretation, and have made possible a new, scientifically grounded understanding of the importance of traditional approaches to the Bible.

With a few broad strokes, I will now sketch the most important changes that could be described as characteristic of a “postmodern” exegesis. I use the expression “postmodern” in this connection not as a word of

reproach (as is unfortunately often done in ecclesiastical circles), but rather as a precise way of describing a new situation, in which the narrowness of “modern” science is understood and attended to. Two postmodern rediscoveries in particular appear to me to be highly significant for the way the Bible is dealt with in the Church.

A theological *Bible interpretation* takes place, according to the view of the Council, in *vital connection with the whole Church*. With this, the Council points to an important condition for a vibrant, a spiritual-religious biblical interpretation, of a kind that has at the same time been newly rediscovered in the secular literary sciences: People have become conscious of the fact that texts are not closed objects that hold intelligible contents like a tin can; reading is not a matter of skimming off the meaning of a text put into it by the author like cream. Texts are, instead, wonderfully unique objects that produce new meanings every time they encounter a reader. They do so by broadening the habitual perspective of the reader or even by breaking into and disturbing it. Texts broaden the world of readers by transporting readers into new worlds. In the act of reading, then, an encounter takes place that does not remain without consequences. The Council’s image of the “never-ending conversation” captures this idea. The meaning of conversation is encounter – deemed successful only when it has drawn the dialogue partners together “into a new land”. These few remarks already make clear to what an extent the open, postmodern understanding of text corresponds to the concern of the Bible. The Word of God is, after all, about conversion, about the “new existence” (Paul Tillich) given us by God, about a new creation in justice and grace.

The Church *lives* with the Bible-book. In it she hears ever anew the “Word of the living God”, whose concern it is not to transport His “children” back to a long lost world of the past; rather He wishes to speak to them in the *here and now* – because, in ever new ways, it is always a matter of life and death. Historicism is in essence foreign to the Bible, to the very nature of the living Word of God. The text-understanding implied here is reflected in the postmodern science of literature and could be described thus: the meaning of a text goes far beyond the conscious intention of any ancient author. The reading of a text is not a matter of historical research; it is rather an encounter in the today. Because we are dealing with ancient texts in the Bible, it is quite clear that a knowledge of the life-world of the ancients is helpful and (normally) required for a correct understanding. But the desire to limit the text to the so-called original intention of the author amounts to a misunderstanding of conversation as an investigation of bygone states of consciousness.

The Council names a second context that is indispensable for a theological Bible-reading: no matter



how exciting might be the work of ferreting out the existence of older texts behind the biblical texts, of inquiring about the dependence of biblical texts on extra-biblical models or of figuring out the role played by biblical texts in their original contexts – *the Bible* is for the Church not primarily a collection of ancient sources, but *the life-book of a faith community*, which assembles in it what the community holds as a guide for all time. *These texts do not stand randomly side by side with one another; rather they describe the great horizon before which the life of the faith community is played out.* It is the drama of the world in the presence of God which plays itself out between the good beginning of creation and the establishment of God's Kingdom "as a new heaven and a new earth, in which righteousness (so often betrayed by human beings) dwells" (2 Pet 3:13).

Even if the biblical books and texts are very different in themselves, nevertheless together they constitute this one great horizon to which the Church continuously attunes itself through reading and hearing. This has led from the beginning to the phenomenon of individual biblical texts being removed from their original life situation and set into new, into literary contexts, which allow this framework of a struggle over the great, the godly justification of the world to enter the realm of experience in the act of reading. The reconstruction of meanings related to a more original layer or of more "original" contexts that were once relevant to the meaning of a text runs counter to this movement, observable in the Bible itself, toward the creation of a new context, that of the Bible itself as a literary whole.

A first example: the reader of the Psalms encounters not only a medley of very distinctive songs and poems, although it is doubtless true that the Psalms taken in themselves are very different from one another. The reader of the Book of Psalms will be taken along a path that begins with complaints regarding the perilous world situation (violence, injustice, sickness, near-death experiences) and ends finally with an almost excessive jubilation over the establishment of God's Kingdom (Pss 145-150). The drama of redemption, the contrasting moods of urgent need and of hope are not merely themes of individual Psalms; they characterize the Book as a whole, thereby bearing the reader along the path of redemption. Something more

wonderful still happens, to, with the reading of the Psalms: in the jubilation of God's People, redemption is already there in the here and now, because the recitation of the Psalms "breaks open" the needy world and lets in the radiance of the divine, even if this occurs (initially) only in song and prayer "with the small voice", "with nothing more substantial than our breath" (Hilde Domin).

A second example: the faithful of ancient Israel and of the early Church discovered that the texts assembled secondarily into a biblical canon possess a meaning and significance that transcend the original occasion. In the Letter to the Colossians we find expressed what amounts to a rule, namely, that the letters are not to be filed away in the archives of the original addressees, but passed on and exchanged, that is, they are indeed to be heard in new situations that could hardly have been envisaged by the sender: "And when this letter has been read among you, have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you read also the letter from Laodicea" (Col 4:16). This is how the Canon of the Bible – that far transcends the original intentions of the biblical authors – comes into being. This is how we get – *within a surviving diversity!* – *the unity of Scripture*, of which the Council speaks: The texts are not here subordinated to pre-existing "dogmatic" perspectives at the expense of their own, distinctive voices and entered into the mix of a sterile theological brew. Such a flattening process has at times occurred, to be sure, and continues to occur, but bad theology can never be a basis of objecting to the rediscovery of the Bible as canon. Out of the diverse witnesses the Church and the community hear the same Spirit of God, who seeks to engage in a conversation that will never cease (see the citation from DV 8 above).

The Council can see these connections, because they have always belonged to the cultural memory of the Church. But the Council in its time lacked the scientific basis for a theological integration of "modern" exegesis, which in view of its scientific seriousness and its patient search for understanding remains indispensable, but which also brought with it a new narrowness of perspective, which resulted in the effective suppression of vibrant approaches to the Bible. Theological interpretation of Scripture was and is both more than, and different from "historical-critical exegesis".

***Furthermore, editions of the Sacred Scriptures, provided with suitable footnotes, should be prepared also for the use of non-Christians and adapted to their situation. Both pastors of souls and Christians generally should see to the wise distribution of these in one way or another.***

(Dei Verbum 25)



### A very promising encounter

Postmodern reflection on literature, on the act of reading and on the understanding of texts and the ecclesial-traditional conception of a religious-spiritual reading of Scripture that came out of Judaism with its (still today!) vibrant interpretation-culture are today coming together – and discovering how much they have in common. It is beginning to dawn on people what possibilities lie hidden in this encounter. The limits of an historical-critical exegesis focused exclusively on the author and the origin of the writings are becoming apparent in many ways. In the past this exegesis has shown little sensitivity to the needs of an ecclesial reading of Scripture. The services scientific exegesis has rendered should in no way be minimized: it has relentlessly uncovered ecclesial monopolies and power-influenced deformations of the biblical message. It has pointed out the inner diversity of the biblical witness with effective precision and in this way has bolted many doors to the tendency to fundamentalist oversimplifications (that occur not only with the “sects,” but even in the Great Church). It has kept us from forgetting what lies in and behind the biblical texts. In general, its historical consciousness, with its concern for scientific controls and communicability, is indispensable for theology.

But it cannot be overlooked that historical-critical exegesis has also left absolutely out of consideration much that belongs to the realms of preaching and catechesis, because it offered no suggestions as to how the Word of God can be heard and preached by a believer within a community of believers. In my opinion this is also the reason why after the Catholic “Bible spring” that occurred around the time of the Council, a time of Bible drought has set in. In this drought time many people have sought refuge in surrogates, because in the advanced study of the Bible they were unable to experience how the Bible today can be the life and faith Book of the Church (and not merely to know that it once was so). Training in historical-critical exegesis has evidently been the cause of a chronic “Bible cold” with many. The Bible has been pushed far away from them, too far away. People can never get rid of their colds because no one can show them how to arrive at a “second naïveté” (P. Ricœur), in which they can feel at home in the world of the Bible, even with the knowledge about all the differences and particularities (revealed by scientific exegesis). They are unable to read the Bible like a great classic – forgetting time and their own petty selves, marveling like a child, as a participant in a world that rises before them; in short: enchanted, transformed, as it were, created anew! For this is precisely what the Bible is all about – becoming transformed through the impact of the Word of God and the Spirit of God.

Forty years after the Council ways are beginning to appear in the perspective of a postmodern science of lit-

erature that could surmount the chasm between scientific and ecclesial readings in a reflective and responsible way. For me these rediscoveries belong to the most important theological events of recent years. A biblical science that confronts these challenges and does not attempt to hold its ground in a frantic effort to seek attention and legitimation for the banner of historical-critical research (now long known to be full of holes) will gain scientific recognition as well as practical influence.

### The Word of God grows – impulses for praxis

The new Bible hermeneutic gives readers back their rights. One must speak of a restoration of rights because the consciousness of an ability to create meaning in the act of reading was first suppressed with the Bible interpretation that came into existence in early modern times in favor of a search for the original (in this context, the really normative) meanings. The early Medieval exegete Pope Gregory the Great (ca. 540-604) was still able to express the view “that the divine Word grows with the reading” (*divina eloquia cum legente crescunt*, Homily on Ezekiel I 7). In clear proximity to the Jewish theory of a revelation that grows with the interpretation process (the oral Torah), Gregory expresses the view that not only the meaning grows, but the Word of God itself. For historical-critical exegesis this idea is, on principle, unacceptable. It sees itself faced with a fixed body of texts, which can however grow if new manuscripts with new readings are discovered. In contrast, for Gregory the word of Scripture is no fixed whole. On this point Gregory’s understanding of text approaches that of the postmodernism. The text is not what is on paper, but is constituted in the very act of engagement with readers. That is a bold idea, which – at first sight – seems to destroy the independence and the objectivity of revelation. But only at this very superficial first look! In the footsteps of the Council, one could respond to this objection: The Church is not outside the phenomenon of revelation; it is instead the social body of revelation, its historically tangible form. God has initiated an ongoing conversation. For this reason the Word of Scripture, which acquires its form and shape in the Church (to the point where it becomes the book of the biblical writings), and from which the Church for its part acquires ever new form, has no existence alongside of the Church, as distinct and separate from it. So just as the Church herself becomes greater and richer with every person and with every believer, so also the Word grows in the reading (and in action!).

What a lofty view of readers of Holy Scripture is expressed here! Their theological value as baptized and spirit-gifted members of Christ is restored to them. Reading is a creative act, in which the creator Spirit works anew. This new biblical hermeneutic has practical consequences as well, which I would like to indicate in closing by way of a few pointed remarks:



- ❑ The reading of the Bible has its own unique and un-derivative value. Indeed, scientific interpretation of the Bible must direct its attention to this creative process and give it its proper value in constructing the frame-work of its methodological program.
- ❑ New forms of spiritual Bible-reading, above all "Bible sharing" as a tested form of spiritual Scriptural reading in community, cannot be seen as merely pre-scientific and therefore dispensable strivings for an understand-ing of the Bible. As unique forms they have a right of their own to exist, regardless of the extent to which they must remain tied to the diversity of ecclesial (and theological) approaches to Holy Scripture.
- ❑ Liturgical Bible use must be rediscovered as an original locus of introduction to an ecclesial Bible interpretation: The liturgy outlines an approach to Scripture, which is often somewhat briefly and obscurely characterized with the rubric "Paschal Mystery." This biblical hermeneutic that takes place in liturgy can perhaps best be seen in the example of the Easter Vigil: The abundance of Scripture read on this occasion is ultimately at the service of a single point, salvation from sin and death, encounter with the saving righteousness of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, whose glory shines in Christ. By reading Scripture together we enter into the experience of the night, in which the Creator gives the gift of life.

The Bible spring is not an event of the past. An impor-tant seed sown by the Council, a theology based on the Word of God, has by no means yet really sprung up. Now growth does not lie in the hands of us, the readers. But how better to shorten the wait than to do so by read-ing Holy Scripture?

(Translation: L. Maluf)





## International Conference “Evangelisation in Africa”

*The Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) held an international conference from January 15-18, 2007 under the theme “Evangelisation in Africa: Ecclesia in Africa in Retrospect and the Way Forward”. This conference served to prepare the way for the second African Bishops’ Synod to be held under the motto “The Church in Africa at the Service of Justice, Reconciliation and Peace” and the participants discussed the status quo of evangelisation in Africa and future perspectives for the continent. Here are some passages from the Comunique which will be helpful in the preparation process for the next CBF Plenary Assembly in 2008.*

(...) Twelve years ago, all the indicators of well-being and prosperity for Africa pointed more or less to a situation of hopelessness. Humanly speaking, there was nothing good to hope for, except that Africa refused to die. The Holy Father, John Paul II and the Fathers of the first African Synod made the observation of this alarming and calamitous situation. However, the Pope also enumerated the human, cultural, institutional, moral, spiritual and religious resources still available in Africa affected by such devastation. More importantly, he portrayed Jesus Christ as the final expression of God’s will to save humanity.

The proclamation of Jesus Christ, dead and risen for all, has instilled in the Church an attitude of the Good Samaritan standing beside this Africa which has fallen into the grip of brigands, and lying wounded, on her way to Jericho. The grace received has become Good News: “We are members of the Family of God” and “The Brotherhood of Christ”. That was indeed the Good News of the Synod: The Church as Family of God! We have therefore an identity of grace. We need to avail ourselves of it to be able to face our challenges.

Since the first Synod, things have not changed for the better, as the various presentations made at the Congress did reveal. The deliberations touched on the following seven main topics of the theme of the Pan-African Congress: “Evangelisation in Africa: Ecclesia in Africa in Retrospect and the Way Forward”:

- (1) Proclamation of the Good News, Conversion and a Call to Holiness.
- (2) Means of Social Communications
- (3) Inculturation

- (4) Dialogue
- (5) Justice, Reconciliation and Peace
- (6) Self-Reliance and Development
- (7) Preparation for the second African Synod

In the course of our discussions, the primary importance of modern technologies of information and communication was expressed by all the participants. The proclamation of the Good News must make good use of them in bringing Jesus Christ, the Communicator par excellence, the truth and the life, to all men and women of our time.

Discussions during the Congress manifested a constant deepening of the identity of grace of the Church as Family of God. As family, Africa needs to rise up to the challenges posed by wars, conflicts of all sorts, chronic economic mismanagement of resources, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, hatred, negative self-image, tribalism, ethnocentrism, corruption, embezzlement, bad governance, etc.

Deliberations at the Congress also showed how some of the Christian minority groups in some countries are not allowed to freely express their faith. Their testimony challenges all our Churches to insist on respect of religious liberty and to continue with the witness of life and love in their evangelising mission. For this reason also Congress participants appeal to our brothers and sisters of the Islamic faith to understand that evangelisation is not meant to proselytise but to be a free proposal of God’s love manifested in Jesus Christ.

The evaluation that we made was oriented firmly towards the second African Synod, which is going to treat the problems of Justice, Reconciliation and Peace. We resolved to leave no stone unturned in preparing for the coming Synod. In the same vein we have decided to intensify the formation of all the members of the People of God: priests, religious and especially the laity whose mission is essentially to be present at the heart of temporal realities: culture, family, work, economics, politics. Indeed, all Christians are meant to be the dough of transformation, the light which brightens, the salt which gives taste. These constitute an organically structured unit. The laity form an important part of the Church, the sacrament of salvation in the world. ■



## Life of the Federation

### ASIA

#### Myanmar: Building up a Biblical Pastoral Network

In October 2006 the Bishops' Conference of Myanmar decided to set up official biblical pastoral structures throughout the country and to elect people in charge of this network. Their motive for this leads back to the Second Vatican Council's calling for the Word of God to be placed at the center of people's lives and at the heart of Church life, and the insight, that this has been neglected too much in Myanmar. There is great need for biblical pastoral formation for lay people, religious orders and priests. Now they have created an Episcopal Commission for Biblical Apostolate (ECBA) at national level with its own office and team. Each diocese is called to nominate a diocesan representative and to set up their own team. Sr Tammy Saberon, a Philippine Columban Sister who formerly worked as a missionary in China and who has been a collaborator of the CBF for many years, has been nominated national coordinator by the Bishops' Conference; till now she was working in the northern part of the country on the border to China where the situation for Christians is particularly difficult, but where she nevertheless managed to organize several biblical pastoral activities.

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Sr. Tammy was also the initiator of the first National Biblical Pastoral Workshop in Yangon, held in January 2007, paving the way for the renewal of biblical pastoral ministry in Myanmar. The main objective, however, was to find, encourage and bring together appropriate people who would become active on national and diocesan levels. The workshop also offered an opportunity to discuss the present stand of the Catholic Church in Myanmar and to decide on main criteria for their biblical pastoral ministry. Thus also programmes and methods were items on the agenda. The pastoral programme implemented in all of the countries of Asia "AsIPA" (Asian Integrated Pastoral Approach) offers, for instance, a common Bible-reading method as one of their main activities, and Myanmar has followed this example. The participants of the Workshop found a common denominator in this and in the Basic Bible Seminar (BBS) already introduced in the northern part of Myanmar.



The fact that all of the bishops of Myanmar were present on the opening day of the first National Biblical Pastoral Workshop was of great encouragement to the other participants, signalling hierarchical support, but was also highly profitable and of great information and sensitization value for the bishops themselves. The bishops' support to the biblical pastoral ministry in Myanmar shines out as a beacon, lighting the way for other Bishops' Conferences in the region to follow. ■



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## Philippines: Bible Week, Youth Camp and Gospel Festival Celebrated

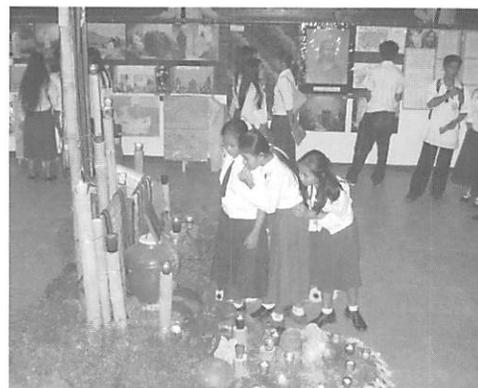
A lot of biblical activities have been going on in the Philippines in the past months and the staff of CBF-member John Paul I Biblical Center in Vigan City/Northern Luzon was very busy monitoring and organizing the different events.

During the 23<sup>rd</sup> Regional Biblical Workshop in Northern Luzon which took place from October 16 to 19, 2006, the John Paul I Biblical Center presented the silver edition of its popular Basic Bible Seminar.

Three months later, from January 22 to 28, 2007, the National Bible Week with the theme: "God's Word: Standard of Justice and Right Living" was held in 14 archdioceses, dioceses and vicariates of Northern Luzon. Students and staff of the Divine Word College of Vigan celebrated the whole week with biblical activities from the celebration of the Word and the Eucharist to contested events, such as poster-making contest, dance drama, a biblical symposium and a Bible quiz. The event culminated in a biblical parade around the UNESCO's World Heritage City of Vigan. The people of Vigan witnessed the college community portraying the biblical characters in their colorful biblical costumes passing over the message of the Living Word in consonance with the theme.

The theme for the 2007 National Bible Week inspired Mr. Charles Javier, principal of the Holy Spirit Academy of Bangued and lay coordinator of the Diocesan Biblical Apostolate of Bangued, to launch a unique diocesan biblical exhibit on January 29, 2007 at the auditorium of the Holy Spirit Academy. The biblical exhibit brings one and all to read the Sacred Scriptures in myriad creative ways e.g. Bible story-telling, pop-up art, biblical shadow play, pantomime, biblical riddles, biblical songs, biblical newspaper etc. etc. The heart of the biblical exhibit was the enthroned Bible surrounded with flowers, lighted candles, indigenous materials and a mini landscape. The exhibit appeared to be the summary of the biblical apostolate of Charles Javier who is becoming more and more in demand in giving lectures and workshops on creative biblical activities for children and youth not only in the Philippines but throughout Asia-Oceania.

"Moving Forward with the Word" was the "battle cry" of the first SVD-PHN (Divine Word Missionaries – Northern Philippine Province) Cagayan District Bible Youth Camp celebrated from February 9 to 10, 2007 in Dana-ili, Abulug, Cagayan. It was attended by hundreds of youth from six schools and included activities like dance drama, poster-making contest, a Bible parade and the celebration of the Eucharist. In the Youth Bible Camp, which was organized by the Biblical Commission of the SVD Cagayan District, the Sacred Scripture is introduced to the youth in a most acceptable manner, like the mystery of incarnation happening again when the Word joins with them in their journey and struggle in life. Inspired with the Word the participants were able to compose original gospel songs, songs that led them to the streets in a Bible parade waving flags and placards bearing their favorite Bible passages. The Word was really alive during those days. The youth were evangelizing the youth ... the most effective evangelizers of the youth indeed are the youth themselves as they move forward with the Word!



Only one day later, on February 11, 2007, the "26<sup>th</sup> Hearts on Fire Gospel Festival" was celebrated at the Divine Word College of Bangued, Abra, Philippines by hundreds of youth, children, parents, teachers, religious congregations, minor and major seminarians, priests and guests. The Gospel Festival which is one of the most attended gospel festivals in Northern Luzon started with the enthronement of the Bible followed by the celebration of the Word and the Eucharist. Colorful popular dance and Philippine dances



introduced the program proper by the students of the Holy Spirit Academy of Bangued with the choral presentation. The following competitions and contests were focused on the Gospels of John and Luke and the Books of Samuel. Biblical rap was the most appreciated part of the contest when the youth displayed their talents and ability in singing and dancing together with their cyber-inspired body language the gospel stories they memorized by heart. The biblical dance drama had some magnificent and varied reactions from the spectators as well as the participants. It was like *lectio divina* on stage where hundreds of people witnessed the gospel events unfolding right in front of their eyes.



(Report: Doms Ramos, svd)

## MIDDLE EAST

### Lebanon: Tenth Biblical Congress on the Gospel of Mark

The Gospel according to Mark was the theme adopted at the Tenth Biblical Congress of the Catholic Biblical Federation which took place from January 21 to 26, 2007, at the convent of Notre-Dame du Puits in Jal el-Dib on the northern end of greater Beirut.

In spite of the political upheavals in Lebanon, all the invited delegations did arrive – from Iraq (6 persons), from Syria (6 persons), from the Holy Land (3 persons), from Sudan (6 persons) and from Egypt (11 persons) – with the exception of the representative of Iran who, for personal reasons, preferred to abstain. And in spite of the risks taken, Professor Fr. Camille Focant, the main speaker of this event, kept his promise and came to give five lectures. The Catholic Biblical Federation also did not fail to show up, with the presence of its General Secretary Alexander M. Schweitzer, which was a mark of encouragement and solidarity. From the Lebanese side there was a strong presence (about 50 persons), and great interest was shown in this congress. The rostrum of speakers was composed of Copts, Catholics, Greek Orthodox, Protestants, Maronite Catholics, Syriac Christians. A brotherly atmosphere and general harmony reigned, and everyone present seemed to appreciate the exchanges of ideas and constructive criticisms. It was a very rich and diversified congress, with seven lectures a day, given by 30 speakers from different countries and church communities. In view of the situation in the country, great anxiety was in the air but this did not disrupt the smooth flow of events or the enthusiasm of the participants or the audience, and no changes had to be made in the program.

This congress brought together Christians from this corner of the world, which is so in turmoil. A powerful and very striking exchange of lived experiences took place and moving testimonies were heard. Although it was an academic gathering, an atmosphere of the spiritual enveloped the whole meeting, with masses celebrated in the different rites, animated by each delegation.

Besides the lectures, meetings, sharing of experiences and activities took place with Alexander M. Schweitzer, as did another encounter with Professor Fr. Camille Focant, bearing on the present state and situation of biblical research.

Each day opened with a prayer, which differed according to the various rites. The same variation occurred with the daily masses closing the daily activities. On Thursday, January 25, all

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the participants of the congress went to the Greek Orthodox University of Balamand, or more precisely to the Faculty of Theology of John Damascene (Lebanon north) to visit the premises and to proceed with the already established program there.



The Congress closed at the convent of Notre Dame du Puits with evaluation meetings and an evening of goodbyes, with sketches, chants, dances and anecdotes presented by the different groups. The benefits of a congress are felt at more than one level, whether human or ecumenical, scientific, pastoral, dynamic and, finally, at the level of publication. At the human level, the contact with persons of different nationalities is enriching; the exchange of experiences from the field is very heartening for the majority of participants who live in countries with Christian minorities. From the ecumenical point of view, participation in the congress by Catholics, Orthodox and Protestants is a Christian witness of the Word of God that unites. On the scientific side, about thirty of the speakers have doctorates in exegesis or in biblical theology, which gives the congress its scientific character, making it appealing to those interested in the biblical domain. At the pastoral level, persons engaged in their parish and in various activities, both catechetical and other, take part in the congress in order to stock up in view of enriching their pastoral activities.

Finally, as in the past, the Acts of the congress will be published in the series *Etudes Bibliques*, which already counts 32 volumes.

*(Report: Ayoub Chahwan)*

*The Biblical Congress 2007 was already the tenth biblical pastoral meeting of the subregion. On the occasion of this anniversary, CBF General Secretary, Alexander M. Schweitzer, looked back in his opening address at the history of the subregion and its regular meetings:*

“For the past 22 years – it was in November 1985 that a biblical pastoral congress was first held in Larnaka, Cyprus – this subregion has been organizing regularly at two-year intervals this coming together of experts on the Bible and in biblical pastoral ministry from almost all countries of the Middle East. This is not only a great organizational accomplishment in a part of the world in which travel, economic aspects and occasionally even communications are not easy, but it is also an important contribution to the further development of biblical research and of practical Bible work, which draw on, and enter into competition with, the most diverse and multifaceted approaches to Holy Scripture. And this common effort over Holy Scripture that transcends national borders is not least a



powerful witness to the fact that the Word of God brings together, binds, reconciles and heals, creates unity in diversity. The Middle East can use a sign like this!

At this 'Jubilee Congress' we cannot help but recall a few individuals who with their biblical commitment and their zeal have contributed in major ways to the fact that the Middle East subregion came into being and that the Biblical Congresses could take place over the past 20 years. Looking back to the founding era we remember Antonios Naguib, today Patriarch of Alexandria for the catholic Copts. Since the mid-1970s he was committed to the establishment of a Bible Center in Egypt, and in 1979 at his instigation Egypt became the first full CBF-member in the Middle East. It is thanks to his far-sightedness and his cosmopolitan thinking that the First Biblical Congress took place in Larnaca, Cyprus. He also became the first coordinator of the subregion that year. In 1987 the Bible Commission was established by the Catholic Hierarchy of Egypt – with Naguib as the responsible Bishop. And finally, he organized the Second Biblical Congress in Cyprus, in 1988. In his response to my letter of congratulations on the occasion of his election as Patriarch in April, 2006 he wrote: 'It was one of the greatest graces in my life, to have had the chance, the joy and the support of the Federation. I can't forget all the meetings with the Executive Committees, and particularly the founding one in the late 1970s, and all the wonderful and fruitful participation of the Plenary Assemblies, until 1992.' It is no exaggeration to see in Patriarch Antonios Naguib one of the founding fathers of the biblical pastoral network and of the CBF in the Middle East.

The name Paul Féghaly is also inseparably connected with the Middle East subregion and with the Biblical Congresses. Abuna Boulos, as he is called, followed in the footsteps of Antonios Naguib, on the latter's recommendation, as coordinator of the subregion. Under Féghaly's direction the third meeting of the subregion took place, for the first time in Lebanon – as have all the meetings since that time. An enormous task lay on his shoulders when the CBF held its Sixth Plenary Assembly in Lebanon in 2002. P. Féghaly had a masterful way of bringing the necessities of such an enormous international event into line with the possibilities and customs of the country. So it was that the CBF Plenary Assembly, which devoted itself to the theme of pluralism against the religious-political background of Lebanon and the Middle East, became a milestone and an unforgettable event in the life of the Federation. The whole area of the translation of theological literature into Arabic is just as difficult to imagine without the name of Paul Féghaly as is the organization of the Middle East Subregion.

Finally, the Sixth Plenary Assembly brought about also the second change in office of the coordinators of the subregion. Fr. Ayoub Chahwan took over the baton from Fr. Féghaly. Despite his fulltime engagement at the Université du Saint Esprit in Kaslik, and in spite of numerous academic obligations he managed to help the subregion move forward in its efforts to bring together and integrate many biblical scholars and biblical pastoral collaborators in the various countries of the Middle East. He further developed the subregion in the areas of religious education and collaboration/networking. In Lebanon well-trained biblical scholars are contributing to insure that a solid training will be given to future priests and collaborators in pastoral care. This is an excellent contribution to the spanning of the chasm that often exists between academic exegesis and practical Bible ministry. And the bonds within the CBF family have been further strengthened under the direction of Fr. Ayoub Chahwan in the past years through courses offered in the various countries, through exchanges of personnel and of material resources, through the establishment of good channels of communication and also through collaboration on projects with the help of the General Secretariat. All in all the conditions thus established make it possible for us to look to the future with optimism.

I am well aware that many hands, heads and hearts not named here have worked together for the diffusion of the Word of God in the Middle East and for a more profound grasp of its meaning. Nevertheless, I am happy to single out these personalities by way of example, not least because this will make clear how God's plan always takes concrete shape through human beings.



As venue for the last CBF Plenary Assembly, Lebanon is the bridgehead of that bridge on the path of the CBF that will lead to the upcoming Plenary Assembly. As you may already know, this will take place in 2008 in Tansania, Africa and will be devoted to the theme: 'Word of God – Source of reconciliation, justice and peace'. Reconciliation as presupposition for peace and for justice in the biblical sense – that sounds like a program written for the Middle East, and thus it binds together the place of the last, the Sixth CBF Plenary Assembly in a special way with the coming, seventh Plenary Assembly. The biblical motto of the upcoming PA reads: 'Deus caritas est – God is love' (1 Jn 4:8, 16). God's love, which showed itself in a decisive way in the self-offering of his Son, and which is also available to us in Christ, is the ultimate foundation for reconciliation, for justice, for true peace. There is no alternative to this logic of love, if the diabolical cycle of hate, revenge and death is to be broken. Your service to the Word of God, which not far from here took on flesh with all its weakness, can only be the service of reconciliation and of love here in the countries of the Middle East." ■

### **Israel : Formation Course in Biblical Places for Teachers in Chinese Seminaries**

Fifteen instructors in Catholic seminaries in China and four Chinese priests participated in a biblical formation course in the Holy Land from January 29 to February 22, 2007. This course was organized by the Catholic Biblical Federation together with the Archabbey of St. Otilien as a continuation of the program for principals and other spiritual leaders in Catholic seminaries in mainland China which the Benedictines had initiated in 2005.

One goal of this year's course was to enable Chinese seminary instructors to study and experience the Bible at the biblical locations themselves. Such on-site Bible study offers a scientifically and spiritually in-depth and concrete access to Sacred Scripture that can hardly be communicated in a lecture hall or library. The preoccupation with the environment and the original setting of the Bible together with the acquisition of sound knowledge in biblical scholarship were also central to the program, as was the spiritual dimension of the Holy sites, with which the central events of Christian faith are so closely tied.

A second important objective was to experience the diversity of the Christian denominations that have developed out of the beginnings of the Mother Church in the Holy Land, and the related experience of their own Chinese Church as a branch on this tree of the multifaceted universal Church. The inter-religious dimension, underscored by the daily reality of the coexistence of the Abrahamic religions in the Holy Land, also played a major role. And finally, learning something about the current religious, political and economic situation of people in Palestine and Israel was another important objective of the course. For the majority of participants the course offered the first opportunity ever for a meeting with foreign cultures and religions.



The conveying of these objectives took place through a combination of classes, seminars and individual lectures, workshops and excursions, as well as through numerous personal encounters. As for instructors, it was possible to acquire specialists in individual areas who were able in part to give classes directly in Chinese; otherwise a simultaneous translator was always available. Besides the study of Old Testament texts the Gospel of Mark ran like a thread through the course.



For the first two and a half weeks the group enjoyed the hospitality of the Ecce Homo Center in Jerusalem. From there excursions were made to places like Bethlehem and Hebron, to Jericho, to the River Jordan, into the Judean desert, and to Qumran and Masada. Alongside the intensive preoccupation with the history and current situation of Judaism and the State of Israel (visits to museums, the Holocaust memorial Yad Vashem) the stay in Jerusalem also offered the opportunity for numerous interconfessional and inter-religious contacts. Among these numbered a meeting with a rabbi, participation in a synagogue service, a reception by the Latin, the Greek Catholic and the Greek Orthodox Patriarchs and a meeting with representatives of the Armenian Church, which included participation in an Armenian vesper service. An exchange with both the faculty and the students at the Latin Seminary of Beit Jala was as instructive as were the visits to the most prominent biblical institutes of the area (the École biblique, the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, etc.).

The starting point for the second part of their stay in the Holy Land was the hostel of the German Union of the Holy Land in Tabgha on the Sea of Galilee. This location offered the possibility of exploring the places of the activity of Jesus in Galilee as this is played out in the Gospel of Mark, all of which was again accompanied by classes, workshops and lectures. Excursions led the group to places like Nazareth, Capernaum and other locations around the Sea of Galilee. The spiritual dimension was underscored by regular *lectio divina*, the Liturgy of the Hours and Eucharistic celebrations, and by spiritual direction.

During an initial evaluation at the end of the stay, the course met with a very positive response. The possibility of studying the Bible “on site” was felt to be an extremely enriching experience and the combination of classes, group work, excursions and individual contacts met with widespread approval.

After a visit to the grave of Lazarus in Bethany, a participant remarked: “The scene was made so vivid here that the Bible no longer seemed like a book, but rather an actual living event.” The Chinese priests also attached great value to the experience of Christian, as well as of interreligious pluralism, and to the experience of unity in diversity. The excellent care given by the – partly Chinese – facilitators of the course also earned praise. For a similar program in the future some expressed the wish for more time at the individual Holy sites and more time for exchanges among the participants themselves.



Course participants unanimously expressed the wish that in the future biblical formation courses will continue to be offered in the Holy Land for Chinese seminary instructors of all theological areas. In this connection the groups also gave some thought to the continuing educational needs of bishops, priests, sisters and laity in the People’s Republic of China itself. Suggestions for further formation courses in other theological disciplines and at other localities ended this fruitful brainstorming session. The participants defined the realms of liturgy/spirituality and missiology/pastoral ministry as particularly important for the Chinese Church. As possible course locations Benedictine communities (liturgy/spirituality), the Philippines and explicitly also Rome (missiology/pastoral ministry) were mentioned.

The course in the Holy Land was very highly valued not least as an expression of inner-ecclesial solidarity. The group leader, Fr. Guo Jincai, summarized this idea as follows: “We know that the world-church is very interested in China – that is wonderful, because it is a sign of unity.” The personal confession of one of the participants summarizes the mood that reigned as the Chinese seminary instructors were preparing to depart: “Since my ordination to the priesthood these have been the happiest moments of my life. Here I could touch the very places where Jesus lived and worked. When I get back home, I can tell my people how heaven looks here.”



Below you will find a few excerpts from the programme. A 12-page brochure with detailed information will be sent to you upon request. Please send your enquiry to the General Secretariat. The electronic version can be found on the CBF website ([www.c-b-f.org](http://www.c-b-f.org)).

### Lectures and courses

- ☐ “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord” (Deut 6:4): History of Israel and the Old Testament (Sr. Maria Ko, fma)
- ☐ “In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar” (Lk 3:1). The religious and political situation at the time of Jesus (Claudio Ettl)
- ☐ “Go make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28:19): Ecumenism in the Holy Land (Fr. Thomas Maier, mafr)
- ☐ “The Son of Man must suffer many things ... and be killed, and after three days rise again (Mk 8:31): Passion and Resurrection of Jesus (Fr. Lionel Goh, ofm)
- ☐ “They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers” (Acts 2:42). The Early Community and the Dawn of Christianity (Fr. Ludger Feldkämper, svd)
- ☐ “Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near ...’” (Mk 1:14): Life and mission of Jesus according to the Gospel of Mark (Claudio Ettl)
- ☐ “But who do you say that I am?” (Mk 8:29): Christology in the Gospel of Mark (Fr. Joseph Wong, osb)

### Guest lectures

Sacred Scripture in the life of the Church: *Dei Verbum* and the Catholic Biblical Federation (Alexander M. Schweitzer) – The Benedictines and the Congregation of St. Ottilien (Archabbot Jeremias Schröder, osb) – Jewish belief and life in Israel (Rabbi Marcel Marcus) – Biblical pastoral ministry and the situation of the Christians in the Holy Land (Fr. Peter Madros) – Ethics in Christianity and Confucianism (Fr. Michele Ferrero, sdb), and others

### Excursions

Desert of Juda/St. George’s Monastery/Jericho – Bethany/Hebron/Bethlehem/Herodeion/Beit Jala – Masada/Ein Gedi/Qumran – Yad Vashem/Ein Karem – Beit Shean/Mount Tabor/Beit Alpha – Mount of the Beatitudes/Tabgha/Capernaum – Nazareth/Cana/Sepphoris/Beit Shearim – Safed/Quneitra/Dan/Nimrud/Banias/Caesarea Philippi

### Visits and meetings

Greek Orthodox Patriarchate Jerusalem – Armenian Patriarchate Jerusalem – Greek Catholic (Melkite) Patriarchate Jerusalem – Latin Patriarchate Jerusalem – Latin Patriarchate Seminary Beit Jala – Latin Vicariate of Nazareth – Dormition Abbey Jerusalem – Convent St. Anne of the Missionaries of Africa – Studium Biblicum Franciscanum Jerusalem – École biblique et archéologique française de Jérusalem, and others.

Archeological Museum of the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum Jerusalem – Library of the École biblique et archéologique française de Jérusalem – Israel Museum Jerusalem – Great Synagogue Jerusalem – Yad Vashem, Holocaust History Museum Jerusalem, and others



## New Members

The CBF welcomes the following new members:

### Full Member

#### **Conferencia Episcopal Panameña (C.E.P.)**

Residencia

Apartado 870933

Panamá 7

Panama

Tel.: +507-223 00 75; 264 82 38

Fax: +507-223 00 42

### Associate Members

#### **Association of the 100 Weeks Bible Groups – Shinseikaikan Bible Studies**

Shinjuku-ku

Shinanomachi 33

160-0016 Tokyo

Japan

Tel.: +81-3-33 51 71 21

Fax: +81-3-33 51 71 32

E-mail: michelchristiaens@ybb.ne.jp

The Association of “The 100 Weeks Bible Groups” promotes a method of Bible-reading that was developed by Fr. Marcel Le Dorze, mep. This method provides for a substantial passage of the Bible to be first “worked on” at home on an individual basis and then once a week in a group setting (for example, at parish level). This method is known especially in Asia and it is practiced also by numerous CBF member organizations (e.g. in Malaysia and Korea).

#### **Polish Province of the SVD – Apostolat Biblijny SVD, Laskovic**

Apostolat Biblijny SVD

Ul. Długa 44

86-130 Laskowice

Poland

Tel.: +48-52-330 73 34

Fax: +48-52-330 73 01

E-mail: apostolat@bibliasvd.pl

Website: www.bibliasvd.pl

The biblical pastoral coordination bureau of the Polish Province of the Divine Word Missionaries organizes spiritual exercises, biblical pastoral meetings, weekends, and individual lectures. It promotes the spreading of *lectio divina*. Moreover, the coordination bureau helps out with the organization of the Polish Ecumenical Bible Day.

#### **Centre Liloba**

Missionnaires du Verbe Divin

B.P. 7463

Kinshasa 1

Democrativ Republic of Congo

Tel.: +243-99-848 48 22

E-mail: cliloba@ic.cd



The Divine Word Missionaries opened the "Centre Liloba" in 2000 which in the meantime has become a well-known institution in Congo and other French-speaking countries in Africa with a large target group of participants. Biblical pastoral activities include a Basic Bible Seminar on parish level, introductory programs to the Bible for young people, Bible Sunday with Small Christian Communities, formation programs for animators of Bible groups, catechists, biblical retreats. Furthermore, the Centre Liloba has been organizing the only French-speaking Dei Verbum course in Africa since 2003.

**Congregation of the Missionary Benedictines of St. Ottilien**

Erzabtei Sankt Ottilien

86941 St. Ottilien

Germany

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Website: [www.missionsbenediktiner.de](http://www.missionsbenediktiner.de)

The Congregation of the Missionary Benedictines of St. Ottilien was founded in 1884 as a response to the dreams of returning to the ancient missionary tradition of the order which in the earlier middle ages had helped to bring the faith to many parts of Europe. The Congregation today numbers approximately 1,060 monks in 20 independent monasteries and foundations on all five continents. They all work together in multiple and differentiated evangelization activities according to the different cultural settings of the 20 monasteries, nurtured by the Benedictine tradition to combine divine office (Bible-based prayer and meditation) with active work. Explicit biblical-pastoral activities in schools, Small Christian Communities, printing presses etc.

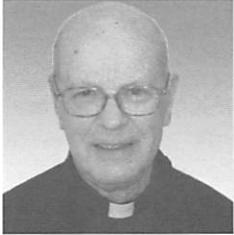
**Special thanks go to the following persons and institutions for their photos:**

Massimo Grilli (p. 4), Ralf Huning, svd (p. 8), Doms Ramos, svd (p. 24, 25), Fernando F. Segovia (p. 12), Georg Steins (p. 17), James Swetnam, sj (p. 33); all other photos: CBF archives.



## Reflections on the Pastoral Use of Scripture in the Catholic Church in the Context of Contemporary Exegesis

James Swetnam, sj



*James Swetnam, sj, holds degrees in classical languages, philosophy, theology and Scripture. Since 1962 he has been a scholar of the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome, where he has held numerous posts, including that of Vice-Rector and Dean of the Biblical Faculty. From 1990 to 1993 he was CBF coordinator of the subregion of Rome.*

That there is a gap between the pastoral use of Scripture in the Catholic Church and contemporary scholarly exegesis is fairly clear. This article is an attempt to address in summary terms the problem posed by this gap on the supposition that such a gap is not desirable: it harms both the pastoral use of Scripture and scholarly exegesis.

On one side is the stance of persons desirous of coming to fruitful terms with contemporary scholarly understanding of Scripture in the context of Catholic pastoral ministry. Such persons normally do not have much academic preparation. They are not usually hostile to contemporary scholarly work in Scripture (most of them don't know much about it), but they are diffident about their own ability to make use of what scholarly work they know of in any significant way. They do at times make use of the results of such scholarship, but they have no way of assessing independently the value of such results. Inasmuch as contemporary scholarly work in Scripture has yielded a variety of results, their use of such work accordingly varies considerably.

On the other side of the gap is the stance of the exegete who has been academically prepared for work in contemporary biblical scholarship. Very often such scholars do have pastoral concerns and many make effective use of their academic expertise. But even with such scholars there is often the lingering concern that when all is said and done pastoral use of the Bible and the academic study of the Bible are two different approaches which should be carefully kept apart in the interest of academic integrity.

There is a fundamental problem here, or at least so it seems to this writer. The problem is how to establish a unity of approach between the academic understanding of the Bible and the pastoral understanding of the Bible. For it seems to the present writer that such a unity is

necessary if the Bible is to be used as God wishes it to be used in the contemporary world. Without such unity the pastoral use of the Bible would be deprived of the immense gifts which the academic understanding of the Bible has bestowed on believers in the past two hundred years or so, especially in the domains of philology and literary analysis. On the academic side, without such unity the scholarly approach to the Bible would be handicapped by remaining cut off from the contemporary world of those who believe precisely as believers and remain locked in a self-sufficient and neutral irrelevance, not to say self-sufficient sterility, which keeps perpetuating itself to the delight of academics and not many more. Two elements would seem to be necessary for the establishment of such unity.

The first element necessary for the establishment of a unity of approach between the academic understanding of the Bible and the pastoral understanding of the Bible is the recognition that in the Catholic view both understandings should be based on a faith commitment in the tradition of the Catholic Church. Such a faith commitment should undergird any Catholic approach to the academic understanding of the Bible (cf. the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation of the Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum* 12.) and any Catholic approach to the pastoral use of the Bible (cf. *DV* 23).

The second element necessary for the establishment of a fundamental unity of approach between the academic understanding of the Bible and the pastoral understanding of the Bible is the recognition that in the Catholic view both understandings should be based on the religious message being made by the biblical text (i.e., of God speaking to His people), so that prayer or a mind-set of prayer fittingly accompanies the reading of the Scriptures (cf. *DV* 12; cf. also the encyclical of Pius XII, *Divino afflante Spiritu* 24). (Would it be a betrayal of the Council's thought and the thought of Pius XII to say that this prayerful attitude is appropriate for a scholarly reading of the Bible as well as a pastoral reading?) In the case of any given passage, the scholar should be able to single out the religious point or points being made. Using this religious point or points as a bridge, the one using scripture pastorally should then be able to show the relevance of the point or points for the contemporary scene.



If the above two elements were universally kept in mind by both academicians and pastoral workers, the gap between the scholarly approach to Scripture and the pastoral use of Scripture would be eliminated or greatly reduced.

This is the theory. In practice it is difficult to see these two steps being put into practice universally, even though as a matter of fact there are many Catholic scholars and Catholic pastoral workers who today offer excellent faith-oriented presentations of God's Word according to the mind of the Church.

From the standpoint of academia, Catholic scholars are much concerned that their academic autonomy be respected, and any explicit resort to an appeal to the teaching authority of the Church with regard to interpreting Scripture is resented by many if not by most such scholars. Concern for the religious message of a text is less resisted, but is easily lost in the mass of other perspectives usually available to a scholar in his or her exegetical presentations. Further, there is the lingering suspicion that all the results of modern scholarly research will be undervalued by being considered subordinate to ecclesiastical obscurantism.

From the standpoint of homiletics, catechetics, etc., Catholic pastoral workers will continue to have an inferiority complex with regard to exegesis, being reluctant to devote as much time as they should to trying to understand what Catholic biblical scholarship is all about. And, it may be added, by being confused if they should try to do so. Especially in view of the fact that not all scholarship explicitly explains religious exegetical points easy to assimilate. And such pastoral workers are not always eager to make explicit to those whose lives they touch the underlying importance of religious faith: various forms of injustice, for example, often make for easier material to wax eloquent on. It is often just too tempting to take a quick glance at a text and then proceed to comment on "what strikes me". Presumed relevance tends to govern the meaning of a text, whereas, of course, the meaning of the text exegetically assessed should always be the basis for assessing relevance.

In practice what one may hope for is an increase in numbers of Catholic scripture scholars not averse to making explicit their Catholic faith with regard to exegesis. (Such a stance would be facilitated immensely if all Scripture scholars were expected to make explicit their own presuppositions which they bring to the interpretation of the Bible, Catholic, Orthodox, Lutheran, Calvinist, Baptist, secularist, atheist, etc.) In such a context the scholar who explicitly holds that faith is the basis for his or her work should not feel obliged to minimize in the slightest the results of scholarly biblical research. But in view of their prior faith commitment explicitly recognized they should put such research in a different perspective.

Their faith is seeking understanding; their understanding is not seeking faith. And scholars not averse to make explicit the religious point of each organic section of scripture they study so that a bridge may be made between their research and pastoral application.

And one may hope for pastoral workers not reluctant to insist on the faith-dimension as the basis for the religious assimilation of God's Word. And for pastoral workers more assiduously concerned to base their use of Scripture on the point or points being made in the passages they are concerned with.

A certain amount of tension between the pastoral approach to the Bible and the academic approach is, of course, inherent in the respective approaches and this tension is to be respected. Properly appreciated, it can lead to improved exegesis and improved pastoral ministry. But the two approaches should not be allowed to be antagonistic to each other, for with mutual antagonism academic exegesis does not remain true to the intrinsic pastoral dimension of the Bible, and the pastoral dimension of the Bible does not remain true to the implied obligation to understand as best as possible God's inspired Word.



## **Pope Benedict on the Synod of Bishops on the Word of God**

*On January 25, 2007 Pope Benedict XVI granted members of the Ordinary Council of the Synod of Bishops an audience. In his greeting the Pope went into the upcoming Bishops's Synod and its theme in detail.*

(...) "The upcoming Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops will be the 12th. Its theme will be: 'The Word of God in the life and the mission of the Church.' The importance of this topic, the one that proved the most popular of all in consultation with the Pastors of the particular Churches, escapes no one. This theme has been on the agenda for quite some time. And this can easily be understood because the spiritual action that expresses and nourishes the life and mission of the Church is necessarily founded on the Word of God. Furthermore, since the Word of God is destined for all the Lord's disciples it requires special veneration and obedience so that it may also be accepted as an urgent call to full communion among believers in Christ.

(...) You have now reached the final stage of the draft of the *Lineamenta*, a document intended as a response to the need, so deeply felt by Pastors, to encourage increasingly contact with the Word of God in meditation and in prayer. (...)

I am sure that once the *Lineamenta* are published the entire Church will find it is a precious instrument to acquire a deeper knowledge of the theme of the upcoming Synodal Assembly.

I express my heartfelt hope that it will help every Christian and every ecclesial and civil community to rediscover the importance of God's Word in their life and also to rediscover the missionary dynamism inherent in the Word of God. The Word of God, as the Letter to the Hebrews recalls, is alive and effective (cf. 4:12) and illumines us as we continue our earthly pilgrimage towards the total fulfilment of the Kingdom of God. (...)" □

## **Fr. Ludger Feldkämper, svd, in honour of his seventieth birthday**

*Dear Ludger,*

*Although we are regularly in direct contact with each other, I very much wanted to give you the surprise of this letter of congratulations in the framework of our BDV. In it are included the remembrances and good wishes that have reached the General Secretariat in recent days from numerous members and friends of our Federation. So in the name of the Catholic Biblical Federation I offer you the most heartfelt congratulations on your seventieth birthday, on May 16, 2007! May the God of life continue to accompany you with His rich blessing in the coming years.*

*For sixteen years you served the CBF as its General Secretary – a time too long and too multifaceted to summarize here, even in rough outline. Much has been said and written about the external and internal growth of our Federation from 1984 to 2000 and about the part you played in it. Today I would like to underline just this one thing: your service was credible, backed by your own conviction and your own life; it was tireless and – by human measurement – very beneficial.*

*"From letters to life" could serve as a heading for your work. How long a way this can sometimes be the occasion of these lines shows – cum grano salis. With your admirable vitality, as strong today as it ever was, you give a powerful rebuttal to an all too literal understanding of the statement *vita hominis septuaginta anni* of Psalm 89. But of course the reminder that our earthly existence will end and that all our hope, our love and even our dying is taken up in God's gracious hand is certainly a reflection most befitting for your seventieth birthday.*

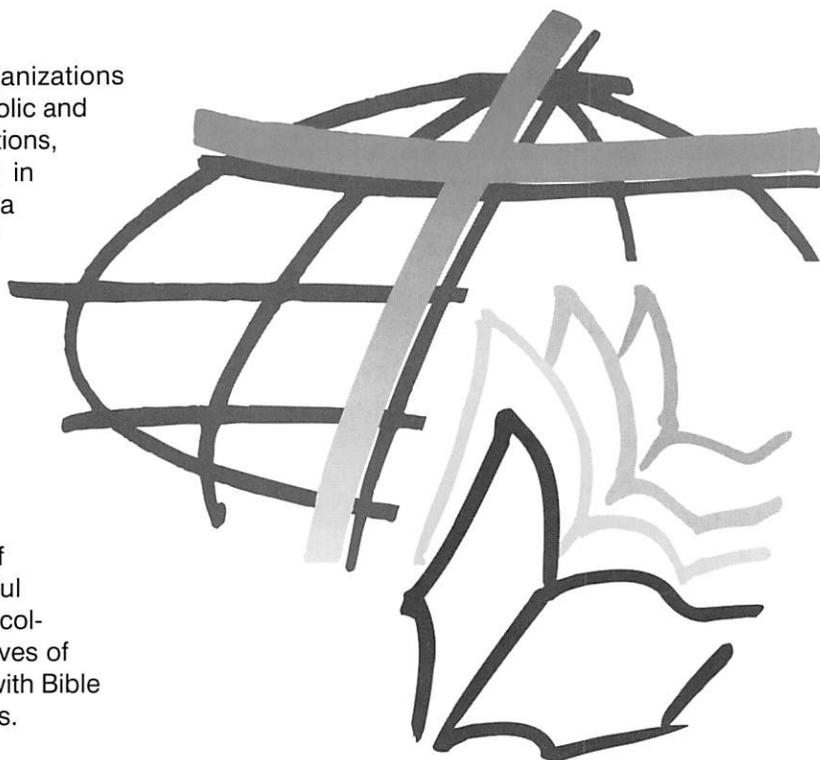
*With this thought, and in the name of the CBF, I wish you a heartfelt *ad multos annos* – without toil or hardship – in the dynamic of the life-giving Word of God!*

*Alexander M. Schweitzer  
CBF General Secretary*

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 235 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**