

# The Revelation of Your Words

*The New Evangelization and the Role  
of the Seminary Professor of Sacred Scripture*

*Edited by*

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## *Introduction*

The student of sacred Scripture can prayerfully proclaim, “The revelation of your words sheds light, gives understanding to the simple” (Ps 119:130 NABRE). God’s written word does not reveal itself; it awaits the attentive reader, docile to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. The sacred page then comes to life and from mere words becomes “revelation” for the reader as it sheds light and gives understanding.

Some students seek a deeper encounter with God’s written word, a deeper experience of revelation. Candidates for ministry surely must experience this deep encounter before going forth to preach. Here enters the professor of sacred Scripture, who accompanies the student seeking the revelation of God’s written word. This is no small task: a seminary charges its Scripture professors to impart knowledge about the Bible and to foster a love of it. The first aspect of this twofold mandate can be quantified through ordinary classroom examination. The second aspect, however, eludes quantification. The professor of the Bible can foster a love of it by his or her enthusiasm in and out of the classroom, by speaking reverently about the truths of the faith, and by helping the students understand the necessity of serious biblical study for authentic preaching and mission. Perhaps most of all, the professor’s living witness according to the biblical message draws students to fall more in love with the Bible. Nevertheless, the professor cannot force the student into that deep encounter with the written word. Once the professor has facilitated the encounter, he or she must trust that the Holy Spirit can accomplish the rest in due time.

This collection of essays treats the role of the seminary professor of sacred Scripture within the context of the New Evangelization. Some of them concern principally the imparting of knowledge and best practices to accomplish this; others concern the fostering of delight in the sacred page and spiritual encounter with God. Although these essays are Catholic, written within a Catholic theological framework and with Catholic seminaries in mind, many of their insights can be transferred to non-Catholic seminary environments. I hope that, even beyond the seminary, teachers of the Bible will benefit from this book, regardless of their denomination and level of instruction.

Although the term “New Evangelization” has much to do with evangelization in general, it properly pertains to the heirs of Christian lands and cultures where belief and religious practice have given way to secularization. This situation has challenged the Church to develop new ways to call people to belief, since many of the baptized do not pass on the faith to the next generation. Readers unfamiliar with the term “New Evangelization” may wish to read the first section of Peter S. Williamson’s essay in the present volume.<sup>1</sup> Each chapter of this book concerns the New Evangelization, whether directly or indirectly. If this collection of essays helps professors and teachers of sacred Scripture to contribute more fruitfully to evangelization, it will have succeeded.

The two parts of this book correspond to two conferences sponsored by the Msgr. Jerome D. Quinn Institute for Biblical Studies, at the Saint Paul Seminary (University of Saint Thomas in Saint Paul, Minnesota). The appendix, though not presented at a Quinn conference, was composed by a scholar present at both conferences. Fr. Scott Carl directed the institute until I took over in the summer of 2019, and he oversaw these conferences, the first in 2013 and the second in 2015.<sup>2</sup> He invited the conference presenters and, from their written submissions, selected those essays fit for publication in this book. As the initial editor for this book, he contacted some of the authors to request revisions. However, because of his increased administrative duties at the seminary, Carl was unable to bring this project to completion.

When I was named director of the institute, Carl entrusted me with the completion of this work. I reviewed all of the essays and requested revisions from the authors. Although these essays have not been subjected to double-blind

1. See the subheading “The Urgency of the New Evangelization,” in “Implications of the New Evangelization for Priestly Ministry and for Teaching Scripture to Seminarians,” 11–15.

2. He also edited select essays from the first two conferences, held in 2009 and 2011: Scott Carl, ed., *Verbum Domini and the Complementarity of Exegesis and Theology*, CTFS (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015).

peer reviews, it is fair to say that they have undergone a quality-control process. We hope that our colleagues would agree that they surpass the threshold for scholarly publication. Future Quinn conference essays will be peer reviewed before publication; this has already been done for those presented in 2017.

Part One of this book corresponds to a conference held on June 12–14, 2013: “The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Catholic Faith: The Role of the Seminary Professor of Sacred Scripture.”

Williamson begins this first half of the present volume with “Implications of the New Evangelization for Priestly Ministry and for Teaching Scripture to Seminarians.” In it, he draws attention to the urgency for the New Evangelization in the face of secularization and abandonment of the Catholic Church, especially by the young. Although he provides a biblical context for evangelization by priests, he helpfully situates the proclamation of the written word of God within the broader evangelical enterprise. For example, in his section on implications of the New Evangelization for priestly ministry, Williamson not only challenges the clergy to prioritize the ministry of the word but also calls them to move beyond mere maintenance of the parochial status quo and to nourish the sort of priestly fraternity that will help to sustain them over a lifetime. Finally, he devotes considerable attention to implications of the New Evangelization for teaching Scripture to seminarians. Here the professor, lay or ordained, must lead by example, appropriating the biblical message into his or her own life. Effective seminary teaching requires much more than a graduate degree in biblical studies could ever certify, and it requires a markedly different approach to the biblical text than that taken by a graduate-school professor training his students to carry out research. For seminarians, it is essential to develop a personal relationship with Scripture, learning to be attentive to charisms of the Holy Spirit. Our future priests need to be convinced of the inspiration and truth of Scripture, have an integrated command of the whole of salvation history related in Scripture, and have an ability to articulate the *kerygma* for leading others to be intentional disciples. Moreover, it is crucial to teach seminarians about controversial aspects and themes of Scripture such as the “dark” passages, sexuality, and Christology. Williamson draws on his own experience to recommend helpful literature treating these issues. Seminary scriptural formation for the sake of the New Evangelization should also involve a deep study and engagement of the figure of St. Paul as an example of virtue and pastoral zeal for future priests.

In “Stand and Deliver: Scripture and the Role of the Seminary Professor in Forming Priests for the New Evangelization,” Steven C. Smith examines the role of the seminary professor in preparing future priests for the New

Evangelization. In the first half of his essay he asks open-ended questions of Scripture professors, concerning the priority that they give to the New Evangelization in the classroom. He recognizes that they already feel pressure to cover a vast amount of material in the classroom, so the mandate to prepare students for the New Evangelization may be experienced as a burdensome additional requirement. Nevertheless, he challenges the professor to adapt to this priority. Smith then devotes the second half of the essay to three practical suggestions for doing so, taking inspiration from three common NT words in Greek. He calls on professors to lead seminarians to give witness (*martureo*) to their faith, especially in their field assignments. The professors can teach seminarians to proclaim (*kerusso*) the Good News, especially in biblically grounded homilies. This chapter culminates with a call to initiate seminarians in apologetics (*apologia*), for which the author proposes a classroom exercise. The activity, known as “Stand and Deliver,” features both written preparatory work on a biblical question, along with a set of pastoral guidelines in order to yield a clear, balanced and attractive response to that question in the course of a real conversation.

Michael Magee builds upon advances in Johannine studies of recent decades in “Looking but Not Always Seeing: The Relevance of Johannine Irony to the New Evangelization.” In particular, he traces the growing scholarly appreciation for the Fourth Gospel’s rich use of irony, a technique that today’s readers can learn to appreciate much in the same way as early readers would have done. Magee shows how this literary aspect of the Gospel can be harnessed for the New Evangelization addressed to a post-Christian society, especially those who possess a superficial knowledge of Jesus and his teachings; superficial knowledge conceals him and impedes the revelation of who he really is. John’s irony consists in a higher perspective that the Evangelist shares with his readers, enabling them (1) to see beyond the surface to the deeper truths being conveyed, (2) to recognize the short-sightedness and prejudiced judgments of the characters, and (3) to take delight in their own sense of belonging to the community of those who see Jesus as he truly is. The modern addressee of the New Evangelization is invited to a similar privilege and a similar voyage of discovery.

Stephen Ryan, OP, argues that Old Testament Wisdom literature can be taught in seminary contexts in such a way as to demonstrate its relevance to the New Evangelization, in “Old Testament Wisdom literature and Formation for a New Evangelization.” These books teach us in attractive and accessible ways, a pedagogy to be imitated by professors and priests. Ryan expands upon Williamson’s insights from the previous Quinn Institute volume concerning the

cultivation of a love for and knowledge of Scripture in the seminary.<sup>3</sup> He applies particular verses to the preparation of preachers and confessors, and advocates an approach that draws out theological implications of the texts within the broad Catholic theological tradition. Finally, Ryan connects teaching on friendship within the Wisdom literature to the New Evangelization: this teaching is relevant to all, for we are called to the blessed life of friendship with God.

Juana L. Manzo presents a pedagogical strategy to teach the theme of the hardening of pharaoh's heart (Exod 4–14) in “Free Will and the Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart: Integrating Modern and Ancient Interpretations into the Seminary Classroom.” She anticipates her students' struggles to reconcile God's hardening of Pharaoh's heart with their prior theological commitment to the endowment of all human beings with free will. Her pedagogical strategy is based on the interpretations of one modern scholar, Brevard Childs, and two church Fathers, Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine of Hippo. Childs studies the variance of linguistic sources, and the stages of literary composition, to interpret the motif of the hardening within the function of divine signs, whose purpose is to reveal God's knowledge and judgment. For Gregory of Nyssa, free will is an essential anthropological element for the understanding of the motif of the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. Augustine attributes the hardening of the heart to the monarch's refusal to accept God's grace. By exposing students to ancient and modern attempts to reconcile the tension between God's hardening of heart and Pharaoh's free will, Manzo teaches her students to seek the aid of interpreters both ancient and modern to work through a difficult passage.

Part Two of this book corresponds to a conference held June 10–12, 2015: “The Joy of the Gospel, the New Evangelization, and the Role of the Seminary Professor of Sacred Scripture.” The presenters looked to Pope Francis's Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*<sup>4</sup> for inspiration.

Kelly Anderson proposes a model of biblical fatherhood in “The Father of Proverbs 1–9: A Spiritual Father for Seminary Professors.” The father of Proverbs 1–9 has so thoroughly assimilated wisdom, beginning with the Decalogue, into his existence, that as he teaches it he gives of his very being. In doing so he imitates God the Father, who gives his substance to his Son from all eternity. The father of Proverbs also imitates the Father by “creating” through his life-giving words. Moreover, the father of Proverbs models a teaching method both gentle and strong. The father attends especially to his son's desires, guiding him toward lasting fulfillment. He presents difficult moral truths to his son

3. P. 66.

4. *Evangelii gaudium* (November 24, 2013) (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2013).

in a non-confrontational way, so that the son can more readily accept them. Even so, he does not spare the son the truth about the deadly wages of sin. Anderson goes on to describe how she has observed a colleague exemplify fatherly virtues in a seminary setting. Indeed, it is possible to imitate the father of Proverbs 1–9, taking him as a biblical model of paternal virtue for the particular vocation of seminary professor.

Carl proposes principles for a spiritual reading of Scripture that builds upon the literal sense of the text, in his essay “Honey in the Comb: Toward a Spiritual Reading of Sacred Scripture in the Twenty-First Century.” He first draws attention to the need for the spiritual reading of sacred Scripture by quoting key magisterial passages and the works of certain theologians. Carl then lays down the principles for “extracting the honey,” that is for drawing from a biblical text a spiritual meaning that delights and nourishes the soul. First of all, the Old Testament must be read in light of Jesus Christ. The rule of faith sets interpretive boundaries and opens interpretive horizons for the one who recognizes the same divine author for all of Scripture. Furthermore, given the analogy of faith, the biblical interpreter reads diverse biblical texts in light of one another and finds in certain passages a “fuller sense” not directly intended by the human author. The interpreter cannot expect to understand the Scriptures and extract their honey without living in accord with them; his conduct affects his interpretation. Finally, Carl demonstrates the application of his principles, in a two-step process, to Psalm 87: First he summarizes a historical/literary commentary of Gianni Barbiero, and then he points out scriptural parallels and suggests ways to read the psalm in light of the Paschal Mystery and the new life that comes from it.

Magee contributed a second essay to this volume: “‘We have found him!’: The Joy of Discovery in the Fourth Gospel.” He examines a selection of passages from the Gospel of John in which the words and gestures of a given witness are indicative not only of his or her dawning awareness of Jesus’s identity but of the palpable joy of discovery. Magee proposes a careful analysis of details, including (1) the immediate context of the biblical passage, (2) the demonstrative words employed, (3) the specific doubts being overcome and hopes being fulfilled, (4) the exhilaration of coming to know and of being known, and (5) the bodily gestures bespeaking interior transformation of the persons involved. The careful analysis of these details allows insights into the way in which the reader or hearer of the Gospel message is privileged to experience, together with the Gospel characters, the joy of discovering Jesus. At the same time, the reader or hearer is being offered the opportunity to become Jesus’s witness, so that others may come to know the same joy.

The final chapter of Part Two, “The Exegete as Seminary Formator,” constitutes James Keating’s response to the other essays. He builds upon them and highlights key points from them that support his own vision of a sustained, fruitful encounter with sacred Scripture in the seminary. To be reasonable, he argues, is to allow oneself to be affected by the supernatural, which has profound implications for the seminary Scripture professor. By letting his or her prayer and spirituality impact his discipline, the Scripture scholar does not enter the “undisciplined” world of affect, image, and poetry, but rather is brought into a sharper clarity about the need for intellectual distinctions, sound logic, and deliberate and critical thought.

Keating writes, “We have chased prayer out of Scripture study in the name of objectivity, but I truly believe that it is in the service of fear.”<sup>5</sup> Although some secular biblical scholars may consider exegesis done in the seminary’s milieu of faith and prayer to be substandard, the opposite is true: the seminary is the freest academic space on earth since it welcomes Truth at the source. This does not mean that the seminary is a place where critical reading is dispensed with in order simply to deepen devotion. Rather, the seminary is Scripture’s home, the place where critical reasoning comes to its fullest powers in a matrix of one’s own and the Church’s loving response to the Paschal Mystery of Christ.

After Part Two, this book concludes with an appendix by André Villeneuve: “On the Importance of Biblical Hebrew in Catholic Seminaries and Academic Institutions.” Under ten headings, Villeneuve makes the case for Catholic students to learn Biblical Hebrew. He begins by surveying pertinent church teaching and goes on to highlight Hebrew’s status as a holy language, being the one in which most of the Bible was composed. Learning Hebrew helps us bridge the enormous cultural gap between ourselves and the ancient hagiographs. Indeed, it is essential in order to interpret the Old Testament well. If that were not enough, knowledge of Hebrew contributes significantly to the proper understanding of Jesus and the New Testament. Moreover, it leads to a better understanding of the Psalms, which are so prominent in the liturgical prayer of the Church.

The final four sections of Villeneuve’s essay describe expected benefits that may be less obvious than the ones just outlined. He explains the great impoverishment caused by the Church’s distancing itself from its Jewish roots, and the great advantage of reversing course. The student of Biblical Hebrew can participate in the revived language, Modern Hebrew, with relative ease; he or she gains access to “the rich world of modern Israeli literature, scholarship, arts, and

5. P. 151.



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culture.”<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the Catholic who learns Hebrew can participate in Hebrew Catholicism, part of a larger Christian movement to (re-)connect to our Jewish roots. Finally, Villeneuve urges readers to take part in the Hebrew “Renaissance,” which many of our evangelical brothers and sisters have embraced. Catholics, he argues, need not lag behind. Moreover, “Hebraiophilia” can both revitalize the Church and help it to reject a newly resurgent anti-Semitism.

These ten contributions provide ample material for reflection on the role of the seminary professor of sacred Scripture, in the context of the New Evangelization. If they make their desired impact in the seminary classroom, they will help professors to make God’s written word become revelation for students. These future ministers will in turn be able take the psalmist’s words as their own, as they profess to the divine author of Scripture, “The revelation of your words sheds light, gives understanding to the simple” (Ps 119:130 NABRE).

I would like to thank people who have contributed to this volume in various ways. Fr. Scott Carl and I thank the benefactors of the Monsignor Jerome D. Quinn Institute for Biblical Studies, which has underwritten the conferences and book production. This institute has recently been renamed as an endowment, while keeping the same purpose as before. The Quinn Endowment will continue to fund Quinn biblical conferences under the auspices of The Saint Paul Seminary’s Institute for Catholic Theological Formation. I also thank my editing and production team for their work: Dawn Eden Goldstein, copy editor; David McEachron, proofreader; Erika Zabinski, indexer; and Judy Gilats, typesetter. Your skills and diligence are appreciated.

FR. KEVIN ZILVERBERG

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