

THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL AND BIBLICAL RENEWAL

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INTRODUCTION

As the Church commemorates the fiftieth anniversary of the announcement of the Second Vatican Council, it is fitting to reflect on the contributions of this Council in the field of Biblical Renewal in the Church. The Bible remains very primary and central to the Second Vatican Council because the most essential teachings of the Council are founded on the Bible, more directly than those of any previous ecumenical council. Among the four Dogmatic Constitutions of the Council, biblical scholarship would agree that the most fundamental one is *Dei Verbum*, on Divine Revelation (the Word of God), because the other three Constitutions are built on the foundations laid in *Dei Verbum*.¹ *Dei Verbum* is the fruit of twenty centuries of lived wisdom of the Church and considerable reflection by her on the developments of modern methods of exegesis. Hence to grasp the full import of *Dei Verbum* and the Biblical Renewal an overview of both the Church's approach to Scripture and the document's immediate scholarship becomes essential. This work is developed in three sections: 1. Context of *Dei Verbum*; 2. Genesis and Content of *Dei Verbum*; 3. Biblical Renewal since *Dei Verbum*.

1. CONTEXT OF *DEI VERBUM*²

Through the centuries, the Church has always carefully guided the faithful and preserved the Scriptures, especially in times of suspicion and uncertainties. The main question in the Church since the second century concerned the canon of the Old and New Testaments. The Council of Trent dispelled this anxiety with its resolution to decree the list of the inspired books of the Canon of the Scripture. In doing so, it confirmed the definition of the whole canon of the Scripture made by the Council of Florence (1438-45). This list is identical to that of the Council of Hippo (393), which used the list found in a letter regarding the Canon sent by Innocent I in 405 to Exuperius, Bishop of Toulouse.

On the question of the unity of the Scriptures since Marcion (+160), who denied the status of the Old Testament, the Church holds fast to the traditional teaching of the Council of Florence that the Old Testament was part of the canon and that both Testaments came from the same God. Soon, study by scholars within the Church, who used critical tools available to them at the time of their biblical studies, began to interpret that the canonical scriptures are God's word to us and on this basis they are clearly distinguishable from other highly esteemed writings. The greatest among the early scholars were: Origen (185-254), who began textual criticism with his *Hexapla*; Eusebius (260-340), who researched the formation of the New Testament; and Augustine (354-430), who laid down principles for comparison of the Synoptic Gospels.

In the Middle Ages biblical scholars had a modified methodology in their exegesis, expressed as the four senses of Scripture: historical or literal, allegorical or Christological, tropological or moral and anagogical or eschatological, which is summarized in two Latin verses: *Littera gesta docet; quid credas allegoria; moralis quid agas, quo tendas anagogia* (which freely translates as: "The letter teaches the deeds/actions; the allegory

(teaches) what you believe; the moral (teaches) how you act; the anagogical (teaches) where you are going”). In such an explanation, the literal sense had historical importance and the other three were essential for belief and behaviour. St Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) accepted that “all other senses of Sacred Scripture are based on the literal.”³

With the dawn of the age of Enlightenment in the 18th century the Church was confronted with a whole new way of approaching the Scriptures, known as modern biblical criticism. The era of modern criticism began with a Catholic scholar, the priest Oratorian, Richard Simon (1637-1712), with his work *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament* (1678). He concluded that Moses was not the only author of the Pentateuch. He stated that the ancient texts had unwritten traditions at their base. Another Catholic, Jean Astruc (1684-1766), observed in his work *Conjectures* (1753) that there is a variation in the divine name in Genesis and proposed that this was due to the use of two distinct sources. Another Catholic scholar, Alexander Geddes (1737-1802), also commented on the same thing at the beginning of the 19th century.

The immense scholarly developments of the 17th and 18th centuries and certain philosophical presuppositions, which were born out of the Enlightenment age, such as, claims to historicity need to be treated with scepticism; ancient culture and religion evolved gradually from the primitive; and all supernatural elements are to be rejected, influenced the direction of biblical studies profoundly, and this gave rise to the Historical-Critical Method. As a result, Protestant scripture scholars such as, Ferdinand Bauer (1792-1890), David Friedrich Strauss (1808-1874), Julius Wellhausen (1844-1918) and Bernhard Duhm (1847-1928) offered various literary interpretations of the Sacred Scripture. This period also witnessed the emergence of Catholic scholars who attributed equal role to science and faith. The Dominican Marie-Joseph Lagrange (1855-1938), who opened

in Jerusalem the *Ecole Biblique de Jérusalem* (1890), argued that exegete could hold to the immutability of truth, and at the same time, could consider seriously the growth of doctrine within the Scripture. Another Catholic scholar having the same mind of Lagrange was Albin van Hoonacker (1857-1933) who worked with the new methodology while not advocating the relativist philosophical assumptions.

During this period, the Church reaffirmed that the *Scriptures* are *God's written word*, they are in no way to be altered or changed. The First Vatican Council (1869-1870) affirmed this fact in *Dei Filius*: "They [books of the Bible] are written by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit [*Spiritu Sancto inspirante*] and hence have God as their author."⁴ Then Pope Leo XIII brought out the Encyclical *Providentissimus Deus* (1893). In this document the Pope presented the following plan for Catholic biblical studies:

- Students of Sacred Scripture should be trained in methods of interpretation (*PD 12*)
- The Vulgate is the authentic version, but other versions of Christian antiquity should not be neglected (*PD 13*)
- A text of the Bible should not be interpreted against a dogma of the Church (*PD 13*)
- Ancient Oriental languages and the art of criticism should be studied (*PD 17*)
- Knowledge of natural science is a good support for lecturers in Sacred Scripture to enable them to detect and refute the fallacious arguments against the God-given Books (*PD 18*).

In the 20th century Hermann Gunkel (1862-1932) developed a method of study of the Old Testament, described as 'form criticism.' Although he continued to regard the books of the Pentateuch as compilations, he attended to the particular texture of the different elements of the text. He

sought to define the genre of each piece (e.g., whether “legend” or “hymn”) and its original setting in the life of the community or *sitz im leben*. To this kind of research into literary genres, “critical study of forms” (*Formgeschichte*) was added and introduced by Martin Dibelius (1883-1947) and Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976) into the exegesis of the Synoptic Gospels. Bultmann combined form-critical studies with a biblical hermeneutic inspired by the existentialist philosophy of Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). As a result, *Formgeschichte* evidenced serious dangers. The most damaging presumptions of this form criticism was that historicity is absent in the biblical text and that any reference to the supernatural remains a myth.

The Church confronted this danger. In *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* (1907) Pope Pius X gave priority to protect the faithful, refuting the modernists on the origin and nature of the sacred books, on inspiration, on the distinction between the human Jesus of history and the divine Christ of faith. Between 1905 and 1915 the Pontifical Biblical Commission issued cautionary and defensive decrees with a clear message: the findings of modernists on the Sacred Scripture do not have place in the Church’s teaching. Immediately, *Spiritus Paraclitus* of Pope Benedict XV (1920), although conservative in tenor, commended briefly that the search for the literal sense of Scripture is an essential task of exegesis and, in order to fulfil this task, it is necessary to determine the literary genre of texts, something which the historical-critical method helps to achieve.

Pope Pius XII with his Encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (1943), which commemorated the 50th anniversary of *Providentissimus Deus*, strengthened Catholic biblical scholarship by embracing scientific models of Biblical criticism. *Divino Afflante Spiritu* expressly commended a responsible use of the critical method and encouraged Catholic scholars to seek the truth in freedom. It acknowledged the validity of literary genre,

different types of literary forms in the Bible. The encouragement to study the Bible in the original languages and not as refracted through the Latin Vulgate, above all, the acceptance that biblical truth appeared in a variety of literary forms proved to be immensely liberating. It really opened up the way for Catholic scholars to embrace the historical-critical approach to the Bible whole-heartedly, which had become a dominant paradigm in Protestant scholarship, having its roots in the Enlightenment age. The emerging Catholic scholars of this era, namely, Joseph Fitzmyer, Raymond Brown and Roland Murphy became masters of the historical-critical approach. Their scholarly research in this field resulted in the realization of the Jerome Biblical Commentary, a monument to Catholic practice of the historical critical method.

Even though the teachings of the Church encouraged the use of critical methods and seek the biblical truth in freedom, some fundamental questions remained unanswered: How does human authorship of biblical books relate to God's 'inspiration'? In what sense and how far is the whole Bible 'true'? In the 'Deposit of Faith' preserved in the Church, what is the relationship between Bible and Tradition? What is the role of teaching authority in the Church in the field of biblical interpretation? To settle these outstanding questions, to encourage biblical revival and to affirm the central and fundamental place of the Bible in the Catholic belief, the Second Vatican Council came out with a major document on the Word of God, *Dei Verbum*.

2. GENESIS AND CONTENT OF *DEI VERBUM*⁵

The commission of the Council Fathers to prepare the draft consisted mainly of the Roman Curia. In the first session of the Council, on 14th November 1962, the draft of the text was presented with the title, *De Fontibus Revelationis*, "The Sources of Revelation." But the Council

Fathers found the draft on Revelation totally inadequate and unsatisfactory. Thus the schema was rejected by a majority vote, short of the required two-third majority. In this delicate situation Pope John XXIII personally intervened and proposed a new joint commission. The new commission consisted of both the former members and scholars trained in critical biblical study. The commission was headed by Augustine Cardinal Bea. The new joint or mixed commission safeguarded fairness, which was supported by Pope Paul VI who succeeded Pope John XXIII.

Three more drafts were presented and discussed in detail before a final text was presented. A majority of the Council Fathers were in favour of the new approach to the Bible adopted by the modern biblical studies. While the original draft emphasized the sources of revelation, the final draft concentrated on Scripture itself. On 18th November 1965 the final draft was put to vote in the presence of Pope Paul VI, 2344 voted in favour of the text and 6 against. Today, *Dei Verbum* represents very specifically the first comprehensive teaching on the Word of God and God's revelation to humankind, presented by an Ecumenical Council in the Church's history and remains a great source of energy for the Church.

The Dogmatic Constitution, *Dei Verbum*,⁶ would have assumed the biblical and proclamatory phrase, "the Word of God" rather than the technical and theological term 'revelation.'

Chapter 1, "Divine Revelation in itself," presents God's initiative in communicating with the humankind in personal terms. It emphasizes that divine revelation took place not only in words but also in deeds. This process has its climax, centre and full revelation in the words and deeds of Jesus Christ. Thus *Dei Verbum* describes God as a God not only who 'speaks' but also a God who 'acts.'

Chapter 2, "The Transmission of Divine Revelation," spells out that God's revelation through his words and deeds is transmitted by Scripture and Tradition. It describes the close connection of sacred Scripture and sacred Tradition. They flow from the same source, form a unity and tend toward the same end. Sacred Scripture is written under the inspiration of the same divine Spirit who also guides the oral transmission of divine revelation in the Church. In short, "the Church does not draw her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy scriptures alone" (DV9). The Church's teaching office, the *Magisterium*, preserves, explains and proclaims the Word of God faithfully.

Chapter 3, "Sacred Scripture: Its Divine Inspiration and Its Interpretation," first, inaudibly lays to rest age-old controversies on 'inspiration' and then places norms for meaningful interpretation of the Scripture. On inspiration it clearly states: "The books of Scripture, firmly, faithfully and without error, teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confined to the sacred Scriptures" (DV11). While interpreting the Scripture, one has to identify, as far as possible, the intention of each biblical author in relation to his historical and cultural situation and the genre in which he was writing.

Chapter 4, "The Old Testament," approves the Christian tradition of reading the Old Testament symbolically and repeats the venerable formula, "God, the inspirer and author of both Testaments" (DV16). It reiterates the traditional understanding that Old Testament prepares the people of God for the coming of the Messiah. While formulating this chapter Council Fathers have shown, one could observe, great care not to offend Judaism, which is the result of increasingly fruitful collaboration between Christian and Jewish scholars, inspired by the Council's document *Nostra Aetate*.⁷

Chapter 5, "The New Testament," places the inter-connection of Old and New Testament by articulating that Old Testament acquires its full

meaning in the incarnation and public ministry of Jesus. Furthermore, the life, ministry, passion, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ and his sending of the Holy Spirit are conveyed to us throughout the New Testament, especially in the Gospels. Here we find the emphasis on a high Christology of the Bible, a firm assertion on the historical value of the Gospels and an understanding that Gospel tradition reflects the situation of early churches.

Chapter 6, "Sacred Scripture in the Life of the Church," remains the longest chapter of the Constitution. Although the chapter is structured by a powerful theological image, the principal character of the chapter becomes practical directives. The practical directions call for biblical revival in the formation of priests, in the liturgy, in the Church's mission and in almost every aspect of the Church's life. It thus emphasizes that Scripture is the soul of theology and not only should the clergy be well trained in Scripture for their ministry of preaching and teaching, bishops should also promote Scripture study for the laity and provide translations and commentaries to assist them in their pursuit.

3. BIBLICAL RENEWAL SINCE *DEI VERBUM*

Dei Verbum gave an intense impulse to the appreciation of the Word of God, from a profound renewal of the life of the ecclesial community, above all in preaching, catechesis, theology, spirituality and ecumenical relations. The following can be considered as prominent developments in the Church, as regards the Bible, since the promulgation of *Dei Verbum*.

Rise of different methods of interpretation: The call to work towards a better understanding and explanation of the meaning of Sacred Scripture, following the directives of the Church strictly, gave rise to different methods of interpretation of the Bible (*DV* 12). The Pontifical Biblical

Commission's Document, *The Interpretation of Bible in the Church* (1993), puts forward these different methods and approaches for interpretation: The Historical-Critical Method; New Methods of Literary Analysis such as, Rhetorical Analysis, Narrative Analysis and Semiotic Analysis; Approaches Based on Tradition; Approaches that Use the Human Sciences; Contextual Approaches and Fundamentalist Interpretation.

Bible Translations: The call of the council, "easy access to Sacred Scripture should be provided for all Christian faithful," (DV22) was received with great enthusiasm. The Church encouraged translation of the Word of God into the language of the people and of the times in which she lives, thus becoming a translating Church, a presence of Christ in a given place. Translating the Bible is an important ministry in the life of the Church. Bible translation is seen today as a sign of the vigour of the Church. "A Church that does not translate the Message into the language of its people misses an important part of her mission."⁸

Rise of print and electronic media: The use of these different approaches to biblical interpretation produced research materials in print, audio and video world. Innovatively, electronics have taken the dispatch of the Bible with online programmes. Now the biblical tools for research and study are available at the click of a mouse. This fact is very well known to the publishers of books and producers of media. As a result, the Bible and its various research outcomes have become a upbeat business to make sufficient profit in the market.

Emergence of Bible Associations and Bible Study Groups: The call to give access to Sacred Scripture to the Christian faithful (ref. DV22) met with a generous response from the faithful as well as the Church leaders. There have been initiatives from them to read and relate Scripture to life. They use Bible as a source of prayer and spirituality. Thus Bible Week, culminating with the celebration of Bible Sunday was established, moreover,

Bible Associations, Bible Conventions, Bible Sunday Schools, Bible Circles, Bible Study Groups, Daily Bible Reading Groups, Bible Classes and Seminars for Laity, Bible Camps for the Youth and Biblical Publications in the Indian Languages emerged, revealing the spiritual power and fruitfulness of the Word of God. Today, the Bible Movements remain a great spiritual force within the Church.

Bible in Preaching: Since the Second Vatican Council there has been an increased and renewed interest in using the Bible in preaching, especially at the Sunday Eucharist. The pastors understand that, for many Christians, the Bible is experienced almost exclusively in the Sunday services, where the Word of God is read aloud and the breaking of the word serves as an important element of the Eucharist. For the vast majority of those who preach and those who listen to preaching, Christian proclamation is “nourished and ruled by Sacred Scripture” (DV21).

Practice of Lectio Divina: The call to ‘frequent reading of the divine Scriptures’ (ref. DV25) gave rise to the ancient tradition of *Lectio divina*: 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. It’s effective promotion and practice has begun to manifest in the Church a new spiritual springtime. As a strong point of biblical ministry, *Lectio divina* is being increasingly encouraged among the faithful, reminding them that the Word of God is a lamp for our feet and a light for our path (cf. Ps 119:105).

Use of the Bible in the Charismatic and Retreat Movements: The Second Vatican Council has been a great boost for the emergence of the Charismatic and Retreat Movements and the extensive use of the Bible by them. The members of the charismatic movements read and pray the Scripture so passionately. In the conference of the guided retreats there is

a predominance of the biblical texts. Today the awareness has grown deep that God speaks through the Scripture even to the ordinary people who know nothing about scientific historical exegesis.

Bible knowledge for Laity: Through *Providentissimus Deus*, Pope Leo XIII encouraged the clergy, not the laity, to study the Scripture. *Dei Verbum* invited the faithful to nourish their faith from the Scriptures. It is also a sharp break from the 16th century Council of Trent, which taught that interpreting the Bible was a task reserved for bishops. The Second Vatican Council insisted that the Bible is the treasure and possession of the entire Church and encouraged its study and reading on the part of all the faithful. Our faithful are now aware that Christ is present not only in the bread and wine, but he is also present in the Scripture. Today a large number of laity show their enthusiasm for biblical studies by attending courses in the National as well as Regional centres.

Bible and Ecumenism: The invite 'to provide editions of Sacred Scripture with suitable notes for the use of non-Christians and adapted to their circumstances' (ref. DV25) encouraged renewed interest in biblical ecumenism. The joint study of Scriptures by Catholic and Protestant scholars resulted in Ecumenical Translations of the Bible, Ecumenical Biblical Associations and biblical research works. Today the Bible serves as a starting point as well as a continual point of reference for ecumenical dialogues.

Dei Verbum and Liberation Theology: *Dei Verbum* urged pastors to make the Sacred Scripture ever more accessible to the faithful (DV22), as a support for their faith and their spiritual life. This strong position of the Council cleared the way for the biblical apostolate. The progress, however, was gradual. In Latin America, the Conference of Medellin (1968) communicated to the Churches of the Continent the Council's impulse of renewal. Its analysis of the political situation exposed the structure of injustice

so loud that it was to influence the way in which the Bible would be read and interpreted. The people of base communities approached the Word of God with renewed emphasis on the liberating experience of the Exodus, the prophetic focus of social justice, the Messianic project of Jesus (Lk 4:13-17) and on the priority given by Jesus to the poor (Mt 25:31-46). Theology, thus became a critical reflection in praxis in the light of the Word of God, taking on a distinctly “liberation” quality in context.

The Word of God becomes the soul of Theology: Dei Verbum emphasizes that sacred tradition, Sacred Scripture and the teaching authority of the Church are so linked and joined together that one cannot stand without the others (DV 10). This highlighting has facilitated the decoding of the theological dimensions of the biblical texts. As a result, the exegesis develops theology, making Scripture as the soul of theology, and theology becomes essentially the interpretation of the Church’s Scripture, as the strong foundation for the theology. In brief, as the Word of God becomes the soul of theology, Scripture does not end up being a text belonging to the past neither is there a conviction that the Divine does not intervene in human history nor is there a dichotomy between exegesis and theology.⁹

Biblical Approach to Catechesis: Since the Second Vatican Council biblical approach to Catechesis began to be considered as a sure way to deepen the faith. The reading of a biblical passage, the interpretation of it in its original context and applying it to concrete present day situations of life, concretely inspire the lives of the catechized, nourish their spiritual life and lead them to conversion. Biblical approach to catechesis strengthened the understanding that one of the main functions of Catechesis is the proclamation of the Word of God.

Word of God in the Liturgy: *Dei Verbum* has made outstanding statements about the importance of the Word of God and about re-

establishing the use of Scripture in every celebration of the liturgy.¹⁰ Thus many riches contained in the one Word of God are excellently brought out in the different kinds of liturgical celebrations and liturgical assemblies. The liturgical celebration, based primarily on the Word of God and sustained by it, becomes a new event and enriches the word itself with new meaning and power.

Verbum Domini: *Verbum Domini* is permeated by the thought of *Dei Verbum*. Following the encyclical letters by Benedict XV, *Spiritus Paraclitus* (1920) and Pius XII, *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (1943), a culmination of the Church's biblical theology was reached in *Dei Verbum*. *The Synod on the Word of God* (2008) and the Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini* (2011) have *Dei Verbum* as their mutual point of reference. *Verbum Domini* is in full continuity with *Dei Verbum*, seeking as its goal, to explain the Second Vatican Council's document more fully.¹¹ By further reflecting on the theme of God's word, it hopes to "review the implementation of the Council's directives, and to confront the new challenges which the present time sets before Christian believers" (VD 3).

The great worth and importance of *Verbum Domini* lies in the strength of its testimony to the Scriptures as the divinely inspired Word of God. This includes a penetrating explanation of the key hermeneutic principles already given by *Dei Verbum*: the principle of the Church as the living subject, from whom and for whom, the Word of God has been written, and the principle of faith which, not only grounds itself in history and takes up the scientific study of history, but also holds fast to the Church's testimony that God has spoken to his children within history through the Word of God (ref. VD 29).

4. PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES OF BIBLICAL RENEWAL IN INDIA

The Second Vatican Council gives us the programme of Catholic renewal. Therefore, Pope Francis often insists in his speeches on the importance of implementing the renewal called for by the Second Vatican Council. Even though there seems to be considerable biblical renewal in the Church after the Second Vatican Council, there still remain various realms where this renewal has to penetrate. A critical observation at the present biblical renewal reveals its future challenges and prospects.

Importance of Bible in the Liturgy: Many Catholics who are well informed of the great reverence for the Holy Eucharist are uninformed about the importance of the Word of God in the liturgy. The Council emphatically states that the Church has always venerated the divine scriptures as she venerates the Body of the Lord (DV 21). However, the Word of God has not received its expected prominence in the liturgy. Some reasons for this contention are the following: Often priests do not break the word from the pulpit, the table of the Word; the faithful are not encouraged to bring the Bible to the Church; priests do not sufficiently quote the bible while preaching; in a recent trend, some members of the clergy and some religious use the bible diaries to proclaim the daily mass readings instead of the Bible or the lectionary. The use of Bible diaries has lowered the magnitude and dignity of Bible in the lives of the clergy and religious. The publication of Bible diaries is a mere 'profit oriented mission' of some religious congregations, which not only curtails the use of Bible in our lives but also goes against the spirit of the liturgy.

Availability of the Bible: If one takes the pain to calculate the money and resources annually spent for the gatherings and conferences of bishops, clergy and religious in India, it will amount to hundreds of millions of rupees. The money, however, spent for the distribution of the Bible to the faithful as a subsidy or otherwise may amount to a few thousands. This

only shows our negligence in promoting the availability of the Bible to the faithful. If the Protestant Churches could subsidize the Bible or give the Bible freely, why is the Catholic Church not able to venture into this type of project? The Church needs to strive to make the Bible available in editions which are affordable both in price and formats equipped with necessary and adequate explanations. To make this possible, we need tap the resources within the Church and to appeal to those who have means to contribute generously.

Biblical Formation of the Laity: It is a known fact that today the laity show great enthusiasm in reading and knowing the Bible. As a result, at the national, regional and diocesan levels, Bible schools have emerged. In order to facilitate the training of the biblical formation of the laity, the Church has to provide more resources and finance. It is an accepted fact that the Church spends very little for the theological/biblical formation of the laity, in comparison to the finance and resources spent for the formation of clergy and religious. Moreover, to avoid the danger of a literalist interpretation of the Word, often called, “biblical fundamentalism,” – especially in the context of the Pentecostal fundamentalist interpretation of the Biblical verses - the lay faithful must be trained not only to become familiar with the Bible but also to interpret the written Word of God in keeping with the Catholic Tradition.

Use of the Word of God in Preaching: The priests need to become ‘Bible-persons’ through the use of Bible quotes in preaching and praying the breviary. The Second Letter to Timothy reminds us: “All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for refutation, for correction and for training in righteousness” (3:16). Hence we understand that the absolute and final authority in all matters of faith and morals is the Bible, God’s own Word. This calls for an abundant use of Bible while preaching the homily. The regular praying of the breviary can become an essential tool to pray over and meditate on the Scripture passages.

Importance of the Bible in the Priestly Formation: One doubts whether too much importance is given in the seminaries to the so called ‘scientific approach’ of studying the Bible and to the ‘demythologizing’ of the Word, in line with the thinking of Rudolf Bultmann. There is the need, therefore, to ensure even more that the seminarians are taught to read Scripture as the living Word of God. Priestly formation has to enable them to acquire an experiential knowledge of the Word as has been always interpreted by the Church. This manner of formation can help them to read the Word of God meaningfully in their personal lives and proclaim it effectively in their ministry.

Ecumenical Collaboration: It is true that the joint study of Scriptures by Catholic and Protestant scholars resulted has in the Ecumenical Translations of the Bible, Ecumenical Biblical Associations and biblical research works. However, we need to explore the possibility of greater ecumenical collaboration in the translation and production of the Bible especially in the regional and tribal languages.

More Initiatives Necessary for Biblical Renewal: More initiatives are needed to foster biblical renewal. Some of them can be:

- The practice of *Lectio Divina*, the meditative reading of the Word of God. Benedict XVI affirms: “If the practice of *Lectio Divina* is promoted with efficacy, I am convinced that it will produce a new spiritual springtime in the Church”¹²
- Meaningful use of the Word of God at all meetings and on all occasions, such as imparting blessings and administering sacraments and sacramentals.
- Reaffirm the importance of Christian practices like enthronement, reading and praying the Holy Bible since the family is the place where the Word is reflected upon, prayed over and shared.

- Popularize the Bible through the use of quiz, magazines, Bible festivals, dance, drama, folk arts, exhibitions, penitential services, vacation Bible classes and Bible study camps.
- Practice ceremonial handing over of the Bible to children and youth on occasions like First Holy Communion and Confirmation and for married couples on the occasion of the Sacrament of Marriage.
- Encourage the faithful to always carry the Bible and to read it often. If you get a seat in a crowded bus, you could use the travel time to read a few lines from the Bible, said Pope Francis to members of a suburban parish filled with people who commute to Rome for work. “A Christian’s first task is to listen to the Word of God, to listen to Jesus, because he speaks to us and saves us with his word,”¹³ the Pope said.

CONCLUSION

The Bible has become an essential and empowering part of daily prayer and worship of God among the Christians since the Second Vatican Council. Thanks to its wonderful document, *Dei Verbum*. Let me conclude with two observations: Firstly, even after these significant biblical renewals since the Second Vatican Council, however, the knowledge of the Bible is still confined to the inner elite rather than diffused among the masses of believers. This minority has acquired scriptural literacy through courses, reading and workshops. They derive nourishment and strength from their reading of scripture. Many of them put into practice a biblical vision of social justice, often at a considerable personal cost. The vast majority of the faithful, however, regard the Bible as mysterious and alien. The pastors have a great responsibility of imparting this majority of believers with

adequate biblical enrichment. Secondly, there exist and there are still emerging good number of biblical commentaries and periodicals for Bible study. At the same time, we often experience the defensive stand of the *Magisterium* on the study and use of the Bible. Hence there is an urgent need to develop a strong middle path between critical study of biblical texts and the barren defensiveness of fundamentalism. In brief, this historic document, *Dei Verbum* is still a guiding light on our path of biblical renewal and enhancement.

(Endnotes)

¹ This consideration is not on the basis of chronology of the Constitutions, but on the teachings found in them.

² This brief survey is based on the works of Dennis J. Murphy (ed.), *The Church and the Bible: Official Documents of the Catholic Church*, Bangalore, TPI, 2007, xxxiv-lxxxiii; Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, Bangalore, NBCLC, 1994; Lucien Legrand, "From Dei Verbum to Verbum Domini," *Word and Worship* 1 / 4 (2011) 222-230; Canon Luiz Ruscillo, "Rereading Dei Verbum in Context," *Faith* 45 / 5 (2013) 16-19; Robert Murray, "Vatican II and the Bible," *Downside Review* 121 (2003) 14-25.

³ St. Thomas Aquinas, *S Thee I*, 1, 10, ad I; see, also CCC 116.

⁴ The text of *Dei Filius* is taken from Dennis J. Murphy (ed.), *The Church and the Bible*, 52.

⁵ This brief survey is based on the works of Herbert Vorgrimler (ed.), *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, London, Burns & Oates, 1969; Robert Murray, "Vatican II and the Bible;" Lucien Legrand, "From Dei Verbum to Verbum Domini;" Jacob Theckanath, "Dei Verbum: The Context and Text," in Arul Raj (ed.), *40 Years of Dei Verbum: Formation and Empowerment of Laity in Biblical and Catechetical Apostolate*, Bangalore, CCBI Centre, 2005, 10-11; Anthony B. Taylor, "The Teachings of Dei Verbum," in *Little Rock Catholic Study Bible*, Collegeville, Liturgical Press, 2011, 18-20.

⁶ The text of *Dei Verbum*, quoted in this work, refers to Austin Flannery (ed.), *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents*, Bombay, St Paul Publications, 1991, 678-690.

⁷ See Holy See's guidelines for dialogue and teaching in Eugene J. Fisher, *Catholic-Jewish Relations: Documents from the Holy See*, London, Catholic Truth Society, 1999.

⁸ Lucien Legrand, "Vatican II on Bible Translation," in Aloysius Xavier and Joseph Titus (eds.), *The Word in Near You: Collected Papers of Lucien Legrand Vol. III*, Bangalore, St Peter's Pontifical Institute, 2004, 97-106, 102 (a careful reading of foot note 6 of this cited work is necessary for a correct sense of this statement).

⁹ For a detailed analysis on this topic in the light of *Verbum Domini*, see, P. Joseph Titus, "The Word of God: The Soul of Theology," *ITS* 48 (2011) 245-255.

¹⁰ Ref. DV 1, 21, 25, 26.

¹¹ In *Verbum Domini* there are a total of thirty references from *Dei Verbum*.

¹² From the speech given at the 40th Anniversary of *Dei Verbum*, September 16, 2005.

¹³ Pope Francis spoke these words on March 16, 2014 during a homily at the parish of Santa Maria dell'Orazione on the northeast outskirts of Rome.