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Theology of the Word of God in the Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini* by Benedict XVI

Teologia słowa Bożego w adhortacji apostolskiej *Verbum Domini*
Benedykta XVI

ABSTRACT: The theology of the word of God is one of the leitmotifs of Joseph Ratzinger's entire theology, and in a way its culmination is the apostolic exhortation *Verbum Domini*, which, although being the result of a collegial reflection on the word of God undertaken during the Synod of Bishops, also bears the unmistakable mark of Benedict XVI's personal theological search and conviction. In this article, the author highlights the most crucial aspects, mainly of a dogmatic nature, of this problem read in the light of the exhortation *Verbum Domini*. In its first part, he explains the essence and specificity of the fact that „God speaks to man.” Rooted in God's action on behalf of man, His word has a sacramental character. Complementing this sacramental dimension of God's word is its close relationship with the action of the Holy Spirit, which influences the word's transmission, writing and interpretation. In the next section of the article, the author discusses the transmission of the word of God. He also defines the action of the Holy Spirit in relation to the word of God. The third part of the paper deals with the response that might be given to God. The nature of the word of God demands, first of all, faith as a condition and way of understanding and living it both individually and communally. The analysis of individual points of the exhortation in relation to post-conciliar theology has made it possible to show the fundamental importance of the word of God in the life of every believer as well as the community of the Church.

KEYWORDS: Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, Scripture, the word of God and the Holy Spirit, the word of God vs. the Church, faith and the word of God, spiritual understanding, post-conciliar theology, sacramentality of the word of God, communication of the word of God

ABSTRAKT: Teologia słowa Bożego stanowi jeden z wątków przewodnich całej teologii Josepha Ratzingera, a poniekąd jej zwieńczeniem jest adhortacja *Verbum*

Domini, która będąc wprawdzie rezultatem kolegialnej refleksji nad słowem Bożym podjętej przez Synod Biskupów, nosi także wyraźne rysy osobistych poszukiwań i teologicznych przekonań Benedykta XVI. W artykule autor zwraca uwagę na najbardziej kluczowe, głównie o charakterze dogmatycznym, aspekty tego zagadnienia odczytywane w świetle adhortacji *Verbum Domini*. W jego pierwszej części wyjaśnia istotę i specyfikę faktu, że „Bóg mówi do człowieka”. Zakorzeniając się w działaniu Boga na rzecz człowieka, słowo Boże ma charakter sakramentalny. Dopełnieniem tego wymiaru słowa Bożego jest jego ścisła więź z działaniem Ducha Świętego, który wpływa na jego przekazywanie, spisanie oraz interpretację. W kolejnej części artykułu autor omawia kwestię przekazywania słowa Bożego. Określa również działanie Ducha Świętego w relacji do słowa Bożego. Trzecia część opracowania zajmuje się zagadnieniem odpowiedzi udzielanej Bogu przez człowieka. Charakter słowa Bożego domaga się od niego przede wszystkim wiary jako warunku i sposobu jego rozumienia oraz jej przeżywania zarówno w wymiarze indywidualnym, jak i wspólnotowym. Analiza poszczególnych punktów adhortacji w odniesieniu do teologii posoborowej pozwoliła na ukazanie zasadniczego znaczenia słowa Bożego w życiu każdego wierzącego, jak i wspólnoty Kościoła.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: Benedykt XVI, *Verbum Domini*, Pismo Święte, słowo Boże a Duch Święty, słowo Boże a Kościół, wiara a słowo Boże, duchowe rozumienie, teologia posoborowa, sakramentalność słowa Bożego, przekazywanie słowa Bożego

The theology of the Word of God (Scripture) is undoubtedly the leitmotif of Joseph Ratzinger's entire theology, and then its elaborated shape defines the character and structure of his theological statements on specific topics that he addressed in his ministry as a theologian and pastor.¹ This theology was mainly rooted in the research carried out during the preparation of his habilitation thesis on the theology of the history in St Bonaventure, and its somewhat verifying moment was his participation as an expert at the Second Vatican Council, especially in the context of the work on the dogmatic constitution on divine revelation *Dei Verbum*.² Numerous results of the research conducted by Ratzinger are available in the seventh volume of his collected writings,³ although various aspects and details of the issue can also be found in other volumes that address various topics. The apostolic exhortation *Verbum Domini* appears to take place to be the culmination of these explorations and writings;

¹ Cf. S.W. Hahn, *Covenant and Communion: The Biblical Theology of Pope Benedict XVI*, Grand Rapids, MI 2009.

² Cf. L. Boeve, "La vraie réception de Vatican II n'a pas encore commencé". *Joseph Ratzinger, Révélation et autorité de Vatican II*, "Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses" 85/4 (2009), pp. 305-339.

³ Cf. J. Ratzinger, *O nauczaniu II Soboru Watykańskiego. Formułowanie – przekaz – interpretacja* [On the Teaching of the Second Vatican Council. Formulation – Transmission – Interpretation], vol. 1-2; Series: Opera Omnia 7/1-2, eds. K. Gózdź, M. Górecka, transl. W. Szymona, E. Grzesiuk, Lublin 2016.

it represents a very important aspect of Benedict XVI's function as a universal teacher.⁴ Although it is to a large extent the fruit of the collegial work undertaken by the Assembly of the Synod of Bishops and the "proposals" formulated at that time, Benedict XVI's personal touch, based on his own research and theological experience, is doubtless present in the presentation, explanation and justification of the text. For this reason, it is worth looking in particular at the theology of the word of God, which, with clear reference to the many post-conciliar explorations in this area, has been synthesised in the exhortation *Verbum Domini*, in order to also contribute to its reception in the Church as it responds to current spiritual and pastoral needs. The theology of the word of God aims first of all to show the word's specificity as precisely the word of *God*, that is, having its source in the salvific action of God. This specificity first gives rise to a consideration of the sacramental dimension of the word of God, and then also determines the specificity of its transmission in the Church.

This article therefore draws attention to the guiding threads of the theology of the word of God, which at the same time call for greater consideration in the current search for a theology of the word of God. It should be noted, of course, that work on this issue has already been undertaken, but nevertheless the complexity of the issue makes it possible to continue reflecting on this seemingly complex issue.⁵

Here, therefore, in addressing the issue set out in the title, we will turn to the first part of Pope Benedict XVI's exhortation *Verbum Domini* on "The

⁴ Cf. R. Pindel, S. Jędrzejewski (eds.), *Hermeneutyka Pisma Świętego w Kościele. Wokół adhortacji Verbum Domini Benedykta XVI o Słowie Bożym w życiu i misji Kościoła* [Hermeneutics of Scripture in the Church. Around Benedict XVI's Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini* on the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church], Series: Hermeneutica et Judaica 6, Kraków 2012; D. Ostrowski (ed.), *Słowo Boże w życiu i misji Kościoła. Wokół adhortacji apostolskiej Benedykta XVI "Verbum Domini"* [The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church. Around Benedict XVI's Apostolic Exhortation "Verbum Domini"], Świdnica 2012, pp. 45–60.

⁵ Cf. D. Brzeziński, *Sakramentalność słowa Bożego w świetle adhortacji apostolskiej Benedykta XVI Verbum Domini* [Sacramentality of the Word of God in the Light of Benedict XVI's Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*], "Liturgia Sacra" 17/1 (2011), pp. 15–23; Z. Chromy, *Teologia Słowa Bożego Benedykta XVI* [Theology of the Word of God by Benedict XVI], [in:] *Słowo Boże w życiu i misji Kościoła. Wokół adhortacji apostolskiej Benedykta XVI "Verbum Domini"* [The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church. Around the Apostolic Exhortation of Benedict XVI "Verbum Domini"], ed. D. Ostrowski, Świdnica 2012, pp. 45–60; W. Linke, *Logos Wcielony i słowo przepowiadane. Teologia Słowa Bożego i praktyka przepowiadania Słowa Bożego w Verbum Domini, Lumen fidei i Evangelii gaudium* [Logos Incarnate and the Preached Word. Theology of the Word of God and the Practice of Preaching the Word of God in *Verbum Domini*, *Lumen fidei* and *Evangelii Gaudium*], "Warszawskie Studia Teologiczne" 28/1 (2015), pp. 104–123.

God Who Speaks” (nos. 6–21), and “Our Response To The God Who Speaks” (nos. 22–28). This is the essential, explicitly doctrinal part of the exhortation, which gives rise, in a way, to the practical applications that are proposed in the rest of the papal document, namely how to understand, interpret and apply the word of God in the life of the Church. The issue to which we turn our attention is closely linked to the contents of the first two chapters of the Second Vatican Council’s *Dei Verbum* constitution, and in fact constitutes a deeper interpretation of them in the light of post-conciliar reflection on the word of God in the teaching and life of the Church.

Word of God and revelation

The first chapter of the exhortation *Verbum Domini* bears a significant title, clearly rooted in the long Ecclesiastical Tradition: “The God who speaks.” This statement points to divine revelation as seen in the light of the *Dei Verbum* Constitution and seeks to synthesise its essence. It contains a certain advance on the doctrine of the First Vatican Council as formulated in the constitution *Dei Filius*.⁶ Catholic theology, following that Council, as well as liturgy and catechesis, essentially treated revelation as a reality of an intellectual nature, aiming to communicate to man a certain body of information-cum-truths concerning God and to designate a sure path leading to Him: *manifestatio veritatis occultae homini facta per Deum*.⁷ In this perspective, faith was mainly seen essentially as an intellectual acceptance of what is not seen (cf. Heb 11:1). The Second Vatican Council, while not questioning this aspect of divine revelation and faith understood in this way, nevertheless defines revelation in an extended way, taking into account also the aspect of God’s giving of himself to man in history, culminating in Jesus Christ, the mediator in the order of creation and salvation, while faith is the response to the gift of salvation, which consists in participating in the life of God.⁸ Revelation becomes explicitly oriented towards communication, participation and encounter, and thus has an

⁶ Cf. First Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Filius* on the Catholic Faith, <https://inters.org/Vatican-Council-I-Dei-Filius>; <https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-ix/it/documents/constitutio-dogmatica-dei-filius-24-aprilis-1870.html> [access: 10.11.2023].

⁷ Cf. e.g. C.J. Vidmar, *Compendium repetitorium theologiae dogmaticae tum generalis cum specialis*, New York 1925, p. 33.

⁸ Cf. J. Królikowski, *Światło Chrystusa i sakrament zbawienia. Studia eklezjologiczne* [The Light of Christ and the Sacrament of Salvation. Ecclesiological Studies], Series: Ministerium Expositionis 5, Krakow 2018, pp. 35–49.

eminently eventual and existential significance. Revelation no longer appears as some external act that miraculously makes contact between God and man possible, with both remaining infinitely distant from each other, but points to a historical and personal event of a communicative nature through which man is graciously enabled to participate in the mystery of God, in his truth and in his holiness, and is thus led to a personal and living inclusion in the communion of the Trinity. Therein lies the essential novelty of the theology of revelation proposed by the Second Vatican Council.⁹

It is important to note a certain change in terminology that occurs in the exhortation *Verbum Domini* as compared to the constitution *Dei Verbum*. The Council referred to both the concept of revelation and the concept of the word of God, with the Bible most readily defined as *locutio Dei*. Pope Benedict XVI places a privileged emphasis on the word of God, also in relation to Scripture.¹⁰ Perhaps this is due to the fact that the term “the word of God” is much more evocative than the word “revelation,” which has a somewhat technical meaning without a clear existential and personal reference. The reference to “the word of God” draws explicit attention to the nature of God’s giving of Himself *ad extra* and in the manner of His effect on man.

The God of Jesus Christ is a Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and as such He has gradually revealed Himself in the history of salvation. This perspective was present in the *Dei Verbum* constitution, beginning with No. 2, which states that “through Christ, the Word made flesh, man might in the Holy Spirit have access to the Father and come to share in the divine nature.” The Father takes the initiative, the Son reveals and actualises the becoming of sons, and the Holy Spirit makes it possible for the believer to receive the life of God in order to become a partaker of it. In No. 20 of the exhortation *Verbum Domini*, this key vision, rooted in the Bible, is taken up in a very explicit and concrete way: God the Father is the source and origin of revelation, the incarnate

⁹ As for *Dei Verbum* constitution cf. L. Alonso Schökel, A.M. Artola, *La palabra de Dios en la historia de los hombres. Comentario Temático a la Constitución “Dei Verbum” del Vaticano II sobre la Divina Revelación*, Bilbao 1991; R. Burigana, *La Bibbia nel Concilio. La redazione della costituzione “Dei verbum” del Vaticano II*, Bologna 1998; F. Testaferri, *La parola viva. Commento teologico alla Dei Verbum*, Assisi 2009.

¹⁰ A very important role in such a view of Scripture was presented above all by Hans Urs von Balthasar in his article *Die Schrift als Gottes Wort*, “Schweizer Rundschau” 49 (1949), pp. 428–442. Later, the article under the title *Wort, Schrift, Tradition* was reprinted in Balthasar’s anthology of texts: *Verbum caro*, Series: Skizzen zur Theologie 1, Einsiedeln 1960, pp. 11–27.

Son is its completion and fullness, and the Holy Spirit is the empowerment to receive it and the guide to a life based on it.

In No. 6 of the exhortation, Benedict XVI refers to God's love in order to make it, as it were, the architectural criterion of revelation: God-Love dynamically reveals Himself in the word of the Son and, through the gift of the Holy Spirit, incorporates man into the love existing between the three persons of the Trinity. This is not just an abstract theological question, but a decisive moment of the Christian life. Accepting the manifestation of Love, which is God Himself, means for the believer a new way of life: it is no longer living for oneself, but orienting one's life towards the salvation of all. It means at the same time the real possibility of reaching the Father through Jesus, the Word of God, and living in communion with the three persons of God, whose principle and animating power is the Holy Spirit – the Spirit of Love.

In the course of history, God has gradually revealed Himself, just as Jesus did, who was part of this pedagogy of God when, for example, He did not speak openly about the kingdom of God, but explained its mysteries to a narrow circle of His disciples. God spoke to his people gradually, according to their capacity to understand and receive, placing himself on the side of the people who still had to mature in order to understand what was being communicated to them, accompanying them and especially speaking their language, sensitively taking into account the times, the ways and the dynamics of their growth (VD 11–13; DV 3 and 6). This means that revelation is not to be understood as some unexpected and spectacular theophany of which God is the author, but is to be understood in such a way that the people who God uses are also an integral part of it. The anthropological dimension of revelation is therefore part of his nature. Benedict XVI, in No. 11 of the exhortation, quotes in full an extremely important text from the New Testament, namely Heb 1:1–2.¹¹ These verses strongly emphasise that God's revelation is a process: God spoke in ancient times through the prophets, and now this speaking is fulfilled in the sending of the Son, through whom and from whom all things came into being. History is, then, the “womb” of God's gracious revelation; it is open to Him in order to host Him. This is the sense in which the Christian faith understands things: not only is Jesus Christ the manifestation of the Word in history, but also the same Word of God revealed as the Absolute in earthly and human adventure.

To indicate the manner in which God revealed himself, Benedict XVI speaks classically of “condescension” (*synkatabasis*) of God in revelation and

¹¹ Cf. P. Grelot, *Une lecture de l'épître aux Hébreux*, Paris 2003, pp. 15–18; A. Vanhoye, *L'epistola agli Ebrei. “Un sacerdote diverso”*, Bologna 2010, pp. 39–46.

in the incarnation (VD 11), following in this the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum* (par. 14). Considering these “ways” of God’s action significantly helps us to understand why God acted in ways that are difficult to understand, which by the way the “dark passages” of the Bible also convey to us (par. 42).

God’s speaking in history has its peak, and reaches its fullness in the incarnation of the Son, the Word, “mediator and the fullness of all revelation” (DV 2 and 4).¹² If God has revealed himself in a decisive and fully definitive way in the person of Jesus, then in the Son he has said all that he intended to say to man (VD 36). Jesus Christ is the Revelator, that is, the living and personal Word of God. Thus Pope Benedict XVI emphasises in his exhortation *Verbum Domini*: “Jesus is revealed as *the word of the new and everlasting covenant*” (par. 12). He not only made a covenant with his people, but he himself was and is the covenant in his passion and his resurrection (par. 13).

The novelty of the Christian faith is therefore not about what Christ said or communicated to us, but about who He is: His person together with the gift of divine life of which He has made human beings partakers. Such a view situates itself at the antipodes of the currents of thought that would like to make Christianity into a kind of general humanistic idea or a mere form of life. The word on which faith is based is the historical person who has transcended the boundaries of time to become an event “for me,” “today,” through which the transformation of human beings takes place.

This account, which is historical, personal and sacramental in character, has broad references to human life. On its basis, one understands how the event of Jesus Christ, the Word of God, encompasses the whole human being within a relationship that can only be adequately expressed through the category of grace. It turns out that capturing the Word of God in an informational and intellectual perspective is far from sufficient. There is no difference between believing what Christ says and believing who He is: “I am the way and the truth and the life” (John 14:6).¹³ To listen to Christ, then, means to encounter him in the Church, which proclaims the word and administers the sacraments, to experience him, for he is the “proto-sacrament of encounter with the Father”: “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9); “whoever receives me receives the one who sent me” (Matt 10:40).¹⁴

¹² Cf. I. de la Potterie, *Studi di cristologia giovannea*, Genova 1992, pp. 316–331.

¹³ Cf. I. de la Potterie, *La vérité dans Saint Jean*, vol. 1: *Le Christ et la vérité, l’esprit et la vérité*, Rome 1977, pp. 241–278.

¹⁴ Cf. J. Królikowski, *Jezus Chrystus jako prasakrament Boga i zbawienia* [Jesus Christ as the Proto-sacrament of God and Salvation], “Tarnowskie Studia Teologiczne” 26/2 (2007), pp. 3–18.

The cosmic and anthropological dimension

Benedict XVI's exhortation *Verbum Domini*, in close connection with the constitution *Dei Verbum* (par. 3), is situated in a very broad perspective. It mentions the cosmic and personal dimension of the Word of God, which exists before any human intervention and before the Bible was written down. Man could potentially know the Word even if he did not have the written word of the hagiographers at his disposal. This would not happen by virtue of a personal effort based on his natural abilities, but is possible primarily because God has established the Word as the foundation of the being of all things: "In Him were created all things" (Col 1:16).

The starting point for talking about revelation is therefore the Creation, as the biblical and patristic tradition, moreover, suggests. This concept, which is referred to in No. 8, is based on biblical and patristic statements. In his *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, St Bonaventure, whom Benedict XVI cites, stresses that "every creature is a word of God, since it proclaims God" (VD 8). Formed in the school of this great scholastic, but also in the light of the Fathers of the Church, Benedict XVI was able to say: "nothing in creation is isolated and the world, next to Sacred Scripture, is a Bible of God."¹⁵

In discussing this issue, it is important to emphasise that neither the Council nor Benedict XVI refers to the concept of "revelation" to indicate the manifestation of God in creation. The Council, in *Dei Verbum*, speaks of "an enduring witness – *perenne testimonium*" (par. 3), while the exhortation *Verbum Domini* limits itself to stating that "Scripture tells us that everything that exists does not exist by chance but is willed by God and part of his plan, at whose center is the invitation to partake, in Christ, in the divine life." (par. 8). There is thus a closer connection between creation and salvation than the First and Second Vatican Councils indicate in their documents. The First Vatican Council took into account the possibility of natural revelation, i.e. it assumed that man would be able to know God based on his natural abilities, starting from created things.¹⁶ This perspective also influences the approach to created realities. They are a gift on the basis of which one can know the Creator. If they are used well, they do not have a negative meaning, as various forms of Manichaeism imply, but are

¹⁵ Benedict XVI, General Audience *St Ephrem* (28 November 2007), [in:] *Insegnamenti di Benedetto XVI*, vol. III, 2 (2007), Città del Vaticano 2008, p. 658; https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2007/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20071128.html [access: 10.11.2023].

¹⁶ First Vatican Council, *Dei Filius...*, op. cit., ch. 2.

an open way to reach God, whose power and truth is reflected in all things. They are His “voice,” as St Thomas Aquinas often referred to them.¹⁷

If God speaks through all that exists, he speaks to an even greater extent in the books of other religions, above all the monotheistic ones, as taught by St Justin Martyr (doctrine of *logoi spermatikoi*) and many other holy Fathers of the Church; other religions, too, have “elements of truth” that refer back to the eternal Word of God, which is present in Christian revelation. Pope Benedict XVI refers to this doctrine when he speaks of interreligious dialogue with the Jews (VD 40, 43). Through these “elements,” God can somehow make Himself known, in accordance with patristic teaching, which was also taken up by the Second Vatican Council in the Declaration *Nostra Aetate*, which states that the actions and lives, precepts and doctrines of other religions “nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men” (par. 2). This statement is also referred to in the declaration *Dominus Iesus* of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (par. 2, 21)

If the Word of God is the cause of creation, and if God speaks in all that has to do with creation (DV 3; VD 8), then for an even more fundamental reason He speaks in man, who at the level of creation, also abstracting from the gift of faith, is in a constitutive relationship with the Word of God (GS 22). Man is included in the relationship created by the Word of God because it is dialogue-oriented and response-oriented. By accepting it, man not only opens himself to God, but fully responds to what he is in his natural and human structure (VD 9). Already in his very being he finds the grounds or conditions for arriving by faith at revelation in Jesus Christ. In this perspective, faith, far from being in conflict with reason, finds itself in harmony with it and oriented towards achieving full union with it for the good of man. Faith does not contradict reason, but strengthens and expands it, since it enables man to see better and more, as indicated in the encyclical *Fides et Ratio* by Saint John Paul II. In this way, the “horizons of rationality” are widened, made more rational in the perspective of faith, as Pope Benedict XVI has consistently emphasised in his teaching, especially addressed to the academic world.¹⁸ In this perspective, too, basing one’s life on the eternal Word, the Creator and “reason” of creation, is the most rational attitude possible.

¹⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum*, I d. 27, 2, 2 ad 3; Thomas Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 4 a. 2.

¹⁸ Cf. L. Leuzzi, *Allargare gli orizzonti della razionalità. I discorsi per l’Università di Benedetto XVI*, Milano 2008.

Sacramentality of the Word of God

The concept of sacramentality can be understood in at least two ways. The first way connects with the dimension of the sign proper to God's communication, and this is the sense in which it is used by Benedict XVI in his exhortation *Verbum Domini*; the second way of understanding refers to the efficacy of the word which, as an inspired word, gives the believer the possibility of a direct encounter with God, analogous to the encounter that is realised through the sacraments.

In addressing the question of the sacramentality of the word, one must start from the fact that the use of the term "word" to indicate communication properly applies only to man. And if it does apply to man, then due account must be taken of the differences that occur. First of all, the speaking of God does not coincide with the speaking of man. For man, speaking is a physiological and psychological act, whereas in the case of God, it is only a way of signifying that He gives Himself and acts, enters into dialogue with man and leads him to an encounter with Himself. "The word of God" signifies the way in which God reveals Himself and at the same time points to the personal reality of His self-giving. With His "speaking," God creates, acts, renews, subjecting Himself to the laws of the human word and of history, which are the mediating means He uses to reach man, both in the past and today. Saint Thomas Aquinas states suggestively: *Dicere Dei est facere*.¹⁹

When God enters into history, then what he communicates always has a sacramental dimension (VD 50), that is, it expresses itself through a sign (word and event) which, for its part, demands an appropriate reading (DV 2). The event of the Exodus from Egypt would not have been "the word of God" celebrated in the history of Israel if it had not been interpreted and commented upon by God himself, who used Moses and the men of his generation.

There is no word in a pure and neutral state, but is given in the form of human, cultural and historical mediation; otherwise man would stand outside the possibility of communicating with God. There is always a sign, or mediation, which refers back to that which is signified and communicated. This character of the Word of God is above all inherent in the mystery of the Incarnation, Scripture and the Church. The eternal Word, in order to reveal himself, assumed humanity and, through it, became the mediator of grace, that is, he makes it possible for man to enter into the life of God. Only through the mediation of the flesh does the Son of God have the possibility of reaching out

¹⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Super II Corinthios*, cap. 1 l. 2.

to man and drawing him to himself; at the same time, it is only because God willed to incarnate himself in this way that man can receive him and respond voluntarily to his offer.

The sacramental dimension is also inherent in Scripture, in which God speaks in human language and the word of God is expressed and concretised in human words,²⁰ which are accessible to man, despite the distance separating the sacred authors who wrote them down. Scripture has the same character as the word of God, expressing the divine through the medium of the human. Human words relate to the word of God just as the humanity of Jesus relates to the eternal Word-Son of God. If one accepts the Incarnation integrally and attributes to Jesus God all that pertains to Jesus, then this is also the way to treat the Bible, in which – through inspiration – the word of God is contained and expressed in human words. The divine character of the Bible does not prevent us from using methods related to the letter, or “body” of the word, in reading it. There is no contradiction between inspiration and a scientific approach to the Bible, that is, the various methods by which one attempts to read what the inspired author intended to signify in words, which is due to the simple fact that inspiration, too, is linked to the writing down of the text, that is, to a reality that presupposes a relationship to a specific time and human historical situation.

Finally, the Church, too, is a sacrament of encounter with Christ. By preaching the word and celebrating the sacraments, it communicates the word of God through signs, in human and tangible form.

In all these areas, faith consists in the ability to go beyond sensory manifestations in order to recognise and grasp the intrinsic reality that underlies it and that defines the “participation in the life of God,” on account of which the Word of God has been revealed and is communicated. In other words, faith is that capacity to grasp the relationship occurring between the sign and what it signifies, between what is human and common to all human beings and what is divine, which is hidden and inaccessible directly to man. It is therefore a question of bringing out the relationship between the Word and words. God speaking to man can only be understood through faith; without faith, the Bible is just a historical document like any other, in many ways a strange book, but there is no God in it. Without faith, the word of God remains mute, failing to reach the human heart.

²⁰ Cf. more extensively J. Corbon, *La Parole de Dieu. Approche catholique*, [in:] J. Corbon, M. Bouttier, G. Khodre, *La Parole de Dieu*, Paris 1966, pp. 17–59; A. Vanhoye, *La Parola di Dio nella vita della Chiesa: La recezione della Dei Verbum*, “Rivista del Clero Italiano” 81 (2000), pp. 244–265.

This last aspect brings us to the subject of the sacramentality of the word in a second sense, that is, in the sense of its efficacy. The word of God gives grace, it gives the possibility to encounter Christ, to receive his sanctifying action. It is the word that saves (1 Tim 3:16), because it does what it signifies. This is also done in the Bible, which, because of its nature as a written word, not only objectifies the word of God in human and concrete language, but makes itself available and becomes a personal event. This happens so that the reader can, as it were, “dwell” in the word and understand it through faith and grace. St John speaks of “remaining” in Jesus by virtue of reference to his word (cf. John 15:7).

In this respect, there is an analogy with the Eucharist (DV 21; VD 56). Already the constitution *Dei Verbum*, placing the Bible and the Body of Christ on the same level in terms of the reverence shown to them,²¹ gave grounds for discovering the sacramentality of the Bible: the word nourishes like the Eucharist, and the Eucharist enlightens and dispels darkness like the word. Properly speaking, then, there are not two tables: the Word and the Body of Christ (SC 48), but there is one: the Word gives life, as does the Eucharist, which does not, however, mean that one table and the other rank equally.

Communicating the Word of God

Tradition and Scripture

Benedict XVI, in his exhortation *Verbum Domini*, recalls the Council’s doctrine on the transmission of the Word of God (par. 17).²² Here, too, it is worth remembering the turnaround that took place at the Second Vatican Council during the intensive work on the *Dei Verbum* constitution. This was one of the most debated points in the drafting of this constitution, since many of the Fathers were associated with a widely held theology according to which revelation is attested by unwritten traditions and by Scripture, treated independently as two separate and autonomous “sources.”²³ In fact, however, this was not a doctrine of the Council of Trent, but of post-Tridentine theologians with a view to distinguishing themselves clearly from the principle of *sola Scriptura* recognised as

²¹ Cf. J. Królikowski, *Słowo Boże i Eucharystia w konstytucji Dei Verbum* [The Word of God and the Eucharist in the Constitution *Dei Verbum*], “Teologia w Polsce” 9/1 (2015), pp. 71–81.

²² Cf. U. Betti, *La rivelazione divina nella Chiesa*, Roma 1970.

²³ Cf. First Vatican Council, *Dei Filius...*, op. cit., ch. 2.

a Protestant principle.²⁴ In the midst of the heated polemic, it was then completely forgotten that the principle of *sola Scriptura* was embraced by St Thomas Aquinas, among others: *Sola Scriptura canonica est regula fidei*.²⁵ The issue certainly calls for attention and an in-depth study of it, for which there is not space here.

According to the *Dei Verbum* Constitution, Scripture and Tradition are neither two sources nor one source of revelation, since it is revelation that is the proper “source” of Scripture and Tradition (DV 7), from which both Scripture and Tradition derive, constituting two ways of transmitting revelation.²⁶ Moreover, it is necessary to speak of Tradition in the singular and to write it with a capital letter, emphasising its singularity, its vitality and the fact that it belongs to the new People of God as a whole.²⁷ The Teaching Authority of the Church is not the source of revelation, but it makes an authentic interpretation of Scripture and Tradition, that is, it guards the one deposit of the word of God contained in them.

For many centuries, revelation retained its oral transmission dimension, so that there was no need for a written text. God was also able to achieve his purpose in this way without giving man the Bible in his hands. Tradition takes precedence over the process of writing down the inspired books and indeed it was only at a later date that they were written down.

In order to better illustrate the relationship between Tradition and Scripture, it is necessary to consider that they are in correlation with each other in relation to the Word of God or the Gospel which Christ entrusted to the Apostles. The Bible is in relation to Tradition for the reason that before the sacred books were written down they were transmitted orally. It was only within Tradition that they were recognised as inspired and included in the canon, that is, in the complete and normative list of the books of the Bible. In the context of the Council debate, J. Ratzinger formulated this point very clearly: “Scripture” only in the faith of the Church becomes Scripture in general; in this sense the existence of Scripture as such is still conditioned by the existence of ecclesiastical Tradition.²⁸

²⁴ Cf. F. Buzzi, *Il Concilio di Trento e il dibattito sul “sola scriptura” protestante*, [in:] *La Bibbia nella storia dell’Europa*, eds. A. Autiero, M. Perroni, Bologna 2012, pp. 125–140.

²⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Super Evangelium S. Johannis lectura* 21, 24; cf. F. Gaboriau, *L’Écriture seule?*, Paris 1997.

²⁶ Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Jedno źródło objawienia* [One Source of Revelation], [in:] J. Ratzinger, *O nauczaniu II Soboru Watykańskiego*, vol. 1, op. cit., pp. 211–214.

²⁷ Cf. G. Segalla, *Scrittura, Tradizione e tradizioni nel loro mutuo rapporto*, “Lateranum” 74/1 (2008), pp. 29–68.

²⁸ J. Ratzinger, *Dyskusje soborowe nad relacją między Pismem i Tradycją* [Council Discussions on the Relationship between Scripture and Tradition], [in:] J. Ratzinger, *O nauczaniu II Soboru Watykańskiego*, vol. 1, op. cit., p. 417.

The Bible, moreover, becomes intelligible in the context of the process of transmission of revelation that is constantly taking place. At the same time, Tradition is subordinate to Scripture, since it is only in the light of Scripture that the contents of Tradition can be considered authentic, i.e. remaining in accordance with divine revelation. The understanding of Scripture grows on the strength of Tradition and the awareness of the permanent significance of the revealed data. We are dealing here with a hermeneutical circle: on the one hand, the material text of Scripture is the norm from which one cannot deviate – it is the normative Apostolic Tradition – but on the other hand, it is the Holy Spirit who plays an irreplaceable role in relation to Tradition, that is, making it “alive,” enabling its historical adaptation and necessary renewal, so that it does not turn into an “archaeological museum,” but remains faithful to revelation. He can only do this in the perspective of pneumatological dynamism.

Vatican II thus sees Tradition in close and intrinsic relationship with Scripture, and vice versa, holding, however, to the principle that Tradition must always be referred to Scripture, since from a formal point of view it alone is the *locutio Dei*, the one and authentic word of God. Tradition is not the word of God on the same level as Scripture. This statement was the point of departure of the Second Vatican Council in relation to the Council of Trent, and it also has an ecumenical bearing in relation to the Reformed communities, which only recognise Scripture as the word of God. Commenting on the statement of *Dei Verbum* on this subject (par. 9), J. Ratzinger wrote that only in the case of Scripture [in *Dei Verbum*] was the verb “is” used. It is thus stated that Scripture *is* the word of God, recorded by means of writing. Tradition, on the other hand, is described only functionally, according to its presuppositions – Tradition transmits the word of God, but it is *not* the word of God. While the dominance of Scripture is clearly emphasised, this is reiterated when describing in more detail the process of the functioning of Tradition, whose function is to preserve, explain and spread. It is not productive but conservative, subservient to an overarching purpose.²⁹

²⁹ J. Ratzinger, *Wprowadzenie i komentarz do Prooemium, do rozdziałów I, II i IV Konstytucji o Objawieniu Dei Verbum* [Introduction and Commentary on the Prooemium, on Chapters I, II and IV of the Constitution on Revelation *Dei Verbum*], [in:] J. Ratzinger, *O nauczaniu II Soboru Watykańskiego*, vol. 2, op. cit., p. 683.

The Bible is the word of God

When we say that the Bible is the word of God, we mean to say that it is different from all other books, that it is not only religious and sacred, but that it is a book that has God as its Author, in the sense that God stands at its origin and He is its primary author. In the Old Testament, the Law is said to have been written with the finger of God (Deut 9:10). This is a metaphor that may seem overblown, but it served to express the belief that the Bible has a divine origin.

In the course of the history of the dogma of inspiration, there has been, mainly under the influence of personalist concepts, a shift from emphasising that human authors were passive instruments in the hand of God (*organon*), to a conception according to which they fulfil the role of true and proper authors, who wrote in a way that corresponded to their intelligence and according to their own character what it pleased God to convey in writing.³⁰ Within this development of the understanding of the writing of the Bible, however, the belief in the divine origin of Scripture, that is, the belief in God as its primary Author, remained unchanged. It must be said, however, that at the beginning of this development, if, on the one hand, the role attributed to human authors as simple instruments was at odds with the human and historical dimension of the Bible, on the other hand, this posed fewer problems in the field of interpretation than does now the acknowledgement of an active role in relation to God's primary action. The issue calls for special reflection, the focus of which was provided by the Pontifical Biblical Commission in a special document on the inspiration and truth of Scripture.³¹

Linked to the concept of inspiration is the question of the truth of the Bible (VD 19). It is well known that with the Renaissance era there was a diminished awareness that the Bible could be treated as a normative source for the human and historical sciences, as had previously been quite widely accepted. The constitution *Dei Verbum*, quoted by Pope Benedict XVI in *Verbum Domini*, changed the way this issue was approached. It no longer treats the Bible as a book that contains no errors (the inerrancy of Scripture), but sees it in the perspective of the transmission of truth relating primarily to man's salvation.³² This is by no

³⁰ Cf. G. O'Collins, *Ispirazione. Verso un'interpretazione cristiana dell'ispirazione biblica*, Brescia 2022, pp. 114–121.

³¹ Cf. Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Inspiration and Truth of Sacred Scripture: The Word that Comes from God and Speaks of God for the Salvation of the World*, Collegeville, MI 2014.

³² Cf. F. Cocco, *La verità della Scrittura: dalla Providentissimus Deus alla Verbum Domini*, "Euntes Docete" 64/2 (2011), pp. 27–40.

means a new thing, for it was already well known to the Church Fathers, but it is seen in a new perspective.³³ Such an approach in no way diminishes the human dimension of the Bible, nor does it lead to a rejection of critical methods when it comes to understanding it. There is progress in the way truth is understood, just as there is progress with regard to revelation. What is needed for the sake of salvation is based on a text that can be interpreted in a pluralistic sense, and its understanding deepens with the passage of time and the development of theological reflection. The truth of the Bible is thus sufficient for man to know the paths leading him to salvation and indeed to attain it.

Word in the Spirit

Dogmatic theology emphasises that the Holy Spirit realises His mission *ad extra* in manifold ways, that is, in the economic context of divine revelation; this stance is particularly concerned with the sanctification of the believer, as the Father is credited with creation and the Son with redemption. Obviously, in each case the three persons of God are acting simultaneously, reflecting their intrinsic unity. The revelation has been fulfilled by the incarnate Son of God, but its reception in the heart of the believer is accomplished through the Holy Spirit, who has the task of making the word of God alive, personal and present, and the heart of man open and submissive, so that the word of God may be fruitfully received.

The exhortation *Verbum Domini* indicates the penetration of the Holy Spirit through the whole process of revelation, from the beginning of salvation history to its concretised fulfilment in the believer who accepts the word in faith (par. 15–16). The Spirit leads to the realisation of God's design in the history of salvation (revelation); the Spirit watches over the actions taken by hagiographers; the Spirit acts when the word of revelation is received (*fides ex auditu*) and when the written word is read or interpreted. He is the author of the unity of the various stages of revelation and the guarantor of interpretive continuity. This is indicated by the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, in which, with regard to the Holy Spirit, it is said that "he has spoken through the prophets."

The work of the Holy Spirit is closely linked to revelation and its understanding. Benedict XVI emphasised this very explicitly: "there can be no

³³ Cf. T. Stramare, *La S. Scrittura come scienza della salvezza*, "Miscellanea Lateranense" 40–41 (1974–1975), pp. 275–284.

authentic understanding of Christian revelation apart from the activity of the Paraclete” (par. 15). It should be noted here that revelation and inspiration are two different realities: inspiration is related to a text written by authors who have received the gift of God’s special assistance, whereby what they have written can be attributed to God at the same time; revelation, on the other hand, concerns the content that it has pleased God to impart, so that man is able to receive the gift of God’s life in Christ. Already because of its developmental nature, not everything that God has revealed is situated on the same level. In the Gospels, for example, there is a loftier revelation than that conveyed in Leviticus, but from the point of view of inspiration, all the pages of the Bible are on the same level. Revelation and inspiration are not corresponding concepts either in relation to their scope: the whole Bible is inspired, in all its parts, as the Council of Trent stressed, and consequently there are no parts of the Bible that are more than others the word of God. No book of the Bible contains the whole of revelation, and revelation itself, given its developmental nature, is nowhere given as a whole.

The fact that revelation is the work of the Holy Spirit can already be read in certain Old Testament texts taken from the prophetic books, in which the word “said” cannot be separated from the Holy Spirit. The Word acquires its proper vitality through His mediation. On the other hand, the bond between Word and Spirit is shown in the life of Jesus, the Word of the Father. Without the Spirit’s participation, there would have been no incarnation in the womb of the Virgin Mary, who conceived under the influence of His action – “through the working of the Holy Spirit.” As the Gospels make clear, Jesus always speaks, acts and carries out his messianic mission in the Spirit.

Turning to the second aspect, that is, the relationship between the Holy Spirit and Scripture, it is necessary to refer to an analogy. As the Word of God was made flesh “from Mary” by the Holy Spirit, so by the same Spirit the word of God in the Bible was written down, since He assisted the hagiographers in their work of writing: “The word of God is thus expressed in human words” (VD 15). He is the Cause of the unity of Scripture, as He is also in the work of revelation. He leads to unity the diversity that exists, He allows the Gospel to be a unity even though there are four Gospels written down, and that there is only one image of Christ even though there are different ways of representing Him.

Apart from working in the Bible, which is the written testimony of revelation, the Holy Spirit also works in Tradition. It should be remembered that the process of transmission was not initiated with Christ when he entrusted the apostles with the task of transmitting what they had learned while they were with him, but was already initiated in the Old Covenant with the prophets,

that is, when God decided to reveal himself, that is, beginning with Abraham.³⁴ This is pointed out in the constitution *Dei Verbum* (par. 7), to which Benedict XVI referred in the exhortation *Verbum Domini* (par. 17). It may be considered a paradox, but this process of transmission continues today. When we interpret Scripture today, we situate ourselves within the circle of this great Tradition and take up its interpretative line of divine revelation.

The action of the Holy Spirit in relation to the word of God did not end with the writing of the Bible, because the Holy Spirit, poured out by Jesus glorified after the Resurrection, sent down on the apostles in the Upper Room, continues his work in the Church constantly, as Jesus himself announced in his farewell speech from the Upper Room recorded by St John. He, always present when the word of God is heard, arouses and strengthens faith. The exhortation *Verbum Domini* cites testimonies taken from Irenaeus, John Chrysostom, Jerome, Gregory the Great, Richard of the Abbey of St Victor (par. 16). Therefore, the Bible, having a theological message, can only be interpreted through a spiritual understanding, which is reached by participating, that is, internally experiencing the reality and truth that are the object of knowledge.³⁵

The action of the Holy Spirit is also prolonged in the believer who reads or interprets Scripture while living in the Church. The exhortation *Verbum Domini* emphasises this in paragraph 16, also citing patristic testimonies. It is, moreover, required by the very nature of the Bible to be read in the same Spirit in which it was written, as emphasised by the constitution *Dei Verbum* (par. 12), to which post-conciliar teaching refers, although this principle is not easily applied today.³⁶

Response to God

The second chapter of Benedict XVI's exhortation *Verbum Domini* is entitled: "Our Response To The God Who Speaks." If revelation is God's self-giving to man, then there is no revelation without a human response, which is an integral part of the fact that God speaks. The believer is not only the addressee of the word of God and experiences it in himself, but he becomes the constitutive

³⁴ Cf. H. Holstein, *La Tradition dans l'Église*, Paris 1960, pp. 15–36.

³⁵ Cf. H. de Lubac, *Scripture in the Tradition*, Series: Milestones in Catholic Theology, Freiburg 2001, pp. 21–22.

³⁶ Cf. I. de la Potterie, *L'interpretazione della Sacra Scrittura nello Spirito in cui è stata scritta (DV 12,3)*, [in:] *Vaticano II. Bilancio e prospettive. Venticinque anni dopo (1962–1987)*, vol. 1, ed. R. Latourelle, Assisi 1987, pp. 204–242.

moment of the event of revelation, for without him the revelation could never be known and would not be able to achieve the purpose assigned to it by God. Given the personal character of the word of God, the response to it must have an equally personal character, cannot be limited to the assent of his reason or his will alone, but is ultimately to embrace the whole man. Benedict XVI emphasises synthetically in *Verbum Domini*: “the proper human response to the God who speaks is faith” (par. 25). Only faith is able to embrace the whole man, who in it engages all his spiritual powers and directs through them his whole life towards God. In this sense, it is man’s adherence to God, encompassing both faith in Him and the trust shown in Him. The Holy Spirit also plays a key role in this process of faith: “in order to accept revelation, man must open his mind and heart to the working of the Holy Spirit who enables him to understand the word of God present in the sacred Scriptures” (VD 25).

A positive response to the word of God takes the form corresponding to the incarnation of the Word in the womb of the Virgin Mary. Whoever accepts the word of God, in accordance with the announcement of Jesus himself, becomes his mother and gives birth to him in the works he produces. St Bonaventure, for example, presented this spiritual event very clearly in his work *Bringing Forth Christ. Five Feasts of the Child Jesus*.³⁷ It can be found in many other authors, both classical and contemporary.

In his exhortation *Verbum Domini*, Pope Benedict XVI highlights the link between the word of God and holiness, seeing it as the best interpretation of the word. Only the one who lives the word of God can understand it; and the one who best understands it is the one who bears witness to it by his deeds. Of course, such an interpretation is never complete and definitive because God’s call exceeds the possibilities of a full response on the part of man, goes beyond the human horizon and is, as it were, constantly onward, but there is something fundamental in this too, namely the call to constantly transcend the interpretation given. There is therefore a close connection between the reception of the word of God and the work of conversion undertaken. Henri de Lubac described this relationship as follows: “The Word of God a living and effective word acquires true fulfilment and total significance only by the transformation which it effects in the one who receives it. This is why, the expression ‘passing on to spiritual understanding’ is equivalent to ‘turning to Christ’ – a conversion which can never be said to have been fully achieved.” Reciprocal causality also between such a conversion to Christ or “passing on

³⁷ Cf. Bonaventure, *Bringing Forth Christ. Five Feasts of the Child Jesus* by St. Bonaventure, transl. E. Doyle, Oxford 1984.

to Christ” and the understanding of Scripture. Through the soul that opens itself to the Gospel and clings to Christ, all Scripture is seen in a new light. All Scripture is transformed by Christ.³⁸

The Word of God reflects the face of the Word who became human words, the face of God who became human. Spiritual tradition constantly sees Christ as the mirror in which the believer should view himself as part of his spiritual journey. At the end of the second chapter of the exhortation *Verbum Domini*, Benedict XVI presents Mary as the model of the Christian who listens to the word of God. There is an intimate relationship between her and the word of God: she lived in the word – she dwelt in it. An eloquent statement by Pope Benedict XVI on this subject can be found in his word at the conclusion of the Vatican retreat in 2006. He said at the time:

What fascinated me is this: the Archangel Gabriel holds a scroll in his hand, which I believe is the symbol of Scripture, of the Word of God. And Mary is kneeling within the scroll; that is, she lives her whole life in the Word of God. It is as though she were steeped in the Word. Thus, all her thoughts, her will and her actions are imbued with and formed by the Word. Since she herself dwells in the Word, she can also become the new “Dwelling Place” of the Word in the world.³⁹

Conclusions

In the first two chapters of his exhortation *Verbum Domini*, Pope Benedict XVI made an inspiring reinterpretation of the doctrine of the Second Vatican Council concerning the word of God addressed to man, and the response of faith that God expects from man. Particularly noteworthy is Benedict XVI’s emphasis laid in the Word of God on the word’s origin precisely from God, from which its specificity then follows. The word of God is intrinsically linked to the descent of God to man, to the manifestation of his love to bring him to a share in salvation, it reaches its fulfilment in Jesus Christ. God’s speech to man, gaining culmination in the mystery of the incarnation of the eternal Word, leads man to the fullness of divine life. This is because, through its union with the whole of God’s action, His word acquires a sacramental character,

³⁸ H. de Lubac, *Scripture in the Tradition*, op. cit., pp. 21–22.

³⁹ Benedict XVI, *Address at the Close of the Papal Spiritual Exercises* (11 March 2006), https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2006/march/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060311_spiritual-exercises.html [access: 10.11.2023].

that is, it is a sign of God's communication, but it also acquires, through its direct union with His action, a special salvific efficacy. Through the word of God, on the basis of it, and above all by receiving it in and through faith, man comes to share in the life of God. This sacramental dimension of the word of God, which has been extensively emphasised by contemporary theology, seems to be the most original and most clearly emphasised aspect of the theology of the word of God, as pointed out by Pope Benedict XVI. This aspect then largely conditions the way in which the word of God is incorporated into the various areas of the Church's life, which are the "places" for giving adequate responses to God.

Advocating the primacy of God's word in revelation, Benedict XVI drew attention to the nature of the Bible and, consequently, to its role in human life. The process of God's revelation in history appears as a sequence of successive stages: creation – revelation – Church – Scripture, in which different actors act with different goals. Although it is a long and complex process, God's revelation is a single reality because it takes place in one and the same eternal Word and is fulfilled in His incarnation. The Bible is not merely the completion of this process, but reflects the Word which is already inscribed in creation and which, in and through the Church, awaits to be received and experienced by every human being. The Bible, therefore, is not just a witness to God's action in the world and some kind of "addition" to church life, but its most intrinsic element. This becomes particularly clear when it is pointed out that the word of God is the word of salvation.

The close connection between the Bible and the word of God then has multiple references to the Christian life and to its interpretation. If, on the one hand, the word of God is not bound to the word of the hagiographers, since it is the person of the Son of God who resounds in the Bible and is encountered in it, then on the other hand, the eternal word of God speaks through human words. For this reason, Scripture remains the privileged place where this word is put at the disposal of man and continues to speak to him, bringing the mystery of God alive to him and enhancing its impact.

The fact remains, therefore, what St Jerome once aptly said, that "ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ." It is important, therefore, for the Christian to establish by faith and in faith a deepened and living relationship with the word of God made available in Scripture. The word of God requires to be treated as personal and up-to-date as possible because, although it is a word that grows out of the past, it is a word that lives today for the sake of every human being and it directs its message to him "today." However, one must not fall into subjectivism or individualism. In order to avoid it, it is necessary

to constantly bear in mind that the Word is intimately connected with the Church, its living Tradition and the interpretation it gives. The word of God, while always being an individual word, remains an ecclesial word, living in the Church and serving its spiritual edification.

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