

Verbum Domini and the Complementarity of Exegesis and Theology

Edited by

Fr. Scott Carl



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FR. SCOTT CARL

*Director of the Monsignor Jerome D. Quinn Institute of Biblical Studies
September 2014*

Introduction

Scott Carl

The Monsignor Jerome D. Quinn Institute of Biblical Studies at The St. Paul Seminary School of Divinity of the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota seeks to improve the teaching of Sacred Scripture for our students and to make a contribution to the broader life of the Church by hosting scholarly conferences. The family and friends of Msgr. Quinn established this endowed institute as a way of continuing his legacy of scholarly study of Sacred Scripture in service of the Church. Msgr. Quinn, who passed away in 1988, was a world-renowned biblical scholar, serving on the Pontifical Biblical Commission (1978-84), being president of the Catholic Biblical Association (1970-71), publishing in the Anchor Bible Commentary series, and being twice an invited professor at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome. He was the author of more than twenty books and articles, including the commentary on Titus in the Anchor Bible Commentary. All the while he maintained a deep concern for the formation of Catholic priests, remaining a faculty member throughout his entire scholarly life (1961-88) at The St. Paul Seminary. The present volume is a manifestation of these two dominant aspects of Msgr. Quinn's life: a scholarly biblical contribution whose primary aim is the formation of Catholic seminarians in preparation for the priesthood.

The Quinn Institute began in 2008, just prior to the XIIth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, which gathered to discuss "The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church" in Rome in October of that year. This synod would eventually lead to Pope Benedict XVI's 2010 Apostolic Exhortation, *Verbum Domini*. These two events became the sub-

ject matter for the first two Quinn Conferences hosted in June 2009 and 2011. The overarching goal of these conferences has been to think about the implications of these acts of the magisterium for our lives as biblical scholars teaching in Catholic seminaries. To this end, Pope Benedict XVI urges that

the study of the word of God, both handed down and written, be constantly carried out in a profoundly ecclesial spirit, and that academic formation take due account of the pertinent interventions of the magisterium. . . . Care must thus be taken that the instruction imparted acknowledge that “sacred Tradition, sacred Scripture and the magisterium of the Church are so connected and associated that one of them cannot stand without the others” [*Dei verbum* 10]. It is my hope that, in fidelity to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, the study of sacred Scripture, read within the communion of the universal Church, will truly be the soul of theological studies. (*Verbum Domini* 47)

Thus, this volume seeks to respond concretely to these exhortations and concerns.

Part one speaks of the complementary relationship of exegesis and theology, with special attention to their tendency to be seen as separate in the exegetical endeavor. Part two speaks more specifically about the role of the Word of God in the formation of seminarians.

The renewal that the Church seeks is in part a response to the modern-day risk of splitting the exegetical and theological meaning of the Sacred Scripture (cf. *Verbum Domini* 35); this is the topic of part one of this volume. It begins with the article, “Inspiration and Incarnation,” by Denis Farkasfalvy. This subject is stressed in *Verbum Domini*:

[T]he theme of inspiration is clearly decisive for an adequate approach to the Scriptures and their correct interpretation [*Propositiones* 5 and 12], which for its part is to be done in the same Spirit in whom the sacred texts were written [*Dei verbum* 12]. Whenever our awareness of its inspiration grows weak, we risk reading Scripture as an object of historical curiosity and not as the work of the Holy Spirit in which we can hear the Lord himself speak and recognize his presence in history. (*Verbum Domini* 19)

Farkasfalvy explores the patristic parallelism between inspiration and incarnation. He addresses how this concept came to influence Vatican II’s *Dei verbum* through the work of theologians such as Henri de Lubac, Hugo Rahner, and Hans Urs von Balthasar. The author proposes that more attention be paid

to the analogous meaning of “inspiration” as applied in a subjective sense to *inspired authors* and, in an objective sense, to *inspired texts*.

Francis Martin, in “Spiritual Understanding of Scripture,” seeks to demonstrate how an ancient tradition of interpreting Scripture by means of prophetic graces is being recovered and integrated by solid historical work done in recent centuries. He seeks to accomplish this goal by explaining how recent advances in the methodology of history have modified the aspects of other approaches that obstructed the spiritual or mystical sense of Sacred Scripture. Moreover, he reflects on some remaining deficient aspects of recent theories of history and cognition, demonstrating how they have impeded many believers from appropriating the Sacred Text. In his conclusion, he proposes that understanding human history and cognition in light of the Incarnation of Christ will dispose us to encounter Christ in the Sacred Text, where he is uniquely present to those who seek him in faith.

The next article, “*Verbum Domini* and Historical-Critical Exegesis,” by Brant Pitre, summarizes five key points that Pope Benedict makes about the historical-critical method, showing its indispensability, the false dichotomy between “scientific exegesis” and “spiritual interpretation,” the need to implement the three components for interpretation from *Dei verbum* 12 (the unity of all of Scripture, the living tradition of the Church, and the analogy of faith), the dangers of a dualistic approach to Scripture, and the need for an explicitly theological exegesis. In the end, Pitre draws out implications of these points, including the challenge that the training of most Catholic exegetes has focused on scientific exegesis without regard to the broader interpretative aspects mentioned by Benedict XVI and necessitated by Catholic theology.

Pablo Gadenz, in “Overcoming the Hiatus between Exegesis and Theology: Guidance and Examples from Pope Benedict XVI,” directly addresses a key concern about dualistic interpretation stressed in *Verbum Domini*. Gadenz demonstrates in the work of Cardinal Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI how dogma is essentially the explanation of Scripture and how the Church is the living subject of biblical interpretation. He thereby begins to fill in the lacuna identified (and experienced) by Pitre.

Lastly in part one comes Christian D. Washburn’s article, “The Catholic Use of the Scriptures in Ecumenical Dialogue.” Ecumenism, too, is stressed by Pope Benedict XVI in *Verbum Domini*: “Conscious that the Church has her foundation in Christ, the incarnate Word of God, the Synod wished to emphasize the centrality of biblical studies within ecumenical dialogue aimed at the full expression of the unity of all believers in Christ” (*Verbum Domini* 46). Washburn describes how the centrality of biblical studies in ecu-

menical dialogue has focused in particular on the historical-critical method. He then addresses the role of the ecclesiological, patristic, and theological interpretations of the Scriptures, which are stressed in *Verbum Domini* and in the articles already introduced above. Washburn argues that these means of interpretation must be seen as part of the organic structure by which divine revelation is handed on, or else the entire Christian message is threatened by a fundamental disarticulation.

Part two focuses on how *Verbum Domini* is concerned with the role of the Word of God in seminary formation. Thus, the particular role of professors of Sacred Scripture in Catholic seminaries comes to the fore in these words: “Candidates for the priesthood must learn to love the word of God. Scripture should thus be the soul of their theological formation, and emphasis must be given to the indispensable interplay of exegesis, theology, spirituality and mission” (*Verbum Domini* 82, quoting *Propositio* 32).

Peter S. Williamson, in his article “Preparing Seminarians for the Ministry of the Word in Light of *Verbum Domini*,” provides a broad picture of refashioning the teaching of Sacred Scripture in seminaries. Drawing from the work of the synod and Pope Benedict XVI, Williamson stresses important orientations for the formation of seminarians in the Word, including the priority of the Word in the ministry of priests, its centrality in a seminarian’s spirituality, the special place of *lectio divina*, and the importance of integrating prayerful reading of Scripture and exegetical study. The paper distinguishes between foundational scriptural formation, such as *lectio continua* or introductory courses, and professional Scripture formation, such as learning a practical method of pastoral exegesis that enables the student not only to carry out the various aspects of priestly ministry but also to form a habit of ongoing biblical study.

In his paper, “Searching for the Obvious: Toward a Catholic Hermeneutic of Scripture with Seminarians Especially in Mind,” James Swetnam, S.J., gives an outline of Catholic hermeneutics based on the Catechism of the Catholic Church. He stresses the intrinsically vertical orientation of hermeneutics since the Holy Spirit is the crucial element both in the ascertaining of the original text in terms of Catholic faith and in the application of this original meaning to the contemporary life of the faithful believer. Moreover, he gives tips to seminarians as to how they can best benefit from his Scripture courses. Throughout the text, Swetnam stresses the need for both seminary professor and student to take explicit consideration of their faith tradition. In so doing, Swetnam in a practical manner addresses the following concern of Pope Benedict XVI: “The lack of a hermeneutic of faith with regard to

Scripture entails more than a simple absence; in its place there inevitably enters another hermeneutic, a positivistic and secularized hermeneutic ultimately based on the conviction that the Divine does not intervene in human history” (*Verbum Domini* 35).

Mary Healy’s article, “*Verbum Domini* and the Renewal of Biblical Preaching,” boldly challenges the reality that Catholic preaching is often biblically impoverished. She manifests how Pope Benedict XVI in his Apostolic Exhortation points toward a means of renewing Catholic preaching by emphasizing two crucial factors. First, he calls for a renewed appreciation of the unique authority of Sacred Scripture as the inspired word in which Christ is truly present and which calls for a response of obedient faith. Second, he invites a rediscovery of the traditional understanding of the fourfold sense, in which all Scripture is recognized as a single word bearing witness to a unified plan of salvation in Christ. Healy concludes her article by reflecting on the implications of these two points and illustrating how they might be applied to homiletic preparation, using an example from Numbers 13–14.

The next article, “The Word of God and the Textual Pluriformity of the Old Testament,” by Stephen Ryan, O.P., is the most technical of the volume, helping to demonstrate the interplay between exegesis and theology regarding inspiration. He discusses the issue of inspiration from the perspective of textual pluriformity in Old Testament texts. He shows how the patristic tradition (Origen, Augustine, Jerome), magisterial teaching (e.g., *Dei verbum, Liturgiam authenticam*), and the liturgical practice of the Catholic Church demonstrate that the Word of God revealed to the prophets and apostles is received by the Church in several authentic forms (e.g., Greek, Hebrew, Latin). The conclusion takes the form of brief theses about inspiration and textual pluriformity and offers reflections on how best to introduce this topic to students in introductory courses of Old Testament exegesis.

Kelly Anderson integrates well the role of exegesis and spirituality in teaching the psalms in her paper, “How the Liturgy of the Hours Provides an Effective Means for Teaching the Book of Psalms.” She proposes integrating both ancient and new methods of interpretation when teaching in a seminary. The professor should first present the most recent findings of modern criticism, including form and canonical criticism of the Psalter. But given that the students are seminarians who pray the psalms daily, a further step is pedagogically advantageous and spiritually formative. By presenting the psalms in the context of the Liturgy of the Hours, professors can teach the seminarians about the role of the psalms in the life and tradition of the Church and how to hear the voice of Jesus Christ resounding in these ancient

prayers. Thus, by studying the psalms using modern critical methods, but within the structure of the Liturgy of the Hours, the students will learn to integrate modern research with the traditional understanding of the psalms in the Church.

Lastly, Michael Magee proposes a helpful integration of exegetical methods to aid seminarians' reception of the development of the Pentateuch and its content in his article, "Combining Synchronic and Diachronic Methodology in Teaching the Pentateuch." This article is certainly helpful for anyone teaching a seminary course on the first five books of the Bible. Magee's experience in the classroom has shown that narrative criticism and other synchronic methods prove especially helpful because they hold the students' interest and prove more useful than historical-critical methods in drawing from the readings a message that can be preached to a congregation. Nonetheless, some familiarity with diachronic methodologies is essential so that the student will be able to utilize the contributions of many scholars over the past century. The article proposes a way of combining the various methodologies to achieve optimal results for the candidates in priestly formation.

One of the fruits of these conferences is that the work of the Monsignor Jerome D. Quinn Institute of Biblical Studies has been internationally recognized. The 2011 Quinn Conference was noted by His Eminence Marc Cardinal Ouellet, P.S.S., Prefect of the Congregation for Bishops, at the Synod on the New Evangelization on October 9, 2012, in his intervention on the reception of Pope Benedict XVI's Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*. Twice he singled out as noteworthy the paper presented by Mary Healy.

In conclusion, quoting his own intervention at the synod, Pope Benedict XVI said, "[W]here exegesis is not theology, Scripture cannot be the soul of theology, and conversely, where theology is not essentially the interpretation of the Church's Scripture, such a theology no longer has a foundation" (*Verbum Domini* 35). Such a union of exegesis and theology is crucial if we are to teach seminarians that "[t]he study of Scripture ought to lead to an increased awareness of the mystery of divine revelation and foster an attitude of prayerful response to the Lord who speaks," words that Pope Benedict XVI wrote explicitly to address the needs of candidates for Holy Orders (*Verbum Domini* 82). This volume seeks to address such fundamental challenges directly and practically, helping to form priests who will not only know Sacred Scripture and how to work with it in an exegetical classroom but also find in it a source of renewal for their vocations and offer well-grounded spiritual insight for the good of that portion of Christ's flock entrusted to their care.