

The Fiftieth Anniversary of Vatican II's *Dei Verbum*

Fifty years ago, on November 18, 1965, 2344 bishops (of the 2350 present at Vatican II)¹ voted to accept the *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*, otherwise known as *Dei Verbum*. *Dei Verbum* not only addresses revelation in general but also focuses particular attention on the Bible, the written source of revelation. This nearly unanimous vote concluded one of the longest and most heated discussions at Vatican II, one that began before the Council opened and concluded only a few weeks before it ended.

The original document proposed to the bishops, known as *De fontibus revelationis* (“Concerning the Sources of Revelation”) was discussed in the very first session of the Council, where it was strongly criticized. In fact, in a first vote on the document 822 bishops (37% of those present) opposed its adoption.² Pope John XXIII then suspended debate on this document and sent it to a special commission for a complete rewriting. With a stroke of genius, he put in charge of this commission two of the most polar opposites in the Roman Curia, Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviani, head of the Holy Office, and an influential drafter of the first *schemata* of the Council, and Cardinal Augustin Bea, head of the Secretariat for Christian Unity and a biblical scholar.³ There were numerous revisions and interventions by bishops, cardinals, and experts over the next three years. Pope Paul VI himself intervened and helped to produce a final vote that was nearly unanimous. For in October 1965 Pope Paul convoked a meeting of the doctrinal commission of the Council in order to obtain the widest possible consensus on this text, which he considered to be one of basic documents of the entire Second Vatican Council.⁴

Dei Verbum is the Latin for “Word of God.” *Word* of course implies communication, and God’s communication to us, God’s self-disclosure, is known as *revelation*. For Christians, God is revealed through nature, through the history of Israel, through the prophets, but most importantly through Jesus. It is especially – but not exclusively – in Sacred Scripture where we learn about God’s activity in Israel and through Jesus, the Son of God. When we say that the Bible is God’s Word, we imply that God communicates to us through Sacred Scripture. So Scripture is venerated as a special form of God’s communication.

It’s good to remember that the Bible was not addressed *originally* to us. Its original audience, or better, audiences, lived 1900 to 3000 years ago, and they communicated in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. Every word is part of a language, a system of communication within a particular community or culture. So what was written or spoken to an ancient Israelite or Jew or Greek may not always be instantly understandable to us. The written Word of God requires interpretation and explanation. As a result we must necessarily feel the *limitations* of the Word of God. That may seem a strange concept to us. After all, God’s

¹ Riccardo Burigana, “Alla riscoperta della Parola di Dio: La storia della redazione della costituzione Dei Verbum,” *Dei Verbum: La bibbia nella chiesa (Parola Spirito e Vita: Quaderni di Lettura Biblica 58)* 9.

² Ralph M. Wiltgen, SVD, *The Rhine Flows into the Tiber: The Unknown Council* (New York: Hawthorn, 1966) 50.

³ Ronald D. Witherup, “Scripture at Vatican II: An Analysis of *Dei Verbum*,” *Newman Rambler* (Vatican II Special Edition No. 2) 20; *The Word of God at Vatican II: Exploring Dei Verbum* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014) 4.

⁴ Burigana, “Alla riscoperta della Parola di Dio,” 10.

Word is perfect, so how can the Bible be limited? It is limited in the sense that it is communicated to us through human language, and every human language is imperfect and limited. Part of the task of studying the Bible then is to struggle with the human imperfections within it as we seek the perfect Word of God.

History of Interpretation. The church has a long history of interpretation of the Bible. For much of the past 2000 years Christians tended to take biblical texts rather literally. Yet at the same time the earliest church often made use of Jewish rabbinical techniques in its interpretation of the text, and later it applied Greek philosophy and philology to the text. Medieval exegesis tended to spiritualize the meaning, a method rejected by Protestant reformers. Largely because of the Protestant Reformation the Roman Catholic Church insisted that the Bible had to be read with special care. The clergy and scholars were expected to know the biblical text well. However, before the nineteenth century the average Catholic priest in Europe and elsewhere did not own a copy of the Bible. Access to God's Word usually came through the lectionary, the breviary, and other liturgical books.

The faithful, moreover, were seldom encouraged to read the Bible. Their knowledge of Sacred Scripture was often limited to what they heard during the liturgy. The Council of Trent neither encouraged nor forbade translations into the vernacular. But its proclamation of the Vulgate as the official text of the Roman Catholic Church limited its use to those who not could read and understand Latin. The church's hostility toward Protestant editions of Sacred Scripture also created the impression that reading the Bible was something Protestant and therefore suspect.⁵

During the past 200 years the most important type of interpretation among both Catholics and Protestants has been the so-called *historical-critical method*, which deals with questions of the origin and history of biblical materials. The Catholic Church was rather hesitant at first in accepting this approach, since it was often used to attack the faith and the church and to advocate extreme positions. During the 19th century the church had basically an apologetic attitude toward this biblical methodology: it felt it had to defend the Bible against the errors of the time (in particular, rationalism and modernism). But the past 100 years have seen a dramatic change in the attitude of the church to historical criticism.

Pope Leo XIII (1873-1903) recognized that the church could not hide its head in the sand when it came to the Bible. In 1890 the Ecole Biblique was founded in Jerusalem to encourage serious scientific study of the Bible. Then in 1893 Pope Leo XIII wrote *Providentissimus Deus*. This encyclical encouraged Catholic scholars to take seriously a modern scientific examination of the biblical text. In 1902 he established the Pontifical Biblical Commission. However, after his pontificate this commission tended to condemn rather than encourage certain developments in biblical studies. For example, in one of its early pronouncements the Pontifical Biblical Commission condemned the idea that Moses did not write the entire Pentateuch. Today nearly no one accepts the theory that Moses is the exclusive author of the Pentateuch. In 1909 Pope Pius X (1903-1914) founded the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome in order to train Bible scholars for the church. In 1920 Pope Benedict XV (1914-1922) issued *Spiritus Paraclitus*, which encouraged the laity to read Sacred Scripture frequently – especially the New Testament.

⁵ Timothy A. Lenchak, "The Function of the Bible in Roman Catholic Mission," in *Scripture, Community, and Mission: Essays in Honor of D. Preman Niles* (ed. Philip L. Wickeri; Hong Kong: Christian Conference of Asia, 2002) 2-3.

In 1935 Augustine Bea, the rector of the Biblicum, attended the OT Congress in Göttingen, Germany – a first for a Catholic exegete. In 1940 Pope Pius XII (1939-1958) wrote a letter to the bishops of Italy defending the right of Catholic scholars to examine the Bible critically. Then in 1943 his encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* was published. In it Pius XII heartily endorsed historical criticism as a significant way to approach the biblical text. He insisted that the interpreter must go back in spirit to the times when these ancient texts were written. That means making use of history, archeology, ethnology, the social sciences, etc.

This insistence on going back to the spirit of the times was confirmed in 1964 by a document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission on *The Historicity of the Gospels (Sancta Mater Ecclesia)*. Note that this document was published during Vatican II but before the final text of *Dei Verbum* was approved. It had great influence on *Dei Verbum*, especially on paragraph 19. Both documents note that the text of the Gospels as we have them was affected by three distinct historical traditions: (1) the historical Jesus; (2) the oral preaching of the apostles; and (3) the work of the evangelists themselves. “Implicit in this scenario is that the Gospels are not necessarily ‘literally’ true in every detail, as the process allowed for accretions and alterations over time. This teaching now appears in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (#126).”⁶

Dei Verbum. The bishops at Vatican II wanted to define and explain the process of revelation. In fact, *Dei Verbum* is the first church document which formally investigated and explained what revelation is.⁷ The final text of *Dei Verbum* also ended up being revolutionary. It departed from traditional philosophic and apologetic approaches to Sacred Scripture and added a necessary pastoral dimension regarding its use by the church. Instead of being philosophical it was biblical – in fact, the Bible had a major effect on the entire Council.⁸ In chapter 1 of *Dei Verbum* alone there are 32 scriptural citations. The document in general was not abstract but historical. It was not apologetic but positive. It did not seek to refute errors but respected the mystery of revelation. It repeated church tradition yet also explained it in an entirely new way. Tradition and Scripture, e.g., were not seen as antagonistic elements but as two cooperative parts of a common revelation from God.

In fact, much of the heated discussion over this Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation concerned Tradition and its relationship to Sacred Scripture. The original document, criticized by many bishops, proposed that Tradition and Sacred Scripture were two separate sources of revelation, with Sacred Scripture being subordinate to Sacred Tradition. Tradition was seen as more important because it was through Tradition that the Church recognized which books belonged to the canon of the Bible (DV 8). Some held that the Council of Trent had recognized both sources of revelation and the priority of Tradition.

⁶ Ronald D. Witherup, “Scripture at Vatican II: An Analysis of *Dei Verbum*,” *Newman Rambler* (Vatican II Special Edition No. 2) 20. See Ronald D. Witherup, *The Word of God at Vatican II: Exploring Dei Verbum* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014) 13-14.

⁷ Ronald D. Witherup, “Scripture at Vatican II: An Analysis of *Dei Verbum*,” *Newman Rambler* (Vatican II Special Edition No. 2) 22; *The Word of God at Vatican II: Exploring Dei Verbum* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014) 57.

⁸ Ronald D. Witherup, “Scripture at Vatican II: An Analysis of *Dei Verbum*,” *Newman Rambler* (Vatican II Special Edition No. 2) 23.

Dei Verbum described the relationship between Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition in this way:

“There exists a close connection and communication between Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture. For both of them, flowing from the same divine wellspring, in a certain way merge into a unity and tend toward the same end. For Sacred Scripture is the Word of God inasmuch as it is consigned to writing under the inspiration of the divine Spirit, while Sacred Tradition takes the Word of God entrusted by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit to the apostles and hands it on to their successors in its full purity.... Both Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture are to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of loyalty and reverence” (DV 9). “Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture form one sacred deposit of the Word of God, committed to the Church” (DV 10).

At this point *Dei Verbum* adds:

“But the task of authentically interpreting the Word of God, whether written or handed on, has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office of the Church (the *magisterium*), whose authority is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ. This teaching office is not above the Word of God but serves it, teaching only what has been handed on, listening to it devoutly, guarding it scrupulously and explaining it faithfully in accord with a divine commission and with the help of the Holy Spirit; it draws from this one deposit of faith everything which it presents for belief as divinely revealed” (DV 10).

It is interesting that *Dei Verbum* was proclaimed as a “Dogmatic Constitution” at Vatican II. This gives *Dei Verbum* significant authority. Vatican II produced many documents, of which four were ranked as Constitutions and only two received the title “Dogmatic Constitution”: *Dei Verbum* and *Lumen Gentium*. The four constitutions can be considered the key or lens through which all the other Vatican II documents can be read and interpreted.⁹ Vatican II’s own Doctrinal Commission expressed its opinion that *Dei Verbum* was actually the first, that is, the most important, of all the Council’s constitutions, since it had far-reaching consequences not only on Vatican II but on the Church itself.¹⁰

A significant element in *Dei Verbum* was the bishops’ refusal to use the word “inerrancy” to describe the inspired Sacred Text.¹¹ Rather the document proclaims that “the books of Scripture, firmly, faithfully and *without error*, teach that truth which God, *for the sake of our salvation*, wished to see confided to the Sacred Scriptures” (DV 11).

⁹ Ronald D. Witherup, “Scripture at Vatican II: An Analysis of *Dei Verbum*,” *Newman Rambler* (Vatican II Special Edition No. 2) 22; *The Word of God at Vatican II: Exploring Dei Verbum* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014) 1.

¹⁰ Ronald D. Witherup, “Scripture at Vatican II: An Analysis of *Dei Verbum*,” *Newman Rambler* (Vatican II Special Edition No. 2) 23; *The Word of God at Vatican II: Exploring Dei Verbum* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014) 63.

¹¹ Ronald D. Witherup, “Scripture at Vatican II: An Analysis of *Dei Verbum*,” *Newman Rambler* (Vatican II Special Edition No. 2) 24.

Dei Verbum frequently refers to the Holy Spirit's role in the life of the church (over 30 times). The Holy Spirit, at work in human hearts, helps church members to believe and to understand what they believe. But the Spirit is especially active in the transmission of revelation in Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition, both of which are the products of the work of the Holy Spirit both in history and in the church. We call this process *inspiration*. The Spirit also helps the *magisterium* to interpret Scripture correctly.¹²

Dei Verbum also insisted that "easy access to Sacred Scripture should be provided for all the Christian faithful" (22). It reminded the church that not only the Eucharist but also Sacred Scripture was a source of spiritual nourishment for clergy, religious, and laity:

"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." (21)

Dei Verbum also reminded Catholics that the preaching, theology, and prayer life of the church had to be based on and nourished by the Word of God.

Dei Verbum acknowledged the hunger for the Word of God that had been growing in the Catholic Church and that had sparked various popular renewal movements characterized by a desire to become more familiar with the Bible. Numerous later documents issued by the Vatican, by bishops' conferences, by individual bishops, and by biblical assemblies have emphasized and developed these concerns of *Dei Verbum*.¹³

Structure of the document. *Dei Verbum* has a prologue and six chapters.

Prologue: (paragraph #1). The Prologue is like the overture of a concert, for it sets the tone for the remainder of the document. The council acknowledges that it must first listen to the word of God before it can proclaim it. Then there is a passage from the First Letter of John: "We announce to you the eternal life which dwelt with the Father and was made visible to us. What we have seen and heard we announce to you, so that you may have fellowship with us and our common fellowship be with the Father and his son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:2-3). After the citation the Prologue affirms that this Constitution falls within the tradition of prior magisterial teachings on this theme, namely those of the Council of Trent (1546) and Vatican Council I (1870). *Dei Verbum's* teachings were to be seen as continuous with the Church's prior teaching on the theme of revelation.

¹² Douglas G. Bushman, "Introduction to the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation: *Dei Verbum*," *The Sixteen Documents of Vatican II* (gen. ed. Marianne Lorraine Trouvé; Boston: Pauline Books & Media) 406.

¹³ See, for example, Catholic Biblical Federation, "The Bible in the New Evangelization," *Bulletin Dei Verbum* 15/16 (1990), 7-18; Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, "Joint Pastoral Letter on the Biblical Apostolate," 32-35; John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, 58; John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, 22; World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate, "Final Statement of the II Plenary Assembly," in *The Word Is Alive in Asia*, ed. John Paul I Biblical Center (Vigan, Philippines: John Paul I Biblical Center, 1989), 16-23; World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate "God's Prophetic People," in *The Word Is Alive in Asia*, ed. John Paul I Biblical Center (Vigan, Philippines: John Paul I Biblical Center, 1989), 24-31.

Chap. 1: Revelation (## 2-6). The first chapter deals with the nature of revelation, and it presents faith as a response to God’s revelation (DV 5). God initiates the process of revelation out of love, and God chooses to reveal himself in various ways – but especially through Jesus. The purpose of revelation is communion in God. God can be known with certainty from nature (something denied by fundamentalists), but it is divine revelation which makes it possible to know God without error. Before Vatican II revelation was viewed primarily in propositional terms, that is, by means of revelation God communicated to us a certain body of truths. Vatican II saw revelation more in terms of a personal relationship, that is, through revelation God was revealing himself in a personal way throughout salvation history.¹⁴ Finally, chapter one also confirms that there will be no new public revelation before the return of Jesus in glory.

Chap. 2: Tradition and Scripture (## 7-10). This chapter deals with the transmission of revelation, which is passed on from Jesus to the apostles to us through Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture.

“The truth of revelation, according to the text, is rooted in Christ’s very person and in his own proclamation of the gospel; but in having commissioned the apostles to carry it forward through their own oral proclamation, the truth of the gospel also lies in the apostolic tradition. The Holy Spirit guided this “apostolic preaching,” which the Church kept alive and eventually included in the canon of Sacred Scriptures.”¹⁵

In Vatican II the church moved away from seeing Scripture and Tradition as two different sources of revelation. Rather, both come from a common source: the Holy Spirit. What was handed on in them includes everything we need for salvation and holiness. Church tradition, aided by the Holy Spirit, helps us to know the canon of sacred books that make up the Bible. So there is a close relationship between the two.

Perhaps the one area where the church always disagreed with Protestant biblical scholars is the recognition that true interpretation of the Bible must take place within a **community** of faith. Catholics have never accepted the notion that every individual has the right to interpret the Bible for himself or herself alone. The Protestant ideal is the individual with a Bible before God. We believe that interpretation is a community affair. This is why in the Catholic Church the **magisterium** or living teaching office of the church has the final authority to interpret tradition and scripture. However, the teaching office of the church is not above scripture but subject to it (DV 10).

Chap. 3: Scripture and inspiration (## 11-13). *Dei Verbum* does not adopt a single theory of inspiration. Instead it proclaims the important role of the Holy Spirit in the process of revelation. The Holy Spirit somehow guided the human authors of the Bible so that that their writings tell us what we need to know for our salvation. God is the Author of the Bible; at the same time we can say that various human writers are true “authors” of Sacred

¹⁴ Douglas G. Bushman, “Introduction to the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation: *Dei Verbum*,” *The Sixteen Documents of Vatican II* (gen. ed. Marianne Lorraine Trouvé; Boston: Pauline Books & Media) 404.

¹⁵ Ronald D. Witherup, “Scripture at Vatican II: An Analysis of *Dei Verbum*,” *Newman Rambler* (Vatican II Special Edition No. 2) 21.

Scripture. Scripture teaches us without error all the truth that God wanted to be known for our salvation. But since this truth comes to us in human words, we must carefully investigate these texts. That means examining carefully the styles and patterns of communicating of the ancient authors in order to find the meaning of the text. Here Scripture is compared to Jesus in terms of the **incarnation**: Just as Jesus is God become fully human, so has God's Word become fully human words in Sacred Scripture.

Chap. 4: The Old Testament (## 14-16) is seen especially in terms of its preparation for Jesus and its fulfillment in the New Testament. Yet it is acknowledged that the Old Testament can also shed light upon and explain the New Testament.

Chap. 5: The New Testament (## 17-20) is also examined, especially the Gospels, which have a special preeminence for Catholics (not for fundamentalists!). The Gospels have historical value and are faithful for teaching us what Jesus said and did in order to gain our salvation. Of course the evangelists did not tell us everything and were influenced by their own churches and circumstances. For us the New Testament has a certain priority over the Old Testament because of its focus on Jesus, the source of revelation and the goal of the Old Testament.

Chap. 6: Sacred Scripture in the Life of the Church (## 21-26). Particular attention in recent years has gone to the final chapter of *Dei Verbum*. This chapter covers the pastoral aspects of the Bible and its use in the church. The church has always venerated Sacred Scripture as she venerates the body of the Lord. It must be nourished by Sacred Scripture, and thus there are a number of recommendations for the church which are especially important for those engaged in biblical ministry: easy access to Scripture, study of the Fathers, the duty of exegetes, theology, *lectio divina*, prayer. A strong role in this process was assigned to the bishops of the church.

Post-Vatican II Consequences. *Dei Verbum* had both immediate and long-lasting influence on the Church.¹⁶ The *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* had the greatest immediate effect, since all Catholics could see, hear, and feel the changes in the liturgy – especially the adoption of the vernacular. However, the new lectionary, with an expanded set of readings because of the three-year Sunday cycle, was almost certainly influenced by *Dei Verbum* and not just by *Sacrosanctum Concilium*.

One immediate consequence of the return-to-the-Bible movement initiated by Leo XIII and culminating in Vatican II was the change in the Catholic attitude toward translating

¹⁶ In lecture notes on *Dei Verbum*, Dennis Hamm, S.J., professor emeritus of theology at Creighton University, points out how *Dei Verbum* made a difference in the life and ministry of the Church:

- Hundreds of Catholic men and women – lay, religious, and clerical – have earned advanced degrees in biblical studies.
- Scripture study now plays a larger role in the training of priests.
- Ecumenical and inter-religious (i.e. Jewish and Christian) collaboration in the making of translations has grown rapidly. The membership of the Catholic Biblical Association now numbers Protestants and Jews.
- Publications on Scripture, both scholarly and popular, have increased noticeably over the past 50 years.
- The expanded array of biblical readings in the new lectionaries has increased biblical literacy in the worldwide Catholic Church.

the biblical text. The translation and publication of portions, New Testaments, and even complete Bibles by Catholics grew tremendously throughout the twentieth century. These translations into the vernacular were from the original Hebrew and Greek texts and not from the Vulgate, which is St. Jerome's translation of these texts into Latin. Unable and unwilling to compete with the Bible Societies, Catholic Church policy since Vatican II has generally been to cooperate in producing interconfessional translations of Scripture. In fact, this is now the Church's preferred method for translating the biblical text. The Vatican's Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity and the United Bible Societies even issued joint guidelines for such cooperation.¹⁷ *Dei Verbum* also suggested that "editions of the Sacred Scriptures provided with suitable footnotes, should be prepared also for the use of non-Christians and adapted to their situation" (25). Unfortunately this is one suggestion of the document which has been neglected.

In 1993 the Pontifical Biblical Commission produced the document, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*. This document explains the historical-critical approach to the Bible but also goes beyond it by examining other recent methodologies. Later Church documents on Sacred Scripture produced by the Pontifical Biblical Commission were also greatly influenced by *Dei Verbum: The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible* (2002); *The Bible and Morality: Biblical Roots of Christian Conduct* (2008); *The Inspiration and Truth of Sacred Scripture* (2014). It is notable that Pope Benedict XVI's 2010 Apostolic Exhortation *The Word of the Lord (Verbum Domini)* refers to *Dei Verbum* about 40 times, while the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* refers to it 75 times!¹⁸

Another important consequence of *Dei Verbum* was a tremendous increase of interest in the Bible in the Catholic Church. Biblical courses, study programs, workshops, institutes, organizations, and scholarly works written on the Bible by Catholics appeared soon after Vatican II and have continued to this day. For example, the Catholic Biblical Federation, an international fellowship of Catholic organizations involved in biblical pastoral ministry, was organized in 1972. SVDs have been involved with the Catholic Biblical Federation since its beginning, and a Polish SVD, Fr. Jan Stefanow, is currently its executive secretary.

In fact, the Society of the Divine Word has been strongly influenced by Vatican II's *Dei Verbum*. Our very name has inspired and challenged numerous SVDs to put into practice the practical proposals of *Dei Verbum*. SVDs have a long tradition of biblical ministry and interest in Sacred Scripture. Already in 1906 St. Arnold Janssen reflected on Holy Scripture and encouraged his spiritual sons to read and preach from the Bible: "The members of the Society of the Divine Word must particularly venerate Holy Scripture and spread abroad its truths."¹⁹

In 1987 Divine Word Missionaries began the *Dei Verbum* Biblical-Pastoral Program in Nemi, Italy, about 25 miles outside Rome. Over the years several hundred priests, brothers,

¹⁷ Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity and the United Bible Societies, "Guidelines for Interconfessional Cooperation in Translating the Bible," new revised edition (Rome: Vatican Polyglot Press, 1987).

¹⁸ Ronald D. Witherup, "Scripture at Vatican II: An Analysis of *Dei Verbum*," *Newman Rambler* (Vatican II Special Edition No. 2) 25.

¹⁹ A. Janssen, *Persönliche Aufzeichnungen aus dem Jahre 1906*, *Analecta SVD* 55, 56-57; cited in *Living by the Word (Witnessing to the Word* 11; Rome: SVD Generalate, June 1987) 13.

sisters, and lay persons – even two bishops – participated in a three- or four-month course of biblical pastoral ministry. For four years, from the summer of 1998 until the summer of 2002, I myself directed this program. As you can see from the title, the program was inspired by chapter six of Vatican II's *Dei Verbum*. Europe is also the home of Editorial Verbo Divino, an SVD publishing house in Spain which has literally distributed and sold millions of copies of the Spanish Bible *La Biblia Latinoamérica* and works on the Bible throughout Latin America as well as numerous editions of the Bible in other languages.

In Africa SVDs founded the Centre pour l'Apostolat Biblique (Center for the Bible Apostolate) in the Congo in 1971. In 1977 we opened the Centre Biblique de Lomé in Togo. Then in 1982 SVDs began Verbum Bible, a publishing house in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Over the decades this publishing house has produced and distributed hundreds of thousands of Bibles not only in French but also in Lingala, Moore, Kikongo, Swahili, Dionla, and other African languages.

In Latin America SVDs founded the Editorial Guadalupe in Buenos Aires, Argentina, the Centro Bíblico Verbo Divino in Quito, Ecuador, and the Centro Verbo in Sao Paulo, Brazil. There are also small biblical centers in Bolivia, Mexico, Paraguay, and northeastern Argentina. In the Philippines the John Paul I Biblical Center was founded in Vigan in 1978, and afterwards we began the Paul VI Biblical Center in Davao.²⁰

Besides these fairly well-known establishments, SVDs have been frequently involved in various biblical ministries and biblical centers throughout the world. In the Chicago Province there is a small biblical center on our property in Granby, Quebec, in Canada. Numerous SVDs have obtained master's degrees and doctorates in biblical theology and/or Sacred Scripture in order to teach in seminaries, universities, and biblical centers. SVDs are encouraged to base their homilies and ministries as much as possible on Sacred Scripture.

Divine Word Missionaries have been reading and studying and preaching on the Bible since we were founded by St. Arnold in 1875. But *Dei Verbum* provided a strong stimulus to our biblical ministries. Nevertheless, we are not alone in our efforts to promote the Word of God and to be involved in biblical ministry. Many dioceses and religious congregations have been inspired by Vatican II and its document *Dei Verbum* to direct their lives and ministries according to the Word of God. What happened fifty years ago is still being lived out today.

Timothy A. Lenchak, SVD
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²⁰ *Living by the Word (Witnessing to the Word* 11; Rome: SVD Generalate, June 1987) 46-47.