



# The Rediscovery of the Word of God

## The Second Vatican Council and the *Dei Verbum*

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It is one of the central and decisive events in the history of Israel: On Sinai, in the very presence of God, Moses receives from the mouth of Yahweh the Ten Commandments, the divine teaching, which is then sealed by the renewed covenant promise. But anyone who expects, after this phenomenal peak experience on the mountain, that Israel's journey will continue at the high level of a lasting euphoria that would enable God's people to find itself in a better world at a single stroke will be disappointed: the revelation at the peak is followed immediately by the sobering descent into the lowlands of the everyday; the highlight on the mountain is followed by the low point in the valley, symbolized in the argument over the golden calf and its punitive consequences. And yet – Israel does ultimately make it into the Promised Land. But in spite of the extraordinary Sinai event, this road to Canaan is hardly a straight pathway; rather it is a road full of bends and twists, obstacles and challenges.

Revelations need to be absorbed. Revelations need to be received, thought through and translated into concrete action. This is not always easy and the process is usually accompanied by setbacks and conflicts. Revelations have their concrete occasions and their concrete times. And yet they transcend their concrete “back then” and exert their influence on later times as well, in ever new and often unexpected ways. Revelations do not simply cause deserts to become Promised Land overnight; rather they are signs that have the capacity to point the way forward to that distant goal.



To compare the Second Vatican Council with the Sinai event may seem something of a stretch, and it is hardly my intention to establish an equation here. There is, however, *one* point of comparison that is fairly obvious: it can be said of the Council, too, that it is one of the distinctive and central events in the life of the Church (as Sinai was in the life of Israel). And as for its remarkable vision and achievements, one could also say: they do not disclose their transformative potential all at once; rather they need to be absorbed, worked out and implemented in particular circumstances – precisely in the everyday of ecclesial reality, after the “summit accomplishment” in Rome.

A document of this Council, which for a long time led a shadowy existence, is the Constitution on Divine Revelation, the *Dei Verbum*. It is certainly no exaggeration to describe the *Dei Verbum* as a milestone on the journey of the Catholic Church from the 20<sup>th</sup> into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Milestones are directional markers; they offer orientation regarding one's present location, but at the same time they are pointers for the way that still lies ahead.

The following contribution is intended to be primarily the first of these: orientation, i.e. a general description of where we are today. It will first offer a brief overview on the origin and a few of the central theses of the “Dogmatic Constitution on the Divine Revelation”, as the document is officially called. (It will normally be cited here in the conventional way, by its first words in the Latin text: *Dei Verbum*.) A second section will highlight a few important developments and results that were inspired and influenced by the *Dei Verbum* in the decades that followed. We will conclude with a short survey of what lies ahead.

### I. The Second Vatican Council and the *Dei Verbum*

#### 1. “Hoc schema mihi non placet”: On the genesis of *Dei Verbum*

It belongs to the enduring achievements of Vatican II that this Council contributed to the rediscovery of the central significance of Holy Scripture for the life of the Catholic Church and the lives of all believers. The need for a biblical animation of the pastoral life of the Church comes to expression in many places within the total of 16 official documents of the Council. The most important com-



ments on this topic are, however, found in the *Dei Verbum*, and there especially in Chapter VI. In that chapter, the Holy Scripture is referred to as the “soul of theology” (cf. DV 24).

Conciliar texts do not just fall “from the sky”, any more than did the texts of Holy Scripture itself; rather, they are the result of a more or less lengthy and complicated process of origination. In the case of the *Dei Verbum* one can say that this drafting process was particularly long, particularly complicated and also particularly controversial. A couple of highlights will illustrate this.

### 1.1 Scriptural interpretation in the Catholic Church in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century

The relationship of the Catholic Church, or the Magisterium to Sacred Scripture, and especially to the question of its interpretation, has not always been easy to define or entirely free of tensions. By at least the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the growing significance of historical and scientific-critical questions raised in the interpretation of biblical texts was beginning to cause restlessness and unease for many in the Catholic sphere and restrictive counter-reactions on the part of the Magisterium.

However, positive developments were also simultaneously in progress. One of the clearest indications of this was the encyclical *Divino afflante Spiritu*, “On Promoting biblical Studies”, issued by Pope Pius XII on 30<sup>th</sup> September 1943. This encyclical committed Catholic Biblical scholarship to scientific research. Despite the dated character of this text and some backward steps that were taken in the years that followed its release, it is almost impossible to overestimate the significance of *Divino afflante Spiritu*. Thanks to its “revolutionary impact” (R.B. Robinson)<sup>1</sup>, the Bible received growing attention in the time following its publication not only among Catholic biblical scholars, but also in the Church’s pastoral ministry.

In spite of its initial positive reception, questions of biblical interpretation nevertheless continued to be debated and discussed. Precisely in the period between the announcing of the Council by Pope John XXIII, in January 1959, and its opening on October 11, 1962 the ongoing discussions were particularly intensive.

Shortly before the beginning of the Council, in 1961, and with the consent of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, the Holy Office (whose name was changed to “Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith” in 1965) published a Monitum entitled *De germana veritate historica et obiectiva s. Scripturae* (“On the genuine, historical and objective truth of Holy Scripture”). This single-page document amounted to an attempt to back away from or at least to severely limit the marked openness to the raising of historical questions that had existed already for years in the Catholic sphere. Although it con-

tains a few positive remarks on the newly awakening interest in the Bible in Catholic circles, this document primarily warns of the negative consequences of a too historically orientated approach to the life and activity of Jesus. This could lead, said the document, to confusion and a weakening of faith among the faithful. Although it was merely a short document and of very general scope, the text was interpreted as more regressive than progressive in overall effect. Other occurrences of the time – such as among other things the withdrawal of teaching permits (restored following the Council) from two professors of the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome – strengthened this impression.

Even during the Council, between the third and fourth sessions, there appeared on 21 April 1964 an Instruction of the Pontifical Biblical Commission entitled: *De historica evangeliorum veritate* (“On the historical truth of the Gospels”). In contrast to the Monitum of 1961 this document laid strong emphasis on the value and utility of the historical-critical approach to biblical texts. Citing *Divino*



Pope John XIII

*Afflante Spiritu* it explicitly urged Catholic Scripture scholars to employ such methods. Moreover, this document developed a three-level model for understanding Gospel origins, one that made a clear distinction between the time of the earthly Jesus, the time of the post-Easter community and the time when the earlier traditions were put into fixed form in the Gospels. Side

by side with this type of comment one also finds a few somewhat more reserved and cautious passages that warn of uncritical and immoderate use of historical methods. In the main section of the text, however, positive expressions predominate in this instruction – which for this reason should be understood as a clear and decisive clarification in the already yearlong dispute over the meaning of the document on Divine Revelation of Vatican II.

Thus far, a short look at events from the perimeters of the Council that focused primarily on the question of the justification (as well as the dangers) of an historically orientated biblical interpretation. But there were other important developments in the field of the biblical apostolate, or ministry before or during the Council that also had a formative influence on the *Dei Verbum*. Among these should be mentioned the birth of the biblical-liturgical movement with its rediscovery of the Bible, the founding of Biblical Associations on the Catholic side, the substantial increase of communication between Catholic and Protestant scholars, etc.

### 1.2 The debates on the contents and the direction of the *Dei Verbum*

On November 18, 1965 the Council released the “Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation”, the *Dei*



*Verbum*. The formal designation “Dogmatic Constitution” shows the importance that was ascribed to this text. Though it did not quite amount to a dogmatic definition, it nevertheless amounted to an expression of the highest teaching office of the Catholic Church.

The *Dei Verbum* was perhaps one of the most strongly debated texts of the Council and as such it had an exciting and complex pre-history. In the preparatory commission, circles of a more traditional bent managed to put



Cardinal Achille Liénart

forward a draft that was very conservative in its orientation and that would have turned back the wheel of history. Very quickly, however, it became clear that the majority of the council fathers disapproved of this draft. When on November 14, 1962 it was first proposed for discussion at a meeting marked by heated debates, it encountered heavy criticism. Cardinal Liénart of Lille expressed the opinion of many of the Council fathers when he uttered the now famous and often cited words: *Hoc schema mihi non placet* (“I don’t like this draft”).

In spite of all the criticism, a complete rejection of the draft is defeated in the next council vote. However, in order to avoid a still more heated debate, John XXIII decides during the night to withdraw the schema on his own authority. The Pope appoints a new coordinating commission, which is endowed in equal proportions with representatives of the conservative and the progressive wings, with a commission to work out a new draft. One of its two chairmen is Cardinal Augustin Bea, who in the 1930s had been rector of the Pontifical Biblical Institute. Since that time, he had been significantly contributing to the positive developments just mentioned in the relationship of the Church to biblical interpretation. In the end, however, it was to be three full years, till the last period of council sessions, before the Constitution on Revelation could finally be brought to a vote. After lengthy preparatory work, which demanded compromises from both sides, the Constitution was finally accepted on November 18, 1965 with 2,344 yes-votes and only 6 no-votes. It was solemnly proclaimed on the very same day.

In the light of this pre-history it is no surprise that the *Dei Verbum* comes across in part as a typical compromise text. The “ambiguity” encountered in many places in the text – which one could alternatively describe in more positive terms as “openness” of expression – for the most part affect those passages which have to do with doctrinal issues, such as the precise nature of revelation, the relationship between Scripture and tradition or the relationship of Scripture and magisterium. But the statements made by the *Dei Verbum* on the significance of Holy Scripture for the life of the Church and on the impor-

tance of a biblical interpretation appropriate for our time are indisputably positive and unambiguous.

## 2. “Magna Charta”: Essential contents of the *Dei Verbum*

Of the many substantive elements of the *Dei Verbum* only three will be highlighted here, all of which are of significance especially for the realm of the interpretation of the Bible in the Church.

### 2.1 Exegesis

For defining the relationship between biblical scholarship and the teaching office of the Church and for the question of the value and significance of scientific exegesis, articles 11–13 of the *Dei Verbum* (Chapter III) are of particular importance.

In article 12 the fundamental principles of historical criticism are quite clearly laid out, for the first time in the context of a conciliar document. Moreover, these principles are explicitly endorsed and acknowledged as necessary. The historical character of revelation and the human form of its transmission are emphasized, as is the important role a Magisterium. It is hardly surprising therefore that for many Catholic biblical scholars this very article 12 of the *Dei Verbum* represented something like the “Magna Charta” for their exegetical work.

The fact that Catholic biblical scholars have been able to move about freely for a long time now in the wide field of biblical interpretation, employing all the reasonable aids and methods, and that they are able to do so with considerable self-confidence – all of this they attribute in no small way to the Second Vatican Council and above all to the *Dei Verbum*.

The historical-critical methods, which at the time of the Council were still the storm center of debates regarding the task and the goal of Catholic biblical interpretation, have since been the subject of further developments, and the soft spots and limitations of the approach have long since been recognized. Nevertheless, that biblical texts have their histories, that they arose in a concrete historical and religious context and that the knowledge of this context is of importance even for a contemporary understanding and interpretation of these texts – that these central principles of biblical interpretation have become irrevocably anchored in the consciousness of the Church – all of this is due in no small part to the *Dei Verbum*. The scientific study of the Bible in Catholic circles has long since ceased to be dominated by the “classical” historical-critical questions (as was often the case in the years immediately following the Council). In the meantime, the repertory of exegetical methods has been considerably expanded. New approaches to the Bible continued and continue to be opened up, such as methods based on the dynamics of communication between



a text and its readers or those that adopt a canonical approach to the Bible, to mention just two of the more recent trends.

All of this attests to the fact that the *Dei Verbum* offered important impulses for the further development of a scientifically grounded biblical interpretation. To be honest, however, it should be mentioned that the implementation of the major lines of direction as well as the goals of the Constitution was by no means an entirely smooth process. Central pillars of the existing relationship between Holy Scripture, ecclesiastical teaching and scientific exegesis were removed by the *Dei Verbum*, but the concrete working out of exactly what it is that should replace them is a complex and many-sided process that is still very much ongoing.

## 2.2 Biblical pastoral ministry

The *Dei Verbum* also provided far-reaching inspiration for the area of biblical pastoral ministry. In this regard articles 21-26 (Chapter VI) are above all of importance.

Article 21 reads:

*The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord, since, especially in the sacred liturgy, she unceasingly receives and offers to the faithful the bread of life from the table both of God's word and of Christ's body. She has always maintained them, and continues to do so, together with sacred tradition, as the supreme rule of faith, since, as inspired by God and committed once and for all to writing, they impart the word of God Himself without change, and make the voice of the Holy Spirit resound in the words of the prophets and Apostles. Therefore, like the Christian religion itself, all the preaching of the Church must be nourished and regulated by Sacred Scripture. For in the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven meets His children with great love and speaks with them; and the force and power in the Word of God is so great that it stands as the support and energy of the Church, the strength of faith for her sons, the food of the soul, the pure and everlasting source of spiritual life. Consequently these words are perfectly applicable to Sacred Scripture: "For the Word of God is living and active" (Heb. 4:12) and "it has power to build you up and give you your heritage among all those who are sanctified" (Acts 20:32; see 1 Thess. 2:13).*

This first article together with the last article (26) constitutes the framework of the whole chapter. In both, the veneration of the Word of God is set in parallel with the veneration of the Eucharist. Both, the table of the bread and the table of the Word should be prepared for and accessible to all the faithful. Of special significance, too, is the statement that Holy Scripture must be "the supreme rule of faith" and the basis of all Christian preaching. Likewise central is the role that regular Bible studies play in education and in the life of clerics, as well as of all believers. For, as it says in article 25 citing the words of Saint Jerome: "Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ."

The text goes on in article 22:

*Easy access to Sacred Scripture should be provided for all the Christian faithful (christifidelibus aditus ad Sanctam Scripturam late pateat oportet). ... But since the Word of God should be accessible at all times, the Church by her authority and with maternal concern sees to it that suitable and correct translations are made into different languages, especially from the original texts of the sacred books.*

Here we encounter an excellent formulation of the Council. It describes the necessity and the character of a biblical pastoral ministry. To provide "easy access to Sacred Scripture" – this includes promoting the translation and distribution of the Bible as well as providing people with the resources and the opportunities to enter into a life-relevant dialogue with the Word of God. In article 25 this point is addressed in the following words:

*It devolves on sacred bishops ... to give the faithful entrusted to them suitable instruction in the right use of the divine books, especially the New Testament and above all the Gospels. This can be done through translations of the sacred texts, which are to be provided with the necessary and really adequate explanations so that the children of the Church may safely and profitably become conversant with the Sacred Scriptures and be penetrated with their spirit. Furthermore, editions of the Sacred Scriptures, provided with suitable footnotes, should be prepared also for the use of non-Christians and adapted to their situation. Both pastors of souls and Christians generally should see to the wise distribution of these in one way or another.*

## 35 Years of CBF



Exactly a year after I took office as Director of the Catholic Biblical Association in Stuttgart came the meeting of the CBF in Bogota, which I experienced as very moving. The paper given by Carlos Mesters at that meeting I found really inspiring, as I did the open and forward-looking atmosphere of the meeting. Since that time it has become clear to me how important the CBF is for the solidarity of Catholic Biblical Associations worldwide, for mutual exchange, mutual stimulation in our work. I think of the many people I came to know, especially during the meeting in Bogota, who are inspired by the Bible. I realize that I am not alone with my problems here in Germany. To my surprise I have noticed how almost all Bible workers in basic communities have difficulties with the hierarchical church. They complain of the lack of financial assistance, but above all of the lack of moral support. A worldwide problem. Even more so, I find it striking how little Bible work is cherished and fostered by the hierarchy. My impression is that although the hierarchy does nothing to hinder Bible work, neither is it particularly fostered or promoted.

Fr. Franz-Josef Ortkemper, Director Katholisches Bibelwerk (Catholic Biblical Association), Germany



In summary, it could be said that the *Dei Verbum*, particularly article 22, represents the “Magna Charta” for the work of all those who are actively engaged in biblical pastoral ministry. Their goal is to cultivate an awareness of the importance of the Bible and to support the formation of all the faithful in the right use of the Bible.

A number of other themes that were significantly impacted by the *Dei Verbum* could be cited here. Among these, the question of the importance of the Bible for the liturgy and for the education of clerics, and the central recognition of the fact that the Old and New Testaments belong together are two that merit attention. The necessity of interconfessional collaboration in the area of Bible translation should also be mentioned here. The *Dei Verbum* gives Catholic Christians the explicit commission to work on Bible translations, and to do so in collaboration with their sisters and brothers of other confessions (cf. *DV* 22: “And should the opportunity arise and the Church authorities approve, if these translations are produced in co-operation with the separated brethren as well, all Christians will be able to use them”). This conciliar assignment issued to Catholics has resulted in collaboration and cooperation with many institutions and organizations from other churches and ecclesial communities.

This brief and cursory backward look shows that the *Dei Verbum* truly represents a milestone in the history of the Catholic Church and its relation to Holy Scripture. The fruits of this remarkable document have indeed been many and various.

## II. The first 40 years after *Dei Verbum*

What results would emerge if we took stock today of the nearly forty years of the reception history of this conciliar text? Here too, without making any claim to completeness, we will highlight especially three points.

### 1. The awakening of biblical pastoral ministry

In the course of the years following the *Dei Verbum* a number of new approaches to the Bible saw rapid development. A real explosion took place in Catholic Bible production. Alongside the existing Bible translations,

new translations were and are being produced in numerous countries of the world. Pastorally oriented commentaries on the Bible were also being written. Materials and study aids for biblical pastoral ministry likewise began to appear, as did Bible correspondence courses and other related activities at the grass-roots level. New approaches to the Bible, such as bibliodrama, for example, were developed; and new life was breathed into old proven methods such as that of *lectio divina*. The training of clerics and lay catechists – the formation of the formators – was thoroughly revisited in the light of the newly discovered central role of Scripture that took place in the years following the publication of the *Dei Verbum*. More recently, the advantages of the “newer” media and means of communication such as the computer, the internet and e-mail have also increasingly been seen as a useful resource for the biblical pastoral ministry. In short: in all the regions of the world, biblical pastoral ministry is experiencing a dramatic upturn, and the impact of this biblical animation of the pastoral life of the Church is almost everywhere to be felt.

### 2. The Catholic Biblical Federation

It is hardly an exaggeration to describe the Catholic Biblical Federation as a “child” of the Second Vatican Council, since the Federation was created specifically to carry out the recommendations of the Second Vatican Council concerning the Bible, particularly with respect to *Dei Verbum*, Chapter VI. The *Dei Verbum* is thus the lead-text of the Federation, and Chapter VI of the Constitution its real motto and the leitmotif of its work.

The idea of such an organization for promoting the Catholic biblical apostolate was already proposed in 1950 by the Austrian Canonist Pius Parsch, one of the protagonists for a renewed liturgy and an awakened interest in Scripture. On the 6<sup>th</sup> of October 1964, during the third session of the Second Vatican Council, a request for an organization of this kind was again made by Bishop Emile Cekada of Skopje, former Yugoslavia. The idea was then brought to fruition by Cardinal Bea who in 1968 called together for consultation in Rome the existing directors of Catholic biblical-pastoral organizations. Finally, on April 16, 1969 the Federation was

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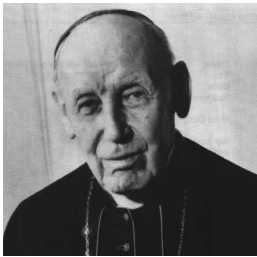
The encounter of persons coming from Africa, Asia, Latin America, North America and Europe made me poignantly aware of the richness of the religious and cultural settings in which the biblical pastoral ministry attempts to take root, of the multiplicity of forms which this ministry takes and must take, but also of the interest, necessity and difficulty of bringing these different approaches into a respectful and constructive dialogue with each other. This is for me one of the major challenges for the CBF as a federation. It must implement structures which permit this common reflection and help it to bear fruit in dialogue with the individual organisms, with subregions and regions and which seek to communicate to the larger Catholic Christian community their common concerns, convictions and commitments.

Thomas P. Osborne, coordinator of the Southern and Western European subregion 1996–2002, Luxembourg



founded, also in cooperation with Cardinal Willebrands, chair of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity.

Till today the CBF remains affiliated with what is now called the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and it has for a long time been *the* institution for the biblical pastoral ministry within the Catholic Church. First called “World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate”, its name was simplified to “Catholic Biblical Federation” in 1990. Today the CBF is represented by 311 members in 127 countries of the world. Thousands of women and men have become engaged in the most



Cardinal Augustin Bea

varied realms of biblical pastoral ministry and Bible work. As priests, religious, catechists and dedicated lay men and women they perform the work of evangelization in the most varied contexts and cultures. They translate the Bible into local languages in which no translation yet exists (and there are still thousands of

such languages). They train women and men, catechists, teachers, lay collaborators or future priests. They do serious research on the books of Scripture and produce biblical pastoral materials for community or classroom work. They develop new Bible-reading methods, e.g., for Bible circles in “small Christian communities”, or offer biblical seminars and workshops. Their contributions extend to social projects in education and community work, as well as to the production of periodicals, radio or television programs – and much more. Thus, the Catholic Biblical Federation is a vibrant network that creates bonds between people of all regions, cultures and nations.

### 3. The Instruction on the “Interpretation of the Bible in the Church” and other documents

The *Dei Verbum* was to remain for many years the most important official announcement of the ecclesiastical Magisterium on the meaning of the Bible and its interpretation in the life of the Catholic Church. But even during this post-conciliar period a series of further documents and pronouncements devoted to this were to appear. Among these the most important is undoubtedly the instruction of the Pontifical Biblical Commission entitled: “The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church”, which was published in 1993 on the occasion of the 100<sup>th</sup> and 50<sup>th</sup> anniversaries, respectively, of the two so-called biblical encyclical “Providentissimus Deus” (Leo XIII) and “Divino Afflante Spiritu” (Pius XII). This text first offers a comprehensive and instructive overview of the methods and tools of biblical scholarship that have become more developed and specialized since the *Dei Verbum*. It sketches guidelines for handling these methods and puts in place a number of fundamental hermeneutical principles. The summary of methods here is fairly

exhaustive, and alongside the historical critical methods, newer scientific and literary methods as well as insights from the human sciences are also taken into account. Particularly important in this connection is the unambiguous and sharp rejection by the commission of every form of fundamentalistic reading of the Bible. Of special interest is the last part of the document, which concerns itself explicitly with the significance of Scripture and its interpretation in the life of the Church. There can be no doubt, however, that it confirms once again the central role of Scripture in the life of the Church and the special importance of biblical pastoral ministry, or the biblical apostolate.

Further publications of the Magisterium that pointed the way forward on the question of the interpretation of the Bible in the Church will be only briefly mentioned here: such as the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* of Pope Paul VI “On proclaiming the Gospel in the world of today” (1975) and another document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission from the year 2001, which treated the question of the meaning of the Old Testament for Jews and for Christians (“The Jewish People and their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible”). These documents, too, are to be seen in the broader context of the reception of the *Dei Verbum*.



During the constituent assembly of the WCFBA (now CBF); in the centre Pope Paul VI and Cardinal Willebrands

### On the way to Canaan

This incomplete and above all historically intended backward look at the origin and influence (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) of the *Dei Verbum* shows that this text is still a vital force even four decades after its publication and that it continues to have a profound influence on the life of the Church. The rediscovery of the Word of God, which had begun even before the Council, came to full fruition through the work of the Second Vatican Council. In the time after the Council, the *Dei Verbum* became fertile ground for numerous positive developments. The hope expressed by the Council that “the treasure of revelation, entrusted to the Church, may more and more fill the hearts



of men" (DV 26) has been brought to fruition and continues to be brought to fruition in the most varied realms.

In spite of all these positive developments and events that have taken place in the course of the last forty years there still remain open questions which have posed new challenges (and opened new opportunities) that could hardly have been dreamed of by the council fathers.

The world of today faces a great variety of challenges and problems. It is not only global challenges such as the problem of the growing influence of fundamentalism, the crisis of the churches and of faith, the difficulties of interreligious and intercultural dialogue that must be confronted; rather, such challenges must be faced in the narrower ecclesiastical realm as well.

The Bible as the Word of God, with its life and faith histories can make an important contribution to the confronting of such questions. When it is discovered and interpreted anew, in every age and by every generation, as a witness to the relationship of God with His people; when its liberating message is unraveled and applied to people's actual life situations; when men and women rediscover the multifaceted character of their own lives in the texts and life histories of the "ancient" biblical books – then Scripture is unfolding its potential to transform human lives and with them the world. This is what makes it visible, almost palpable, that Scripture is at one and the same time a historical document of the past and a faith witness for the present, that these aspects do not stand in contradiction or competition, but that they belong inseparably together.

Such an understanding has an impact on biblical pastoral praxis and on exegetical work, as well as on the way the two relate to each other. The question as to how mutual exchange and interplay between academic-scientific studies on the one hand and the concrete, practical work in the field of biblical pastoral ministry on the other can be improved and intensified still remains a challenge. More than ever is it necessary to find methods (and persons, too) that have the capacity to build

bridges, so that scientific study of the Bible and biblical pastoral praxis do not approach Scripture in their own independent ways, but can rather be seen as two panels that belong together, of one and the same door. I mean by this that door which stands wide open and enables access to Scripture.

Revelations need to be worked out, absorbed. Compared to what would be a "normal" reception period for an Ecumenical Council in the Catholic Church, the now almost 40 years that have elapsed since the Second Vatican Council and the *Dei Verbum* would actually appear to be a relatively short time. In such matters, things tend to be measured in centuries rather than in decades. In other words: today, 40 years later, we still find ourselves in the mid-phase of the impact and reception of this important document, but by no means at its end. Much has been achieved in this time, important goals have already been reached on the road traveled by the word of God, a number of milestones have already been passed along the way. But at the same time much remains to be done. The peak-experience of the Council is an event of history, the return into ecclesial reality is our present. But the journey toward the Promised Land continues ...

(Transl: L. Maluf) ■

<sup>1</sup> *Robinson, Robert Bruce*, Roman Catholic Exegesis since Divino Afflante Spiritu. Hermeneutical Implications (=SBL.DS 111), Atlanta 1988, p. 23.

## 35 Years of CBF



The Catholic, and by this I mean the worldwide and comprehensive unity in diversity has taken on not only one but many faces for me through the CBF: lay, religious, priests, bishops, members of many different cultures, nationalities and language communities, representatives of different spiritualities and theological traditions – all of these have marked and continue to mark the life of the CBF.

The CBF has thus become a mirror of the Bible itself, with its 72 books, its numerous and highly varied characters and narratives, with the great lines of hope for redemption through Jesus Christ, of trust in the one God, and of love for the poor and disadvantaged, but also with the tension-filled multiplicity of different world and life experiences.

*Daniel Kosch, EC moderator 1996–2001, Switzerland* ■