

SYNOD OF BISHOPS
 XII ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY
The Word of God
in the Life and Mission of the Church

LINEAMENTA

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PREFACE

“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (*Heb* 4:12).

The Word of God has shown itself to be a *living* force throughout the course of salvation history. God, the Source of Life (cf. *Lk* 20:38), takes the first step in communicating himself. His Word is addressed to man, the work of his hands (cf. *Job* 10:3), who is created precisely to respond and enter into dialogue with his Creator. Therefore, the Word of God is always present to humankind from the first moment of creation to the very end of its pilgrimage on this earth. The Word of God manifests itself in a variety of ways, culminating in the mystery of the Incarnation, when the Word, who was with God, became man (cf. *Jn* 1:1, 14) through the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ, who died and rose again, is the “*Living One*” (*Rev* 1:18), the One who has the words of eternal life (cf. *Jn* 6:68).

The Word of God is *piercing*. It casts light on every person’s life and indicates the road to be followed. This is clearly seen in the Ten Commandments (cf. *Ex* 20:1–21), which Jesus summed up in the commandment to love God and neighbour (cf. *Mt* 22:37–40). The Beatitudes (cf. *Lk* 6:20–26) are the ideals of the Christian life which are lived in listening to God’s Word. The Word of God searches the sentiments of the heart, inclining persons towards good and purifying them from what is sinful. In communicating himself to the sinner, who is called to holiness, God exhorts him to turn from his sinful ways: “*Turn from your evil ways and keep my commandments and my statutes, in accordance with all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by my servants the prophets*” (2 *Kgs* 17:13). In the Gospel, the Lord Jesus makes a similar invitation: “*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*” (*Mt* 3:2). Through the grace of the Holy Spirit, the Word of God penetrates the heart of the penitent sinner and restores it to communion with God in his Church. The conversion of a sinner causes great rejoicing in heaven (cf. *Lk* 15:7). In the name of the Risen Lord, the Church continues his mission of preaching “*repentance and forgiveness of sins to all nations*” (*Lk* 24:47). In docile obedience to the Word of God, the Church follows the path of humility and conversion in order to be always more faithful to Jesus Christ, her Spouse and Lord, and to proclaim his Good News with greater conviction and authenticity.

The Word of God is active, as demonstrated in the personal lives of the patriarchs and prophets and seen throughout the history of the Elect of the Old and New Testaments. Jesus Christ bears witness to this in a totally unique way. The Word of God became flesh “*and dwelt among us*” (*Jn* 1:14). Through his Church, he carries on the proclamation of the Kingdom of God and the healing of the sick (cf. *Lk* 9:2). The Church continues to accomplish these salvific works through the Word and the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, the source and summit of the life and mission of the Church, where the words of consecration produce through the grace of the Holy Spirit their effect of transforming bread into the Lord’s Body and wine into his Blood. (cf. *Mt* 26:26–28; *Mk* 14: 22–23; *Lk* 22: 19–20). The Word of God is therefore the source of communion not only between humankind and God but also among people, one with another, all of whom are the Lord’s beloved.

This close connection between the Eucharist and the Word of God was a factor in the choice of topic for the next Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, fulfilling a long-held desire to treat the Word of God in a synodal assembly. Consequently, after the Synod of Bishops on *The Eucharist: Source and Summit of the Life and Mission of the Church*, which took place from 2 to 23 October 2005, thoughts naturally turned to giving attention to *The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church*, in order to examine more thoroughly the meaning of the one table of the Bread and Word. This topic was seen as a priority among the particular Churches as indicated by their Bishops, the Pastors. In fact, the choice of topic for the next synodal assembly came about as a result of a collegial process. According to custom, the General Secretariat, at the request of the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, polled the entire Episcopate of the Catholic Church for a choice of topic. The Word of God, with various nuances and a significant variety of aspects, emerged as the preferred topic among the responses from the Eastern Catholic Churches *sui iuris*, the episcopal conferences, the heads of the Roman dicasteries and the Union of Superiors General. The volume of material was analysed by the XI Ordinary Council of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, which, in a certain way, represents the entire synodal assembly. In fact, 12 of its members were elected from among the members of the XI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. In keeping with the norms of the *Ordo Synodi Episcoporum*, three members of the Council were appointed by His Holiness, Pope Benedict

XVI. A fruitful discussion by the Ordinary Council reduced the choices to three topics, which the General Secretary then submitted to the Supreme Pontiff.

The Holy Father, President of the Synod of Bishops, made his decision public on 6 October 2006. Subsequently, the Ordinary Council of the General Secretariat began work on preparing this *Lineamenta*, the document intended briefly to present the subject in question, that is, the Word of God, and to set forth its positive aspects in the life and mission of the Church, while not overlooking certain areas which might pose difficulties or, at least, require a thorough examination for the good of the Church and her life in the world. Consequently, the *Lineamenta* makes frequent reference to the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, following in a particular manner the approach adopted by the Council Fathers, that is, hearing the Word of God with reverence so as to proclaim it confidently (cf. *DV*, 1). In addition to re-reading *Dei Verbum* from a pastoral vantage point, the document cites the successive pronouncements of the Magisterium of the Church which authentically interpret the sacred deposit of faith, contained in Divine Tradition and the Sacred Scriptures.

To facilitate reflection and discussion on the topic everywhere in the Church, the *Lineamenta* includes a list of detailed *Questions* associated with the subject treated in each chapter. The above-mentioned collegial bodies are asked to submit a written response to these questions **before November of this year**. The Ordinary Council, assisted by specialists, will then study this material and present it in an orderly fashion in a second document, traditionally called the *Instrumentum Laboris*, which will become the agenda of the XII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, to take place—God willing—from 5 to 26 October 2008.

From the Church's inception, the Word of God has been her very life. In Christ, Word-Incarnate through the power of the Holy Spirit, the Church is "*a kind of a sacrament or sign of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all humankind*" (*LG*, 1). The Word of God is also the timeless, underlying reason for the Church's mission to those both near and far. Obeying the mandate of the Lord Jesus and entrusting herself to the power of the Holy Spirit, the Church is, therefore, in a permanent state of mission (cf. *Mt* 28:19).

Following the example of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Lord's lowly servant, the Synod wishes to promote an inspired rediscovery of the Word of God as a *living, piercing and active* force in the heart of the Church, in her liturgy and in her prayer, in evangelization and in catechesis, in exegetical studies and in theology, in personal and communal life, and also in the cultures of humanity, purified and enriched by the Gospel. In allowing themselves to be moved by the Word of God, Christians will then be in a position to respond to whoever asks a reason for their hope (cf. *1 Pt* 3:15) and to love their neighbour not "*in word or speech but in deed and in truth*" (*1 Jn* 3:18). In this way, their good works will shine forth like a light in the world, reflecting the glory of God, and all will praise our Father who is in heaven (cf. *Mt* 5:16). The Word of God, then, casts its rays on every aspect of the Church's life and, by its presence in society, also acts as a leaven for a more just and peaceful world, devoid of every kind of violence and open to the building of a civilization of love.

"The word of the Lord abides for ever. That word is the good news which was preached to you" (*1 Pt* 1:25). Reflection on the synodal topic will become a humble prayer that the rediscovery of the Word of God might illumine the path of humanity in the Church and society through the course of history which is oftentimes arduous, as it confidently awaits a "*new heavens and a new earth where righteousness dwells*" (*2 Pt* 3:13).

Nikola Eterovic

Titular Archbishop of Sisak

General Secretary

Vatican City, 25 March 2007

INTRODUCTION

Why a Synod on the Word of God?

“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we saw it, and testify to it, and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing this that our joy may be complete” (1 Jn 1:1–4).

1. “In the beginning was the Word” (Jn 1:1). “The Word of our God will endure for ever” (Is 40:8). The Word of God, present at the creation of the world and humankind, initiates history: “God spoke” (Gn 1, 3,6ff.). The Incarnation of God’s Son, Jesus Christ, the most decisive moment in history, is announced by the Word of God: “And the Word became flesh” (Jn 1:14). The Word of God will bring history to a close with the sure promise of meeting Christ in everlasting life: “Surely, I am coming soon” (Rev 22:20).

The Word of God is the ultimate surety which God, in his infinite love, gives to people of every age and time, enabling them to become witnesses to his Word. The Synod wishes to reverently contemplate this mystery of the Word, God’s greatest gift, to render thanks for it, to meditate upon it and to proclaim it to all members of the Church and all people of good will.

2. In an increasing number of ways, people today are displaying a great need to listen to God and speak with him. At present, Christians are eagerly seeking the Word of God as the source of life and as a means of encountering the Lord in a personal manner.

Clearly, the unseen God interacts in this personal encounter “out of the abundance of his love; [he] speaks to humankind as friends and lives among them, so that he may invite and take them into fellowship with himself.”¹ This generous act of God’s Revelation is an ongoing, grace-filled event.

This communication takes place through the action of the Holy Spirit, who, through the Word, seeks to renew the life and mission of the Church, to call her to an ongoing conversion and to send her to bring the message of the Gospel to all peoples, so “that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (Jn 10:10).

3. The Person of Christ the Lord is at the core of the Word of God. Throughout her history, the Church has constantly experienced and mirrored the mystery of the Word. “What do you believe the Scriptures to be, if not the Word of God? Certainly, many words are penned by the prophets; yet the Word of God is one, uniting the whole of Scripture. The faithful conceive this unique Word from a seed given by God as a lawful spouse, and fruitfully bring it forth from their mouths, so to speak, by giving it birth and recording it in characters, so it can be passed on, even to us.”²

In the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, the Second Vatican Council set forth the Church’s solemn Magisterium on the Word of God, explaining its teaching and indicating its practice. This document completed the long study and development of three Encyclical Letters: *Providentissimus Deus* of Leo XIII, *Spiritu Paraclitus* of Benedict XV and *Divino Afflante Spiritu* of Pius XII.³ It also represented a stage in the process of renewal in exegesis and theology which was further enriched by the spiritual experience of the faithful and opportunely treated in the *Synod of Bishops* of 1985⁴ and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. In the years following the Council, the Magisterium of the universal and local Churches placed greater insistence on an encounter with the Word, convinced that this “will bring the Church to a new spiritual Spring.”⁵

In the continuing process of God’s breathing forth his Word, this *Synodal Assembly* is being convoked in close connection with preceding Synods of Bishops (1965–2006). It looks to the foundations of faith and seeks to present how the Word has been encountered in the Bible (cf. *Josh* 24; *Neh* 8; *Acts* 2) and throughout the history of the Church.

4. More specifically, this Synod wishes to set forth, in continuity with the preceding one, the intrinsic connection between the Eucharist and the Word of God, since the Church must receive nourishment from the one “bread of life from the table of both God’s word and Christ’s body.”⁶ This is the Synod’s underlying purpose and primary goal, namely, to fully encounter the Word of God in Jesus the Lord, present in the Sacred Scriptures and the Eucharist. St. Jerome observes: “The Lord’s flesh is real food and his blood real drink; this is our true good in this present life: to nourish ourselves with his flesh and to drink his blood in

not only the Eucharist but also the reading of Sacred Scripture. In fact, the Word of God, drawn from the knowledge of the Scriptures, is real food and real drink.”⁷⁷

Forty years after the Second Vatican Council, questions arise as to what are the fruits of the conciliar document, *Dei Verbum*, in our Church communities and whether this Dogmatic Constitution has really been taken to heart. With regard to the Word of God, many positive things have clearly taken place in the People of God: for example, biblical renewal in the liturgy, theology and catechesis; the distribution and practise of the Bible by the biblical apostolate and efforts of communities and ecclesial movements; and the increased use of the instruments of today’s communication media.

Some things, however, pose *problems* or still remain an *open question*. The lack of knowledge and uncertainty regarding the teachings of Revelation are a deep concern. Many Christians remain without any contact with the Bible and the danger is always present that it will not be used properly. Without the truth of God’s Word, relativism becomes alluring in people’s lives and thinking. This situation urgently warrants a total and complete knowledge of the Church’s teachings concerning the Word of God. It also requires employing suitable methods in providing all Christians with opportunities to encounter Sacred Scripture. The Church must take up the new ways suggested by the Spirit today to ensure that the various manifestations of the Word of God be known, discerned, loved, and more profoundly grounded and lived in the Church, thereby becoming the Word of Truth and Love for all people.

5. *The purpose* of this Synod is primarily pastoral, namely, spreading and strengthening encounters with the Word of God by thoroughly examining its doctrinal underpinnings and allowing them to show the manner in which this is to be done. This will lead to experiencing the Word of God as the source of life in everyday circumstances and devising true and readily available ways in which Christians and all people of good will can listen to God and speak with him.

In a concrete sense, the Synod intends among its many objectives: to help clarify the basic truths of Revelation as the Word of God, Divine Tradition, the Bible and the Magisterium, which prompt and guarantee an authentic and effective living of the faith; to spark an appreciation and deep love of Sacred Scripture so that “the faithful might have easy access” to it;⁸ to renew listening to the Word of God, in the liturgy and catechesis, specifically through *lectio divina*, duly adapted to various circumstances; and to offer a Word of consolation and hope to the poor of the world.

This Synod desires to give the Word of God as bread to the People of God. Its aim is to foster a proper approach to biblical hermeneutics and to correctly direct the process of evangelization and inculturation. It also intends to encourage ecumenical dialogue, which is closely linked to listening to the Word of God and to promote an encounter and dialogue of not only Christians and Jews⁹ but also those engaged in interreligious and inter-cultural dialogue. The synod proposes to achieve this task by treating the following *three areas*:

- Revelation, the Word of God, the Church (Chapter I)
- The Word of God in the Life of the Church (Chapter II)
- The Word of God in the Mission of the Church (Chapter III).

In this way, the foundational elements of the Word of God might be united to its operation in the Church.

The *Lineamenta* does not intend to treat every demand and application of encountering the Word of God. Rather, drawing on the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, this document will describe the essential characteristics of the Word of God, emphasizing both its doctrinal content and that drawn from experience and inviting the reader to provide further detailed information.

Questions

Introduction

1. What “signs of the times” in your country give this Synod on the Word of God a particularly timely character? What do people expect from it?
2. What is the relation of the preceding Synod on the Eucharist to the present one on the Word of God?
3. Do experiences and practises with the Bible exist in your particular Church? What are they? Do Bible groups exist? Describe them and their activities.

CHAPTER I

Revelation, the Word of God and the Church

“In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world” (Heb 1:1,2).

God takes the Initiative: Divine Revelation by the Word of God

6. “In his goodness and wisdom God chose to reveal himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of his will.”¹⁰ At the risk of subjecting the mystery of God to the human word and the formality of an arbitrary report, the Second Vatican Council *masterfully and accurately* set forth in *Dei Verbum* a summary of the faith professed by the Church throughout the ages. God makes himself known in a gratuitous and direct way so as to enter into an interpersonal relationship of truth and love with humankind and the world he created. God reveals himself in the visible realities of the cosmos and history “through deeds and words having an inner unity,”¹¹ thereby demonstrating an “economy of Revelation,” namely, a plan which seeks the salvation of humankind and, through it, all creation. At one and the same time, this Revelation communicates the truth about God, One in Three, and the truth about humanity, loved by God and destined for eternal happiness. This Divine Revelation gloriously culminates in the Person of Jesus Christ, “who is both the mediator and the fullness of all Revelation.”¹²

This gratuitous communication, which presupposes a deep communion analogous to human intimacy, is characterised by God himself and his Word, that is, the “Word of God.” Fundamentally speaking, it is a personal act of the Trinitarian God, who loves and consequently “speaks.” God speaks to humankind so that each person might acknowledge his love and respond to him.¹³ An attentive reading of the Bible clearly demonstrates that this communication has continually taken place from Genesis to Revelation. When the Word of God is read and proclaimed, above all in the Eucharist, the “Sacrament par excellence,”¹⁴ and in the other sacraments, the Lord himself makes an appeal to us to “become part” of a deeply profound and uniquely interpersonal event of communion between him and us and each of us with one another. Truly, the Word of God is active and accomplishes its purpose (cf. *Heb 4:12*).

The Human Person Needs Revelation

7. A person is capable of knowing God by relying simply on God-given human resources (cf. *Rm 1:20*), namely, the world of creation (*liber natur*). In various circumstances in history, as a result of sin, this knowledge of God has become clouded and uncertain and even denied by many. But God does not abandon humanity; he puts a deep longing in individuals for light, salvation and peace, even if this is not always recognised. Proclaiming the Gospel to the whole world has helped keep people aware of this bond with the Creator and has resulted in religious and cultural values.

The *People of God* are showing signs of a keen desire—even a deep yearning—for an intense, sure faith. In removing the veil of ignorance, confusion and self-doubt about God and humankind, the People of God can discern and uphold the truth of God among the many conquests of our technological age. This deep, extensive yearning, almost a crying out, leaves a person open to perceive the truth of God’s revealing himself for the sake of humanity and to listen to his Word. This is the underlying objective of the Synod: to investigate the pastoral implications of the topic in guaranteeing and advancing the process of a new evangelization and permitting the gathering of valuable information for ecumenical, interreligious and cultural dialogue.

The Word of God is Intimately a Part of Human History and Guides it

8. Persons in some cultures think that everything comes from them and as a result consider themselves masters of their own destiny. This attitude makes it difficult for them to accept that someone might come into the world to enter into dialogue and provide the meaning of existence. Such a mentality can also be seen in often incorrect conceptions of God and various forms of doubt. God, however, who cannot silence the truth of his Word, reassures the individual that his Word is amicable and spoken for a person’s good. While always respecting a person’s freedom, the Word of God, nonetheless, requires a faithful listening to and meditating on its content. Truly, the Word of God “must appear to each individual as an opening to his problems, with a response to his questions, a widening of his values and together meet his aspirations.”¹⁵ Again, we understand from *Dei Verbum* that the Word of God precedes every human word and initiative.

God pronounces his Word to open a person to unexpected horizons of truth and meaning as stated in *Genesis* 1; *John* 1:1ff.; *Hebrews* 1:1; *Romans* 1:19-20; *Galatians* 4:4; and *Colossians* 1:15-17. St. Gregory the Great maintains: “Scripture comes down to our level in using our poor words, so as to allow us gradually to climb, step-by-step, from what is seen near-at-hand to things sublime.”¹⁶

From the start, God wanted “to make known the way leading to eternal salvation.”¹⁷ Scripture reveals how God’s Almighty Word began a dynamic dialogue with humanity from its very beginning. Oftentimes, dialogue was often dramatic, but eventually it prevailed. In the history of God’s Chosen People, Israel, the supreme Revelation took place in Jesus Christ, his Eternal Word-Made-Flesh (cf. *Jn* 1:14). St. Ephrem states: “I considered the *Creator-Word*, and likened it to the Rock that accompanied the people in the wilderness. It was not from any reservoir of water within the Rock that it poured forth glorious streams for them: there was no water in the Rock, yet oceans sprang forth from it. In like manner, the Word created things out of nothing. Blessed is that person accounted worthy to inherit your Paradise! In his book, Moses described the creation of the natural world, so that both Nature and Scripture might bear witness to the Creator: Nature, through man’s use of it, Scripture, through his reading of it. These are the witnesses which abound everywhere; they are to be found at all times, present at every hour, confuting the unbeliever, who is ungrateful towards the Creator.”¹⁸

The *pastoral implication* of this idea of the Word of God is striking. Its history is intimately intertwined with the history of humankind. In fact, it is the very basis of the history of humanity. For this reason, human history is not composed simply of human thoughts, words and initiatives. Vibrant traces of the Word of God can be seen in nature and culture. Not only does the Word give human knowledge its true value, but the human sciences themselves help reveal the Word’s identity. The Word, in taking on a human nature, reveals the humanism intended from the very beginning. In a special way, the Word itself chose a people to share the path of freedom and salvation and to show the steadfastness and patience of God and his being an “*Emmanuel*” (*Is* 7:14) “God-with-us” (*Is* 8:10; cf. *Rm* 8:31; *Rev* 21:3). This explains how the Word of God, through biblical testimony, was reflected in the thoughts and expressions of individuals through the ages. At times, this took place in a contorted and beleaguered manner like a cry for help in the dark events of history, yet it had extraordinary effects in history as seen in an appealing manner in the lives of the saints. Living their special charisms as gifts of the Holy Spirit, they showed the inherent, fundamental potentiality of the Word of God, when taken to heart.

Today, people need help to understand the correct relationship between public Revelation, which constitutes the Christian Creed, and private revelations, not to mention the importance of both for a faith which is indeed genuine.

Jesus Christ is the Word of God Made Man, the Fullness of Revelation

8. “In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son” (*Heb* 1:1ff). Generally speaking, Christians are aware of the centrality of the Person of Jesus Christ in the Revelation of God. However, they do not always know the important underlying reasons, nor do they understand in what sense Jesus is at the heart of the Word of God. Consequently, when they read the Bible, they are at a loss in making it a truly Christian reading.

For this reason, *Dei Verbum* recalls that God willed a totally unexpected event to take place: “For he sent his Son, the Eternal Word, who enlightens all men, so that he might dwell among men and tell them of the innermost being of God (cf. *Jn* 1:1-18). Jesus Christ, therefore, the Word-Made-Flesh, was sent as ‘a man to men.’ He ‘speaks the words of God’ (*Jn* 3:34), and completes the work of salvation which his Father gave him to do (cf. *Jn* 5:36; 17:4).”¹⁹ Therefore, in his earthly life and hour of glory, Jesus took upon himself and fulfilled the entire purpose, meaning, history and plan of the Word of God. Thus, St. Irenaeus maintains: “Christ brought us all that could possibly be new, by bringing himself.”²⁰

Pastorally speaking, this truth requires an understanding on how to gather, in an analogous way, the various meanings of the Word of God in the faith of the Church, as seen in the Bible. In the Scriptures, Jesus Christ is shown to be the Eternal Word of God, which shines forth in creation, is given a historical character in the message of the prophets, is fully manifested in the Person of Jesus, is echoed in the voice of the apostles and is proclaimed in the Church today. In a general sense, the Word of God is Christ-the-Word, who, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is the key to all interpretation. “The Word of God, who was

in the beginning with God, is not, in his fullness, much talk or a multiplicity of words; but a single Word, which embraces a great number of ideas (*theoremata*), each of which is a part of the Word in its entirety... and if Christ refers us to the Scriptures in testifying to himself, it is not to one book that he sends us to the exclusion of another, but to all, because all speak of him.”²¹ Thus, continuity can be seen in diversity.

The essence of the Church’s proclamation is this richness of the Word. If the Church knows how to understand herself in Jesus Christ, she will feel herself generated and renewed by the Word of God. However, it is also true that the Word of God (which is Jesus) has also to be understood, as he himself said, “according to the Scriptures” (*Lk* 24:44-49). Christ-the-Word is in the history of the People of God in the Old Testament, which bears witness to him as Messiah; he is present at this historical moment in the Church, who proclaims Christ-the-Word through preaching, meditates on him through the Bible and experiences him through divine friendship. Christ-the Word guides the Church’s life. St. Bernard observes: “In the plan of the Incarnation of the Word, Christ is the centre of all Scripture. The Word of God, already capable of being heard in the Old Testament, became visible in Christ.”²²

The Word of God as a Symphony

9. The points treated in the preceding section now permit a listing of the senses which the Church gives to the Word of God in the process of Revelation. It can be compared to a symphony played with many instruments, since God communicates his Word in many and various ways (cf. *Heb* 1:1). The history of Revelation is long and has a diversity of heralds, yet it is always characterised by a hierarchy in meaning and function. Consequently, it is right to speak of an analogous sense of the Word.
 - a - In Revelation, the Word of God is the **Eternal Word of God**, the Second Person of the Most Blessed Trinity, the Son of the Father, the basis for intra and extra communication of the Trinity: “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made*” (*Jn* 1:1-3; cf. *Col* 1:16).
 - b - Therefore, the **created world** “*tells of the glory of God*” (*Ps* 19:1); everything is his voice (cf. *Sir* 46:17; *Ps* 68:34). In the beginning, God created the cosmos by his Word and sealed creation with his wisdom. The work of interpreting the created order was given to humankind, created to the image and likeness of God (cf. *Gn* 1:267-27; *Rm* 1:19-20). Indeed, humanity receives through the Word the invitation to enter into dialogue with God and creation. God thus made all creation and humanity *in primis* to render “perennial witness to him.”²³
 - c - “*The Word became flesh*” (*Jn* 1:14): The Word of God par excellence, the ultimate and definitive Word, is **Jesus Christ**. His Person, mission and life on earth are intimately united, according to the Father’s plan which culminates at Easter. But that plan will not reach its fulfilment until Jesus consigns the Kingdom to the Father (cf. *1 Cor* 15:24). He is the Gospel of God to humankind.
 - d - In view of the Word who is the Son-Incarnate, the Father spoke in ancient times to the fathers through the prophets (cf. *Heb* 1:1). Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the apostles continue to proclaim Jesus and his Gospel. Thus, in service to the one Word of God, the words of man are taken as the words of God, resounding in the **proclamation of the prophets and the apostles**.
 - e - Sacred Scripture, under divine inspiration, unites Jesus-the-Word to the words of the prophets and apostles. The Bible itself attests to the authenticity of this fact. In containing the Word of God written under divine inspiration, the Bible can truly be said to be the Word of God.²⁴ Every page looks to the Word, Jesus, because he said, “*It is precisely the Scriptures that bear witness to me*” (*Jn* 5:39). Through the charism of divine inspiration, **the Books of Sacred Scripture** have a direct, concrete power of appeal not possessed by other texts or holy writings.
 - f - But the Word of God is not locked away in writing. Even though Revelation ended with the death of the last apostle,²⁵ the Word-Revealed continues to be proclaimed and heard throughout Church history. The Church has the responsibility to proclaim the Word in the world as a response to its aspirations. In this way, the Word continues to move ahead through **spirited preaching** and many other forms in service to the Gospel. Preaching is the Word of God communicated by a living God to living persons in Jesus Christ by means of the Church. From this vantage point, it can be understood that

when God's Revelation is preached, something which can truly be called the "Word of God" finds fulfilment in the Church.

The Word of God displays all the qualities of true communication between persons. For example, it is informative, because God communicates his truth; expressive, because God makes plain his manner of thinking, loving and acting; and finally, it is an appeal addressed by God to a person to be heard and given a response in faith.

The task of ordained ministers is to instruct the faithful in a proper conception of the Word of God by avoiding erroneous or over-simplistic approaches and any ambiguity. Emphasis needs to be placed on the Word of God's intrinsic connection to the mystery of the Trinitarian God and his Revelation; its manifestation in the world of creation; its germinal presence in the life and history of humanity; its supreme expression in Jesus Christ; its infallible confirmation in Sacred Scripture and its transmission in the living Tradition of the Church. Since the employment of human language is part of the mystery of the Word of God, research in the sciences of language and communication will necessarily be involved.

Personal Faith Responds to the Word of God, a Faith Manifested in Listening

10. "The obedience of faith is owed to the God who reveals."²⁶ A person is to listen to the One who gives through speaking, "freely surrendering his entire self."²⁷ This leads to a person's totally accepting the invitation of full communion with God and doing his will for the sake of the community and every believer.²⁸ This idea of faith and communion will be seen in each encounter with the Word in preaching and Bible reading. For this reason, *Dei Verbum* recommends in approaching the Scriptures what is universally confirmed about the Word of God: "God...speaks to men and women as to a friend...so that he might invite and take them into fellowship with himself."²⁹ "In the Sacred Books, the Father who is in heaven meets his children in great love and speaks to them..."³⁰ Revelation is a communion of love, oftentimes expressed in Sacred Scripture in terms of "covenant" (*Jn* 9:9; 15:18; *Ex* 24:1-18; *Mk* 14:24).

An aspect of noteworthy *pastoral significance* is touched upon here, namely, faith concerns the Word of God in all its signs and languages. Through the dynamic power of the Holy Spirit, the Word communicates truth to faith by means of a teaching or doctrinal formula. It recognizes that the Word is the basic force at work in conversion; a light in response to the many questions in the believer's life; a guide to a proper and wise discernment of reality; an invitation not simply to read or speak the Word but to "do it" (*Lk* 8:21); and finally, an everlasting source of consolation and hope. From this follows, as a certain logic of faith, the task of acknowledging and ensuring the primacy of the Word of God in the life of believers by receiving it as the Church proclaims it, understands it, explains it and lives it.

Mary, Every Believer's Model of How to Welcome the Word

11. In penetrating the mystery of the Word of God, Mary of Nazareth, from the moment of the Annunciation, remains the Teacher and Mother of the Church and the exemplar of every encounter with the Word by individuals or entire communities. She welcomes the Word in faith, mediates upon it, interiorises it and lives it (cf. *Lk* 1:38; 2:19,51; *Acts* 17:11). Indeed, Mary listened to and meditated upon the Scriptures; she associated them with Jesus' words and the events which she discovered were related to his life. Isaac Stella says: "In the inspired Scriptures, what is said in a universal sense of the virgin mother, the Church, is understood in an individual sense of the Virgin Mary... The Lord's inheritance is, in a general sense, the Church; in a special sense, Mary; and in an individual sense, the Christian. Christ dwelt for nine months in the tabernacle of Mary's womb, he dwells until the end of the ages in the tabernacle of the Church's faith. He will dwell for ever in the knowledge and love of each faithful soul."³¹

The Virgin Mary knows how to take into account what is happening around her and live the necessities of daily life, fully aware that what she receives as a gift from her Son is a gift for everyone. She teaches us not to stand by as idle spectators before the Word of Life, but to become participants, allowing ourselves to be led by the Holy Spirit, who abides in believers. She "magnifies" the Lord, discovering in her life the mercy of God, who makes her "blessed," because "she believed that there would be a fulfilment of what had been spoken to her from the Lord" (*Lk* 1:45). She invites every believer to put Jesus' words into practise: "Blessed are those who have not seen yet believe" (*Jn* 20:29). Mary is the paradigm of the person who truly prays the Word and knows how to keep the lamp of faith burning in daily life. St. Ambrose observes that every Christian

believer conceives and begets the Word of God. According to the flesh, Christ has only one mother; but, according to the faith, everyone gives him birth.³²

The Word of God, Entrusted to the Church, is Transmitted to Every Generation

12. “In His gracious goodness, God has seen to it that what he had revealed for the salvation of all nations would abide perpetually in its full integrity and be handed on to all generations.”³³ As Friend and Father of humankind, God continues to speak. Even though Revelation has ended, it continues, in a certain way, in a communication where the Word of God becomes actually present to us. Indeed, Revelation is still able to provide enlightenment and increase our understanding. This is because the Father, in giving the Spirit of Jesus to the Church, entrusts the treasure of Revelation to her³⁴ and makes her the primary recipient and privileged witness of the loving and salvific Word of God.

For this reason, the Word is not an inert deposit in the Church, but “the supreme rule of her faith” and life-giving power, “advancing through the power of the Holy Spirit” and “growing” with the “reflection and study of believers,” the personal experiences of the spiritual life and the preaching of Bishops.³⁵ Men of God, who have “abided in” the Word, bear particular witness to it.³⁶ Surely, the clear and primary mission of the Church is to transmit, in keeping with Jesus’ mandate (cf. *Mt* 28:18–20), the Divine Word to all humankind in every time and place. History confirms how this took place and how it continues, after so many centuries, even in our day with great vitality and fruitfulness, despite the various obstacles it encounters.

Divine Tradition and Sacred Scripture in the Church: A Single Sacred Deposit of the Word of God

13. In treating this subject, we need to recall that the Word of God became the Gospel or *lieta notizia* (“Good News”) in Jesus Christ. As such, the Word of God becomes part of apostolic preaching and continues through the ages in two ways which are visibly and inextricably interconnected. One is the dynamic flow of a living Tradition, manifested by “all that she herself [the Church] is and all that she herself believes,”³⁷ that is, through worship, doctrine and the Church’s life. The other is Sacred Scripture, which, by virtue of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, preserves in written form the unchanging character of the original and constitutive elements of this living Tradition. “This Sacred Tradition, therefore, and Sacred Scripture of both the Old and New Testaments are like a mirror in which the pilgrim Church on earth looks at God, from whom she has received everything, until she is brought finally to see him as he is, face to face (cf. *1 Jn* 3:2).”³⁸ The Church’s Magisterium, which is not above the Word of God, must “authentically interpret the Word of God, whether written or handed on.”³⁹

The Second Vatican Council insists on the fundamental unity and close connection between Scripture and Tradition, stating that the Church treats both “with the same sense of loyalty and reverence.”⁴⁰ The Magisterium renders irreplaceable service in guaranteeing an authentic interpretation of the Word of God by “listening [to it] devoutly, guarding [it] scrupulously and explaining [it] faithfully.”⁴¹

Pastorally speaking, through following the Church’s teaching, the relation between Scripture and Tradition is clearly seen and is translated into real-life experiences. For example, in the early Church, Tradition preceded Scripture and was always a kind of fertile “*humus*” which “makes the Sacred Letters more profoundly understood and continuously active in her.”⁴² On the other hand, “‘the Word of God is living and active’ (*Heb* 4:12) and ‘it has power to build you up and give you your heritage among all those who are sanctified’ (*Acts* 20:32; cf. *1 Thess* 2:13).”⁴³ Both are channels of communication of the Word of God. Therefore, the Word of God finds its completeness of meaning and grace in experiencing both, “one inside the other.” In this way, both can be called, and indeed are, the “Word of God.”

This teaching has many important implications in pastoral practice. For example, the idea of “*sola Scriptura*” cannot exist in and of itself, because the Scriptures are related to the Church, namely, to the one who receives and understands both Tradition and Scripture. The Scripture has the essential role of providing access to and being the authentic source of the Word, thus becoming the reference point in the proper understanding of Tradition.

Practical implications also arise from the distinctions concerning apostolic tradition, later tradition which interprets it and applies it to the present, and other ecclesiastical traditions. Also to be considered is the Church’s decisive action in determining the canon of the Scriptural Books which thus guaranteed their authenticity (73 books: 46 of the Old Testament and 27 of the New Testament).⁴⁴

Finally, what always needs to be borne in mind is the necessary and active interaction and dialogue of Sacred Scripture and Tradition with the signs of the Word of God in the world of creation, especially in the human race and its history.⁴⁵

Thought also needs to be given to the Church's living Tradition and the genuine service to the Word of God in *the form of catechisms*, from the first Symbol of the Faith, the core of every catechism, to the various versions through the ages, the most recent in the universal Church being the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the catechisms of the local Churches respectively.

Sacred Scripture, the Inspired Word of God

14. “For Sacred Scripture is the Word of God inasmuch as it is consigned to writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.”⁴⁶ The Word of God set in writing is commonly referred to as Scripture (Sacred) and the Bible, two particularly meaningful names in themselves, much like Holy Writ and the Good Book, terms known even outside the confines of Church.

Principally speaking, the following points come to mind in reading the Bible: the theological framework previously mentioned; Scripture and Tradition communicate the Word of God without change and echo the “*voice of the Holy Spirit*,”⁴⁷ the meaning of the charism of inspiration with which the Holy Spirit constitutes the biblical books as the Word of God and entrusts them to the Church for acceptance through faithful obedience; the unity of the Canon as the criterion of interpretation of Sacred Scripture; biblical truth understood, above all, as “*that truth which God wanted put into sacred writings*,”⁴⁸ and the sense and content of the Bible as the Word of God written in human language, in which the interpretation of the Bible, under the guidance of faith, is united to philosophical and theological criteria, bearing in mind the document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*.⁴⁹

Today, the People of God are increasingly showing a hunger and thirst for the Word of God (cf. *Am* 8:11, 12). This vital fact should not be overlooked, because the Lord himself is prompting it. At the same time, sad to say, this need is not universally felt, because of little contact with the Word of God and a lack of adequate access to the Holy Book. To help the faithful understand what the Bible is, why it is there, how beneficial it is to the faith and how to use it, the Church has always responded, and needs to even more today, to the important demands contained in four chapters of *Dei Verbum*.⁵⁰ Our Church communities are faced with the task to adequately know them, in conjunction with other magisterial teaching and competent research.

A Necessary, Demanding Task: Interpreting the Word of God in the Church

15. The fact that many of the Church's members, individually and in groups, are intensely studying the Word of God in the Bible affords a rare opportunity to instruct the faithful in understanding it properly and apply it to everyday life. In a certain way, this is especially true today, because Scripture reading can provide a fresh encounter between the Word of God and the human sciences, particularly in philosophical, scientific and historical research. This contact between the Word and culture can help people come to a knowledge of the truth and values concerning God, man and things. It also allows a continuous opportunity to treat new problems. In the process, reason seeks faith, which results in people working together for truth and life in accordance with God's Revelation and the aspirations of humankind.⁵¹

At the same time, this phenomenon can also pose a *danger* that the Scriptures will be interpreted arbitrarily or literally, as in fundamentalism. On the one hand, this approach shows a desire to remain faithful to the text, but on the other, displays a lack of knowledge of the texts themselves. In this way, it falls into serious errors and also creates useless controversy.⁵² Another danger in Bible reading can come from viewing the Scriptures in a certain “ideological” fashion or simply as human words apart from faith (cf. *2 Pt* 1:19-20; 3:16), resulting in contrary opinions or different versions of the Bible. The Bible dynamically proclaims the Word and is the source of life for the believer. Improperly reading the Bible can also obscure the role of the Magisterium in service to the Word of God, both in the Bible and Tradition. Generally speaking, there is a scarce, imprecise knowledge of the rules of hermeneutics concerning the Word, which should draw on criteria coming from human and revealed sources in conjunction with Church Tradition and an attentive listening to the Magisterium.

Today, other aspects of the teachings of the Second Vatican Council and subsequent documents of the Magisterium⁵³ require detailed examination so that the Word can be properly communicated in the

Church's pastoral activity. The Bible, the Book of God and man, has to be read with a correct blending of its historical-literal sense and its theological-spiritual sense.⁵⁴ A proper exegesis of the text, therefore, must be based on the historical-critical method enriched by other approaches.⁵⁵ This is the basis for interpreting Scripture. However, to arrive at its complete and total sense, the theological criteria, set forth in *Dei Verbum*, should be taken into consideration: "the content and unity of all of Sacred Scripture...the living Tradition of the whole Church...[and] the analogy of faith."⁵⁶ Today, thorough theological and pastoral reflection is necessary in forming Church communities in a proper and fruitful knowledge of Sacred Scripture as the Word of God, contained in the mystery of the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, living in his Church.

The Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, stated: "I would very much like to see theologians learn to interpret and love Scripture as the Council desired, in accordance with *Dei Verbum*: may they experience the inner unity of Scripture—something that today is helped by 'canonical exegesis' (still to be found, of course, in its timid first stages)—and then make a spiritual interpretation of it that is not externally edifying but rather an inner immersion into the presence of the Word. It seems to me a very important task to do something in this regard, to contribute to providing an introduction to living Scripture as an up-to-date Word of God, beside, with and in historical-critical exegesis."⁵⁷

In this context, careful attention should be given to what might be gleaned from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the various voices and traditions which the Bible has generated in the life of the People of God and research in the theological and human sciences.

In this regard, consideration must be given to the interpretation of the Word of God done each time the Church comes together to celebrate the Sacred Mysteries. The *Introduction to the Lectionary*, proclaimed during the Eucharist, has the following to say on the subject: "Since, by the will of Christ himself, the new People of God is unique in the wonderful variety of its members and also in the diversity of tasks and offices which each has in relation to the Word of God: the faithful have the responsibility to listen to and meditate on it; but to explain it is the responsibility only of those who by right of sacred ordination have the task of teaching or those who have been entrusted with the exercise of this ministry. Thus, in her teaching, life and worship, the Church carries on and transmits to all generations all that she herself is and all that she believes. In this way, she constantly ensures that the Word of God, in the fullness of divine truth, is realized in her throughout the ages."⁵⁸

Old and New Testaments: A Single Economy of Salvation

16. For various reasons, many people's knowledge of the Scriptures and their recourse to the Bible in the Church is not totally satisfactory. At times, there is a reluctance to take up passages from the Old Testament which appear difficult. These *run the risk* of being set aside, considered arbitrarily or never read at all. The faith of the Church considers the Old Testament a part of the one Christian Bible and acknowledges its permanent value and the bond between the two testaments.⁵⁹ This situation urgently requires a formation centred on a *Christian reading of the Old Testament*. This task can be assisted by liturgical practise which always makes the reading of the Old Testament essential for a full understanding of the New Testament. Jesus himself confirmed this in the Emmaus account where the Master, "beginning with Moses and all the prophets, interpreted for them the things concerning himself in all the Scriptures" (Lk 24:27). The liturgical readings of the Old Testament can serve as an invaluable tool in providing for a specific, working encounter with the Sacred Text, which consists in using both the responsorial psalm as an invitation to pray and meditate on what is proclaimed, and the thematic link between the first reading and the Gospel in light of the general plan of the mystery of Christ. In this regard, it can truly be said, "The New is in the Old concealed, and the Old is in the New revealed:" *Novum in Vetere latet et in Novo Vetus patet*.⁶⁰

St. Gregory the Great maintains: "What the Old Testament promised is brought to light in the New Testament; what was proclaimed in a hidden manner in the past, is proclaimed openly as present. Thus, the Old Testament announces the New Testament; and the New Testament is the best commentary on the Old Testament."⁶¹

Today, the New Testament enjoys a certain familiarity in biblical practise. The rich variety of texts in lectionaries and the praying of the Liturgy of the Hours gives central value to the Gospels, which are

proclaimed in their entirety in a three-year cycle of liturgical feasts and each year on the weekdays. These lectionaries also give prominence to the great teachings of St. Paul and the other Apostles.⁶²

Questions

Chapter I

1. *Knowledge of the Word of God in the History of Salvation*

What is the prevalent idea among the faithful (parishes, religious communities, movements) on Revelation, the Word of God, the Bible, Divine Tradition and the Magisterium? Do the faithful understand the various levels of meaning of the Word of God? Is Jesus Christ understood to be central to the Word of God? What is the relation between the Word of God and the Bible? What aspects are less understood? What are the reasons?

2. *The Word of God and the Church*

To what extent does approaching the Word of God develop a dynamic knowledge of belonging to the Church, the Body of Christ, and prompt a genuine participation in the Church's mission? What is the faithful's understanding of the relation between the Word of God and the Church? Does a proper relation between the Bible and Divine Tradition exist in exegetical and theological studies, and in the faithful's encounter with the Holy Book? Is catechesis based on the Word of God? Are the Sacred Scriptures well-valued? What is the perception of the Magisterium's importance and responsibility in the proclamation of the Word of God? Is there a genuine listening to the Word of God in faith? What aspects need to be clarified and reinforced?

3. *Signs of the Church's Faith in the Word of God*

How has *Dei Verbum* been received? The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*? What is the specific magisterial role of Bishops in the apostolate of the Word of God? What is the task of ordained ministers, priests and deacons in proclaiming the Word (cf. *Lumen Gentium* 25, 28)? What is the faithful's understanding of the relation between the Word of God and the consecrated life? How can the Word of God be employed in the formation of future priests? What formation in the Word of God is needed in the People of God—priests, deacons, consecrated persons and the laity?

4. *The Bible as the Word of God*

Why are Christians eagerly seeking the Bible today? What effect does the Bible have on the life of faith? How is the Bible received in the non-Christian world? And among people of culture? Does a proper approach to the Scriptures always exist? What are some of the more common failings? Describe the faithful's understanding of the charism of inspiration and truth of the Scriptures. Do the faithful realize that the spiritual sense of Scripture is the final sense willed by God? How is the Old Testament received? If the Gospels are read more often, is the knowledge and reading of them satisfactory? What are overwhelmingly considered the "difficult pages" of the Bible today, and what approach should be taken in their regard?

5. *Faith in the Word of God*

How do believers look at the Word of God? Do the faithful listen to the Word of God with a deep faith and do they aim at re-generating their faith by it? Why do the faithful read the Bible? What criteria for discernment are used by believers in reading the Bible?

6. *Mary and the Word of God*

Why is Mary the Model and Mother of listening to the Word of God? Is the Word of God received and lived as she did? How can Mary become the Model for every believer of listening, meditating upon and living the Word of God?

CHAPTER II

The Word of God in the Life of the Church

“So shall my Word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not remain to me empty, but shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it” (Is 55:11).

The Church is Born and Lives by the Word of God

17. The Church professes to be constantly called and renewed by the Word of God. To proclaim this in a loving and forceful way, she first assumes a continual stance of “reverently listening” to the Word of God. In the process, she is intimately struck with wonder and accepts the Word with a humble and trustful faith,⁶³ after the example of Mary, who listened to the Word and put it into practise (cf. *Lk* 1:38). For this reason, the Lord made her a model of the Church.

The Christian community approaches Sacred Scripture in the same manner. “For in the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven meets his children with great love and speaks with them.”⁶⁴ The Scriptures are then in the heart and hands of the Church as the “Letter sent by God to humankind,”⁶⁵ the Book of Life, and the object of a profound reverence analogous to that afforded the Body of Christ.⁶⁶ In the Scriptures, the Church community discovers God’s plan for herself, humankind and all created things. Therefore, “she considers them, together with Sacred Tradition, as the supreme rule of faith,” proclaims them forcefully and approaches them as “food for the soul and the source of the spiritual life.”⁶⁷

Christians receive the Bible from the Church; they read it with the Church and share its spirit and purpose. In this manner, their aim is the ultimate purpose of every encounter with the Word, taught by Christ, namely, to follow the Master in doing God’s will in the life of faith, hope and charity (cf. *Lk* 8:19-21).

The Word of God Sustains the Church Throughout Her History

18. Drawing on the power of the Word is a constant element in the life of the People of God. This can be seen from the time when the prophets spoke to God’s people, Jesus spoke to the crowds, and the disciples and apostles spoke to the first community, down to the present. For this reason, the presence of the Word, primarily in the Bible, is afforded attentive study as demonstrated throughout the ages in biblical studies and Church history.

In the times of the Church Fathers, the Scriptures were the centre and source of theology, spirituality and the pastoral life. The Fathers are the masters, without equal, of what is called the “spiritual” reading of the Scriptures, which, when done faithfully, does not destroy the “letter,” that is, the concrete, historical sense, but allows a reading of the “letter” in the Spirit. In the Middle Ages, Sacred Scripture was also the basis of theological reflection. The approach at the time distinguished four senses of reading Scripture (literal, allegorical, moral and anagogical).⁶⁸ The age-old tradition of *lectio divina* is a monastic form of prayer. It serves as a source of artistic inspiration and is transmitted to the faithful through various forms of preaching and popular piety.⁶⁹ Today, a rise in a spirit of analysis, scientific progress and the division among Christians and its consequent duty of ecumenism, are leading, not without difficulty and debate, to a more proper methodological approach and a better understanding of the mystery of Scripture in the heart of Tradition. At present, the Church is experiencing a renewal based on the centrality of the Word of God, the great plan of the Second Vatican Council.

Besides a historical plurality of forms, a *geographical plurality* of forms can also be said to exist. Because of its ongoing presence in the Bible, the Word of God is spread in the work of evangelization to the particular Churches of the five continents. The Word is progressively being inculturated in them, thereby becoming a source of animation of the faith of many people, the basis of the Church’s communion, a testimony to the inexhaustible richness of the mystery of the Word and the lasting font of inspiration and transformation of culture and society.

Through the Power of the Holy Spirit, the Word of God Permeates and Animates Every Aspect of the Church’s Life

19. The Holy Spirit guides the Church to all truth (cf. *Jn* 16:13), allowing her to understand the true sense of the Word of God and ultimately leading her to the great moment of Revelation of the Word itself, the Son of God, Jesus of Nazareth, the Revelation of the Father. The Spirit is the soul and interpreter of Sacred

Scripture, which is the Word of God written under his inspiration. Sacred Scripture then “must be read and interpreted in the sacred Spirit in which it was written.”⁷⁰ Guided by the Spirit, the Church seeks to “move ahead towards a deeper understanding of the Sacred Scriptures” so as to feed her children. In doing so, she also draws in a special way from the study of the Fathers of the Eastern and Western Churches,⁷¹ from exegetical and theological research and from the lives of the saints and witnesses to the faith.

In this regard, a passage from the *Introduction of the Lectionary* on the subject is worth quoting: “The working of the Holy Spirit is needed if the Word of God is to make what we hear outwardly have its effect inwardly. Because of the Holy Spirit’s inspiration and support, the Word of God becomes the foundation of the liturgical celebration and the rule and support of all our life. The working of the Holy Spirit precedes, accompanies and brings to completion the whole celebration of the Liturgy. But the Spirit also brings home (cf. *Jn* 14:15-17, 25, 26; 15:26-16:15) to each person individually everything that is spoken in the proclamation of the Word of God for the good of the whole gathering of the faithful. In strengthening the unity of all, the Holy Spirit also fosters a diversity of gifts and furthers their multiform operation.”⁷²

Therefore, through the working of the Holy Spirit, the Christian community is being built up daily by allowing itself to be guided by the Word of God and by accepting the gift of enlightenment, conversion and consolation which the Spirit communicates through the Word. “*For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope*” (*Rm* 15:4).

The Church’s primary task is to assist the faithful in understanding how to encounter the Word of God under the guidance of the Spirit. *In a particular way*, she is to teach how this process takes place in the spiritual reading of the Bible; how the Bible, Tradition and the Magisterium are intrinsically joined by the Spirit, and what is required of the believer to be guided by the Holy Spirit received in Baptism and the other sacraments. St. Peter Damascene states: “Whoever has experienced the spiritual sense of the Scriptures knows that the simplest word of Scripture and the most profound are uniquely one, both having the salvation of humankind as their purpose.”⁷³

The Church is Nourished on the Word in Various Ways

20. “All preaching in the Church must be nourished and regulated by Sacred Scripture.”⁷⁴ St. Paul’s prayerful desire, “*that the Word of God might spread and triumph*” (2 Thess 3:1), is being fulfilled and expressed in many ways, in a variety of places in the life of the Church. This process calls for an attentive faith, apostolic dedication and a sound pastoral care which is ongoing, creative and capable of enrichment from shared experiences. A present-day necessity, recommended to every community in the Church, is a pastoral life based on the Bible, or better, one with the Bible as its ongoing inspiration.

From the vantage point of unity and interaction, the Church knows and fully upholds the dynamic nature involved in encountering the Word of God as the source of all the Church’s pastoral activity. The Word which is proclaimed and listened to, seeks to become the Word celebrated in the Liturgy and the Church’s sacramental life. In this way, the Word of God becomes the basis of the Church’s life through her experience of communion, charity and mission.⁷⁵

a - In the Liturgy and Prayer

21. “Let the intimate connection between words and rites be apparent in the liturgy.”⁷⁶ The Church has learned to discover and welcome God who speaks through liturgical prayer—as compared to personal and communal prayer—in a unique manner. Indeed, Sacred Scripture is a liturgical and prophetic reality in which the Holy Spirit proclaims and bears witness, beyond what is attested in written form, to the actual event of Christ’s life in this world. Acknowledging that liturgical celebrations spread a knowledge and love of Sacred Scripture, the Church’s ongoing task is to put into practise the letter and spirit of the Second Vatican Council on the use of the Word in the Liturgy. This requires a vibrant process of renewal, both qualitative and quantitative, which is a call to the faithful to reflect in common on the Council’s various directives.

In this regard, it is essential to keep in mind that “Christ is present in his Word, since it is he himself who speaks when the Holy Scriptures are read in the Church.”⁷⁷ Therefore, “Sacred Scripture is of the greatest importance in the celebration of the Liturgy.”⁷⁸ It follows, then, that special attention needs to be given to

every moment of encounter with the Word during liturgical actions, namely, the Eucharist (Sunday), the sacraments, the preaching of homilies, the seasons of the liturgical year, the Liturgy of the Hours, sacramentals, various forms of popular piety and mystical catechesis.

The primary position is reserved for the Eucharist, as the intrinsically one “table of both God’s Word and Christ’s Body,”⁷⁹ particularly that celebrated on the Lord’s Day: “It [the Mass] is the privileged place where communion is ceaselessly proclaimed and nurtured.”⁸⁰ For many Christians, Sunday Mass, one of the principal moments for encountering the Word of God, remains today the only point of contact with the Word. Consequently, this should give rise to a true pastoral zeal to celebrate and to authentically and joyously live the encounter with the Word during the Sunday Eucharist.

Concretely speaking, maximum care should be given to the Liturgy of the Word celebrated during not only the Eucharist but also the other sacraments. This will be seen in proclaiming the texts in a clear, audible manner. It is also reflected in homilies, where the Word resounds in a clear and encouraging manner and the events of life and history can be interpreted in the light of faith. All this is done with the support of the prayers of the faithful, which themselves can be their response of praise, thanks and petition to God who speaks there. In this regard, the *Ordo Lectionum Missae*⁸¹ deserves special attention, as too, the praying of the Divine Office.

Undeniably, the Church today needs to consider how her pastoral activity can make these most important moments of encountering the Word of God more accessible to the faithful.

b - in evangelization and catechesis

22. “By the same Word of Scripture, the ministry of the Word, that is, pastoral preaching, catechetics and all Christian instruction, in which the liturgical homily must hold the foremost place, is nourished in a healthy manner and flourishes in a holy way.”⁸² Pope John Paul II stated that “all the work of evangelization and catechesis is drawing new life from attentiveness to the Word of God.”⁸³ This is one of the most obvious fruits of the Second Vatican Council. The process continues to advance and become more encompassing and well-defined, strengthening convictions and providing assistance in many ways. The Church knows that in receiving the gift of the Word of God as her greatest treasure, she is taking the Word as her greatest task, namely, giving the Word to others.⁸⁴ By way of example, it is worthwhile to mention here some occasions to minister to the Word provided in the initial proclamation and catechesis in the course of the liturgical year, in preparation for Christian initiation and also in ongoing formation.⁸⁵

For this purpose, in accord with the contents of the *General Directory for Catechesis* and the *Catechetical Directories* of the different local Churches, consideration should be given to the forms of communicating the Word, together with the ever-changing needs of the faithful in different times and spiritual, cultural and social circumstances.⁸⁶ This process requires due attention to a proper evaluation, purification and appreciation of popular piety in light of the Word of God, from which these practises often flow. In this regard, the means of communicating the Word, already existent in the Church and mentioned in part thus far, merit further attention: lectionaries, the Liturgy of the Hours, catechisms, celebrations of the Word, etc.-

Direct contact with Sacred Scripture plays an important role in the work of evangelization. Indeed, the primary aim of evangelization is Sacred Scripture: “In concrete terms, catechesis should be ‘an authentic introduction to *lectio divina*, that is, to a reading of the Sacred Scriptures, done according to the Spirit who dwells in the Church.’”⁸⁷ At the same time, evangelization has the Scriptures as its essential content: catechesis “must imbibe and permeate itself with biblical and evangelical thought, spirit and attitudes by constant contact with them.”⁸⁸

Teaching the Bible in school, particularly in the study of religion, has particular value in culture.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* has a specific role as a valid and legitimate instrument for ecclesial communion and a sure norm for teaching the faith.⁸⁹ It is not intended to be a substitute for biblical catechesis, but to be integrated in a more complete vision of the Church.

The Word of God is communicated to everyone, even those who do not know how to read. Consequently, the many resources of social communication today are a particular advantage. A fruitful ministry of the Word of God requires a skilled, up-to-date and creative employment of the diverse means of *social communications*.

Significant cultural and social changes require a catechesis which helps explain the “difficult pages” of the Bible on subjects such as history, science and moral problems and provides a better understanding of questions concerning Old Testament ideas on God, man and woman and moral conduct.

c - In exegesis and theology

23. “The study of the Sacred Writings is, as it were, the soul of Sacred Theology.”⁹⁰ Undoubtedly, what has been achieved in this field after the Second Vatican Council is cause to praise the Lord for the grace of his Spirit of Truth. Furthermore, because of the Word of God that dwells in our midst (cf. *Jn* 1:14), the same Spirit stirs us to seek to discern the new ways in which the Word is at work among the people of our time and to gather the aspirations and challenges of humanity concerning the Word.

Today, important ideas are emerging in a manner seldom before expressed: the duty of exegetes and theologians to study and explain the Scriptures *according to the mind of the Church*; interpreting and teaching the Word of the Bible in conjunction with the Church’s living Tradition and *visa versa*; keeping uppermost in mind the heritage of Church Fathers on the subject; relying on the guidance of the Church’s magisterial teachings; and accompanying the work with intelligence and a spirit of loyalty.⁹¹

While on the subject, it might be beneficial to recall what *Optatam Totius* proposed in its time on the teaching of theology and its methodology in priestly formation, a great part of which is still awaiting implementation. The approach offered in the document also needs to be enacted, namely, starting from biblical themes as reference-points in a curriculum, which in being researched and taught can guarantee an appropriate summary of doctrine for priests and serve as a source of reflection for the People of God. Returning to the conciliar directives would enrich the Word of God itself as it finds fulfilment in the teaching of the various theological disciplines and in the ongoing dialectical process associated with the *auditus culturæ*.⁹²

The relationship between God’s Revelation and the life and mentality of people today also deserves attention. This involves: using the Word of God to reflect upon the present trends in anthropology; studying the relation of reason to faith “as the two wings which the human spirit employs to raise itself to contemplating the truth”⁹³ and the means of communicating the one truth which comes from God; and the dialogue with the great religions in the process of building a more just and peaceful world in God’s name.

The Christian community eagerly desires that biblical scholars, receiving “appropriate support,” will zealously help those in the ministry to the Divine Word to offer “the nourishment of the Scriptures to the People of God, to enlighten minds, strengthen wills, and set hearts on fire with the love of God.”⁹⁴

d - In the life of the believer

24. “Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ himself.”⁹⁵ “All...must hold fast to the Sacred Scriptures through diligent sacred reading and careful study.”⁹⁶

With advances in biblical catechesis, the spiritual sense of Scripture is one of the most appealing and promising aspects of the Word of God in the life of his People. The supreme vocation of the Christian is to encounter, pray and live the Word. Pope John Paul II observed: “Individuals and communities now make extensive use of the Bible.”⁹⁷ However, that number should increase and the quality of approaching the Word should reflect the the final end of the Word in service to the Church. A genuine spirituality of the Word demands “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 words.”⁹⁸ In the words of St. Augustine: “Your prayer is your word addressed to God. When you read the Bible, God speaks to you; when you pray you speak to God.”⁹⁹ This should lead to giving priority and preference to certain aspects.

In the first place, the Word of God is to be encountered in a spirit of both interior and exterior poverty, fully corresponding to the Word of God itself: “*For you know the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich*” (2 *Cor* 8:9). It is a way of being, then, based on how Jesus listened to the Word of the Father and proclaimed it to us, namely, with total detachment from things and a readiness to proclaim the Gospel to the poor (cf. *Lk* 4:18). “It is a joy to see the Bible taken up by people who are humble and poor, who thereby can provide a more penetrating light in its interpretation and fulfilment from a spiritual and existential vantage point, because it comes from a secure knowledge of oneself.”¹⁰⁰

Above all, the Church should encourage the biblical practise traditionally called *lectio divina* with its four stages (*lectio, meditatio, oratio* and *contemplatio*). This practise was characteristic of the early days of the Church and was present throughout her history.¹⁰¹ The tradition was originally reserved to monasteries, but today the Spirit, through the Church's Magisterium, is inspiring the practise among the clergy,¹⁰² parish communities, ecclesial movements, families and the young.¹⁰³ Pope John Paul II observed: "It is especially necessary that listening to the Word of God should become a life-giving encounter, in the ancient and ever valid tradition of *lectio divina*, which draws from the biblical text the living word which questions, directs and shapes our lives,"¹⁰⁴ "through the use even of new methods which have been well-thought-out over the years."¹⁰⁵ The Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, made a particular appeal to young people: "I urge you to become familiar with the Bible, and to have it at hand so that it can be your compass pointing out the road to follow."¹⁰⁶ He also observed for everyone's benefit: "The diligent reading of Sacred Scripture accompanied by prayer brings about that intimate dialogue in which the person reading hears God who is speaking, and in praying, responds to him with trusting openness of heart"¹⁰⁷

The relatively new practise of *lectio divina* in the People of God as a whole requires a proper, tireless and ongoing formation of priests, those in the consecrated life and the laity. It should reach the point of a shared experience of God resulting from the Word itself which is listened to (*collatio*)¹⁰⁸ The Word of God is to be the primary source of inspiration in the spiritual life of the Church communities in its many practises, such as spiritual exercises, retreats, devotions and acts of piety. In this matter, an important goal (and criterion of authenticity) of this practise is to make an individual grow in a personal application of his reading of the Word for its sage teaching, its ability to help the Christian discern the realities of life and the *reasons for hope* contained therein (cf. *1 Pt* 3:15), which are fundamental to Christian witness and the pursuit of holiness.

Sharing the thought of the Church Fathers, St. Cyprian makes the appeal: "Diligently practise prayer and *lectio divina*. When you pray, you speak with God; when you read, God speaks with you."¹⁰⁹

"Your word is a lamp for my step, a light on my path" (*Ps* 119:105). The Lord, the Lover of Life, desires that his Word enlighten, guide and bring comfort to every aspect of the believer's life, regardless of personal circumstances or situations. His Word is active in the workplace and leisure time, in moments of suffering, in the exercise of responsibilities in families and society and in every instance whether happy or sad. In this manner, everyone can discern in each situation how to hold to what is good (cf. *1 Thess* 5:21), and come to know God's will and put it into practise (cf. *Mt* 7:21).

Questions

Chapter II

1. *The Word of God in the Life of the Church*

What importance is shown to the Word of God in the life of your community and among the faithful-at-large? In what way is the Word of God a source of nourishment for Christians? Does the danger exist of reducing Christianity to a “religion of the book”? Describe how individuals show reverence and familiarity towards the Word of God in their personal life and in the life of the community on Sundays? Weekdays? In the special seasons of the liturgical year?

2. *The Word of God in the Formation of the People of God*

What is being done to transmit the entire and complete teaching of the Word of God to your community and to each member of the faithful? Are future priests, consecrated persons and those responsible for various services in the community (catechists, etc.) properly formed and periodically updated in the biblical aspects of their pastoral ministry? Are there ongoing programmes of formation for the laity?

3. *The Word of God, Liturgy and Prayer*

What is the faithful’s approach to Sacred Scripture in liturgical and personal prayer? What is their understanding of the relationship between the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist? Between the Word celebrated in the Eucharist and the everyday life of the Christian? Does the Word of God have a genuine resonance in homilies? What needs to be done? Is a listening to the Word of God incorporated in the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation? Does the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours include a listening to and dialogue with the Word of God? Does this practise extend to lay people? Do the People of God have sufficient access to the Bible?

4. *The Word of God, Evangelization and Catechesis*

Bearing in mind the teachings of the Second Vatican Council and those of the Church’s Magisterium, describe the positive and negative aspects of the Word of God and catechesis? How is the Word of God treated in the various forms of catechesis (Christian initiation and ongoing formation)? Does the community give sufficient attention and study to the written Word of God? If yes, please explain? How are various groups of people (children, adolescents, young people and adults) introduced to the Bible? What introductory courses on Sacred Scripture are offered?

5. *The Word of God, Exegesis and Theology*

Is the Word of God the soul of exegesis and theology? Is its character as the Word-Revealed sufficiently understood and revered? Is scientific research of the Bible animated and sustained by a proper grounding in the faith? What is the customary method of approaching the scriptural text? What role does the Bible play in theological study? Is the Bible sufficiently taken into consideration in the pastoral life of the community?

6. *The Word of God and the Life of the Believer*

What is the impact of Sacred Scripture in the spiritual lives of the People of God? The clergy? Those in the consecrated life? The lay faithful? Is Mary’s attitude of poverty and trust in the *Magnificat* evident? Why does seeking to pile up material goods impede a fervent listening to the Word of God? In the celebration of the Eucharist and other liturgical celebrations, is the Word of God a strong or weak instrument of communicating the faith? Why do various Christians seem to be cold or indifferent to the Bible? Is *lectio divina* practised? Under what forms? Which factors favour it and which do not?

CHAPTER III

The Word of God in the Mission of the Church

“And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up; and he went to the synagogue, as his custom was, on the Sabbath day. And he stood up to read; and there was given to him the book of the prophet Isaiah. He opened the book and found the place where it was written, ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.’ And he closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant, and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, ‘Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’” (Lk 4:16–21).

The Church’s Mission is to Proclaim Christ, the Word of God Made Man

25. “To nourish ourselves with the Word in order to be ‘servants of the Word’ in the work of evangelization: this is surely a priority for the Church at the dawn of the new millennium.”¹¹⁰ This requires going to the school of the Master, realizing that his Word is at the centre of the proclamation of the Kingdom of God (cf. Mk 1:14–15) and engaging in words and deeds which are a teaching and testimony of life. The Kingdom of God, coming forth from the Word of God, is a kingdom of truth, justice, love and peace, which is offered to everyone. In preaching the Word, the Church participates in building the Kingdom of God, reveals its workings and puts it forth as the salvation of the world. The Kingdom of God is the Gospel to be proclaimed to the ends of the earth (cf. Mt 28:19; Mk 16:15). The act of proclaiming and that of listening to the proclamation is the guarantee of the authenticity of one’s faith.

St. Paul’s words, “Woe to me, if I do not preach the Gospel” (1 Cor 9:16) are particularly resonant today. Every Christian must see these words as not simply a declaration but a vocation to serve the Gospel for the world’s sake. Jesus said, “the harvest is plentiful” (Mt 9:37); it is also diversified. Many people have never heard the Gospel, particularly in Africa and Asia; others have forgotten the Gospel; and still others are yearning to hear it.

Past and present *difficulties* often hinder the journey of the People of God in listening to its Lord. For various reasons, including a lack of financial resources, many regions stand materially in need of biblical texts, Bible translations and copies for distribution. The sects are posing a particular problem in the proper interpretation of the Bible. To bring the Word to others is a serious undertaking, requiring that a person be deeply committed to thinking *cum Ecclesia* (“with the Church”). It also calls for trusting in the transforming power of the Word in the heart of the hearer. “For the Word of God is living and active...piercing to the division of soul and spirit” (Heb 4:12). Today, a particularly evident and cogent demand is using the Word of God in proclamation and witness as a source of conversion, justice, hope, fellowship and peace. Thirdly, serving the Word requires boldness, courage, a spirit of poverty, humility, coherence of life and amiability.

The Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* of Pope Paul VI still has a timely character in teaching the art of proclamation. Likewise, the Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est* of the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, emphasizes the close connection of charity with the proclamation of the Word of God and the celebration of the sacraments.¹¹¹ Logically speaking, after having received the Word of God which is love, proclaiming the Word would be impossible without putting love into practise through acts of justice and charity. These are only a few tasks and goals of particular importance in treating the evangelizing mission of the Word of God.¹¹²

St. Augustine writes: “We should clearly understand that the fulfilment and goal of the Law and all Holy Scripture is the love of an object which is to be enjoyed and the love of an object which we can enjoy in fellowship with others. No one needs to be commanded to love himself. The whole temporal dispensation was framed for our salvation by the Providence of God that we might know this truth and be able to act upon it....Whoever, then, thinks that he understands the Holy Scriptures, or any part of them, but interprets them in a way not leading to building up this twofold love of God and neighbour, does not yet understand them as he should.”¹¹³

The Word of God is to be Accessible to All, in Every Age

26. The Church asserts her freedom to proclaim the Word of God with the boldness of the Apostles (cf. *Acts* 4:143; 28-31) and maintains that “easy access to Sacred Scripture should be provided for all the Christian faithful.”¹¹⁴

The Bible is a necessity in the Church’s mission; it contains its fundamental message. Despite much insistence by the Church, it must be admitted that most Christians, in effect, do not have personal contact with the Scriptures; and those who do, have many theological and methodological uncertainties in communicating their content. The danger exists that the Bible will not be a viable part of the Church and communion, but something open to subjectivism and arbitrariness, or even reduced to an object of private devotion as other things in the Church. Therefore, the Church must necessarily foster a strong and credible pastoral activity on the Word.

This effort will determine the specific initiatives to be undertaken. For example, the Bible needs to be fully valued in pastoral programmes. Under the guidance of the Bishop, pastoral plans having the Bible as their foundation need to be formulated in each diocese. Such plans could well draw upon the Bible’s already being present in the Church’s great liturgical actions and offer on these occasions direct contact with the Bible, especially in the practise of *lectio divina* for youth and adults. Doing this will ensure that the communion of priests and laity, and thus, entire parishes, communities of the consecrate life and ecclesial movements, will be grounded in and make manifest the Word of God.

Apostolic activity, centred on the Bible, on the diocesan, metropolitan and national levels, plays a specific role in achieving this goal. Such a programme would assist the spread of biblical practise,¹¹⁵ foster a biblical movement among the laity, attend to the formation of leaders of listening groups or Bible groups with particular concern for youth, and provide courses in the faith, inspired by the Bible, to include even immigrants and the many who are searching.

We rightly point out here that, since 1968, the World Catholic Biblical Federation, instituted by Pope Paul VI, has sought to foster the conciliar approach to the Word of God. Almost every episcopal conference is a member of this Association; therefore, its presence on every continent has important ramifications. Its goal is to distribute Bibles in various languages and provide everyday people with assistance in knowing the Bible and living its teaching through accurate translations, done under the pastoral care of Bishops. At times, these translations might also be suitable for liturgical use. The Church community’s task must also be to make the Bible available at a cost accessible to people.

Furthermore, a wise blending of methods and new forms of language and communication must also be employed in the transmission of the Word of God, for example, radio, TV, theatre, cinema, music and songs, including the more recent media, such as CDs, DVDs, Internet, etc.¹¹⁶

Persons in the consecrated life must have a specific role in bringing the Word of God to others. The Second Vatican Council stated: “...in the first place they should have recourse daily to the Holy Scriptures in order that, by reading and meditating on Holy Writ, they may learn ‘the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus Christ’ (*Phil* 3:8),”¹¹⁷ and find renewed energy in their task of education and evangelization, especially of the poor, the vulnerable and those on the periphery of society. In imitation of the Church Fathers, they must make the Bible-text the object of daily “rumination.” St. Ambrose maintains that when a person begins to read Sacred Scripture, God walks with him in an earthly paradise.¹¹⁸ And Pope John Paul II reminds us: “The Word of God is the first source of all Christian spirituality. It gives rise to a personal relationship with the living God and with his saving and sanctifying will. It is for this reason that from the very beginning of the Institutes of Consecrated Life, and in a special way in monasticism, what is called *lectio divina* has been held in the highest regard. By means of it, the Word of God is brought to bear on life, on which it projects the light of that wisdom which is a gift of the Spirit.”¹¹⁹

The Word of God: the Grace of Communion Among Christians

27. Communion among Christians is one of the major objectives in the Church’s pastoral activity. In fact, the Word of God and Baptism are two essential aspects, uniting the faithful in Christ. Based on this fact, the ecumenical movement needs to continue its task working towards full unity. Only a return to the Word of God, interpreted in light of Church Tradition, can guarantee a full encounter with Christ and his fol-

lowers.¹²⁰ The farewell discourse of Jesus in the Upper Room starkly highlights that this unity consists in a communal witness to the Word of the Father, given by the Lord (cf. *Jn* 17:8).

Listening to the Word of God, then, must always take into consideration its ecumenical dimension. With notable satisfaction, the Bible is seen today to be the major point of encounter in prayer and dialogue among Churches and ecclesial communities. In the spirit of the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, these groups collaborate on ecumenical translations in spreading the Sacred Texts.¹²¹ Since the time of the Council, the Church's Magisterium has made a great contribution in this area.¹²² Attentively reading this material and facing certain situations, the Church awaits clear indications of progress and activity in the movement towards unity. In this regard, His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI states: "Listening to the Word of God is a priority for our ecumenical commitment. Indeed, it is not we who act or who organize the unity of the Church. The Church does not make herself or live of herself, but from the creative Word that comes from the mouth of God. To listen to the Word of God together; to practise the *lectio divina* of the Bible, that is, reading linked with prayer; letting ourselves be amazed by the newness of the Word of God that never ages and is never depleted; overcoming our deafness to those words that do not correspond with our prejudices and our opinions; to listen and also to study, in the communion of believers of all ages: all these things constitute a path to be taken in order to achieve unity in the faith as a response to listening to the Word."¹²³

The Word of God: A Light for Interreligious Dialogue

28. Though always present in the Church in the course of her history, interreligious dialogue today poses new demands and unprecedented tasks. Theological research must thoroughly examine its challenges and assess its pastoral consequences. Keeping in mind the teachings of the Church's Magisterium stated thus far on the subject,¹²⁴ reflection and evaluation in the matter require consideration of the following points:

a - With the Jewish people

29. Special attention is given to the Jewish people. Christ and the Jews are Sons of Abraham, grounded in the same Covenant, because God, who is always faithful to his promises, has not revoked the first covenant (cf. *Rm* 9-11). Pope John Paul II maintains: "This people was gathered together and led by God, the Creator of heaven and earth. Thus, its existence is not a mere fact of nature or culture, in the sense that through culture man displays the resources of his own nature. It is a supernatural fact. This people perseveres in spite of everything, because they are the people of the Covenant, and despite human infidelities, the Lord is faithful to his Covenant."¹²⁵ They share a great part of the canonical books of the Bible, called the Old Testament by Christians. In this matter, the Pontifical Biblical Commission's document, *The Jewish People and Its Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible*,¹²⁶ provides a reflection on the close association of the two in faith, which is equally mentioned in *Dei Verbum*.¹²⁷ In this regard, two aspects deserve special consideration: the original character of the Jewish understanding of the Bible and an effort to overcome every form of anti-Semitism.

b - With other religions

30. The Church is called to bring the Gospel to all creation (cf. *Mk* 16:15). In performing this task, the Church encounters a great number of followers of other religions who have their own sacred books and way of understanding the Word of God. Everywhere she encounters persons who are actively searching or simply waiting unawares for the "Good News." In every case, the Church feels herself duty-bound to the Word which saves (cf. *Rm* 1:14).

First and foremost, we should remember that Christianity is not a religion of the book, but a religion of the Word of God, Incarnate in the Lord Jesus Christ. When considering the Bible in relation to the sacred texts of other religions, due care is required so as not to fall prey to syncretism, superficial approaches or a distortion of the truth. In dealing with the numerous sects which use the Bible for purposes and methods in opposition to the Church, particular attention needs to be given to the purity of the Word of God, authentically interpreted by the Magisterium.

Positively speaking, an effort should be made to know non-Christian religions and their respective cultures so as to discern the seeds of the Word present in them. It is important to remember that listening to God

should lead to the elimination of all forms of violence, so that the Word might become active in the heart and work of promoting justice and peace.¹²⁸

The Word of God: The Leaven in Modern Culture

31. Encountering the Word of God takes place in the different cultures (systems of thought, ethical principles, philosophy of life, etc.), which are oftentimes subjected to economic and technological influences, inspired by secularism and propagated through the various instruments of the mass media, which could be called “secular Bibles.” Engaging in a dialogue of culture is more urgent than ever. Though strongly charged at times, this dialogue has great potential in proclaiming the Word as a rich source of inquiry which finds its liberating response in the Lord.

This demands that the Word of God enter as leaven in a pluralistic and secularised world, in the “modern *areopaghi*” of art, science, politics, and communication (cf. *Acts* 17:22), and thus bring “the power of the Gospel into the very heart of culture and cultures,”¹²⁹ to purify them, elevate them and make them instruments of the Kingdom of God.

This task also requires a catechesis on Jesus Christ as “*the Way, the Truth and the Life*” (*Jn* 14:6), not a casual treatment, but one which adequately prepares a person to confront opposing positions. It should be done in a way which clearly sets forth the Christian mystery and its beneficial effects in people’s personal lives. Doing so requires research on the so-called “history of effects” (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) of the Bible on culture and on a common *ethos*, for which the Bible is rightly referred to and valued as the “*Great Code*,” especially in the West.

The Word of God and Human History

32. On her pilgrimage towards the Lord, the Church is also aware that the Word of God can be read in the events and signs of the times with which God manifests himself in history. The Second Vatican Council states: “The Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel. Thus, in language intelligible to each generation, she can respond to the perennial questions which people ask about this present life and the life to come, and about the relationship of the one to the other.”¹³⁰ Dealing with human affairs, the Church ought to know how “to decipher authentic signs of God’s presence and purpose in the happenings, needs and desires in which this People has a part along with other people of this age,”¹³¹ and thus assist humanity to encounter the Lord of Life and History.

In this way, the Word of God, planted by Christ as the seed of God’s Kingdom, makes its way through human history (cf. *2 Thess* 3:1). When Jesus returns in glory, that Word will resound in an invitation to participate fully in the joy of the Kingdom (cf. *Mt* 25:24). In response to this sure promise, the Church cries out in ardent prayer: “*Maranatha*” (*1 Cor* 16:22) “*Come Lord Jesus!*” (*Rev* 22:20).

Questions

Chapter III

1. *Proclaiming the Word of God in the Contemporary World*

From pastoral experience, describe the factors which foster a listening to the Word of God and those which hinder it? Can a certain interior unrest or the stimulus of other Christians, etc., lead to a renewal of faith? Can secularism, the continual bombardment of various messages from the world, life-styles opposed to Christian teaching, etc., hinder it? How must the Word of God be proclaimed in light of these challenges?

2. *Easy Access to Scripture*

How does the directive in *Dei Verbum*, 22, “Easy access to Sacred Scripture should be provided for all the Christian faithful,” correspond to fact? Provide some data, even if it be approximate, on this. Can an increase in listening to God’s Word in the Bible be detected among individuals and whole communities?

3. *Spreading the Word of God*

Describe the biblical apostolate in the diocesan community? Is there a diocesan programme? Are those working in the programme properly prepared? Are people aware of the Catholic Biblical Association? What are the means of encounter with the Word of God (Bible study, listening groups, courses on the Bible, a Day of Celebrating the Bible and *lectio divina*) and which are most frequented by Christians? What translations of the Bible—complete or partial—are available? What is the practise of the Bible in families? What programmes are offered to people at various age levels (children, adolescents, young people, adults)? How are the means of social communication employed? What elements are seen to have value?

4. *The Word of God in Ecumenical Dialogue*

Proclaiming the Word in today’s world requires a coherency with one’s witness of life. Is this noticeable in the lives of today’s Christians? How can it be fostered? In ecumenical dialogue, how have the particular Churches taken up the principles contained in *Dei Verbum*? Does Sacred Scripture enter into ecumenical discussion with Sister Churches? What role do they attribute to the Word of God? What are their points of encounter with the Word of God? Is collaboration possible with the *United Bible Societies* (UBS)? Are there conflicting situations in the use of the Bible?

5. *The Word of God in Dialogue with the Jewish People*

Is priority given to dialogue with the Jewish people? What points of encounter on the Bible might prove beneficial? Are biblical texts used to ferment attitudes of anti-Semitism?

6. *The Word of God in Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue*

Describe any existing experiences of dialogue based on the Christian Scriptures with those who possess their own sacred books. How can those who do not believe in the divine inspiration of Sacred Scripture come in contact with the Word of God? Does a Word of God exist even for those who do not believe in God? Is the Bible also approached in its character as a “Great Code,” which contains a richness for all? Describe any experiences of intercultural dialogue which uses the Bible as a reference point. What procedures can be followed to support Christian communities in dealing with the sects?

CONCLUSION

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Col 3:16-17).

Listening to the Word of God in the Life of the Believer

33. *A fervent listening to the Word* is fundamental to a personal encounter with God. Living according to the Spirit results from making room for the Word and allowing it to be born in one’s heart. No one can fathom the depths of the Word of God. However, only in the previously mentioned manner can the Word take hold of and convert a person, making him discover its riches and secrets, widening his horizons and promising freedom and full human development (cf. *Eph 4:13*). Knowing Sacred Scripture is one of the charisms of the Church; she transmits this knowledge to believers who are open to the Spirit.

According to St. Maximus the Confessor: “The Words of God, if pronounced by rote and not heard, have no resonance in the actions of those who merely speak them. But rather, if they are pronounced and put into action, they have the power to dispel demons and help people build God’s dwelling in their hearts and make progress in works of justice.”¹³² This comes about through an act of praise arising from the heart, without the use of words, a prayer which flows from simplicity and adoration, after the example of Mary, the Virgin who listened so well that every Word of God was taken up and lived in love (cf. *Deut 6:5; Jn 13:34, 35*). Then, the believer, who thus becomes a “disciple,” can now taste “*the goodness of the Word of God*” (*Heb 6:5*) by living it in the Church community, proclaiming it to those near and far and making the words of Jesus, the Incarnate-Word, present in a personal way: “*The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel*” (*Mk 1:15*).

GENERAL INDEX OF QUESTIONS

(A complete listing of the Questions appearing at the end of each chapter)

Introduction

1. What “signs of the times” in your country give this Synod on the Word of God a particularly timely character? What do people expect from it?
2. What is the relation of the preceding Synod on the Eucharist to the present one on the Word of God?
3. Do experiences and practises with the Bible exist in your particular Church? What are they? Do Bible groups exist? Describe them and their activities.

Chapter I

1. *Knowledge of the Word of God in the History of Salvation*

What is the prevalent idea among the faithful (parishes, religious communities, movements) on Revelation, the Word of God, the Bible, Divine Tradition and the Magisterium? Do the faithful understand the various levels of meaning of the Word of God? Is Jesus Christ understood to be central to the Word of God? What is the relation between the Word of God and the Bible? What aspects are less understood? What are the reasons?

2. *The Word of God and the Church*

To what extent does approaching the Word of God develop a dynamic knowledge of belonging to the Church, the Body of Christ, and prompt a genuine participation in the Church’s mission? What is the faithful’s understanding of the relation between the Word of God and the Church? Does a proper relation between the Bible and Divine Tradition exist in exegetical and theological studies, and in the faithful’s encounter with the Holy Book? Is catechesis based on the Word of God? Are the Sacred Scriptures well-valued? What is the perception of the Magisterium’s importance and responsibility in the proclamation of the Word of God? Is there a genuine listening to the Word of God in faith? What aspects need to be clarified and reinforced?

3. *Signs of the Church’s Faith in the Word of God*

How has *Dei Verbum* been received? The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*? What is the specific magisterial role of Bishops in the apostolate of the Word of God? What is the task of ordained ministers, priests and deacons in proclaiming the Word (cf. *Lumen Gentium* 25, 28)? What is the faithful’s understanding of the relation between the Word of God and the consecrated life? How can the Word of God be employed in the formation of future priests? What formation in the Word of God is needed in the People of God—priests, deacons, consecrated persons and the laity?

4. *The Bible as the Word of God*

Why are Christians eagerly seeking the Bible today? What effect does the Bible have on the life of faith? How is the Bible received in the non-Christian world? And among people of culture? Does a proper approach to the Scriptures always exist? What are some of the more common failings? Describe the faithful’s understanding of the charism of inspiration and truth of the Scriptures. Do the faithful realize that the spiritual sense of Scripture is the final sense willed by God? How is the Old Testament received? If the Gospels are read more often, is the knowledge and reading of them satisfactory? What are overwhelmingly considered the “difficult pages” of the Bible today, and what approach should be taken in their regard?

5. *Faith in the Word of God*

How do believers look at the Word of God? Do the faithful listen to the Word of God with a deep faith and do they aim at re-generating their faith by it? Why do the faithful read the Bible? What criteria for discernment are used by believers in reading the Bible?

6. *Mary and the Word of God*

Why is Mary the Model and Mother of listening to the Word of God? Is the Word of God received and lived as she did? How can Mary become the Model for every believer of listening, meditating upon and living the Word of God?

Chapter II

1. *The Word of God in the Life of the Church*

What importance is shown to the Word of God in the life of your community and among the faithful-at-large? In what way is the Word of God a source of nourishment for Christians? Does the danger exist of reducing Christianity to a “religion of the book”? Describe how individuals show reverence and familiarity towards the Word of God in their personal life and in the life of the community on Sundays? Weekdays? In the special seasons of the liturgical year?

2. *The Word of God in the Formation of the People of God*

What is being done to transmit the entire and complete teaching of the Word of God to your community and to each member of the faithful? Are future priests, consecrated persons and those responsible for various services in the community (catechists, etc.) properly formed and periodically updated in the biblical aspects of their pastoral ministry? Are there ongoing programmes of formation for the laity?

3. *The Word of God, Liturgy and Prayer*

What is the faithful’s approach to Sacred Scripture in liturgical and personal prayer? What is their understanding of the relationship between the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist? Between the Word celebrated in the Eucharist and the everyday life of the Christian? Does the Word of God have a genuine resonance in homilies? What needs to be done? Is a listening to the Word of God incorporated in the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation? Does the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours include a listening to and dialogue with the Word of God? Does this practise extend to lay people? Do the People of God have sufficient access to the Bible?

4. *The Word of God, Evangelization and Catechesis*

Bearing in mind the teachings of the Second Vatican Council and those of the Church’s Magisterium, describe the positive and negative aspects of the Word of God and catechesis? How is the Word of God treated in the various forms of catechesis (Christian initiation and ongoing formation)? Does the community give sufficient attention and study to the written Word of God? If yes, please explain? How are various groups of people (children, adolescents, young people and adults) introduced to the Bible? What introductory courses on Sacred Scripture are offered?

5. *The Word of God, Exegesis and Theology*

Is the Word of God the soul of exegesis and theology? Is its character as the Word-Revealed sufficiently understood and revered? Is scientific research of the Bible animated and sustained by a proper grounding in the faith? What is the customary method of approaching the scriptural text? What role does the Bible play in theological study? Is the Bible sufficiently taken into consideration in the pastoral life of the community?

6. *The Word of God and the Life of the Believer*

What is the impact of Sacred Scripture in the spiritual lives of the People of God? The clergy? Those in the consecrated life? The lay faithful? Is Mary’s attitude of poverty and trust in the *Magnificat* evident? Why does seeking to pile up material goods impede a fervent listening to the Word of God? In the celebration of the Eucharist and other liturgical celebrations, is the Word of God a strong or weak instrument of communicating the faith? Why do various Christians seem to be cold or indifferent to the Bible? Is *lectio divina* practised? Under what forms? Which factors favour it and which do not?

Chapter III

1. *Proclaiming the Word of God in the Contemporary World*

From pastoral experience, describe the factors which foster a listening to the Word of God and those which hinder it? Can a certain interior unrest or the stimulus of other Christians, etc., lead to

a renewal of faith? Can secularism, the continual bombardment of various messages from the world, life-styles opposed to Christian teaching, etc., hinder it? How must the Word of God be proclaimed in light of these challenges?

2. *Easy Access to Scripture*

How does the directive in *Dei Verbum*, 22, “Easy access to Sacred Scripture should be provided for all the Christian faithful,” correspond to fact? Provide some data, even if it be approximate, on this. Can an increase in listening to God’s Word in the Bible be detected among individuals and whole communities?

3. *Spreading the Word of God*

Describe the biblical apostolate in the diocesan community? Is there a diocesan programme? Are those working in the programme properly prepared? Are people aware of the Catholic Biblical Association? What are the means of encounter with the Word of God (Bible study, listening groups, courses on the Bible, a Day of Celebrating the Bible and *lectio divina*) and which are most frequented by Christians? What translations of the Bible—complete or partial—are available? What is the practise of the Bible in families? What programmes are offered to people at various age levels (children, adolescents, young people, adults)? How are the means of social communication employed? What elements are seen to have value?

4. *The Word of God in Ecumenical Dialogue*

Proclaiming the Word in today’s world requires a coherency with one’s witness of life. Is this noticeable in the lives of today’s Christians? How can it be fostered? In ecumenical dialogue, how have the particular Churches taken up the principles contained in *Dei Verbum*? Does Sacred Scripture enter into ecumenical discussion with Sister Churches? What role do they attribute to the Word of God? What are their points of encounter with the Word of God? Is collaboration possible with the *United Bible Societies* (UBS)? Are there conflicting situations in the use of the Bible?

5. *The Word of God in Dialogue with the Jewish People*

Is priority given to dialogue with the Jewish people? What points of encounter on the Bible might prove beneficial? Are biblical texts used to ferment attitudes of anti-Semitism?

6. *The Word of God in Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue*

Describe any existing experiences of dialogue based on the Christian Scriptures with those who possess their own sacred books. How can those who do not believe in the divine inspiration of Sacred Scripture come in contact with the Word of God? Does a Word of God exist even for those who do not believe in God? Is the Bible also approached in its character as a “Great Code,” which contains a richness for all? Describe any experiences of intercultural dialogue which uses the Bible as a reference point. What procedures can be followed to support Christian communities in dealing with the sects?

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Conc. Œcum. Vat. II, Const. dogmatica de Divina Revelatione *Dei Verbum*, 2.
- ² Rupertus Abbas Tuitiensis, *De operibus Spiritus Sancti*, I, 6: SC 131, 72-74.
- ³ Cf. Leo XIII, Litt. Encycl. *Providentissimus Deus* (18 novembris 1893): DS 1952 (3293); Benedictus XV, Litt. Encycl. *Spiritus Paraclitus* (15 septembris 1920): AAS 12(1920), 385-422; Pius XII, Litt. Encycl. *Divino afflante Spiritu* (30 septembris 1943): AAS 35 (1943), 297-325.
- ⁴ Cf. Synodus Episcoporum, Relatio finalis Synodi episcoporum *Exeunte cætu secundo: Ecclesia sub verbo Dei mysteria Christi celebrans pro salute mundi* (7 decembris 1985): Enchiridion del Sinodo dei Vescovi, 1, Bologna 2005, 2733-2736.
- ⁵ Benedictus XVI, *To Participants at the International Congress Honouring Dei Verbum* (16 September 2005), in *L'Osservatore Romano: Weekly Edition in English*, 21 September 2005, p. 7; cf. Paulus VI, Epistula Apostolica *Summi Dei Verbum* (4 novembris 1963): AAS 55 (1963), 979-995; Ioannes Paulus II, *Weekly General Audience* (22 May 1985), in *L'Osservatore Romano: Weekly Edition in English*, 27 May 1985, pp. 1, 2; Idem., *Discourse on the Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (23 April 1993), in *L'Osservatore Romano: Weekly Edition in English*, 29 April 1993, 3, 4, 6; Benedictus XVI, *Angelus* (6 November 2005), in *L'Osservatore Romano: Weekly Edition in English*, 9 November 2005, p. 1.
- ⁶ Conc. Œcum. Vat. II, Const. dogmatica de Divina Revelatione *Dei Verbum*, 21.
- ⁷ S. Hieronymus, *Commentarius in Ecclesiasten*, 313: CCL 72, 278.
- ⁸ Conc. Œcum. Vat. II, Const. dogmatica de Divina Revelatione *Dei Verbum*, 22.
- ⁹ Cf. Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible* (24 May 2001); Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City, 2001.
- ¹⁰ Conc. Œcum. Vat. II, Const. dogmatica de Divina Revelatione *Dei Verbum*, 2.
- ¹¹ *Ibidem*.
- ¹² *Ibidem*.
- ¹³ Cf. *ibidem*.
- ¹⁴ Missale Romanum, Editio typica tertia, Typis Vaticanis, Vatican City 2002, *Institutio generalis*, n. 368.
- ¹⁵ Paulus VI, *Lettre au IVème Congrès national français de l'enseignement religieux (1-3 Avril 1964)*, in *La Documentation Catholique n. 1422 (19 Avril 1964)*, p. 503.
- ¹⁶ S. Gregorius Magnus, *Moralia*, 20,63: CCL 143A, 1050.
- ¹⁷ Conc. Œcum. Vat. II, Const. dogmatica de Divina Revelatione *Dei Verbum*, 3.
- ¹⁸ S. Ephraem, *Hymni de paradiso*, V, 1-2: SC 137, 71-72.
- ¹⁹ Conc. Œcum. Vat. II, Const. dogmatica de Divina Revelatione *Dei Verbum*, 4.
- ²⁰ S. Irenaeus, *Adversus Hæreses* IV, 34, 1: SC 100, 847.
- ²¹ Origenes, *In Ioannem* V, 5-6: SC 120, 380-384.
- ²² Cf. S. Bernardus, *Super Missus est*, Homilia IV, 11: PL 183, 86.
- ²³ Conc. Œcum. Vat. II, Const. dogmatica de Divina Revelatione *Dei Verbum*, 3.
- ²⁴ Cf. *ibidem*, 24.
- ²⁵ Cf. *ibidem*, 4.
- ²⁶ *Ibidem*, 5.
- ²⁷ *Ibidem*.
- ²⁸ Cf. *ibidem*, 2; 5.
- ²⁹ *Ibidem*, 2.
- ³⁰ *Ibidem*, 21.
- ³¹ Isaac de Stella, *Serm.* 51: PL 194, 1862-1863.1865.
- ³² Cf. S. Ambrosius, *Evang. secundum Lucam* 2, 19: CCL 14, 39.
- ³³ Conc. Œcum. Vat. II, Const. dogmatica de Divina Revelatione *Dei Verbum*, 7.
- ³⁴ Cf. *ibidem*, 26.
- ³⁵ *Ibidem*, 8; cf. 21.
- ³⁶ Cf. *Catechismus Catholicæ Ecclesiæ*, 825.
- ³⁷ Conc. Œcum. Vat. II, Const. dogmatica de Divina Revelatione *Dei Verbum*, 8.
- ³⁸ *Ibidem*, 7.
- ³⁹ *Ibidem*, 10.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, 9; cf. Conc. Œcum. Trident., *Decretum de libris sacris et de traditionibus recipiendis*: DS 1501.
- ⁴¹ *Ibidem*, 10.

- ⁴² *Ibidem*, 8.
- ⁴³ *Ibidem*, 21.
- ⁴⁴ Cf. *Catechismus Catholicae Ecclesiae*, 120.
- ⁴⁵ Cf. J. Ratzinger, *An Attempted Explanation of the Conceptual Problem of Tradition*, in K. Rahner – J. Ratzinger (W.J. O’Hara, trans.), *Revelation and Tradition*: Search Press Ltd., London, 1966.
- ⁴⁶ Conc. Œcum. Vat. II, Const. dogmatica de Divina Revelatione *Dei Verbum*, 9; cf. 24.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, 21.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, 11.
- ⁴⁹ Cf. Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (15 April 1993), IV, C.3, in *Origins*, Catholic News Service, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, 6 January 1994, pp. 497-524.
- ⁵⁰ Conc. Œcum. Vat. II, Const. dogmatica de Divina Revelatione *Dei Verbum*, cc. 3-6.
- ⁵¹ Ioannes Paulus II, Litt. Encycl. *Fides et Ratio* (14 septembris 1998), 13-15: *AAS* 91(1999), 15-18.
- ⁵² Cf. Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (15 April 1993), IV, C.3, in *Origins*, Catholic News Service, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, 6 January 1994, pp. 497-524.
- ⁵³ Cf. *ibidem*, cap. IV, A.B., pp. 1703-1715.
- ⁵⁴ *Catechismus Catholicae Ecclesiae*, n. 117.
- ⁵⁵ Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (15 April 1993), IV, C.3, in *Origins*, Catholic News Service, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, 6 January 1994, pp. 497-524.
- ⁵⁶ Conc. Œcum. Vat. II, Const. dogmatica de Divina Revelatione *Dei Verbum*, 12; cf. *Catechismus Catholicae Ecclesiae*, nn. 109-114.
- ⁵⁷ Benedictus XVI, *Discourse to the Bishops of Switzerland* (7 November 2006), in *L’Osservatore Romano*: Weekly Edition in English, 22 November 2006, pp. 5, 10.
- ⁵⁸ Missale Romanum, *Ordo lectionum Missæ*: Editio typica altera, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 1981: *Prænotanda*, n. 8.
- ⁵⁹ Cf. Conc. Œcum. Vat. II, Const. dogmatica de Divina Revelatione *Dei Verbum*, 15-16.
- ⁶⁰ Cf. S. Augustinus, *Quæstiones in Heptateucum*, 2,73: *PL* 34, 623; cf. Conc. Œcum. Vat. II, Const. dogmatica de Divina Revelatione *Dei Verbum*, 16.
- ⁶¹ S. Gregorius Magnus, *In Ezechielem*, I, 6,15: *CCL* 142, 76.
- ⁶² Cf. Conc. Œcum. Vat. II, Const. dogmatica de Divina Revelatione *Dei Verbum*, 18-19; Ioannes Paulus II, *Weekly General Audience* (22 May 1985), in *L’Osservatore Romano*: Weekly Edition in English, 27 May 1985, pp. 1, 2.
- ⁶³ Conc. Œcum. Vat. II, Const. dogmatica de Divina Revelatione *Dei Verbum*, 1.
- ⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, 21.
- ⁶⁵ S. Gregorius Magnus, *Registrum Epistolarum* V, 46, 35: *CCL* CXL, 339.
- ⁶⁶ Cf. Conc. Œcum. Vat. II, Const. dogmatica de Divina Revelatione *Dei Verbum*, 21.
- ⁶⁷ *Ibidem*.
- ⁶⁸ Cf. *Catechismus Catholicae Ecclesiae*, 115-119.
- ⁶⁹ Guīgus II Prior Carthusiae, *Scala claustralium sive tractatus de modo orandi*: *PL* 184, 475-484.
- ⁷⁰ Conc. Œcum. Vat. II, Const. dogmatica de Divina Revelatione *Dei Verbum*, 12.
- ⁷¹ *Ibidem*, 23.
- ⁷² Missale Romanum, *Ordo Lectionum Missæ*. Editio typica altera: *Prænotanda*, 9.
- ⁷³ Petrus Damascenus, *Liber II*, vol. III, 159: *La Filocalia*, vol. 3°, Torino 1985, 253.
- ⁷⁴ Conc. Œcum. Vat. II, Const. dogmatica de Divina Revelatione *Dei Verbum*, 21.
- ⁷⁵ Cf. Congregatio Pro Clericis, *Directorium generale pro catechesi* (15 augusti 1997), 47: *Enchiridion Vaticanum* 16, Bologna 1999, pp. 663-665.
- ⁷⁶ Conc. Œcum. Vat. II, Const. de Sacra Liturgia: *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 35.
- ⁷⁷ *Ibidem*, 7.
- ⁷⁸ *Ibidem*, 24.
- ⁷⁹ Conc. Œcum. Vat. II, Const. dogmatica de Divina Revelatione *Dei Verbum*, 21.
- ⁸⁰ Ioannes Paulus II, Litt. Ap. *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (6 januarii 2001), 36: *AAS* 93 (2001), 291.
- ⁸¹ Cf. Missale Romanum, *Ordo Lectionum Missæ*: Editio typica altera: *Prænotanda*.
- ⁸² Conc. Œcum. Vat. II, Const. dogmatica de Divina Revelatione *Dei Verbum*, 24.
- ⁸³ Ioannes Paulus II, Litt. Ap. *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (6 januarii 2001), 39: *AAS* 93 (2001), 293.
- ⁸⁴ Cf. CIC, can. 762.

- ⁸⁵ Cf. Congregatio Pro Clericis, *Directorium generale pro catechesi* (15 augusti 1997), pars I, c.II: Enchiridion Vaticanum 16, Bologna 1999, pp. 684-708.
- ⁸⁶ To be borne in mind in this regard is the document of the Congregatio de Cultu Divino et Disciplina Sacramentorum, *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy: Principles and Guidelines* (9 April 2002), nn. 87-89, which gives attention to the relation between popular piety and the Word of God.
- ⁸⁷ Congregatio pro Clericis, *Directorium generale pro catechesi* (15 augusti 1997), 127: Enchiridion Vaticanum 16, Bologna 1999, p. 794.
- ⁸⁸ *Ibidem*.
- ⁸⁹ Cf. Ioannes Paulus II, Const. Ap. *Fidei Depositum* (11 octobris 1992), 4: AAS 86 (1994), 117.
- ⁹⁰ Conc. Œcum.Vat. II, Const. dogmatica de Divina Revelatione *Dei Verbum*, 24; cf. Leo XIII, Litt. Encycl. *Providentissimus Deus* (18 novembris 1893), Pars II, sub fine: ASS 26 (1893-94), 269-292; Benedictus XV, Litt. Encycl. *Spiritus Paraclitus* (15 septembris 1920), Pars III: AAS 12 (1920), 385-422.
- ⁹¹ Cf. Conc. Œcum.Vat. II, Const. dogmatica de Divina Revelatione *Dei Verbum*, 12; Decretum de activitate missionali Ecclesie *Ad Gentes*, 22.
- ⁹² Cf. Conc. Œcum.Vat. II, Decretum de Institutione sacerdotali *Optatam Totius*, 16; CIC, can. 252, CCEO, can. 350.
- ⁹³ Ioannes Paulus II, Litt. Encycl. *Fides et Ratio* (14 septembris 1998), Proœmium: AAS 91 (1999), 5.
- ⁹⁴ Conc. Œcum.Vat. II, Const. dogmatica de Divina Revelatione *Dei Verbum*, 23.
- ⁹⁵ S. Hieronymus, *Comm. in Is.*; Prol.: PL 24, 17.
- ⁹⁶ Conc. Œcum.Vat. II, Const. dogmatica de Divina Revelatione *Dei Verbum*, 25.
- ⁹⁷ Ioannes Paulus II, Litt. Ap. *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (6 januarii 2001), 39: AAS 93 (2001), 293.
- ⁹⁸ Conc. Œcum.Vat. II, Const. dogmatica de Divina Revelatione *Dei Verbum*, 25.
- ⁹⁹ S. Augustinus, *Enarrat. in Ps* 85,7: CCL 39, 1177.
- ¹⁰⁰ Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (15 April 1993), IV, C.3, in *Origins*, Catholic News Service, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, 6 January 1994, pp. 497-524.
- ¹⁰¹ Cf. Guigus II Prior Carthusiae, *Scala claustralium sive tractatus de modo orandi*: PL 184, 475-484.
- ¹⁰² Cf. Conc. Œcum.Vat. II, Decretum de Institutione Sacerdotali *Optatam Totius*, 4; Ioannes Paulus II, Adhort. Ap. Post-syn. *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (25 martii 1992), 47: AAS 84 (1992), 740-742.
- ¹⁰³ Benedictus XVI, *Discourse at the Meeting with the Youth of Rome and the Lazio Region* (6 April 2006), in *L'Osservatore Romano*: Weekly Edition in English, 12 April 2006, 5, p. 6,7.; Idem., *Message for the 21st World Youth Day* (9 April 2006), in *L'Osservatore Romano*: Weekly Edition in English, 1 March 2006, p. 3.
- ¹⁰⁴ Ioannes Paulus II, Litt. Ap. *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (6 januarii 2001), 39: AAS 93 (2001), 293.
- ¹⁰⁵ Benedictus XVI, *To Participants at the International Congress Honouring Dei Verbum* (16 September 2005), in *L'Osservatore Romano*: Weekly Edition in English, 21 September 2005, p. 7.
- ¹⁰⁶ Benedictus XVI, *Message for the 21st World Youth Day* (9 April 2006), in *L'Osservatore Romano*: Weekly Edition in English, 1 March 2006, p. 3.
- ¹⁰⁷ Benedictus XVI, *To Participants at the International Congress Honouring Dei Verbum* (16 September 2005), in *L'Osservatore Romano*: Weekly Edition in English, 21 September 2005, p. 7.
- ¹⁰⁸ Cf. Ioannes Paulus II, Adhort. Ap. Post-syn. *Vita Consecrata* (25 marti 1995), 94: AAS 88 (1996), 469-470.
- ¹⁰⁹ S. Cyprianus, *Ad Donatum*, 15: CCL IIIA, 12.
- ¹¹⁰ Ioannes Paulus II, Litt. Ap. *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (6 januarii 2001), 40: AAS 93 (2001)294.
- ¹¹¹ Cf. Benedictus XVI, Litt. Encycl. *Deus Caritas Est* (25 decembris 2005): AAS 98 (2006), 217-252.
- ¹¹² Cf. *ibidem*, 20-25: AAS 98 (2006), 233-237.
- ¹¹³ S. Augustinus, *De doctrina Christiana*, I, XXXV, 39; XXXVI, 40: PL 34,34.
- ¹¹⁴ Conc. Œcum.Vat. II, Const. dogmatica de Divina Revelatione *Dei Verbum*, 22; cf. CIC, can. 825; CCEO, can. 654 et 662 §1.
- ¹¹⁵ Cf. *ibidem*, n. 25.
- ¹¹⁶ Cf. Congregatio Pro Clericis, *Directorium generale pro catechesi* (15 augusti 1997), 160-162: Enchiridion Vaticanum 16, Bologna 1999, pp. 845-847.
- ¹¹⁷ Conc. Œcum.Vat. II, Decretum de accomodata renovatione vitæ religiosæ *Perfectæ caritatis*, 6.
- ¹¹⁸ Cf. S. Ambrosius, *Epist.* 49, 3: PL 16, 1154 B.
- ¹¹⁹ Ioannes Paulus II, Adhort. Ap. Post-syn. *Vita Consecrata* (25 Marti 1996), 94: AAS 88 (1996), 469.
- ¹²⁰ Cf. Conc. Œcum.Vat. II, Decretum de Oecumenismo *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 21.
- ¹²¹ Cf. Conc. Œcum.Vat. II, Const. dogmatica de Divina Revelatione *Dei Verbum*, 22.
- ¹²² Ioannes Paulus II, Litt. Encycl. *Ut Unum Sint* (25 maii 1995): AAS 87 (1995), 921-982. Videas etiam: Pontificium Consilium Ad Unitatem Christianorum Fovendam, *Directorium œcumenicum noviter compositum*: AAS 85 (1993), 1039-1119.

- ¹²³ Benedetto XVI, *Homily: Our World Awaits the Common Witness of Christians* (25 January 2007), in *L'Osservatore Romano: Weekly Edition in English*, 31 January 2007, p. 5.
- ¹²⁴ Cf. Conc. Œcum. Vat. II, *Decretum de activitate missionali Ecclesiae Ad Gentes* 22; *Declaratio de Ecclesiae habitudine ad Religiones non-Christianas Nostra Aetate*, 2-4.; *Congregatio Pro Doctrina Fidei, Dominus Iesus*, 20-22: AAS 92 (2000), 761-764.
- ¹²⁵ Ioannes Paulus II, *To Participants at the Symposium, The Roots of Anti-Judaism in the Christian Milleu* (31 October 1997), in *L'Osservatore Romano: Weekly Edition in English*, 5 November 1997, p. 1.
- ¹²⁶ Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible* (24 May 2001), Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City, 2001.
- ¹²⁷ Cf. Conc. Œcum. Vat. II, *Const. dogmatica de Divina Revelatione Dei Verbum*, 14-16.
- ¹²⁸ Cf. Benedictus XVI, *Message for the 2006 World Day of Peace: In Truth, Peace*, (8 December 2005), in *L'Osservatore Romano: Weekly Edition in English*, 21/28 December 2005, pp. 6, 7; *Message for the 2007 World Day of Peace: The Human Person, the Heart of Peace* (8 December 2006), in *L'Osservatore Romano: Weekly Edition in English*, 20/27 December 2006, pp. 6, 7.
- ¹²⁹ Ioannes Paulus II, *Adhort. Ap. Catechesi Tradendæ* (16 octobris 1979), 53: AAS 71(1979), 1320.
- ¹³⁰ Conc. Œcum. Vat. II, *Const. Pastoralis de Ecclesia in mundo huius temporis Gaudium et Spes*, 4.
- ¹³¹ *Ibidem*, 11.
- ¹³² S. Maximus Confessor, *Capitulum theologicorum et æconomicorum duæ enturiæ* IV, 39: MG 90, 1084.

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