

SCRIPTURE READING URGED VEHEMENTER (DV NO. 25): BACKGROUND AND DEVELOPMENT

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This article relates the itinerary of Vatican II's exhortation to Catholics to practice prayerful Scripture reading. In 1961 the Preparatory Theological Commission treated Bible reading in a cautionary and admonitory mode that highlighted guidance by the Magisterium. But the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity insisted that pastoral ministers should introduce the faithful to devout reading of Scripture leading to personal encounters with God. The conciliar encouragement of lectio divina deserves appreciation and further application as a pastoral consequence of Vatican II's Dei verbum.

THIS CONTRIBUTION PRESENTS the main stages in the genesis of *Dei verbum* (DV), the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, no. 25, in which Vatican Council II states a central pastoral consequence of biblical inspiration by issuing a forceful and specific exhortation directed to all the faithful to engage in frequent and prayerful Scripture reading. Added to this presentation are five appendixes giving draft texts formulated along the itinerary to DV no. 25, which include *De verbo Dei: Schema decreti pastoralis* prepared by the Secretariat for the Promotion of the Unity of Christians. At the end, I offer my initial reflections on this Vatican II word to Christians. But I begin well before the council, with the promotion of biblical reading in Venice in 1956 by the future Pope John XXIII.¹

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¹ Capitalization of words in this article follows, for the most part, the practice found in the conciliar texts quoted or referred to. Translations throughout are mine unless otherwise indicated.

**PRELUDE: CARDINAL PATRIARCH RONCALLI'S PASTORAL
ON SCRIPTURE READING, 1956**

In 1956, the Archdiocese of Venice celebrated the fifth centenary of the death of its proto-patriarch, St. Lorenzo Giustiniani (1381–1456). In his Lenten pastoral letter of 1956, Cardinal Patriarch Angelo G. Roncalli called attention to St. Lorenzo's deep immersion in Scripture and urged the Venetian faithful to turn to Bible reading as a way to follow the counsels and example of their first patriarch. Roncalli made the centenary into a pastoral call to take up Scripture.²

Roncalli's pastoral opens by celebrating the biblical books as grand monuments to divine relations with humanity, being God's testimony that, in the Scriptures of Israel, prepares for the union of divinity with humanity in the incarnation. The further biblical narratives, especially the Gospels, manifest sublimity and the fullness of holiness, as they teach humans to worship God in spirit and truth. His episcopal consecration had impressed on Roncalli his duty to teach Scripture and to inculcate in people a familiarity with the sacred book. While church measures that restricted biblical reading during the Reformation era were conditioned by particular circumstances, under recent popes the promotion of Bible reading has become a characteristic mark of the Catholic apostolate.

Roncalli's letter then offers a brief anthology of citations from St. Lorenzo Giustiniani to impress on readers the beauties of Scripture and to stir their desire to taste and see the solid and life-giving spiritual nourishment that the biblical books offer. The letter closes with a concise appeal to turn to the biblical wellsprings of the Christian life so as to further the spread of evangelical truth, which is the living substance of the two Testaments of the Bible.

This action of 1956 gives us a good example of what Pope John XXIII had in mind later, when he named the spiritual reinvigoration of the faithful as a primary aim of Vatican II, which came to expression in the initial paragraph of the council's first promulgated document, *Sacrosanctum concilium*.

² "La Sacra Scrittura e S. Lorenzo Giustiniani: Lettera pastorale per la Quaresima," in Angelo Giuseppe Card. Roncalli, *Scritti e discorsi*, 3 vols. (Rome: Edizioni Paoline, 1959) 2:329–51. On February 22, 1956, when he finished writing the pastoral, Roncalli wrote in his diary that his letter should give rise to "un buon movimento per lo studio della Bibbia" (a good movement of Bible study) (*Pace e Vangelo: Agende del patriarca*, ed. Enrico Galavotti, Edizione nazionale dei diari di Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli – Giovanni XXIII 6/2, 1956–58 [Bologna: Istituto per le scienze religiose, 2008] 48).

BIBLE READING IN THE PREPARATORY THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION'S SCHEMA *DE FONTIBUS REVELATIONIS*, 1960–1961

To begin work on the schema *De fontibus revelationis*, Sebastian Tromp, secretary of the Preparatory Theological Commission, composed on July 18, 1960, a *primum tentamen* of theses treating Scripture and tradition (the sources of revelation), biblical inerrancy, literary genres, gospel historicity, and the Protestantizing danger of a theology based solely on Scripture to the neglect of tradition and the Magisterium.³ Tromp's Thesis 2 stated that Scripture, being in many passages obscure, has not been given by God to individual believers, but to the Church's Magisterium for explaining the text. After a meeting of a small group of Rome-based consultants on July 20, the text had a new thesis, no. 3, on biblical reading, which stated that while Scripture reading should be highly commended, it is not appropriate for every believer, because of the obscurity of many passages and because the religion and morality of the Old Testament has been raised by Christ to a higher perfection.⁴ The text underwent slight modifications in the coming weeks, and on September 24 it went out as a *schema compendiosum* of 13 theses to the Commission's members in view of a late October 1960 meeting to discuss them.⁵ The importance of this schema *De fontibus* for Sebastian Tromp appears in its thesis form, by which it gives positions to be maintained, and not just topics to be developed, as was the case in the other three "compendious schemas" prepared at the same time.⁶

³ The text is in *Konzilstagebuch Sebastian Tromp SJ*, edited by Alexandra von Teuffenbach, vol. 1/2 (Rome: Gregorian University, 2006) 834–35. Tromp discussed his theses with Salvatore Garofalo, professor of Scripture at the Pontifical Urban University. Later in the work of the Commission, Garofalo chaired the consultants' subcommission that drafted *De fontibus*, which the Commission members approved on September 21, 1961.

⁴ These early developments are narrated by Karim Schelkens, *Catholic Theology of Revelation on the Eve of Vatican II: A Redaction History of the Schema De fontibus revelationis (1960–1962)* (Leiden: Brill, 2010) 76–85.

⁵ In the distributed text the order was changed, with the former nos. 2–3 now being: "9. Sacra Scriptura non est a Deo immediate data singulis fidelibus, sed Ecclesiae. 10. Licet sacrae Scripturae lectio summopere sit commendanda, tamen non omnibus et singulis indiscriminatim convenit, tum prae obscuritate aliquarum partium, tum quia religiositas et moralitas Veteris Testamenti a Christo Domino ad altiore perfectionem sunt elevatae" (given by Riccardo Burigana, *La Bibbia nel concilio: La redazione della costituzione "Dei verbum" del Vaticano II* [Bologna: Il Mulino, 1998] 468).

⁶ Along with the theses of *De fontibus*, Tromp also composed in early July 1960 topical outlines for three more theological schemas: *De ecclesia*, *De deposito fidei pure custodienda*, and *De rebus moralibus et socialibus*.

In early 1961 a subcommission expanded the original theses into a complete schema *De fontibus revelationis* in five chapters. The prioritized issues were (1) the insufficiency of Scripture, because important revealed truths come to the Church through tradition (vs. J. R. Geiselmann); (2) the proper methods of literary interpretation, which were central in the Roman controversy ignited by the early 1961 attack of Msgr. Antonino Romeo on the Biblical Institute; and (3) the historicity of Gospel narratives, on which the schema formulated condemnations of mythical and reductive interpretations.

The schema's chapter 5 on Scripture in the Church had come onto the *De fontibus* subcommission's agenda in June 1961, leading to the text approved as chapter 5 on June 23.⁷ This text was modified in only small ways at the plenary meeting of the Theological Commission on September 20–21,⁸ and in early October the whole schema went to the Central Preparatory Commission where it became the object of some severe critical objections on November 9–10, 1961.

The draft text that the Theological Commission gave to the Central Commission in *De fontibus* began its chapter 5 with no. 24, on the Church's perennial protective care and diffusion of Scripture through homilies and liturgical readings.⁹ No. 25 set forth the special standing of the Vulgate Latin version, which "is immune from any error in matters of faith and practice" and is "so closely connected with the Church's Magisterium that it should be acknowledged to share in the authority of tradition."

Chapter 5 then devoted paragraphs 26–27 to Scripture reading.¹⁰ These expand considerably the earlier theses of Tromp, by working in biblical and patristic citations, but no. 26, directed to priests as preachers, includes as well Tromp's original point that one receives Scripture from the Church, its first depository, in view of spiritual growth, which requires docility. No. 27, on Scripture reading by the faithful, noted positively the spread of modern-language translations for reading that fosters spiritual enlightenment and motivation. But over half of no. 27 was admonitory, on the lines of Tromp's thesis no. 3 (later no. 10). Biblical reading must be

⁷ See Schelkens, *Catholic Theology of Revelation* 213–17. Garofalo composed the first draft of chapter 5.

⁸ *Ibid.* 232.

⁹ This overture to the chapter states succinctly what the major biblical encyclicals of the popes had treated at greater length on the Church's protection and promotion of Scripture. See Dean Béchar, ed., *The Scripture Documents: An Anthology of Catholic Teaching* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2002) 42–44 (Leo XIII, *Providentissimus Deus* [1893]) and 116–21 (Pius XII, *Divino afflante Spiritu* [1943]).

¹⁰ Below, the Appendix (pp. 571–73) gives these paragraphs in English translation.

done in the light of church teaching and “with a secure and appropriate formation,” because both Testaments contain obscure and difficult texts, which 2 Peter 3:16 states regarding the Pauline letters. Translations need episcopal approval and must include explanatory passages “which agree with the mind of the Church, whose living Magisterium is for the faithful the proximate norm of belief.”¹¹ The “authentic meaning” of biblical passages is ascertained by the Magisterium, to which Scripture has been entrusted for its interpretation. In fact, every initiative for spreading Scripture among the faithful must be under episcopal oversight, since, as mentioned a few lines earlier, the bishops are the bearers of apostolic teaching.

The concluding paragraphs of the schema that the Preparatory Theological Commission sent to the Central Preparatory Commission reminded Catholic exegetes, in no. 28, that they need the Holy Spirit’s aid in their interpretive work and that this work should above all bring out Scripture’s theological and spiritual doctrine. Catholic exegesis has its criteria, and so must be “always attentive to the analogy of faith, to the church’s tradition, and to the norms given by the Apostolic See in this regard.” No. 29, on theology and the Bible, stated that Holy Scripture, along with tradition, is like the soul of theological work. But while biblical interpretation contributes to good theology, one must be mindful that right interpretations of Scripture cannot be in dissonance with church teaching, because the same God is author of both the Bible and the church’s doctrine. The schema concludes with the directive that the work of theologians should aim to show the *concordia* of perennial and current Catholic doctrine with the foundational and inspired texts of Scripture.¹²

Before following the *iter* of *De fontibus*, with special attention to its chapter 5, I turn to another text of Vatican II’s preparation, which addressed the topic of Scripture reading in the Church.

¹¹ The schema gives no reference to a source of this statement, but it comes from Pius XII’s *Humani generis* of 1950, in a passage regarding theologians, for whom “the proximate and universal norm of truth” is the Church’s magisterium, “because Christ entrusted the scriptures and apostolic traditions to this authoritative office for their defense and interpretation” (Claudia Carlen, I.H.M., ed., *The Papal Encyclicals* 5 vols. [Ann Arbor, MI: Pierian, 1970] 4:177).

¹² This directive also comes from Pius XII’s *Humani generis*, which the schema again does not reference. Theology can pursue confidently its demonstration of agreement between the Bible and later doctrine, for “together with the sources . . . God has given to his church a living magisterium to elucidate and explain what is contained in the deposit of faith obscurely and implicitly” (Carlen, *Papal Encyclicals* 4:178).

**THE UNITY SECRETARIAT ON SCRIPTURE READING:
THE 1962 SCHEMA *DE VERBO DEI***

From the start of its work in late 1960, Cardinal Augustin Bea's Secretariat for Promoting the Unity of Christians (SPCU) had a subcommission no. 4 on the word of God, whose task was to give the council an account of the importance of God's word in Catholic teaching and life.¹³ The subcommission's chair was Professor Hermann Volk, who then held the Dogmatic Theology Chair in the Faculty of Catholic Theology in the University of Münster. Volk had been for some time pondering Protestant criticisms of a perceived contrast between Catholic emphasis on the sacraments and the relatively small Catholic concern for biblical preaching and personal Bible-reading.¹⁴

A first result of the Word of God subcommission's work came before the SPCU plenary meeting of April 1961 in a seven-page draft, in French; it had four sections: (1) the word as both a gift to and task of the Church, (2) the word and the sacraments, (3) the word in pastoral ministry, and (4) possible consequences in the council's treatment of the word of God.¹⁵

Section 1 of the draft distributed by Volk's subcommission recalls how recent popes have spoken emphatically about the importance of the word of God and have urged Bible reading on priests and laypeople, with

¹³ At the SPCU's first plenary of November 1960, the list of subcommissions included "4. 'Verbum Dei' in Ecclesia; eius momentum in doctrina et vita; eius praedicatio: in Missa (Epist. et Evang. in lingua vulgari) et catechesis." The creation of new subcommissions led in August 1961 to this one becoming no. 6, with its topic reformulated as "De Dei Verbi virtute et principalitate," which implied that its schema would develop a theological basis for the spiritual power of the proclaimed Word and for showing the high ranking of God's Word among the constitutive elements of the Church. My source for these SPCU working documents is Mauro Velati, ed., *Dialogo e rinnovamento: Verballi e testi del segretariato per l'unità dei cristiani nella preparazione del concilio Vaticano II (1960-1962)*, Testi e ricerche di scienze religiose, Serie Fonti e strumenti di lavoro 5 (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2011) 97-98.

¹⁴ Also on Volk's "word of God" subcommission were Johannis Feiner (Chur, Switzerland), Frans Thijssen (diocese of Utrecht), Charles Boyer (Gregorian University), and George Tavard (then at Mount Mercy College, Pittsburgh).

¹⁵ Velati, ed., *Dialogo e rinnovamento* 395-403, followed on 403-9 by the minutes of the discussion, in which Bea underscored the ecumenical importance of the topic, adding that while Volk's text was that of a dogmatic theologian, the Secretariat should especially develop the pastoral consequences mentioned at the end, to avoid having a document that would encroach on the proper area of the Theological Commission. Volk insisted on treating God's word not just on its instructional content, but as well on the word as a mode of God's saving gift of life to believers.

Benedict XV cited in this sense.¹⁶ The council should underscore the importance of the word in the Church, which must show by its proclamation and interpretation that “the Church is not above, but under the Word, and by this is under God’s sovereignty.”¹⁷ Also the council could well, as a possible consequence, urge the faithful to pray more frequently with Scripture texts, especially the Psalms.¹⁸

During 1961, Volk developed his text into a longer systematic treatment, especially by adding many biblical passages, and this was on the agenda of the November 1961 plenary of the Secretariat.¹⁹ The concluding section spoke of Holy Scripture as “the source and constant nourishment of the spiritual life, by which the pastoral ministry should orient itself in order to be fruitful in all its forms.”²⁰ Applications are then made to homiletic preaching, to vernacular recitation of the Breviary, to the centrality of Scripture for novice religious, and to the need of easily usable editions. The last point gives rise to this statement:

An important duty in pastoral ministry is to carefully introduce the faithful to the spiritual reading of Scripture. . . . For Holy Scripture brings a person in a unique way into the mysteries of the Kingdom of God, helping one to recognize its hidden reality and fortifying one’s confidence in Christ who works efficaciously in us, in virtue of the power by which he triumphed over all the powers of the world.²¹

¹⁶ Benedict XV had written, “Who can fail to see what profit and sweet tranquility will result in well-disposed souls from such devout reading of the Bible? Whosoever comes to it in piety, faith, and humility, and with determination to make progress, will assuredly find therein and will eat the ‘bread . . . which comes down from heaven’ (Jn 6:33) and will personally experience what David speaks of, ‘What is unknown and hidden in your wisdom you manifested to me’ (Ps 50:8 Vulg.). . . . As far as in us lies, Venerable Brethren, we shall, with St. Jerome as our guide, never cease urging all the faithful to peruse daily the Gospels, Acts, and Epistles, with the intent to absorb these into their own flesh and blood” (Encyclical *Spiritus Paraclitus*, September 15, 1920, on the 15th centenary of the death of St. Jerome, which Volk’s draft cited from *Acta apostolicae sedis* [AAS] 12 [1920] 405. My translation corrects that given in Béchard, ed., *Scripture Documents* 97).

¹⁷ Velati, ed., *Dialogo e rinnovamento* 402. Secretariat member Archbishop John C. Heenan (Liverpool) asked for a further explanation of this, to which counselor Gregory Baum responded with a line from St. Francis de Sales to the effect that the Church does not issue judgments on God’s word itself, but on interpretations of it (404–5).

¹⁸ Velati, ed., *Dialogo e rinnovamento* 403

¹⁹ The text is found in *ibid.* 676–87, with added paragraph numbers 1–41. Sections remained on the word as gift to the Church, that is, on it as a means of God’s saving presence (especially revered in the liturgy) and as the Church’s task in theology and in the pastoral ministry, where the word shows its spiritual fruitfulness.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 685.

²¹ *Ibid.* 686.

But the SPCU discussion of Volk's developed text on the word of God was cut short, because on November 9–10, 1961, Cardinal Bea had taken an active part in the Central Preparatory Commission's critical treatment of the Theological Commission's schema *De fontibus revelationis*. This draft contained its chapter 5 on the Bible in the Church, which would be revised. But for the SPCU Bea saw an opening because the theological schema gives no recognition to the high value of God's word in the liturgy and for the spiritual life. Also, the Theological Commission was reserved about commending biblical reading and preaching, both of which are ecumenically important. The outcome was a mandate given to Volk to compose—for the council itself—a succinct *pastoral* decree on the word of God.²²

In early 1962 Volk prepared a concise theological gem, of 1300 words in 13 paragraphs.²³ This came to the Central Preparatory Commission, which approved the text for the council on the Commission's last working day, June 20, 1962. The SPCU text eventually supplied formulations to *Dei verbum's* chapter 6 on the place and role of the biblical word and Scripture reading in Catholic life.

This pastoral schema commends insistently the “living and life-giving word of God, in which God's saving power is most certainly present in an efficacious manner” (no. 1). This is the word proclaimed in the Spirit and through the Church, . . . primarily by Scripture . . . , which not only contains God's word but in an eminent sense is God's word” (no. 2). Nos. 3–7 expand on the spiritual power of the word, on Christ's words making known divine mysteries, on God's personal and paternal conversation with believers, and on the apostolic word concerning Christ, by which the content and saving power of God's revelation enters into well-disposed minds and hearts. By its power, it truly becomes for believers

²² Ibid. 687–91, giving the minutes of the November 30 and December 1, 1961, discussion. But Volk also reworked his longer text, giving it out in French at the SPCU plenary of March 6–10 (872–83) and publishing it in the original German as “Wort Gottes: Gabe und Aufgabe,” *Catholica* (Münster) 4 (1962) 241–51.

²³ Velati, *Dialogo e rinnovamento* 883–89, giving the March draft in Latin and the changes introduced during the plenary meeting of March 1962 to fill out and polish the text for submission to the Central Preparatory Commission with a view to its coming before the council. The text received by the Central Commission, “De verbo Dei—Schema decreti pastoralis,” is given in *Acta et documenta Concilio Oecumenico Vaticano II apparando: Series II, Praeparatoria*, 3 vols. in 7, ed. Commissio Centralis Praeparatoria Concilii Vaticani II (Vatican City: Typis Vaticanis, 1969) 2/4:816–19; and in a revised form that went to the Council members, in *Acta commissionum et secretariatum* 3/2:454–57. In the Appendix below (pp. 573–77), I give the latter version in my English translation from the Latin.

in Christ a vital source of sturdiness in faith and of a characteristic spirituality, so as to give the Church support and strength (no. 3). What began in Jesus' words of spirit and life to convert hearts and draw disciples to follow him, resounded then in apostolic preaching and continues to echo in the Church as the principal means of the unfolding Christian economy.

Nos. 8–13 present Scripture in its nourishing and formative effectiveness. “Believers must be marked and interiorly formed by reverence for this word and by a piety drawn from the wisdom of the Scriptures, ‘for ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ (Jerome)’” (no. 8). The word informs liturgical worship, where readings and preaching lead into the narrative of thanksgiving proclaiming the Lord’s death until he comes (no. 9). Biblical vocabulary is central in the sacraments; thus, word and sacrament should never be sundered but be ever coalescing (no. 10). The care of souls centers on communicating the word that nourishes unto eternal life (no. 11). Therefore Bible reading, study, and meditation must be habitual for priests and seminarians. Theological work should develop in the greatest possible proximity to Scripture, for along with tradition, Scripture study keeps theology ever fresh, as Pius XII had pointed out (no. 12).²⁴

In no. 13 the schema makes devout Scripture reading by the faithful a main concluding point, connected with what went before in the text’s recommendations to priests. In their practice of pastoral care, a key component is to guide their people “to practice frequent and devout Scripture reading.” This will lead believers to contemplate God in his nearness and will engender firmness against temptation. The main aim of Scripture reading is personal encounter with God, through individual hearing and appropriation of his word. A brief reference to magisterial guidance introduces a protective factor against spiritual subjectivism, before the final sentences point to the support of devout reading that is expected from liturgical renewal. The general conclusion is that esteem

²⁴ In *Humani generis* Pius XII had written: “Theologians must always return to the sources of divine revelation. . . . Each source of divinely revealed doctrine contains so many rich treasures of truth, that they can really never be exhausted. Hence it is that theology through the study of its sacred sources remains ever fresh; on the other hand, speculation which neglects a deeper search into the deposit of faith proves sterile, as we know from experience” (Carlen, ed., *Papal Encyclicals* 4:178). I cite this because the main point about theology has fallen victim to a printing error in Joseph A. Komonchak’s reference to the passage in his “*Humani Generis* and *Nouvelle Théologie*,” in *Ressourcement: A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology*, ed. Gabriel Flynn and Paul D. Murray (New York: Oxford University, 2012) 138–56, at 151.

and reverence for God's word will bring to the whole church new spiritual impulses.²⁵

THE FURTHER *ITER* OF VATICAN II'S RECOMMENDATION OF SCRIPTURE READING, 1961–1965

De Fontibus Revelationis in the Central Preparatory Commission, November 1961

An anticipation of the famous Vatican II clash of November 1962 over *De fontibus revelationis* occurred a year earlier when the Central Preparatory Commission took up the Preparatory Theological Commission's text on November 10, 1961.²⁶ On that day several cardinals spoke to the passages on Scripture in the Church. Cardinal Julius August Döpfner (Munich/Freising) found no. 27 exaggerating on the Magisterium in connection with Bible reading, since the teaching office focuses its attention elsewhere, namely, on formally taught church doctrine. Bea delivered a sweeping critique of the schema, especially of its account of biblical inspiration and generally on its minimal use of the recent biblical encyclicals. Bea's intervention included (1) precisions on the "juridical authenticity" of the Vulgate (clarified in *Divino afflante Spiritu*), (2) a call for more charity toward exegetes, and (3) the bad impression given by the multiplied references to the Magisterium. Also (4) in drawing on *Humani generis*, the Theological Commission had omitted the encyclical's celebration of the inexhaustible power of the biblical source for "rejuvenating" theology and life.²⁷ Bea's intervention had a notable impact on the members of the Central Commission, and when they voted on *De fontibus*,

²⁵ In a preliminary evaluation of September 1962 of the first seven Vatican II schemas, Cardinal Joseph Frings (Cologne) used a text composed by Professor Joseph Ratzinger; it contained the suggestion about *De fontibus revelationis* that "in place of Chapter V, much of the draft text presented by Cardinal Bea, *On the Word of God*, could well be substituted, since it treats the same topic and does this better" (citing my translation from "Six Texts by Prof. Joseph Ratzinger as *Peritus* before and during Vatican Council II," *Gregorianum* 89 [2008] 233–311, at 277). Later, during the 1962 Vatican II debate on the Theological Commission's *De fontibus revelationis*, Archbishop Denis Hurlley (Durban, South Africa) mentioned, on November 19, the SPCU schema *De verbo Dei* as exemplifying a pastorally enriching schema, whose language shows the expansive power of God's word, which was notably lacking in *De fontibus*. See *Acta synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II* (hereafter AS) 6 vols. in 31 (Vatican City: Typis Vaticanis, 1970–) 1/3:198.

²⁶ Schelkens (*Catholic Theology of Revelation* 234–44) introduces the procedures of the Central Commission and reviews the November 10, 1961, debate on *De fontibus*.

²⁷ *Acta et documenta: Series II* 2.1:540 (Döpfner) and 546 (Bea).

55 of 70 members voted *placet iuxta modum* and indicated that Bea's intervention expressed the content of their reservations.

However the Theological Commission held its ground against criticisms of *De fontibus* in the Central Commission, because votes *placet iuxta modum* counted as votes of approval of the text. As a result only minor changes appeared in the paragraphs on Scripture reading in the published *De fontibus* sent out with six other texts to all the Council Fathers in late summer 1962.²⁸ Although *De fontibus* stood first in the booklet, it gave way to liturgy as the topic treated during Vatican II's first three weeks of debate. But the turn of *De fontibus* came on November 14, 1962.

It is well known that the council's conflicted discussion of *De fontibus*, November 14–20, 1962, led to an impasse when the Fathers were asked to vote on taking the schema off the immediate agenda. The 62% who voted *placet* to this motion fell short of the two-thirds majority needed to carry it and so the council seemed destined to evaluate each chapter of a schema rejected by a majority. But on November 21 Pope John XXIII exercised his authority by informing the Fathers that he was remanding the schema *De fontibus* for revision by a newly created Mixed Commission, composed of the council's Doctrinal Commission and the Unity Secretariat, to which the pope added some cardinals.

The *Textus Prior* of the Mixed Commission on Scripture in the Church, 1962–63

The Mixed Commission went to work in November 1962 and made an early decision to give the schema the new title, *De divina revelatione*, and to have it open with a *prooemium* on revelation in itself (eventually, nos. 1–6). For revising chapter 5 on Scripture in the Church, a subcommission of six members was named, including Cardinal Paul-Émile Léger (Montréal) and Hermann Volk (recently made bishop of Mainz). The group had a new text ready by December 3, which the whole Mixed Commission discussed, emended, and approved two days later. This revised chapter 5, now entitled *De Sacrae Scripturae usu in Ecclesia*, entered the version of the schema that went out to the Fathers along with several other

²⁸ When the future Council Fathers got the booklet of seven texts, they were asked to respond in letters giving their initial evaluation of the schemas. In his response, Frings called for a major revision of the schema *De fontibus*, including the recommendation that the whole chapter 5 be replaced by the SPCU schema *De verbo Dei*, which “treats the same topic and does this better.” Frings's evaluation was the work of his *peritus*, Ratzinger. I give this response in “Six Texts by Prof. Joseph Ratzinger” 233–311, at 264–68.

revised schemas on April 22, 1963. Because other intermediate revisions followed, this draft is known as the *Textus prior*.²⁹

In the draft, the paragraphs recommending Scripture reading gained importance by becoming the concluding two numbers, with the paragraphs on exegesis and theology moving ahead to the middle of the chapter. This change, together with others, gave a decidedly pastoral orientation to the treatment of Scripture in the Church. This treatment begins in the first paragraph (now no. 21, because of omissions in earlier chapters), where the SPCU's *De verbo Dei* (no. 8) contributes the notion of a personal encounter between the divine Father and his children through the sacred books. Also, no. 3 of *De verbo Dei* adds the affirmation of the saving efficacy of God's word in giving vigor to the Church and spiritual nourishment to the faithful. No. 22 now makes no reference to the Vulgate, but speaks only of translations from the original texts, in biblical versions to spread a more profound and widespread knowledge of Scripture. No. 23 on exegetes, simplifies notably *De fontibus* no. 28 to urge that biblical experts collaborate with theologians to aid the Church in pastoral care that nourishes the faithful. No. 24 asserts that theology has from Scripture its "primary and inalienable foundation and content," with Scripture conveying constant theological rejuvenation, as *De verbo Dei* had cited from Pius XII. The same *De verbo Dei*, no. 2, also gave no. 24 the affirmation that Scripture both contains God's word and is God's word. Theology is to serve ministry, especially by its contribution to homilies on the Scripture readings.

No. 25, on priests, no longer cites 2 Timothy 3, as in *De fontibus* no. 26, since this text on the effects of inspiration had moved forward to chapter 2, no. 11, on inspiration itself. No. 24 cites only one of the previous three patristic texts and moves quickly to communicating the word during the liturgy.

No. 26, on Scripture reading by the faithful, condenses notably no. 27 of *De fontibus* by, for example, dropping the earlier references to obscurities in the Bible. The people are to "freely" approach Scripture as it is available in the liturgy and other means now widespread. Church authority appears in a positive light as approving these means of formation. Bishops are guides in the use of Scripture by promoting well-annotated translations. A final passage adopts the last two sentences of *De verbo Dei* no. 13 on the hope for spiritual renewal in the Church from the greater esteem and reverence for the word promoted by this text. "For, the word of the Lord remains forever."

The *Textus prior* thus concludes by featuring elements of a biblically based spirituality as the pastoral goal of the combined work of exegetes,

²⁹ I give the whole text of the *Textus prior*, chapter 5, in the Appendix, pp. 577–78 below.

theologians, pastors and homilists, and the bishops who promote programs of biblical formation.

The Doctrinal Commission's Revision on Scripture in the Life of the Church, 1964

In response to the May 1963 distribution of the *Textus prior*, numerous written comments came in from the council members, with chapter 5 on the use of Scripture in the Church being treated in 44 interventions by individual council members and in ten responses by episcopal conferences. But when the announced agenda of the 1963 period of the council did not include *De revelatione*, the Doctrinal Commission suspended work on further revising this text on the basis of the written comments. But Pope Paul VI, in his closing discourse of period 2 on December 4, 1963, gave notice that the revelation schema would be taken up again in period 3 in 1964. Time was given for further written interventions, and in March 1964 a doctrinal subcommission on the revelation schema, with Bishop André-Marie Charue (Namur, Belgium) as president, began work on revising the *Textus prior* on the basis of the council members' many recommendations.

The assignment of *periti* to review the Fathers' comments and initially propose revisions of chapter 5 brought together two Jesuits, Alois Grillmeier and Otto Semmelroth, professors at Sankt Georgen, Frankfurt/Main, with Professor Ratzinger of Münster. At meetings of April 20–24, the Charue subcommission reviewed proposals by the *periti* for revising the biblical chapters, 2–5, with Grillmeier presenting the revision on Scripture in the Church.

One of the most frequent critical reactions by the Council Fathers to the *Textus prior* had been that it said far too little in no. 26 by way of exhorting the faithful to read Scripture frequently for strengthening their faith and personal spirituality.³⁰

The revision, called *Textus emendatus*, consolidated nos. 25 and the first part of no. 26 into a single no. 25 that recommended Scripture reading to various persons. The last part of the previous no. 26 became the epilogue to the chapter on Scripture in the Church.

³⁰ Calls for this exhortation came in the comments of Bishop Dammert Bellido of Cajamarca, Peru (AS 3/3:827), of Bishop Henriques Jimenez, Auxiliary of Caracas, Venezuela (AS 3/3:840, citing *De imitatione Christi* 1.5), Bishop Jaeger of Paderborn, Germany (AS 3/3:844), Bishop Przyklenk of Januária, Brazil (AS 3/3:869), Bishop Schoemaker of Purwokerto, Indonesia (AS 3/3:876), the Southern African bishops' conference (AS 3/3:894), the Belgian episcopal conference (AS 3/3:897), the bishops of southern France (AS 3/3:900–01, with explicit mention of *lectio divina*), the German and Scandinavian bishops (AS 3/3:905, 913), and the Indonesian bishops' conference (AS 3/3:917).

The emended no. 25 first extended the exhortation to practice constant biblical study for the enrichment of the ministry of the word from priests (as in *Textus prior* no. 25) to deacons and catechists as well. A second major change transformed the colorless statement of the previous no. 26 about the faithful freely approaching Scripture into an energetic exhortation directed *vehementer particulariterque* to all the faithful, with special mention of those in religious life, calling them to read and study Scripture in order to grow in the knowledge of Christ.³¹ A third change responded to the requests of a number of Council Fathers that the text should go beyond the liturgical readings and programs of formation, which were already mentioned in the *Textus prior*, by adding a reference to the practice of personal devout reading (*sive per piam lectionem*) of the Bible.³² The fourth change added a long sentence urging the preparation of well-adapted editions of Scripture for non-Christians, to give the exhortation its missionary outreach.

The *Textus emendatus* of the whole schema on revelation gained the approval of the Doctrinal Commission in early June 1964, to which was added a satisfied word from Bea that members of the Unity Secretariat need not be called together for a further meeting of the Mixed Commission. The revision went out to the Council Fathers in mid-July and was treated in the council *aula* from September 30 to October 6, 1964. This week was a decisive step toward *Dei verbum* because many Fathers, including leading Cardinals like Döpfner, Meyer (Chicago), Léger, König, and Bea announced their judgment on the revision as *placet* or even *valde placet*.

Final Emendations of *De Revelatione* on Scripture Reading, 1964 and 1965

After the *aula* discussion, the Charue subcommission reviewed the further recommendations that had been offered for improving the text. From this review, a further revision, the *Textus denuo emendatus*, went

³¹ The first two changes depended on the written comments of Bishop João Batista Przyklenk of Januária in the state of Minas Gerais, Brazil (see the previous note). He was a German-born member of the Missionary Congregation of the Holy Family, who included in his written intervention a text offered to express his main desires, namely, to include deacons and to speak an insistent word on Bible reading by religious. The Grillmeier-Semmelroth-Ratzinger team found Bishop Przyklenk's formulation so good that they adopted much of it, while incorporating the word to religious into the insistent exhortation of all the faithful. The phrase "*vehementer particulariterque*" came from Bishop Przyklenk's suggestion that the council address religious on this "*vehementer peculiarique amore*" (AS 3/3:869).

³² Those wanting this insertion included the episcopal conferences of Indonesia, Germany and Scandinavia, and southern France (as in n. 30 above). The emended text of no. 25 is given in the Appendix, pp. 578–79, below.

to the full Doctrinal Commission, which gave its approval in meetings of November 10–11, 1964. On November 20, all the Council Fathers received the new version in a booklet giving it side-by-side with its predecessor text and accompanying it with explanations of the further emendations.

In no. 25, two changes occurred in the second text of 1964. First, the maxim from Jerome on ignorance of Scripture being tantamount to ignorance of Christ was moved ahead so as not to imply that this pertained especially to those in religious life. Second, at the behest of some Council Fathers, an elegant sentence was added to the exhortation to read the Bible, with its commendation of biblical programs. The addition brought out the need for prayerful interiorization of the content that a person takes from Bible reading: “Let them remember, however, that prayer should accompany the reading of Sacred Scripture, so that it becomes a dialogue between God and the human reader. For ‘we speak to him when we pray; we listen to him when we read the divine oracles’ (Ambrose, *De officiis*).”³³

Voting on the schema of *Dei verbum*, the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, took place in period 4 of Vatican II, beginning on September 20, 1965. In this vote, the Council Fathers accepted the chapter on Scripture in the Life of the Church by 1,915 votes of *placet*, 212 votes of *placet iuxta modum*, and only one *non placet*. The Doctrinal Commission, in meetings from September 29 to October 11, reviewed the amendments proposed by those voting *placet iuxta modum*, including seven on no. 25. But the outcome was that none of the amendments offered to no. 25 were found necessary or even compatible with the text that had been overwhelmingly approved.

In this amendment process, some Council Fathers had asked for a restrictive modification of the recommendation of biblical reading. In the amendment proposed by 51 members, the early reserved outlook of Tromp and Garofalo came back in the request that the insistent recommendation of Scripture reading be accompanied by a reference to the Church’s past and present teaching that reading all of Scripture is not necessary for each and every member of the faithful.³⁴

But the Doctrinal Commission dismissed this restrictive clause, first, as not cohering with the citation from Jerome about ignorance of Scripture

³³ This came from recommendations submitted by Archbishop Modrego y Casás of Barcelona (AS 3/3:483) and Volk of Mainz (AS 3/3:345). The further emended text is given in the Appendix, pp. 578–79, below.

³⁴ The proposed modification: “Licet autem Ecclesia docuerit et doceat lectionem totius S. Scripturae non omnibus et singulis necessarium esse, nihilominus *Sancta Synodus* christifideles cunctos, *praesertim sodales religiosos . . .*” (italicizing the proposed additions; citing from Francisco Gil Hellin, ed., *Concilio Vaticani II Synopsis: Constitutio dogmatica de divina revelationis Dei verbum* [Vatican City: Typis Vaticanis, 1993] 167).

being tantamount to ignorance of Christ; second, because a following passage is equivalently protective against erroneous reading, by noting the duties of bishops regarding translations and regarding the explanations that must come with published Bible texts; third, because for some time the popes have been urging Scripture reading upon all Catholics, and, to show this, references to such passages in the biblical encyclicals of Benedict XV and Pius XII were to be added to note 5, which gave the source of the citation from Jerome.

On November 18, 1965, the final voting on *De revelatione* resulted in 2344 votes of *placet* and only six of *non placet*, after which Pope Paul VI promulgated the constitution *Dei verbum* on divine revelation itself, the transmission of revelation by tradition and Scripture, and how the inspired Scriptures should be central in the life of Catholic Christians.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

The Second Vatican Council's vigorous exhortation of the faithful to engage in devout Scripture reading (*Dei verbum* no. 25) could not have been foreseen on the basis of the work in 1961 of the Preparatory Theological Commission. What prevailed at that time was instead the Commission's concern over potential dangers to faith and Catholic doctrine that could arise from reading the Scriptures, which in places are quite obscure in their meaning for believers. This was an echo in the mid-20th-century preparation of Vatican II of a staple of traditional anti-Protestant controversial arguments that aimed to refute the position that the Scriptures were clear to everyone regarding the gospel, and, even more, to exclude attributing to the Holy Spirit an assuring guidance of the devout reader and his or her private judgment on the biblical message for one's salvation.

The schema *De fontibus revelationis*, which the Vatican II membership received before the council opened, bore several traces of passages in Pius XII's *Humani generis*. This appeared in words about the Magisterium being the proximate norm of biblical interpretation and on the task of Catholic theologians to show the agreement between present-day Catholic doctrine and the message and doctrine of the Bible. In time, these lines from Pius XII all but disappeared as the schema *De revelatione* was several times revised. Instead, another text of *Humani generis* came to the fore, namely, Pius XII's charter for *ressourcement*, when he affirmed the inexhaustible potential of the Bible to contribute ongoing rejuvenation to faith and theological instruction.

This study has shown the influence exercised on *Dei verbum*, in chapter 6 on the Bible in the life of the Church, by the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, especially through the introduction into the constitution of passages from the Secretariat's pastoral schema *De verbo Dei*. While it remains true that *Dei verbum* benefitted greatly from the preconciliar

biblical movement, one has to note that the ecumenical pioneers brought together in Bea's Unity Secretariat also made a valuable contribution. However, it was fateful that one point of the Secretariat's text did not enter *Dei verbum*, namely, the affirmation in *De verbo Dei*'s final paragraph, no. 13, that pastors have the duty to instruct and guide their people in devout reading of Scripture. This, one has to say, is an element sadly missing from much of the pastoral practice that followed Vatican II.

In revising the schema *De fontibus revelationis*, a crucial change came when the paragraphs of the final chapter were given a new order. Directives on the work of exegetes and theologians moved from the end of the chapter into its center, which allowed the exhortation on Bible reading to have a more emphatic final place in the text. This was a textual realization of the desire of John XXIII and of many Council Fathers that Vatican II should have a primarily pastoral aim and character. Then the little-known German-Brazilian missionary bishop, João Batista Przyklenk, recommended greater insistence on personal Scripture reading than was present in the 1963 text. From his suggestion came the forceful *vehementer* that qualifies the council's recommendation in *Dei verbum* no. 25. A profound "final touch" to no. 25 insisted on prayer before and during one's encounter with God while reading the inspired and inspiring biblical text.

Thus, Vatican II's dogmatic constitution *Dei verbum* has a significant pastoral conclusion concerning what is today known as *lectio divina*. In the reception of the Constitution, commentators have given much attention to its Christocentrism of revelation (chap. 1), to its elegant account of tradition as vital and dynamic (chap. 2), to the great care evident in its expression of the truth of the inspired Scripture (chap. 3), and to its illuminating statement on the genesis of the Gospels (chap. 5). But *Dei verbum* also deserves appreciation and a ready application of its chapter 6 on all that Scripture can give to rejuvenate church members, especially by the practice of devout Bible reading, which is forcefully (*vehementer*) urged on them in no. 25 of the constitution.

APPENDIX

Preparatory Theological Commission

Schema *De fontibus revelationis*³⁵

Chapter 5, Sacred Scripture in the Church (Selections)

26. [*Reading of Scripture by Priests*] Every minister of the Church should recall the admonition of St. Paul the Apostle, "all Scripture is divinely

³⁵ The Theological Commission approved this schema on September 21, 1961, for forwarding to the Central Preparatory Commission, which would evaluate it

inspired and useful for teaching, convincing, correcting, and instructing in justice, so that the man of God may be complete and fully taught for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16-17). As with the Church Fathers who have gone before us, “those who carry out the duty of preaching must not neglect the study of sacred letters,”³⁶ for the word of the priest should “be grounded in reading of the Scriptures”³⁷ to prevent a preacher from becoming externally empty “by not being interiorly a listener.”³⁸ The sacred books “can prepare one for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 3:15), when they are received from the hands of the Church and a devout reader is moved by docility of spirit and a desire of learning, which promotes spiritual growth.

27. [*Reading of Scripture by the Faithful*] In our times, by the blessing of divine providence, not a few of the faithful have taken up the praiseworthy practice of reading Sacred Scripture in the original texts. Above all, many translations of the sacred books in current languages, made from the original languages, have come out for the use and benefit of many. One has to especially rejoice over the active love that is promoting the publication and diffusion of the Gospels of Christ and writings of the Apostles. This holy reading, as the Fathers and Doctors of the Church give witness and as holy individuals know by experience, enlightens the mind, makes firm the will, and inflames the heart with love of God. But this most holy Vatican council adds its warning that the faithful of Christ should approach the sacred text in awareness of the Church’s teaching and with a secure and appropriate formation. This holds especially for the reading of the Old Testament, but also for the New Testament, in which “some things are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable individuals twist to their own perdition, as they do with the other parts of Scripture” (2 Pt 3:16). Therefore translations used by the faithful must be examined and approved by the bishops “with whom is the apostolic teaching.”³⁹ Also, translations should offer necessary and sufficient explanations that agree with the mind of the Church, whose living Magisterium is for the faithful the proximate norm of belief. In fact the authentic meaning of the divine words cannot be determined by any individual, even if he or she be learned, but by the Magisterium of the Church, to

regarding its adequacy for distribution to the council members and eventual deliberation on it in the council *aula*. The Latin original of nos. 26–27 is in *Acta et documenta: Series II* (Praeparatoria 2/1 (1965) 530–31.

³⁶ Gregory the Great, *Pastoral Rule* 2.11; PL 77.50.

³⁷ Jerome, Letter to Nepotianus 8; PL 22.534.

³⁸ Augustine, Sermon 179; PL 38.966.

³⁹ Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 4.32; PG 7.1071.

which is entrusted the deposit of Holy Scripture for its interpretation. Every initiative for the diffusion and explanation of Holy Scripture among the Christian people must take place under the authority of the bishops.

Secretariat for Promoting the Unity of Christians

The Word of God: Schema of a Pastoral Decree⁴⁰

1. The Church commends to all believers in Christ God's living and life-giving word, which is God's gift from on high and the shield of faith, a reality that the Church never ceases to revere with highest honor and devout affection. This commendation is of greater importance today, when the sower of tares does not oppose single doctrines but the very fact of revelation and the whole deposit of revelation by seeking to weaken the assent of believers to God's word. Against these growing dangers for faith, the Church sets in opposition, from among the other gifts of grace, the living and life-giving word of God, in which God's saving power is most certainly present in an efficacious manner.

2. This word embraces all of what God says to us in revelation, as it echoes through Scripture and tradition in the Church's worship and life. This is the word proclaimed in the Spirit in and through the Church, where it becomes present and operative as an "efficacious word" (Heb 4:12). This occurs primarily by the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, which not only contain God's word but in an eminent sense are God's word and which moreover give witness through the Church to "God's mighty deeds" (Acts 2:11) and to all his saving activity.

3. The Church knows that God's word is wholly unlike human words, since it transcends them by far. God's word is filled with spiritual strength and force, with heavenly vigor and supernatural power, being "the power of God" (1 Cor 1:18), the word of salvation (Acts 13:26) and of life (Acts 5:20), so as to be for all Christians the wellspring of the spiritual life, food for the soul, the strength of faith, the support and vigor of the Church. When lived out faithfully each day it can instill

⁴⁰ This schema was approved by the council's Central Preparatory Commission on June 20, 1962. The Council Fathers received the text, revised in nos. 2, 7, 9, and 13 (noted by underlining), in *Schemata constitutionum et decretorum de quibus disceptabitur in Concilii sessionibus: Series IV* (1963) 378–82, from which this translation has been made. The schema itself was not debated, but it did contribute several passages to chapter 5 [later, 6], on Scripture in the Church, of the *Textus prior* on divine revelation produced by the Mixed Commission (Doctrinal and SPCU) of 1962–1963.

authentic faith and unshakeable hope in opposition to the attractions of pseudo-science and to the anxieties of this life, which today oppress a vast number of souls.

4. “God spoke in many and various ways to the fathers by the prophets, but in our days he has spoken in his Son” (Heb 1:1–2). The words of the Word Incarnate make known the mysteries of God, so that in faith one becomes truly united with God. The God who addresses man in his word approaches us personally, coming near in spirit and grace as a Father embracing all his children. For believers, God’s word is life, grace, and spiritual food. “Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word coming forth from the mouth of God” (Mt 4:4). “The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life” (Jn 6:63). God’s word works chastely in souls, inviting them to the highest realities, while disposing them to choose a life of conversion to God and of following him by their deliberate decision. One who receives God’s word in himself in faith “has eternal life and . . . passes from death to life” (Jn 5:24).

5. God’s word is above all a divine gift to the Church, in which many ecclesial duties and tasks concern this divine word. It was given in this way that Jesus the Redeemer mandated the Apostles, and in them the Church, to preach by the Holy Spirit’s empowerment the Gospel of Christ to all nations. For this he gave them full power. This is the fullness of revelation, brought to completion in the Apostles, for “whoever hears you hears me” (Lk 10:16). Therefore the Apostles’ discourse was never a merely human word telling about Christ and his saving work, but instead a ministry of the word of Christ himself. First from the mouths of the Apostles and then by the voice of the Church this was passed on and has come to us, to work effectively and salvifically in us, “because in accepting the word of God by hearing us, you received not a human word but, as it truly is, the word of God, which is now at work in you who believe” (1 Thes 2:13).

6. This same apostolic word, “the word of truth, the gospel of salvation” (Eph 1:13), contains in itself force and power to transform everyone and bring them to rebirth, so they may live no longer “from a perishable but from an imperishable seed, the living word of God” (1 Pt 1:23). This same apostolic word echoes through the successive centuries, never dying out or fading away, but instead always living and operating in the catholic and apostolic Church built “on the rock” (Mt 16:18). Therefore God’s word not only lays the foundation of Catholic doctrine, but at the same time, when it becomes present among us by the Church’s preaching, it has to be taken as a mode and means of the economy of salvation, by

which God himself touches the souls of believers by his word and saving grace to lead them to share in divine life. But no one is able to listen to God's word who is not prepared to accept it by having the interior disposition and docility given effectively by grace. But the word received in souls becomes fruitful by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

7. The Church can never be nor even thought of without God's word. The Apostles . . . wanted to be "ministers of the word" (Lk 1:2) who proclaimed not themselves but Christ. In just this way the apostolic Church is truly the minister of the word under the supreme authority of God who speaks. Thus, nothing new may ever be added to and nothing handed on may ever be removed from the divine revelation that is complete in the Apostles.

8. The word of the revealing God comes to expression not only in dogmatic truths defined by the Church, but it also continually offers believers nourishment of their spiritual lives especially by the inspired passages of the Holy Scripture of both Testaments. For this reason believers must be marked and interiorly formed by reverence for this word and by a piety drawn from the wisdom of the Scriptures, "for ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ," as St. Jerome pointedly affirmed. Hearing this sacred discourse is not like reading any other book, for in Scripture the heavenly Father carries on a living and vital conversation with his children. In the Church no other reality but the Gospel receives the recognition given by saying, *Per evangelica dicta deleantur nostra delicta* ("Through the words of the Gospel / may our sins be wiped away").⁴¹

9. The Church celebrates God's word with special solemnity in its liturgical action of praise, in which a necessary part has been from the beginning the reading of Scripture to the faithful for their formation in the mysteries of faith. But God's word is present beyond the reading of Scripture, for this word is undoubtedly present to us in other and varied ways. This occurs above all in preaching and when the faithful assemble to celebrate in thanksgiving "God's great deeds" (Acts 2:11). Then they announce and commemorate the death of the Lord "until he comes" (1 Cor 11:26). Also every testimony to Christ in the Spirit (1 Cor 12:3), every conferring of a sacrament (see Rom 6:3ff, on baptism), and every teaching of "sound doctrine" (1 Tim 1:10) entails the saving proclamation of the power of Christ and by this shares to some extent in the power of the word of God.

⁴¹ A prayer prescribed in the Roman Missal to be said quietly by the priest after he proclaims the Gospel as he kisses the opening words of the text in the Missal or Lectionary.

10. In the ministry of the Church, God's word acquires its supreme saving efficacy when it enters into the constitution of the sacraments, which are often performed by using words taken directly from Scripture. Consequently, word and sacrament should never be dissociated or separated from each other, but instead should be understood as coalescing in one reality when Christ makes operative our salvation by their coming together at the same time.

11. In its ministry the Church protects and honors the word that it receives from the Lord by preaching it to the faithful in such a way as to offer them the spiritual food that by God's word nourishes them for eternal life, which is a notable spiritual function of the care of souls. For this reason the homily should be practiced as the supreme form of preaching, as the example of the Church Fathers shows us. Because God's word has an exalted place in the economy of salvation, its clear doctrine is most profitable, not only by serving to ground doctrine and truth, but also to the extent that God's word in the Church and through her becomes actualized as "God's living and effective word" (Heb 4:12).

12. Priests should from their time as seminarians be accustomed to reading Scripture and never cease meditating on it. By this they will become assiduous hearers of God's word and develop into excellent preachers. The theological disciplines, in debates and in giving their account of profound truth, should follow as close as possible the words of Scripture and take it as normative. For Scripture and tradition "contain so many rich treasures of truth, that they in fact can never be exhausted. Hence it is through the study of the sacred sources that theology remains ever youthful, while, on the other hand, speculation that neglects to search more deeply into the sacred deposit proves sterile, which we know from experience."⁴²

13. A duty of pastors is to gently lead all the faithful as early as possible to practice frequent and devout Scripture reading. Thereby the people will become accustomed to contemplate in themselves the mysteries of God and from this to draw spiritual strength against all the attacks of impiety. Let everyone be fully convinced that the primary purpose of Scripture reading is that one hears God speaking to oneself and accepts His word into oneself with an open and docile spirit—under the guidance of the Magisterium to which God has entrusted his word. An aim of preaching and of a worthy and competent renewal of all liturgical worship should be that the continual proclamation of God's word will have an eminent place

⁴² Pope Pius XII, *Humani generis*, August 12, 1950; AAS 42 (1950) 569.

as well in the solemnities of sacraments. Just as increased devotion to the Eucharist has enriched the Church's life, so one may hope that in the same way the Church will receive new impulses of spiritual life from the proper esteem and reverence for the word. For the word of the Lord remains forever.

**Mixed Commission (Doctrine and SPCU) for Revising
*De fontibus revelationis***

Textus Prior Approved and Sent to the Council Fathers
(April 22, 1963)⁴³

Chapter 5, The Use of Holy Scripture in the Church (Complete Text)

21. [*The Church Venerates Holy Scripture*] The Church has from the beginning shown the heavenly treasure of the sacred books of the Old and New Testaments great veneration and has never ceased to distribute this singular gift of God to the faithful, especially in its sacred liturgy, commending them for devout reception as a precious gift from God. In the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven meets his children lovingly and in a way converses with them. God's word has in itself so much strength and force that it is in reality the support and vigor of the Church and for her children, the strength of faith, food for the soul, and wellspring of the spiritual life.

22. [*Recommendation of Accurate Translations*] To open the access to Holy Scripture widely for believers in Christ, the Church by her authority and maternal solicitude recommends and takes care that accurate translations be prepared from the most excellent original texts, so that God's word may be known more deeply and declared more abundantly.

23. [*The Apostolic Office of Catholic Teachers*] The Spouse of the Word incarnate, the Church taught by the Holy Spirit of God and Christ, is always seeking to gain a deeper understanding of the Scriptures (see Jn 16:13), so that she may pasture her children with divine discourses. Catholic exegetes, along with theologians, must dedicate their efforts

⁴³ Although the supervisory Coordinating Commission approved this draft text for distribution, the initial written comments sent in by the Fathers in summer 1963 made clear that it was not yet a satisfactory basis for treatment in the council *aula*. Therefore, it underwent another revision, based mainly on the Fathers' written observations, in spring 1964. The translation offered here is from the Latin text given in *Acta synodalia* 3/3:101-5, left-hand column, which was given so that readers could appreciate the subsequent *Textus recognitus* of 1964, given in the right-hand column.

so that, under the lead of the Church's Magisterium, they study more deeply the divine texts, and thereby many ministers of the divine word may be able to offer to God's people nourishment from Scripture, so as to illumine minds, make wills firm, and inflame human hearts with love of God.

24. [*Theology Is Based on God's Word*] Theological science has from the word of God its primary and inalienable foundation and draws from Scripture the contents that give it great solidity and constant rejuvenation. Scripture not only contains God's word, but is truly God's word. From this, the ministry of the word of God, namely, pastoral preaching in which the homily has pride of place, is nourished to good health and flourishes with holiness.

25. [*Scripture Reading Recommended for Priests*] Therefore priests of Christ must give themselves to assiduous reading and diligent study of the Holy Scriptures, both to prevent a preacher from becoming "an externally empty preacher by not being interiorly a listener" (Augustine, Sermon 179) and so they may be able to communicate to their flock all the many riches of the divine word, especially during liturgical worship.

26. [*Scripture Reading Also Recommended for the Faithful*] The faithful as well should freely approach the sacred text itself, whether through the liturgy so filled with divine discourse or through other programs for this purpose, which with the approval of church authority are happily spreading everywhere in our times.

It is for the bishops, "with whom apostolic doctrine resides" (Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 4.32), to guide the faithful entrusted to them in the right use of the divine books and to see to it that they have translations of the sacred texts accompanied with necessary and truly sufficient explanations, so that their converse with Holy Scripture may be safe and fruitful.

Just as increased devotion to the Eucharist has enriched the Church's life, so one may hope that in the same way the Church will receive new impulses for the spiritual life from the rightful esteem and reverence for God's word, which "remains forever."

Doctrinal Commission

Textus Emendatus, Approved in June 1964 and
Sent to the Council Fathers July 14, 1964 (Selection)
(modifications of the *Textus prior* indicated by underlining)

25. [*Reading of Sacred Scripture Recommended*] Therefore, all clerics, especially priests of Christ and others, who as deacons or catechists, are

officially engaged in the ministry of the word, should give themselves to assiduous reading and diligent study of the Holy Scriptures, both to prevent any of them from becoming “an externally empty preacher by not being interiorly a listener” (Augustine, Sermon 179) and to make them able to communicate to the faithful entrusted to them the abundant riches of the divine word, especially during divine worship.

Likewise, the Holy Synod exhorts forcefully and specifically (*vehementer particulariterque exhortatur*) all the Christian faithful, especially those in religious life, lest “by ignorance of the Scriptures they may be ignorant of Christ” (Jerome, *Comm. in Is.*), to learn instead by frequent study of the Scriptures “the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus Christ” (Phil 3:8). Let them therefore turn gladly to the sacred text itself, when it is offered by the sacred liturgy or approached by devout reading or through programs and other aids for this purpose, which with the approval and guidance of the Church are happily spreading everywhere in our times.

It is for the bishops “with whom apostolic doctrine resides” (Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 4.32), to guide the faithful entrusted to them in the right use of the divine books, especially of the New Testament and above all of the Gospels. This is done by translations of the sacred texts that are equipped with necessary and truly adequate explanations. Thus members of the Church may become familiar with the Holy Scriptures safely and to their profit, so as to be steeped in their spirit.

Moreover, editions of Sacred Scripture, provided with suitable notes, should be prepared for the use of non-Christians as well and adapted to their circumstances. Let these be prudently circulated, either by pastors of souls or by Christians of any walk of life.

Doctrinal Commission

Textus Denuo Emendatus, Approved November 10–11, 1964 and
Given to the Council Fathers November 20 (Selection)
(modifications of the *Textus emendatus*, no. 25, para. 2,
indicated by underlining)

Likewise, the Holy Synod exhorts forcefully and specifically (*vehementer particulariterque exhortatur*) all the Christian faithful, especially those in religious life, to learn by frequent study of the Scriptures “the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus Christ” (Phil 3:8). “For ignorance of the Scriptures means ignorance of Christ” (Jerome, *Comm. in Is.*).⁴⁴ Let them therefore turn gladly to the sacred text itself, when it is offered by the sacred

⁴⁴ The Jerome citation now comes after the passage on learning Christ, so as to clearly apply to all, not just religious.

liturgy or approached by devout reading or through programs and other aids for this purpose, which with the approval and guidance of the Church are happily spreading everywhere in our times.

Let them remember, however, that prayer should accompany the reading of Sacred Scripture, so that it becomes a dialogue between God and the human reader. For “we speak to him when we pray; we listen to him when we read the divine oracles” (Ambrose, *De officiis*).