

Studien zum Neuen Testament  
und seiner Umwelt

27

## STUDIEN ZUM NEUEN TESTAMENT UND SEINER UMWELT (SNTU)

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## INHALTSVERZEICHNIS

REIMUND BIERINGER

Biblical Revelation and Exegetical Interpretation

According to Dei Verbum 12 ..... 5

BEATE KOWALSKI

Forschungsgeschichtlicher Überblick:

Sprache und Stil des Lukasevangeliums ..... 41

ALBERT FUCHS

Das Verhältnis der synoptischen agreements zur johanneischen Tradition,  
untersucht anhand der messianischen Perikope

Mk 6,32-44 par Mt 14,13-21 par Lk 9,10-17; Joh 6,1-15 ..... 85

KLAUS SCHOLTISSEK

Johannes auslegen III.

Ein Forschungsbericht ..... 117

MARIUS REISER

Eschatologie in der Verkündigung Jesu ..... 155

CORRADO MARUCCI

Gemetrie und Isopsephie im Neuen Testament -

eine wirkliche Hilfe zum Verständnis? ..... 179

ERICH SEITZ

Das rätselhafte ἐπιβαλόν.

Zu Mk 14,72 ..... 199

REZENSIONEN ..... 212

Achtemeier P.J., *Introducing the New Testament* (Fuchs) ..... 212

Asgeirsson J.M., *From Quest to Q* (Fuchs) ..... 273

Baek L., *Werke. Bd. 4: Aus Drei Jahrtausenden* (Fuchs) ..... 283

Baumert N., *Studien zu den Paulusbriefen* (Schmeller) ..... 258

Berger K., *Sind die Berichte des Neuen Testaments wahr?* (Gmainer-Pranzl) ..... 287

Bond H.K., *Pontius Pilate in History and Interpretation* (Fuchs) ..... 214

Broer I., *Einleitung in das Neue Testament II* (Fuchs) ..... 213

Bultmann R., *Theologie als Kritik* (Fuchs) ..... 285

Burkett D., *The Son of Man Debate* (Fuchs) ..... 267

Carson D.A., Justification and Variegated Nomism (Oberforcher) .....	284
Denaux A., New Testament Textual Criticism and Exegesis (Fuchs) .....	276
Deutschmann A., Synagoge und Gemeindebildung (Fuchs) .....	244
Engberg-Pedersen T., Paul and the Stoics (Scholtissek) .....	259
Frey J., Die johanneische Eschatologie III (Oberforcher) .....	233
Gräßer E., Forschungen zur Apostelgeschichte (Fuchs) .....	240
Hays R.B., The Faith of Jesus Christ (Fuchs) .....	253
Hengel M. - Schwemer A.M., Der messianische Anspruch Jesu (Fuchs) .....	263
Hieke Th., The Database of the IQP. Q 6:20-21 (Fuchs) .....	224
Hill Ch.E., Regnum Caelorum (Friedl) .....	271
Horn F.W., Das Ende des Paulus (Fuchs) .....	241
Karrer M., Kirche und Volk Gottes (Fuchs) .....	280
Kim S., Paul and the New Perspective (Wick) .....	256
Kraus Th.J., Sprache, Stil und historischer Ort des 2. Petrusbriefes (Kieffer) .....	262
Kraus W., Zwischen Jerusalem und Antiochia (Scholtissek) .....	253
Labahn M., Offenbarung in Zeichen und Wort (Fuchs) .....	227
Lindemann A., Der Erste Korintherbrief (Repschinski) .....	247
Lohse E., Das Neue Testament als Urkunde des Evangeliums (Fuchs) .....	281
Maser S. - Schlarb E., Text und Geschichte (Fuchs) .....	278
McKnight S., A New Vision for Israel (Repschinski) .....	269
Müller C.G., Mehr als ein Prophet (Fuchs) .....	222
Neirynek F., Colloquium Biblicum Lovaniense (Fuchs) .....	286
Neirynek F., Q-Parallels (Fuchs) .....	225
Pfeiffer M., Einweisung in das Neue Sein (Repschinski) .....	272
Repschinski B., The Controversy Stories in the Gospel of Matthew (Fuchs) .....	215
Sasse M., Der Menschensohn im Evangelium nach Johannes (Giesen) .....	235
Schrage W., Der erste Brief an die Korinther (1 Kor 15,1-16,24) (Fuchs) .....	248
Sim D.C., The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism (Fuchs) .....	220
Thiselton A.C., The First Epistle to the Corinthians (Fuchs) .....	249
Thompson M.M., The God of the Gospel of John (Labahn) .....	238
Wengst K., Das Johannesevangelium, Bd. 1-2 (Fuchs) .....	226
Winter B.W., After Paul Left Corinth (Repschinski) .....	250
Witherington B. III, Grace in Galatia (Fuchs) .....	251
Woyke J., Die neutestamentlichen Haustafeln (Scholtissek) .....	261

Reimund Bieringer

## Biblical Revelation and Exegetical Interpretation According to *Dei Verbum* 12

### *Introduction*

In recent years the enthusiasm of biblical renewal which had motivated the Biblical Movement following Vatican Council II has to a large extent disappeared. Scientific exegesis is sometimes accused of weakening the dynamic power of the biblical message by its one-sided concentration on historical or literary aspects of the texts. This is offered as one of the reasons why the results of historical research have only born fruit in a very limited way for other theological disciplines, magisterial texts of the Church and for the spirituality of believers today.

In the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum* the Council made an effort to restore Scripture to its central place in the Church<sup>1</sup> by developing a new theology of revelation, by determining the relationship between Scripture and tradition in a new way, and by endorsing the use of the historical-critical method for the interpretation of the Bible. To what extent did this effort have success? Which aspects of *Dei Verbum* were received and accepted, which ones were ignored or even rejected? Is the present crisis of scientific exegesis at least partially a consequence of a one-sided interpretation of *Dei Verbum*? Can *Dei Verbum* offer a new impetus today so that the Bible in the Church can be more what it is and actually should be?

We will approach these questions in three steps. First we will briefly summarize the theology of revelation that is found in DV 1-6 (I.). This will be followed by a synchronic and a diachronic reading of the contribution of DV 12 to the understanding of biblical interpretation (II.). Finally we will give an overview over the history of interpretation and the effective history of DV 12 (III.).

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<sup>1</sup> The Melkite archbishop Neophytos Edelby stated in his speech delivered to the council fathers on October 5, 1964: "The reformers set over against each other scripture and the church". According to him, this is therefore a post-tridentine and a Western problematic. An English translation of this widely noted speech is found in *O'Collins*, 1993, 174-177.

*I. The Theology of Revelation of Dei Verbum 1-6*

In the course of the preparation of *Dei Verbum* it became clear that it would be necessary to lay a theological foundation for the specific questions for which explanations were sought. Vatican II is the first council in history which ever spoke explicitly and exclusively about revelation in a separate document.<sup>2</sup> *Dei Verbum* consciously and explicitly mentions the Councils of Trent and Vatican I as its predecessors in this effort, but what follows is rather a *relecture* than a restatement of their teaching. K. Barth aptly translated "inhaerens vestigiis" in DV 1 as: "moving forward from the footsteps of those councils".<sup>3</sup>

Revelation has had three basic meanings in the course of history: 1. *epiphany* (a collection of divine oracles), 2. *supernatural divine instruction or doctrine*, and 3. *self-communication to invite people into communion*.<sup>4</sup> *Dei Verbum* uses revelation in the third sense of the word. The content of revelation is God himself and the "mystery" (*sacramentum*)<sup>5</sup> of his will (DV 2), not the "eternal decisions of his will", as Vatican I said. Even at the place where *Dei Verbum* takes over the formulation of Vatican I (in DV 6), it immediately adds "regarding the salvation of human persons" and uses the verbs "to manifest and to communicate" instead of "to reveal". The "mystery of his will" in DV 2 is a reference to Eph 1:9 and is said in view of Christ, as can be seen in the subsequent text ("through Christ, the Word made flesh"). Thus God does not reveal a doctrine or eternal decisions, rather revelation is a process in which God's Son and God's desire to save humans are shared with us. The purpose of revelation is salvation which is characterized as communion with God. Through Christ human beings have access to the Father. God addresses human beings as friends, lives among them and invites them into communion with himself. Revelation is thus not just information or instruction which demands obedience, but rather an event in which God shares himself and changes human beings by making them sharers of the divine nature (DV 2). By doing so God enables human persons to accept God's invitation to friendship and partnership. All of this is realized *par excellence* in the Christ event. Thus the goal of the revelation

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<sup>2</sup> Seckler, 1981.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted by Ratzinger, 1967, ET, 169.

<sup>4</sup> Seckler, 1981, 220-225 distinguishes between 1. "epiphantisches Offenbarungsverständnis", 2. "instruktionstheoretisches Offenbarungsmodell" and 3. "Modell der realen Selbstmitteilung Gottes".

<sup>5</sup> Abbott, 1966 translates: "hidden purpose".

event is not obedient submission, but invitation, transformation and a free, personal answer. The monologue is replaced by dialogue and encounter. The interpersonal event of encounter is central, i.e., the process of revelation itself instead of the result of revelation.

DV 6 is, however, a sign of a healthy balance. For the council fathers did not lose sight of the more objective, doctrinal aspect despite their emphasis on revelation as a process.<sup>6</sup> Even though revelation is not a doctrine in the first place, it is nonetheless true that, as DV 6 says, God through revelation has revealed a certain content, himself and the eternal decisions of his will. But even here the dialogical element cannot be overlooked. God wanted humans to participate actively in the process of revelation. This can be seen in the choice of verbs, "to show forth" and "to communicate". By using the verb "to wish" (*voluit*)<sup>7</sup> the text indicates ever so subtly that God cannot realize this event alone. Human persons have to do their part by responding to the invitation. This is probably the reason why DV 6 changed the generic "humankind" of Vatican I into the personal expression "human beings" (*homines*). The addition of "regarding the salvation of human persons" has the same effect.

This radically new theology of revelation which, because of its implications concerning the God - humans relationship, is foundational for all of theology has not yet reached the consciousness of a majority of believers. One reason may well be that the council itself was not completely aware of the radicality of this new position and its implications, except, of course, the bishops and theologians who worked it out.<sup>8</sup> We notice moreover that this new theology has not penetrated *Dei Verbum* and the other conciliar documents completely, leaving some inconsistencies which, in due course, will be the subject of our investigation. Most of the commentaries on *Dei Verbum* during the past decennia pay too little attention to the theology of revelation in DV, esp. in studies on the importance of the document for scientific exegesis.

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Waldenfels, 1969.

<sup>7</sup> The translation of Abbott, 1966, "he chose" is misleading.

<sup>8</sup> Seckler, 1981, 220: "... das christliche Normalbewußtsein von heute ... hat von dem Wandel, der in der Offenbarungskonstitution des Konzils zum Ausdruck kommt, noch kaum etwas bemerkt. Das liegt nicht zuletzt daran, daß das Konzil selbst das Neue, das es zu diesem Thema bringt, als solches kaum vermerkt und vielleicht nicht einmal so sehr selbst bemerkt, einige Konzilsväter und Theologen, die die Texte erarbeitet haben, ausgenommen".

## II. Biblical Interpretation According to *Dei Verbum* 12

The conciliar statements concerning biblical interpretation in DV 12 must be understood in the context of *Dei Verbum* as a whole, esp. in the perspective of the theology of revelation in DV 1-6. DV 12 is the result of a long process which has left many characteristic traces of committee work and compromise. It is, therefore, no surprise that DV 12 has been interpreted in very different, frequently conflicting ways. But since the Church only considers the final form as conciliar document, we first present a synchronic reading of the text.<sup>9</sup> In a second step we will test our results with the help of insights which can be gained in a diachronic study.

### 1. A Synchronic Reading of DV 12

An analysis of the text in its present form begins with searching for formal structuring signals.<sup>10</sup> In three sentences the conjunctions *autem* (12,1<sup>11</sup> and 7) and *sed* (12,6) are used. While 12,2 is not introduced by a particle (it is *asyndeton*), all the other sentences begin with the adverb *enim* (12,3.5.8) or the adverb *porro* (12,4). The former is mostly motivating, the latter indicates the continuation of a line of thought. This already suggests that a new line of thought begins in 12,1.6 and 7. This is confirmed by the observation that in the sentences introduced by *autem* or *sed*, the full expression "Sacred Scripture" is used, while the second reference to the Bible in the same context uses the simple "Scripture" (exception: 12,1!). In DV 11 and 13 "Sacred Scripture" is clearly one of the elements that announce a new topic. Therefore I suggest to structure DV 12 as follows: 12,1-5;

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<sup>9</sup> I am well aware that conciliar texts do not have one single author and can, therefore, not be understood without a thorough investigation of their history of composition which is found in section 2 entitled "A Diachronic Reading of DV 12", see below, 16. Nonetheless I consider it helpful to begin with an analysis of the meaning of the text as it stands now. Our findings here will have to be put to the test of a diachronic reading. Cf. *Lohfink*, 1992, 29: "Zunächst einmal gilt bei der Hermeneutik von Konzilsdokumenten: Die Erforschung der Autorenintention kann zwar hilfreich sein. Deshalb habe ich mich auch nicht gescheut, die Konzilsakten auszuwerten. Aber letztlich ist in solchen Dokumenten nur das gesagt, was im Text steht".

<sup>10</sup> See the charts of DV 12 in Latin and English on pp. 38-39 and 39-40 respectively.

<sup>11</sup> Throughout this study, the references to particular parts of *Dei Verbum* 12 follow the presentation and numbering of the text as found in the charts on pp. 36 and 37. In the official text and in the translations DV is subdivided into 26 sections each consisting of several sentences. In this study we refer to the sentences within the sections by giving the section and the sentence number separated by a comma, e.g., 12,1 is the first sentence of section 12.



12,6 and 12,7-8. Admittedly, 12,1-5 is much longer than the other two parts. But this may be due to the somewhat parenthetical nature of 12,3-5 which has no parallel in 12,6. In 12,6 the conjunction *sed* may well have an epanaleptic instead of an adversative meaning.<sup>12</sup>

If we leave aside 12,3-5 for a moment, 12,1-2 and 12,6 can be shown to be clearly parallel. Both parts begin with a motivating subordinate clause (*cum*) which both times contains a reference to an insight of a Church Father (Augustine and Jerome<sup>13</sup> respectively). In 12,1 "God" is mentioned, in 12,6 the "Spirit". We should note that in DV 11 God and the Holy Spirit are mentioned together in four places. This is an additional caution against considering 12,6 to be an antithesis to what precedes. In both 12,1 and 12,6 the topic is the interpretation of Scripture. The comparative "no less carefully" (*non minus diligenter*) in 12,6 is probably to be read in correlation with "carefully" (*attente*) in 12,1. The parallel gerundive constructions in 12,2 and 12,6 which use the same verbs two times (*ad ... eruendam/eruedum ... respicienda sunt/respiciendum est*) must also be noted.

The style of DV 12,6 is much more concise than the one of 12,1-2 as can be seen in the following chart:

<i>Line of thought in 12,1-5</i>	<i>Line of thought in 12,6</i>
In Sacred Scripture God has spoken through humans in human fashion; the interpreter must carefully investigate what the sacred writers really	Sacred Scripture was written by means of the Spirit  ... must be read and interpreted by means of the same Spirit

<sup>12</sup> The Latin conjunction *sed* which is present in 12,6 can be used to lead back to the main idea after a parenthesis. See *Pertsch* (Menge-Güthling),<sup>7</sup> 1978, and *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, 1982, 1723, (2 b): "in resuming after a digression". However, most commentators are defending the adversative meaning of *sed*. *Lohfink*, 1992, 26 calls *sed* an "Absetzungs-partikel" and concludes: "Hier beginnt etwas Neues". *De la Potterie*, 1988, 252 comments: "Le texte commence par 'cependant' (*Sed*) et fait une coupure très nette: à juste titre on en fait le début d'un nouveau paragraphe". *Abbott*, 1966 translates "but", thus presuming an adversative meaning. Only the translation of *Tanner*, 1990, 976, viz. "further", is in line with our view.

<sup>13</sup> The official text refers to Augustine, *De Civ. Dei*, XVII, 6, 2: PL 41, 537, as well as to Jerome, *In Gal.* 5,19-21: PL 26, 417A. With regard to the latter reference, *de la Potterie*, 1988, 239, states: "Cette norme herméneutique rappelé par le P. Congar a été transmise en Occident dans la formulation que lui a donnée saint Jérôme. Cependant, c'est à Origène qui fut le premier à trouver des formules si nettes sur le rôle de l'Esprit dans l'interprétation de l'Écriture".

<p>intended to signify if he wants to see clearly what God wanted to communicate to us</p> <p>If the intention of the sacred writers is to be brought to light literary forms must be regarded.</p> <p>Moreover the interpreter must investigate the "Sitz im Leben" of the literary genres; the customary styles of perceiving, speaking and narrating must be given attention.</p>	<p>(no less carefully must be regarded the content and unity of Scripture as a whole) (if the meaning of the sacred texts is to be correctly brought to light).</p> <p>If the meaning of the sacred texts is to be correctly brought to light, the content and unity of Scripture as a whole must be regarded no less carefully.</p> <p>The living Tradition of the whole church and the analogy of faith must be taken into account.</p>
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*Structure of the line of thought*

<p>A Intention of the interpreter: B to bring to light God's intention.</p> <p>B In order to bring to light God's intention,</p> <p>C the intention of the sacred writer must be investigated.</p> <p>C In order to investigate the intention of the sacred writer,</p> <p>D one must investigate the literary forms.</p>	<p>A Intention of the interpreter: B to bring to light the meaning of the sacred texts.</p> <p>B In order to bring to light the meaning of the sacred texts,</p> <p>D one must no less carefully regard the content and unity of Scripture as a whole.</p>
<p>A B B C C D</p>	<p>A B B D</p>

As a consequence of the concise style of DV 12,6 the reader is somewhat dissatisfied. The question needs to be asked whether we can use the parallelism between 12,1-5 and 12,6 in order to presume that some statements of 12,1-5 are implicitly also intended to be understood in 12,6. The central question is whether in addition to investigating the intention of God in the authorial intention, we can presume that investigating the meaning of the sacred texts themselves can also lead us to the intention of God. Even though this connection is not explicit, I assume that the meaning of DV 12 as a whole allows for such an interpretation.

There is one more problem which needs to be discussed in the context of this analysis of the structure of DV 12, namely the question where 12,7 belongs in the context. Because of the conjunction *autem*<sup>14</sup> and the recurrence of the full and solemn expression "Sacred Scripture",<sup>15</sup> I am inclined to see in 12,7 the beginning of a new part,<sup>16</sup> even though the original Latin edition of the text as well as most translations present 12,7-8 as one paragraph with 12,6. At first sight 12,7-8 looks like a continuation of 12,6. The words *sensus*, *Ecclesia* and *interpretari* are found in both parts and are thus forming elements of continuity. But the parallel expressions *exegeta* (in 12,7) and *interpres* (in 12,1 and 4),<sup>17</sup> the use of *intelligere* in 12,5 and 12,7 (both times in a very similar construction)<sup>18</sup> as well as the stress on study in 12,1 (*investigare*), 12,4 (*inquire*) and 12,7 (*praeparato studio*)<sup>19</sup> also link 12,7-8 with 12,1-5. In 12,8 the phrase "all of what has been said about the way of interpreting Scripture" explicitly refers to everything that has been said since 12,1. In that light, it would be very strange, if "according to these rules" in 12,7 would only refer to 12,6.<sup>20</sup> Finally, "the meaning of Sacred Scripture" (12,7) is, in my

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<sup>14</sup> The conjunction *autem* marks the beginning of a new subsection in DV 12,1. Both there and in 12,7 the meaning is not adversative, but rather "introducing a fresh idea or consideration" *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, 1982, 220. The choice of *Abbott*, 1966 not to translate *autem* in 12,7 is to be commended for not introducing an adversative connection. But it misses the point that *autem* is marking the beginning of a new subsection.

<sup>15</sup> A reference to "Sacred Scripture" is found in 12,1 (twice) and 12,6 as well. The use of the simple, resumptive "Scripture" in 12,6a<sub>2</sub> and 12,8 lets "Sacred Scripture" appear as marking a new beginning. In light of this one should, however, have expected the use of the simple "Scripture" in 12,1b<sub>1</sub> where, for no obvious reason, the full expression "Sacred Scripture" is repeated.

<sup>16</sup> With *Lohfink*, 1992, 35 ("Abschlussbemerkung: Kirchenbezug der Bibelwissenschaft"), and against *de la Potterie*, 1988, 252-253, who proposes the following structure: A (12,1) B (12,2-5) B' (12,6-7) A' (12,8). We see that he separates 12,7 from 12,8. 12,7 forms a subsection with 12,6, while 12,8 is "une conclusion générale" (252).

<sup>17</sup> Note that, by way of contrast, in 12,6 we find an impersonal formulation in the passive.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *Ad recte ... intelligendum* with *ad ... penitus intelligendum*.

<sup>19</sup> Note the translation by *Tanner*, 1990: "through their study" and by *Flannery*, 1975: "that their research may help". The translation of *Abbott*, 1966 as "through preparatory study" and the German "auf Grund wissenschaftlicher Vorarbeit" (*Rahner/ Vorgrimmler*, 1966) are incorrect renderings which reduce exegetical study to a preparatory activity. *praeparato* in the ablative absolute expression *praeparato studio* does not refer to the quality of the study as preparatory, but to the completion of the activity of studying.

<sup>20</sup> I see much justification in using 12,8 to shed light on 12,7, since 12,8 is an explanatory motivation of 12,7 (cf. *enim*). To me this provides a strong reason to reject *de la Potterie*, 1988, 252-253, who constructs 12,8 alone as the conclusion of 12,1-5.6-7.

view, broader than the expression "the meaning of the sacred texts" in 12,6. It embraces on the one hand, the meaning which the sacred writers wanted to give to it and in fact did give to it (cf. 12,4), and, on the other hand, the meaning of the texts themselves (cf. 12,6).

Thus I conclude that 12,7 refers to the task of the exegete as it is expressed in DV 12 as a whole, both the study of the authorial intention (12,1-5) and of the meaning of the text (12,6).<sup>21</sup> If, as I tried to argue above, 12,1-5 and 12,6 are not antithetical, such an interpretation is even more likely.

12,8 adds to 12,7 a statement of the responsibility of the Church toward exegesis. The expression *haec, de ratione interpretandi Scripturam, ...* is again referring to the ways of interpretation mentioned in 12,1-5 and 12,6. 12,7 and 8 clearly belong together and complement each other. While 12,7 states what exegesis can contribute to the Church (to help the process of maturing), 12,8 tells us how the Church relates to exegesis (the exegetical ways of interpretation are subject to the judgment of the Church). This is why I consider 12,7-8 to be the conclusion of both the first and the second part. The structure is thus: A (12,1-5); A' (12,6); B (12,7-8).

After this analysis of the structure we now proceed to an investigation of the meaning of DV 12. It is not before 12,7 that our text states the task of the exegete, namely as "to understand and explain the meaning of Sacred Scripture". Despite and even in all the concentration on authorial intention, this remains the ultimate purpose. The method which exegetes use has two dimensions, the foundation of which can already be found in DV 11. There the sacred writers are called "inspired authors" (11,3-4) and the sacred texts are characterized as "inspired by God" (*omnis Scriptura divinitus inspirata*, 1,5; cf. 11,1.2.4). DV 12 explicates what are the consequences of this view for exegesis. What are the implications of the assumption that the biblical texts were written down by inspired authors? What are the consequences for exegesis, if we assume that Scripture as a whole is inspired by God? The first aspect is dealt with in 12,1-5, the second in 12,6. Both perspectives presuppose that the divine reality (what God intended to say) must be sought in earthly reality. As "the Word became flesh" (John 1:14) in Jesus Christ, as God

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<sup>21</sup> Many exegetes are hesitant to accept that there might be a difference between authorial intention and the meaning of the text. While we cannot get to the meaning of a text separate from its author's intention, we may not reduce the meaning of texts to what we know from authorial intention. Texts say more (and at times different things) than what their authors intend them to mean.

spoke through the words of the human person Jesus of Nazareth, so God's word of Sacred Scripture is expressed in the human words of the sacred writers.

DV 11,3-4 states clearly that God moved human persons to write "everything and only those things which He wanted"<sup>22</sup> "as true authors", i.e., the "truth which God wanted put into the sacred writings for the sake of our salvation". This is why "everything asserted by the inspired authors or sacred writers must be held to be asserted by the Holy Spirit" (11,4). Thus God has spoken "through human beings in human fashion" (12,1) and "has made use of their powers and abilities" (11,3). This view of the nature of the text determines which methods are to be used by exegetes. If they want "to see clearly what God wanted to share with us", they have to study the intention of the sacred writers (12,1). The historical-critical method as it is described in 12,1-5 using the example of form criticism (cf. "among other things") is recommended in the search for authorial intention and in and through it God's intention. In Scripture the divine intention thus is not present parallel to or separate from the human author, but in and through the latter.

There is one clause in 12,1 which at first sight seems to contradict such an interpretation. It is the last clause of the sentence, which we quote here in context: the interpreter "*attente investigare debet, quid hagiographi reapse significare intenderint et eorum verbis manifestare Deo placuerit*" (italics added). Here it looks like the two subordinate clauses are expressing two different tasks, or at least two different phases of the same task of the exegete. In that case the meaning of *et* would be cumulative instead of explicative. But in the Latin text the second clause is not introduced by *quid*.<sup>23</sup> This way the second clause is linked very closely with the first.

The expression *eorum verbis* has the same effect. God does not express his intention parallel to or separate from the words of the human authors, but precisely through their words. The question arises in which sense the human words are the means by which God's word is expressed. A number of elements in the text suggest to understand the relationship between God's intention and human words as symbolic in the following sense. As a rose is a symbol of love given by a lover, so the human words are symbol of God's word. Human words are the words in which the

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<sup>22</sup> The quotes from *Dei Verbum* in this paragraph are taken from the translation of Abbott, 1966.

<sup>23</sup> The translation of Abbott, 1966, is misleading in this regard: The interpreter "should carefully investigate *what* meaning the sacred writers really intended *and what* God wanted to manifest by means of their words" (italics added). See also below, 19.

inexpressible expresses itself, the place where, what cannot be heard, can be listened to. In the Scriptures human words are God's way of self-expression. But God's word is always more and cannot be reduced to human words. In my view this is why 12,1 does not stop after the first "what" clause. By adding the second clause, the council warns exegetes not to lose sight of the fact that, even though God's intention is not expressed independently of the human intention, it cannot be reduced to the human intention.<sup>24</sup> This insight must influence the way the historical-critical method is practiced. Sacred Scripture must be studied as profane literature, and yet this must happen with an awareness that in and through these fragile words the inexpressible is taking on expression. The text of *Dei Verbum* does, however, not specify in which way this must be done.

After focusing our attention on the beginning of 12,1, we now turn to the second *crux interpretum* in our text, namely DV 12,6. Divine revelation also happens in and through the sacred texts. 12,6 seems to presuppose (implicitly) that the intention of the author and the meaning of the text are not fully identical. In 12,4 this idea is already present in the distinction between what the sacred writer "intended to express and actually expressed". What a text actually expresses is never fully the same as the intention of its author. Texts express both more and less than what their authors intend. Sometimes the meaning of a text also greatly differs from the authorial intention. The intention of an author can never be expressed fully nor adequately in the meaning of a text, since it is always richer than what can be committed to words. In addition it depends on the competence of the authors to what extent they succeed in adequately expressing their intentions in a text. Finally, written texts to some extent take on a life of their own. In new contexts they can take on new meanings which must, however, always remain in line with the original authorial intention. 12,6 asserts that the texts of the sacred writers take on new meaning in the context of Scripture as a whole (and also in the living Tradition of the whole Church). This new meaning must be brought to light (*eruer*) with the help of scientific tools. Here too the exegetes are at work in a critical way (cf. *non minus diligenter*). We can conclude this from the fact that both syntax<sup>25</sup> and language<sup>26</sup> in 12,2 and 12,6ca<sub>2</sub> are virtually identical. Here again we may not

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<sup>24</sup> Similarly human love needs visible (symbolic) expressions like a rose and cannot express itself independently of such expressions. Love is, however, always more than these symbolic expressions.

<sup>25</sup> Note the gerund constructions *ad ... eruendam/ erendum* and *respicienda sunt/ respiciendum est*.

<sup>26</sup> The verbs *eruer* and *respicere* are used in both places.

overlook that what is uttered in human words and under human circumstances is the speaking of the unspeakable.

DV 12,6 also expresses the conviction that the texts of the sacred writers are not intended as texts of the past. By having been taken up into the canon, by being read over and over again in the living Tradition of the whole Church and by feeding the faith of the Church, the texts of the past have had an effective history (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) which the council considers to be of essential importance. This second dimension of exegetical work which is expressed in 12,6 cannot be separated from the first. As shaping the preunderstanding (*Vorverständnis*) of the exegete and the readers in general, it is always (even unconsciously) part of the interpretative process, and thus of any historical-critical exegesis. "Preunderstanding" means that in the course of their upbringing and education the interpreters have received an understanding of the essence of Scripture as a whole and that their view of Scripture is always already shaped by the tradition and the doctrine of the community into which they were initiated. It should be noted that the content and unity of Scripture as a whole, the living Tradition and the analogy of the faith are not presented in DV 12,6 as three elements of the same importance. Scripture is clearly primary whereas Tradition and *analogia fidei* are given second place by the use of the expression *ratione habita*.<sup>27</sup>

At the end of our synchronic analysis of DV 12 we restate, by way of conclusion, the most important results. As far as the structure of the text is concerned, we have arrived at the following position. 12,1-5 and 12,6 are parallel parts, and 12,7-8 functions as their conclusion. This has important implications for the meaning of the text. The two parallel parts of DV 12 (1-5 and 6) are dealing with two movements of the exegetical task which correspond to the character of the biblical text. 12,1-5 accepts without hesitation the importance of historical-critical interpretation. This is a consequence of the fact that the council takes seriously both that biblical texts have human authors and that they are part of a concrete historical setting. 12,6 speaks about the second movement of exegetical interpretation which consists of a careful consideration of "the content and unity of the whole of Scripture". The council reminds the exegetes in 12,6 that it is not enough to investigate the connections of a text with its historical situation. They are also required to investigate the connections with the whole of Scripture. While doing this they also have to consider the connections with Tradition, and they may not lose sight of the

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. the translation of *Abbott*, 1966: "... must be taken into account".

coherence of the church's faith. This second movement is a consequence of the conviction that in the human authors' intention God's intention is coming to expression and that texts of the past, transcending their historical situations, are able to speak to later readers.

The council has found a balanced solution for extremely difficult problems by suggesting what we have called above<sup>28</sup> a symbolic relationship between the intention of the human author and the intention of God. The profane scientific method is whole-heartedly embraced as the way of studying sacred texts. But in the study of historical particularity and of small sections (mostly pericopes) of Scripture, exegetes may not lose sight of the whole. Despite the necessary striving for scientific objectivity, they may not overlook the inescapable *a priori* of a preunderstanding which is acquired by being part of a tradition. In the necessary distancing of the text to accept its otherness they may not get lost in a retrospective attitude.

## 2. *A Diachronic Reading of DV 12*

It would be beyond the scope of this study to undertake a detailed analysis of the extremely complicated history of composition of DV 12. Between 1961 and 1965 no less than seven schemas or forms were composed before the final form was accepted on November 18, 1965. But a few observations are in place in order to test the results of my synchronic analysis. It must first be noted that, in Forms A to C, the inerrancy of Scripture was the leading motive of chapter II<sup>29</sup> (which became chapter III, DV 11 -13, in the final text). Inerrancy was thus also the one and only purpose of the general hermeneutical rules mentioned in schema C of 1962:<sup>30</sup> "the general character of a book, on which the Church has to make judgment in case of doubt; the particular circumstances of the time in which the hagiographers were writing; and contemporary forms of thought and behaviour".<sup>31</sup>

Beginning with Form D the apologetic concern was left behind as is reflected in the omission of "inerrancy" from the title. For the first time we meet the positive, constructive goal of knowing "which truth God wanted to communicate to us" (Form D, 12). Form D is thus the first schema that is close enough to the final form

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<sup>28</sup> See above, 13-14.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. the title of chapter II: "De Scripturae inspiratione, inerrantia et compositione litteraria".

<sup>30</sup> Cf. the title of no. 13: "Quomodo inerrantia diiudicanda sit".

<sup>31</sup> *Grillmeier*, 1967, ET: 201, cf. 202.



to warrant detailed synoptic comparison. In what follows I shall limit my observations to the two issues which were central to my synchronic reading of the text. The first one is the way the council describes the relationship between authorial intention and God's intention in Scripture. The second issue is the place of DV 12,6 in the context and its relationship with the rules of interpretation mentioned in 12,1-5.

Form D, 11 minimizes the human contribution in the composition of Scripture. God is the "principal author" (*principalis auctor*), the sacred writers are "living instruments" (*viva instrumenta*). God uses human beings who are in possession of all their human faculties as living instruments and commands to them what to write. According to DV 11,3, however, God employs human beings who use their own faculties and powers as authors in the true sense of the word (while God is the "originator")<sup>32</sup> in order that they write what God desires. The statements of DV 11 which strongly emphasize God's presence and activity in and through the human writers are not found in Schema D. In the final text the human writers are characterized as "true authors".

The introductory sentence of Form D, 12 reads: *Cum autem Deus per homines scripserit, ...*,<sup>33</sup> i.e. using human beings as instruments. In DV 12,1 *per homines* takes on a new meaning in a new context where we read: *Cum autem Deus in Sacra Scriptura per homines more hominum locutus sit ...* Humans are not just instruments, mouthpieces of God, but, as the addition *more hominum* clarifies beyond doubt, the use of *per* does not take away that humans speak and write in their full personhood and as full subjects. God does not use them as instrument, rather in and through what they speak in human fashion, God speaks.<sup>34</sup>

Forms D and E, 12 describe the content of revelation as "*the truth* which God wished to communicate to us" (italics added). In Form F this is changed into "*what* God wished to communicate to us (*nobis*) (italics added)". I disagree with N. Lohfink who claims that *nobiscum* ("with us") in the final form is only a stylistic change compared to *nobis* ("to us") which is still found in Form F.<sup>35</sup> I am inclined to think that *nobiscum* is a consequence of the change from *quamnam veritatem* to *quid*. This change seems to have been motivated by the desire to change the monological concept of revelation into a dialogical one which is in line with the dialo-

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<sup>32</sup> See Grillmeier, 1967, ET: 203, n. 4.

<sup>33</sup> "Since, however, God wrote by means of human beings, ...".

<sup>34</sup> See above, 13-14.

<sup>35</sup> Lohfink, 1992, 22, n. 7.

gical theology of revelation of DV 1-6.<sup>36</sup> This purpose is only fully achieved by using *nobiscum*. The change from *nobis* to *nobiscum* causes a shift in the meaning of the verb *communicare*. While it means "to communicate something to someone", "to inform someone of something" when used together with *nobis*, *nobiscum* brings out the connotation "to share". If we read the references to revelation in DV 12,1 in the light of the theology of revelation of *Dei Verbum* (cf. DV 1-6), we note that the terminology in 12,1 is to some extent taken over from DV 6 where we read: "Through divine revelation God wished to manifest and communicate (*manifestare ac communicare*) himself and the eternal decisions of his will regarding the salvation of the human person".

Here *Dei Verbum* uses language of the dogmatic constitution *Dei Filius* of Vatican I. But there are a number of significant changes, as we have already worked out above.<sup>37</sup> Despite the clear reference to Vatican I, the meaning is now clearly dialogical instead of monological. As I stressed above, DV 6,1 has the function of balancing out the document's emphasis on the revelation event by giving due attention to the content of revelation while not abandoning the dialogical perspective. It is only fitting that in a reference to revelation in the Scriptures (and not directly in the Christ event, cf. DV 2), the document takes up again language which had already been used in statements on the content of revelation.

The interpreter of Sacred Scripture can come to understand what God wished to reveal by carefully investigating "what the sacred writers really intended to signify". This clause was in substance already present in Form D.<sup>38</sup> The second clause *et eorum verbis manifestare Deo placuerit* was only introduced in Form E together with the adaptations which give the final form to both DV 11 and to the introductory clause of DV 12,1. There is good reason to assume that both redactional changes are closely connected and presuppose each other. The shift in meaning noted above for the expression *per homines* as well as the addition of *more hominum* tells us how we have to understand *eorum verbis*. They are in the full sense of the word *their* words. God does not use them as instruments, but they are related to what God manifests in and through them as a symbol is related to what is symbolized.

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<sup>36</sup> See above, 6-7.

<sup>37</sup> See above, 7.

<sup>38</sup> Form D, 12,3: *Quod autem ad singula spectat, modus veritatem attingendi diiudicetur oportet ex sensu quem in determinatis adiunctis, pro sui temporis condicione, exprimere intendit et expressit hagiographus.*

The addition of *et eorum verbis manifestare Deo placuerit* raises the question of its content relationship to the immediately preceding *quid* clause. It must be noted that the added clause is not introduced by *quid*.<sup>39</sup> Proposals to write "and what"<sup>40</sup> instead of "and" were rejected by the Theological Commission which instead stated that "and" alone is used in the text as a neutral expression in order to leave the question of the relationship between human and divine intention as open as possible. A statement in favor of the *sensus plenior* which would have been suggested by the addition of *quid* was explicitly avoided, even though it was not deliberately rejected either. The question was intentionally left open by the Council.<sup>41</sup>

While we need to respect this stated intention of the authors of DV 12, we cannot fail to note that our diachronic analysis brought to the fore a number of observations which support the result of our synchronic reading. At the time when in DV 11-12 the decisive changes were undertaken which gave full attention to the authentically human contribution to the composition of Scripture and at the moment when God's action was presented as happening in and through human persons as persons, the clause *et eorum verbis manifestare Deo placuerit* was added to the description of the task of the interpreter of Sacred Scripture. I cannot help but see in this a confirmation of the symbolic interpretation of the relationship between authorial intention and God's intention, a view which had been the result of our synchronic reading of this text.<sup>42</sup> Such a "symbolic interpretation" does full justice to the personal contribution of both human authors and of God to the meaning of Sacred Scripture.

Moreover, it was precisely at the moment when the above mentioned decisive changes happened in DV 11 and 12,1, that the text of 12,6-7 was added to the text in Forms E-F. Is this accidental, or is there an intentional connection between all

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<sup>39</sup> English, Dutch, French and German translations can hardly imitate the Latin style. Therefore most translations add "what".

<sup>40</sup> In Latin there are two options, either "et quid" or the weaker "quidque".

<sup>41</sup> This view is confirmed in the *relationes*: "abstrahitur autem a solvenda quaestione de 'sensu pleniori'" (Schema 1964) and "Tredecim Patres petunt ut loco et, scribatur quidque, ut appareat quaestionem de sensu pleniori non dirimi". "Omnes concordant de non dirimenda hac quaestione. Si scribitur quidque, quaestio in sensum positivum dirimeretur. Expressio et est neutralis (Modi, 1965). Cf. *Rigaux*, 1968, 267, n. 9. *Grillmeier*, 1967, 219-220. *Gnilka*, 1985, 10 correctly stresses that, even though DV 12,1 may leave open the possibility of *sensus plenior*, it is only *sensus plenior* in the narrow sense of the word, i.e., a "fuller sense" which must take its starting-point in the results of the historical-critical analysis.

<sup>42</sup> See above, 13-14.

these additions?<sup>43</sup> The final form of 12,6 was reached in three redactional stages (cf. Forms E, F, G). Introduced by the particle *sed*, Form E mentions a second set of interpretative principles<sup>44</sup> in addition to the ones mentioned in the preceding text,<sup>45</sup> namely the consideration given to "the content of Scripture as a whole in the living Tradition of the Church under the analogy of faith". The roots of this statement are to be found in *Providentissimus Deus*, 14 where Pope Leo XIII states as

the first object of the Catholic commentator ... to interpret those passages which have received an authentic interpretation either from the sacred writers themselves, under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost ..., or from the Church, under the assistance of the same Holy Spirit, whether by her solemn judgment or her ordinary and universal *magisterium* - to interpret these passages in that identical sense, and to prove, by all the resources of science, that sound hermeneutical laws admit of no other interpretation. In the other passages, the analogy of faith should be followed, and Catholic doctrine, as authoritatively proposed by the Church, should be held as the supreme law; for, seeing that the same God is the author both of the Sacred Books and of the doctrine committed to the Church, it is clearly impossible that any teaching can by legitimate means be extracted from the former, which shall in any respect be at variance with the latter. Hence it follows that all interpretation is foolish and false which either makes the sacred writers disagree one with another, or is opposed to the doctrine of the Church.<sup>46</sup>

The parallels and differences between *Providentissimus Deus* and DV 12,6-7 (and Form E) are striking. An obvious parallel can be seen in the fact that both texts combine the description of the task of the exegete with hermeneutical rules that can authenticate interpretation. But in *Providentissimus Deus* the role of the interpreter is restricted to two areas. On the one hand, exegetes have the task to legitimate and to prove the authentic interpretation that certain passages have al-

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<sup>43</sup> More research would be needed into the concrete historical circumstances of both additions. Cf. *Rigaux*, 1968, 267, n. 9, who mentions that "et eorum verbis manifestare Deo placuerit" was added at the request of three bishops, A. Carli, P. Seitz (Vietnam) and A. Tabera Araoz. I wonder whether the simultaneity of the addition in 12,1 with that of 12,6 could not be seen as a corroboration of the result of my synchronic reading, namely that both texts are concerned with a depth dimension of the technical exegetical work itself, not with two separate phases of the exegete's work nor with two disciplines, viz. exegesis and dogmatic theology. *Contra Grillmeier*, see below, 26-27.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. *etiam* ("also").

<sup>45</sup> The preceding text in Form E roughly corresponds to what in the final version became DV 12,2-5.

<sup>46</sup> *Leo XIII*, *Providentissimus Deus*, in *Carlen*, 1981, 331-332.

ready received by the biblical authors or by the Church. On the other hand, to interpret the other texts for which "the sacred writers themselves" and the "ordinary and universal *magisterium*" have not yet decided upon an authentic interpretation, in a way that avoids any contradiction within Scripture and with the doctrine of the Church. In DV 12,6-7 the Church's interpretation of Scripture and its doctrine is no longer considered to be static and defined once and for all, since it is admitted that the studies of the exegetes can contribute to the maturation of the Church's judgment "on the true meaning and interpretation of the sacred scriptures".<sup>47</sup> Thus the distinction between Scripture passages which have already received an authentic interpretation and others that have not is no longer present in *Dei Verbum*.

Form E lists three hermeneutical rules with regard to the interpretation of Scripture: the content of Scripture, the living Tradition of the Church and *analogia fidei*. Only the last one is found literally in *Providentissimus Deus*. In Form E, the "living Tradition of the Church" is used to move beyond the rather restrictive view of Leo's encyclical which mentions the magisterium and "the Holy Fathers, the Doctors and other interpreters of mark".<sup>48</sup> In the encyclical of Leo XIII, the "content of Scripture" is only present in the rejection of contradictions between the sacred writers.<sup>49</sup>

The closest parallel between *Providentissimus Deus* and Form E, 12 consists in the fact that in both the doctrine of the Church is the central hermeneutical rule. Leo XIII stresses that the doctrine of the Church has God as its author like the Scriptures. Similarly, Form E, 12 speaks of the content of Scripture not in its own right, but as it is reflected in the living Tradition of the Church and under the analogy of the faith. This changes decisively in Form F. Now the content, supplemented with "and the unity" of Scripture as a whole and *as such* (no longer as reflected in the Church's tradition) is presented as the central hermeneutical principle. In a

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<sup>47</sup> Since "judgment" does not have an object in DV 12,7, I supply it from the second decree of session 4 of the Council of Trent which is literally taken up by Vatican I. I quote from *Tanner*, 1990, 664, cf. 806.

<sup>48</sup> *Leo XIII*, *Providentissimus Deus*, in *Carlen*, 1981, 332. Cf. "the living Tradition of the *whole Church*" (italics added) in DV 12,6. By adding "whole", the final text is even more explicitly inclusive than Form E.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. DV 12,6: "content *and unity of the whole of Scripture*". This final version expresses even more of this concern by stressing the unity of the whole of Scripture. It is, however, characteristic of the spirit of *Dei Verbum* and of Vatican II that it focuses on a positive quality (the unity) instead of the apologetic claim that the sacred writers do not contradict each other. The concept of unity is also broader, less defining and therefore more realistic than the idea of non-contradiction.

second and obviously secondary movement, the living Tradition of the Church and the analogy of faith must also be taken into account.<sup>50</sup> Thus Scripture and not Tradition or the analogy of faith is presented as actual source of knowledge for the interpretative work aimed at in 12,6.<sup>51</sup> It is important to note that, as different from the previous encyclicals, DV 12 does not mention the magisterium. In its place it rather speaks of the *living* Tradition of the *whole* Church.<sup>52</sup> The expression "living Tradition"<sup>53</sup> introduces a critical dimension. It moves away from the static, once and for all character of Church doctrine that was still reflected in the previous encyclicals. It also seems to contain a value judgment, since it implies that besides the living Tradition there are also dead traditions. It would be worth further investigation whether the addition of the adjective "whole" to "Church" was intended as an ecumenical gesture to include the Tradition of all Christian churches.<sup>54</sup>

The introductory clause "since Holy Scripture is to be read and interpreted by means of the same Spirit through whom it is written" was only added to DV 12,6 at the very last stage of the redactional process. This addition not only created an obvious parallel between 12,6 and 12,1, but also gave the central place to the Holy Spirit. As an interpretative principle this addition had originally been formulated by the Pontifical Biblical Institute and consequently had been adopted by a group

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<sup>50</sup> Lohfink, 1992, 27-28, n. 20 claims that the final text uses a formula "die enger und weiter ausgelegt werden kann und auf jeden Fall nicht so ausgelegt werden muß, daß es sich bei Tradition oder *analogia fidei* auf der Ebene rationaler Beweisführung um den Ausgangspunkt der Argumentation handelt. Die ältere Formulierung [in Form E] hätte Anlaß zu weniger offenem Verständnis geben können". Lohfink rightly observes that most commentators treat the text as if Form E had become the final text: "Es wird kaum über Inhalt und Einheit der Schrift gesprochen, um die es doch im Hauptsatz geht". See also *de la Potterie*, 1988, 272-273.

<sup>51</sup> The place of "the content and unity of Scripture as a whole" in DV 12,6 is also evident from a comparison with *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, 24. It is here that the redactors of Form F have borrowed the expression *ratione habita*, "taking into account",. The final form of DV 12,6 even takes over the expression "no less diligently", *non minus diligenter*. Pius XII mentions here "explanations and declarations of the Magisterium of the Church", "explications by the Holy Fathers", and the *analogia fidei*. DV contracted the first and the second into "Tradition" and thus shifted the meaning. It kept the third element. There is, however, no corresponding element to "the content and unity of Scripture as a whole" in *Divino Afflante Spiritu*.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Form F: "the *living* Tradition of the Church".

<sup>53</sup> The capital letter is intended to make a distinction between this and the plural "traditions".

<sup>54</sup> Cf. *Merrigan*, 1993.

of bishops. It found its way into DV 12,6 on the inspiration of the speech of the Melkite archbishop Neophytos Edelby on October 5, 1964.<sup>55</sup>

Finally we need to inquire whether a diachronic reading gives any clues as to the function of DV 12,7 in the context. A forerunner of 12,8 is already found in Form D. A version roughly similar to DV 12,7 was introduced into the document at the level of Form E, precisely at the same moment when DV 12,6 was added. Continuing with a statement on the task of exegetes after DV 12,6 was suggested by the fact that, in *Providentissimus Deus* 14, the statements on the hermeneutical principles are part of a larger context on the task of the exegete. This does not necessarily provide redaction-critical proof that DV 12,7 structurally belongs to 12,6. Rather redactors are free to reuse borrowed material in a creative way. To understand their intentions, more evidence is needed which is found in the following redaction-critical consideration. Our synchronic and diachronic analyses agreed that, as opposed to Form E, the final version of 12,6 is ultimately speaking of only one hermeneutical rule, viz. "the content and unity of the whole of Scripture". It is therefore unlikely that the plural "these rules" in 12,7 is only pointing to what is mentioned in 12,6. 12,7 is rather drawing the conclusion from both 12,1-5 and 12,6, and the "rules" are the historical-critical (diachronic)<sup>56</sup> and the literary (synchronic) rules of interpretation which are dealt with in these respective parts of DV 12.

We see this interpretation confirmed in the following redaction-critical observation. In Form D the forerunner of DV 12,8 was introduced with the expression *Cuncta autem haec*. As we demonstrated in our synchronic approach to the text, *autem* can carry an introductory meaning.<sup>57</sup> We take it therefore as a signal that there is a transition to something new, namely the conclusion. When what later became 12,6 and 7 was added in Form E and when the later 12,8 was essentially preserved unchanged, *autem* was moved to the beginning of the preceding sentence (*Exegetarum autem est*) while *enim* came to take its place (*Cuncta enim haec*). This was kept unchanged in the final text. We see in this redactional activity an in-

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<sup>55</sup> An English translation is found in *O'Collins*, 1993, 174-177. Cf. also *de la Potterie*, 1988, 257, n. 66. See his entire article for a one-sided interpretation of this principle which claims that the "pneumatological" exegesis as intended in DV 12,6 is the only authentic interpretation of Scripture. This relegates historical-critical exegesis to a preparatory role: "le véritable travail 'd'interprétation' de l'Écriture, dès lors, ne commence qu'ici" (*ibid.*, 255).

<sup>56</sup> In keeping with the situation of Catholic exegesis at the time, DV 12,2 only mentions form criticism.

<sup>57</sup> See above, 11, note 14.

dication that the conclusive character of the last sentence of Form D, 12 was extended to the second last sentence in Form E and is therefore present in 12,7. 12,7 and 8 therefore clearly belong together.

By way of conclusion we would like to point out that our diachronic analysis has confirmed the findings of our synchronic reading. The structure which we detected (12,1-5 parallel to 12,6 and 12,7-8 as a conclusion of both parts) is above all corroborated by some changes in the last stage of redaction (for instance, the addition of the introductory sentence of 12,6). Moreover it became obvious that the symbolic relationship between the intention of the human author and of God, which we detected in DV 12, was the result of a long struggle and conscious decisions (as, e.g., the refusal to add *quid* in 12,1e). Our study of the process of composition has also brought to light that the final form of DV 12,6 is the result of much discussion and a careful wording. The presentation of "the content and unity of the whole of Scripture" (as such and not just as reflected in Tradition) as the central hermeneutical principle is a courageous departure from previous teaching, one that has largely gone unnoticed in post-conciliar discussions.

### *III. Some Aspects of the Effective History of Dei Verbum 12*

In the diachronic reading I tested the results of my synchronic analysis of the conciliar text. In yet another critical approach I will now compare my own reading with the major interpretations DV 12 has received in the past thirty years.<sup>58</sup> The different translations of *Dei Verbum* can be considered as a mirror image of some important aspects of DV 12:

W.M. Abbott, 1966	A. Flannery, 1975	N. Tanner, 1990
12,1 ... the interpreter of sacred Scripture, in order to see clearly what God wanted to communicate	... the interpreter of sacred Scripture, if he is to ascertain what God has wished to communicate	... if the interpreter of holy scripture is to understand what God has wished to communicate

<sup>58</sup> In this study we have refrained from analyzing the 1993 document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission on "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church". For the text see *Pontifical Biblical Commission*, 1994, and *J.A. Fitzmyer*, 1995. It should be noted that there are surprisingly few substantial references to DV in this document. I hope to be able to present in a later study a comparison of the content of this document with DV which is missing in the extensive secondary literature.



<p>to us, should carefully investigate what meaning the sacred writers really intended, and what God wanted to manifest by means of their words.</p>	<p>to us, should carefully search out the meaning which the sacred writers really had in mind, that meaning which God had thought well to manifest through medium of their words.</p>	<p>to us, he must carefully investigate what meaning the biblical writers actually had in mind; that will also be what God chose to manifest through their words.</p>
<p>12,6 ... no less serious attention must be given to the content and unity of the whole of Scripture, ...  The living tradition of the whole Church must be taken into account along with the harmony which exists between elements of faith.</p>	<p>... no less attention must be devoted to the content and unity of the whole of Scripture, taking into account the Tradition of the entire Church  and the analogy of faith, ...</p>	<p>... attention, no less than that mentioned above to the content and coherence of scripture as a whole, taking into account the whole church's living tradition  and the sense of perspective given by faith.</p>

None of these three English translations of DV 12,1 gives a correct rendering of all the nuances of the Latin text. Abbott gives the most literal translation, but it should not be overlooked that the "what" which introduces the second subordinate clause is not found in the the original text. It was deliberately not accepted by the redactors in order to avoid a decision in favor of the theory of the *sensus plenior*.<sup>59</sup> Abbott's rendering could give rise to the misunderstanding that the conciliar text sees human and divine intentions as two separate realities. The translations of Flannery and Tanner avoid that misunderstanding by clearly identifying the divine with the human intention. Flannery accomplishes this by making the second clause into an apposition of the first, Tanner literally expresses the identification ("that will also be"). In the light of my synchronic and diachronic readings both Flannery and Tanner probably go too far, as they run the risk of reducing the divine to the human intention.

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<sup>59</sup> See above, 19, esp. note 41.

### 1. A. Grillmeier

A. Grillmeier, one of the first commentators and a *peritus* of the commission that was charged with redacting the text,<sup>60</sup> clearly states, "If the intention of the sacred writers and that of God are so likened to each other, the question of their full and complete identity is still not settled in any way".<sup>61</sup> He distinguishes between two groups of interpreters.

Historically-minded exegetes might like to reduce the divine meaning of Scripture to what can be proved historically to have been the meaning in the mind of the sacred writer and see only this as truly scientific exegesis. Other, more theologically oriented exegetes or scriptural theologians or even dogmatic theologians defend the idea of a graded exegesis: as a first step, they want to discover by critical historical means - like the others - what it was the sacred writers intended to say. They consider this also as the *sensus divinus*, but only to the extent to which the sacred writer of the time grasped it. They do not, however, simply identify what God desired to express with his historically conditioned understanding of the writer, but extend it beyond this.<sup>62</sup>

Here Grillmeier clearly outlines the two opposing positions and underlines that the council ultimately refused to choose between them. He is, however, firmly convinced that the conciliar text contains a minimum consensus which unites both groups. In the past thirty years this minimum consensus has not been accepted by all commentators. Consequently members of both camps have claimed the support of DV 12 in defense of their own views. Grillmeier states the minimum consensus in two points: First, "any scriptural statement which has been arrived at by critical work is a genuine *sensus pneumaticus*. The pneumatic meaning of Scripture must not be separated from the historically established *sensus auctoris*". Second, "all searching for the *sensus plenior* must start with the findings of critical historical research, which must proceed according to legitimate methods of theological scholarship".<sup>63</sup>

Grillmeier strongly emphasizes that we encounter the divine intention in the human intention, since the divine intention was written down in the human word and for all, for the sake of our salvation under the influence of the spirit of Christ.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Ratzinger, 1968, 162.

<sup>61</sup> Grillmeier, 1968, 238.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 238-239.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 242 and 243.

Therefore, whoever applies historical-critical methods is already involved in theological exegesis.<sup>65</sup> According to Grillmeier, in its present context 12,6 might easily lead to the misunderstanding of considering the interpretation in the Holy Spirit to be something different from historical-critical interpretation. Grillmeier cautions against this misconception when he states unmistakably, "This 'interpretation in the Holy Spirit' takes place naturally primarily along the lines of the method indicated".<sup>66</sup> In 12,2-5 and 12,6 the text does not intend an opposition between rational and theological exegesis. According to Grillmeier, the distinction is rather between "technical exegetical rules" and "rules of dogmatic theology".<sup>67</sup> They are practiced by different persons, the exegetes on the one hand, and the biblical and dogmatic theologians on the other.<sup>68</sup> This distinction is a surprising and inconsistent element in Grillmeier's argumentation. After what he said about the possible misunderstanding of 12,6, one would have expected him to consider 12,6 as addressing the depth dimension of historical-critical exegesis which is, on principle, inseparable from the technical exegetical work. 12,6 would thus not introduce a new element, i.e., the work of another discipline, dogmatic theology, nor a second step of the exegetes' work, when they would leave their technical methods behind.

## 2. J. Gnilka, N. Lohfink and G. O'Collins

Grillmeier's distinction between technical exegetical and dogmatic rules of interpretation has not met with much enthusiasm.<sup>69</sup> Further attempts have been made to clarify the type of distinction present in 12,1 and 12,6. J. Gnilka shares with Grillmeier the same basic conviction that the theological meaning of a Scripture text is encountered in the intention of the human author. Gnilka concludes that, besides historical criticism, other scientific approaches to understand Scrip-

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<sup>65</sup> This is unmistakably stated by yet another *peritus* who was involved in the preparation of the conciliar document, *Rigaux*, 1968, 279: "Serviteur de la science historique, l'exégète ne peut, sans trahir les sources sur lesquelles il œuvre, refuser d'être le médiateur de la vérité des assertions théologiques. La vérité du fait est unie à la vérité de la signification aussi bien au niveau du commentateur qu'à celui de la source". In n. 42 on the same page he even goes as far as saying: "A ce propos, il convient de se rendre compte que tout exégète, croyant ou incroyant, qui dégage avec justesse la pensée des auteurs fait de la théologie".

<sup>66</sup> *Grillmeier*, 1968, 243.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 240 and 242.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 243.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. the critical remarks by *Lohfink*, 1992, 29-30, esp. 30, n. 26.

ture are hardly possible. Consequently he was accused of ignoring DV 12,6 and with it the divine nature of Scripture.<sup>70</sup> A careful reading of Gnilka's position reveals, however, that he was obviously misunderstood, since he does not deny the "divine nature" of Scripture, but rather upholds that we can only encounter it *in* the "human nature".

Gnilka further explicates what theological interpretation might mean. According to him theological interpretation is not something separate from historical-critical exegesis, but it is the way in which the historical-critical method is practiced. In order to clarify this view, he bases himself on what he considers to be of enduring value in Bultmann's hermeneutics.<sup>71</sup> For Bultmann, the otherness, strangeness and distance of the Bible is important. The interpreter is seen as being part of the interpretative process. This goes against the naive claim of historical positivism to be completely objective. For Bultmann the most subjective is the most objective interpretation. The interpreter approaches the text with a certain pre-understanding of the reality about which questions are addressed to the text. Any interpretation presupposes that the interpreter is interested in and concerned with the reality which is expressed in the text. In Scripture this reality is the question of salvation, that is, the meaning of a person's life<sup>72</sup>. In an earlier study Gnilka had concretized the concern of the readers with the biblical text, i.e., the preunderstanding, as the willingness to believe, to hope and to love. The theological dimension is seen in the claim of the text to confront its readers with an event which transcends and breaks open any empirical experience and thus shows the preunderstanding as inadequate.<sup>73</sup> Even though Gnilka does not explicitly refer to DV 12,6, his reflections on the interpreter's part in the interpretative process at least partially overlap with "the living Tradition of the entire Church" mentioned in 12,6.

In recent years, two exegetes, commenting on *Dei Verbum*, independently proposed a new interpretation of what the conciliar document understood by the rules mentioned in 12,1-5 and 12,6. N. Lohfink concludes, after a careful analysis of DV 12, that DV 12,1, as disposition of the text, mentions two tasks of the exegete, the first one focused on authorial intention, the second one on the meaning of the texts.

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<sup>70</sup> *de la Potterie*, 1988, 251, n. 62. He characterizes Gnilka's position as "insoutenable", as "une sorte de monophysisme (mais inversé!)".

<sup>71</sup> In this area Gnilka sees a clear parallel between Bultmann's and Augustine's view.

<sup>72</sup> *Gnilka*, 1985, 15-17.

<sup>73</sup> *Gnilka*, 1974, 474-475.

The first is concerned with the past, while the second one investigates the meaning which God intended for us today.<sup>74</sup> Lohfink considers DV 12,6 as directing the exegete's attention to what we call today "synchronic reading". Even though this happens in a very indirect and incomplete way, we may say that the conciliar text contains a "weißer Fleck" which has been keeping open a space for the recent change of paradigm in exegesis from diachronic to synchronic methods.<sup>75</sup>

According to G. O'Collins the reference to the synchronic approach to the text is more explicit. Diachronic and synchronic approaches together form the two distinguishable, but inseparable<sup>76</sup> dimensions of biblical interpretation. The first approach respects the critical distance, the second taps the transformative power of the text. O'Collins calls the second also pneumatological exegesis which leads us, as DV 12,6 postulates, to Christ (cf. the content and unity of Scripture as a whole), to the church (cf. the living Tradition) and to theology (cf. analogy of faith). Historical and pneumatological exegesis relate to one another like reason and faith. While the christological, ecclesial and theological aspects involve historical research, the historical methodologies should not be applied without faith.

It is obvious that the above mentioned authors do not analyze DV 12,6 as carefully as required. Gnülka and Lohfink neglect the precise content of DV 12,6.<sup>77</sup> O'Collins who gives one of the most detailed and creative interpretations, mistakenly presents the hermeneutical rules of 12,6 as if they were all on the same level

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<sup>74</sup> Lohfink, 1992, 26.

<sup>75</sup> Even though Lohfink calls the theory of the *sensus plenior* in exegesis a "seltsame Blüte" (*ibid.*, 34), one cannot help but realize that in his own interpretation of DV 12 he gives a *sensus plenior* to DV 12,6: "Ich glaube daran, daß nicht nur in den biblischen Schriften, sondern ebenso in der Kirche und speziell auch in Konzilien der Heilige Geist am Werk ist. Er kann die Geschichte so fügen, daß vorher unverbundene Fäden plötzlich zusammenlaufen und sich glücklich verknüpfen. Er hat dafür gesorgt ... Zugleich sorgte er auch dafür, daß in der weiten, kirchlich und national so vielfältigen Welt der Bibelforschung die methodologische Dialektik weiterlief und allmählich jene Methoden nach oben drängten, für die das Konzil in seinem weißen Fleck schon den Ort freigelassen hatte".

<sup>76</sup> O'Collins, 1993, 142.

<sup>77</sup> Already in 1964, some time before the final redaction of *Dei Verbum* Lohfink, 1964, 178-179 offers insights which might have been more helpful to interpret 12,6 in its context. Lohfink states that the study of literary genres is not a panacea to solve all the problems of biblical inerrancy. In its place, he offers the unity of Scripture as an alternative hermeneutical principle. As we have seen above, 14-16, the duality of literary genres and "the content and unity of the whole of Scripture" is at the heart of the line of thought in DV 12,1-6.

thus neglecting the clear priority that the final version of the text gives to the content and unity of Scripture.<sup>78</sup>

### 3. I. de la Potterie and J. Ratzinger

In the recent discussion some authors have raised their voices in fundamental disagreement with the basic consensus shared by the above mentioned positions. They see in DV 12 two clearly separate and distinct interpretative procedures<sup>79</sup> and give clear preference to the second. In 1988 I. de la Potterie presented what he himself calls "a rigorous analysis"<sup>80</sup> of DV 12. His position is reflected in his structuring of DV 12. 12,1de<sup>81</sup> announces the two separate levels which the text will deal with, the rational work of the interpreter and ecclesial, Christian interpretation. The former is elaborated on in 12,2-5, the latter in 12,6-7. 12,7 is thus seen as being part of 12,6 and separate from 12,8 which he considers to be the conclusion of the entire text. De la Potterie's attention is mainly focused on 12,6-7. The rational work of the interpreter necessarily remains on the human, historical level. That is why the actual work of "interpretation" only begins with the application of principles which are specifically Christian. The rational work is only a means to reach that goal. The divine and properly Christian meaning of the text represents a surplus in comparison to the human sense.<sup>82</sup> According to de la Potterie it is a gross error, of which he implicitly accuses the majority of exegetes, to think that the action of the Holy Spirit in Scripture remains restricted to people, i.e., the authors alone. In addition to the authors, the object of their activity, i.e., the text of Scripture, its content, is also inspired.<sup>83</sup> On the second level of the exegete's work the Holy Spirit plays the central role. The insights are not gained by means of scientific methods. It is rather the life in the faith of the interpreter, being inhabited by the Holy Spirit which

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<sup>78</sup> For the details see above our redaction-critical analysis, 19-21.

<sup>79</sup> *Ratzinger*, 1989, 40 calls for two "Auslegungsgänge". See also *Molina Palma*, 1985, who speaks of "deux niveaux du travail exégétique".

<sup>80</sup> *de la Potterie*, 1988, 235.

<sup>81</sup> The subdivisions of the text of DV 12 and the numbering used here is my own, as it is found in my presentation of the text in the charts on p. 37-39.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 255 and 256.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 264-265. The connection of inspiration with authorial intention is a recent development. *Lohfink*, 1964, 175 says, for instance, about Thomas Aquinas: "Bei ihm spielt die Aussageintention eines bestimmten Hagiographen keine Rolle".

is of utmost importance. In this way the exegete shares in the Church's task of interpreting the Scriptures (cf. 12,8).

The authority of the Church plays an even more important role in a critical analysis of historical-critical exegesis by J. Ratzinger published in 1989.<sup>84</sup> He acknowledges the lawfulness and the necessity of historical-critical methodology. According to him DV 12,6 contains the theological hermeneutics, which consists of seeing the parts in the perspective of the whole. Unlike de la Potterie (and O'Collins) who see Christ as the principle of Scriptural unity, Ratzinger sees the Church, the people of God as the element of continuity. He asserts that the right to authentically interpret Scripture belongs to the magisterium. Classical historical criticism had set out with the purpose of leaving behind any such authoritative body; it rejected the authority of the Church and of tradition in the process of interpretation. According to Ratzinger, the Bible can only be understood correctly in the collaboration of the historical and the theological methodologies. Otherwise Scripture becomes a word of the past which everyone individually is trying to transport into the present.

In conclusion we note that the relationship between 12,1-5 and 12,6 presented a major problem in the scholarly discussion of DV 12. Grillmeier discovered there hermeneutical rules for two different theological disciplines, exegesis and dogmatic theology. Most of the more recent scholars agree, however, that the rules of 12,1-5 and 12,6 are intended as rules for only one discipline, viz. exegesis. Nevertheless they disagree as to the nature of the relationship. According to Gnilka, 12,1-5 speaks about the historical-critical method, 12,6 about theological interpretation as the way in which historical criticism is practiced. O'Collins is convinced that both parts of DV 12 are referring to diachronic and synchronic approaches respectively. While for Gnilka and O'Collins the dimensions of biblical interpretation spoken about in 12,1-5 and 12,6 form an inseparable unity, they are distinct interpretative procedures for de la Potterie. For him the historical-critical approach is only preparatory and clearly subordinate to the theological approach where the scientific methods are replaced by the Holy Spirit.

Our own interpretation of DV 12 which we presented in part II is perhaps most akin to that of Gnilka. Our detailed analysis of the conciliar text, however, raises some doubts as to whether the intention of the original author is really the only place where we can encounter the theological meaning of the text. Our reading of

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<sup>84</sup> Ratzinger, 1989, 19-21 (this section is missing in the English version), cf. 40.

DV 12,6, a text which is absent from Gnllka's discussion, has led us to the conclusion that, in order to discern the theological meaning and in it God's intention, we need to read a text in the light of "the content and unity of the whole of Scripture". This hermeneutical principle implies, albeit in our own reading, the possibility that the content of a particular Scripture text might have to be corrected in the light of the whole.<sup>85</sup>

### *Conclusion*

Our interpretation of DV 12 in this study has attempted to understand the relationship between the intention of the human author and of God in the text, between historical-critical and theological methodology. As our historical overview has shown, it has been common since the Council to emphasize one side at the cost of the other. The result of one-sided interpretations of *Dei Verbum* has been monologue and isolation. If the creative dialogical tension between the focus on historical circumstances and conditions of composition on the one hand and the focus on Scripture as a whole on the other is dissolved in one or the other direction (cf. for instance, historical-critical exegesis that ignores theological questions, or theological exegesis that plays down the importance of historical-critical investigation), monological patterns of interpretation begin to appear. As a result, exegesis has been tempted more and more to turn in on itself while practicing its technical, historical and frequently atomistic work. On the other hand, there are exegetes like J. Gnllka who find that the results of exegetical work are frequently ignored. Official Church documents mostly use their own way of interpreting biblical texts without the benefit of the studies of the exegetes which, according to DV 12,7, are to help the Church's judgment to mature. The use of Scripture in official church documents of recent years is all too frequently cut off from exegesis and in that sense monological. DV 12,7-8 continues to invite both the Church and exegetes to give up their monological behavior and to listen to each other.

On the basis of this study it is my conviction that a nuanced exegesis of DV 12 can foster the dialogue between exegesis and the Church at large. This is a necessity since neither of them can fulfill their specific task without the other. In DV 1-6, Vatican II presents dialogue as the essence of revelation. This means that God trusts human beings enough to make them partners in this encounter and to

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<sup>85</sup> For a discussion of an important aspect of this problem see *Bieringer*, 1997, 60-67.



accept them as friends. This dialogical relationship is the model for our interpersonal communication. The Church community is invited to trust the exegetes and vice versa. To be truly dialogue instead of cryptic monologue, the dialogue between both as partners must meet certain criteria. Both need to accept that God can speak through the other. Moreover both need to admit the presence of human weakness, limitation and sin in themselves (cf. DV 13). This implies that they admit that Scripture, the Church and exegesis not only reveal the word of God, but also conceal it under the ideologies of which they are part.

Through the rise of the liberation theology movement, ideology criticism<sup>86</sup> has entered the arena of exegetical criticism. Since both the sacred writers, the members of the Church who have been shaping tradition and the exegetes are all under the consequences of human sin, ideology criticism is a clear necessity.<sup>87</sup> We must keep asking the question whose power agenda a certain text, even a Scripture text is designed to serve. But ideology criticism must also be extended to the study of the Tradition of the Church and, of course, to the work of the exegetes.

The fundamental problem is on which basis ideology criticism can be practiced. Both in the slave trade in the context of New World slavery and in South African apartheid politics, to just mention two examples, both sides used the Bible to support their views. While it must be granted that on this side of the eschaton it will be impossible to establish a formula, or a canon within the canon or a body of authority that can once and for all separate "the sheep" from "the goats", we must continue the individual and communitarian efforts to find ways of correcting parts of Scripture, of the Tradition, of official church pronouncements, and of exegetical work in the name of the content and unity of the whole of Scripture taking into consideration the living Tradition and the analogy of faith (cf. DV 12,6). The perspective from which certain aspects of the Bible are interpreted as ideology can never be so to speak "chemically pure", since the interpreters themselves are all part of a sinful world which is in the grip of many ideologies. Accepting this will help us realize that on this side of the eschaton there is no authority that can give us the unambiguous criteria with absolute certainty.

If we could accept our own historically conditioned limitations and the negative consequences of sin which affect us all, it might be easier to accept that revelation is by no means closed. While Christians believe that in Jesus Christ we have been

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<sup>86</sup> See, e.g., *Ideological Criticism of Biblical Texts*, in: *Semeia* 59 (1992).

<sup>87</sup> See *Bieringer*, 1997.

offered the definitive revelation from God, this revelation remains open for the future. As Joh 16,13 affirms, the Spirit remains active in the church and leads the post-Easter church in unprecedented ways. It inspires people and communities of any age to write their own "fifth gospel". In continuity with the other gospels the writing of this new gospel will have to be open to the Spirit guiding us to new insights in response to the new challenges unprecedented in Scripture and Tradition.

This openness would have to mean that our approach to Bible and Tradition needs to be dialogical. True interpretation is based on true dialogue. Exegesis needs to turn away from any monological inclinations in order to be able to contribute more effectively to the maturing of the Church's judgment and to the writing of the fifth gospel.

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## Appendix I: Dei Verbum 12 in Latin

*Investigating What God Reveals Through Sacred Scripture*

<i>A. By Studying Authorial Intention</i>	<i>A'. By Studying the Content and Unity of the Whole of Scripture</i>
<p>1a <u>Cum</u> autem Deus in <b>Sacra Scriptura</b> per homines more hominum locutus sit,</p> <p>1b<sub>1</sub> <i>interpres</i> Sacrae Scripturae,</p> <p>1c ut perspiciat, quid Ipse nobiscum communicare voluerit,</p> <p>1b<sub>2</sub> attente investigare debet,</p> <p>1d quid hagiographi reapse significare intenderint</p> <p>1e et eorum verbis manifestare Deo placuerit.</p> <p>2a <u>Ad</u> hagiographorum intentionem <b>eruedam</b></p> <p>2b inter alia etiam genera litteraria <b>respicienda sunt</b>.</p> <p>3 Aliter enim atque aliter veritas in TEXTIBUS vario modo historicis, vel propheticis, vel poeticis, vel in aliis dicendi generibus proponitur et exprimitur.</p> <p>4a Oportet porro ut <i>interpres</i> SENSUM inquirat,</p> <p>4b<sub>1</sub> quem in determinatis adiunctis hagiographus,</p> <p>4c pro sui temporis et suae culturae conditione,</p> <p>4d ope generum litterariorum illo tempore adhibitorum</p> <p>4b<sub>2</sub> exprimere intenderit et expresserit.</p> <p>5a Ad recte enim <u>intelligendum</u> id quod SACER auctor scripto asserere voluerit,</p> <p>5b rite attendendum est</p> <p>5c tum ad suetos illos nativos sentiendi, dicendi, narrandive modos,</p> <p>5d qui temporibus hagiographi vigeabant,</p> <p>5e tum ad illos qui illo aevo in mutuo hominum commercio passim adhiberi solebant.</p>	<p>6a<sub>1</sub> Sed</p> <p>6b <u>cum</u> <b>Sacra Scriptura</b> eodem Spiritu quo scripta est etiam legenda et <i>interpretanda</i> sit,</p> <p>6c <u>ad</u> recte SACRORUM TEXTUUM SENSUM <u>eruedum</u>,</p> <p>6a<sub>2</sub> non minus diligenter <b>respiciendum est</b> ad contentum et unitatem totius Scripturae,</p> <p>6d ratione habita vivae totius Ecclesiae Traditionis et analogiae fidei.</p>

*B. The Exegetes' Contribution to the Church's Ministry of the Word*

- 7a Exegetarum autem est  
 7b secundum has regulas adlaborare  
 7c ad **Sacrae Scripturae** SENSUM penitus intelligendum et exponendum,  
 7d<sub>1</sub> ut  
 7e quasi praeparato studio,  
 7d<sub>2</sub> iudicium Ecclesiae maturetur.  
 8a Cuncta enim haec, de ratione *interpretandi* **Scripturam**,  
 8b Ecclesiae iudicio ultime subsunt,  
 8c quae verbi Dei servandi et interpretandi divino fungitur mandato et ministerio.

## Appendix II: Dei Verbum 12 (translation of R. Bieringer):

*Investigating What God Reveals Through Sacred Scripture*

<i>A. By Studying Authorial Intention</i>	<i>A'. By Studying the Content and Unity of the Whole of Scripture</i>
<p>1a<sub>1</sub> Now,            1b <u>since</u> God speaks in <b>Sacred Scripture</b> through humans in human fashion,            1a<sub>2</sub> <i>the interpreter</i> of <b>Sacred Scripture</b>,            1c in order to see clearly what God wanted to share with us,            1a<sub>3</sub> should carefully investigate            1d what meaning the sacred writers really intended,            1e and God wanted to manifest by means of their words.</p> <p>2a <u>If</u> the intention of the sacred writers is to be <u>brought to light</u>            2b "literary forms" <b>must be regarded</b>.            3a For truth is proposed and expressed in a variety of ways,            3b depending on whether a TEXT is history of one kind or another,            3c or whether its form is that of prophecy, poetry, or some other type of speech.            4a Moreover the interpreter must investigate            4b what MEANING the sacred writer intended to express and actually expressed in particular circumstances            4c as he used contemporary literary forms            4d in accordance with the situation of his own time and culture.</p>	<p>6a, Furthermore,            6b <u>since</u> <b>Sacred Scripture</b> must be read and <i>interpreted</i> by means of the same Spirit            6c by whose mediation it was written,</p> <p>6d <u>if</u> the MEANING OF THE SACRED TEXTS is to be correctly <u>brought to light</u>,            6a<sub>2</sub> no less carefully the content and unity of the whole of <b>Scripture must be regarded</b>            6e taking into consideration the living Tradition of the whole Church and the analogy of the faith.</p>

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| <p>5a For the correct <u>understanding</u> of what the SACRED author wanted to assert,<br/> 5b due attention must be paid<br/> 5c to the customary and characteristic styles of perceiving,, speaking, and narrating<br/> 5d which prevailed at the time of the sacred writer,<br/> 5e and to the customs which were normally followed at that period in their everyday dealings with one another.</p> |  |
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*B. The Exegetes' Contribution to the Church's Ministry of the Word*

- 7a Now it is the task of *exegetes*  
7b to work according to these rules  
7c toward a better understanding and explanation of the MEANING of **Sacred Scripture**,  
7d<sub>1</sub> so that  
7e through their study  
7d<sub>2</sub> the judgment of the Church may mature.
- 8a For all of what has been said about the way of *interpreting Scripture*  
8b is subject finally to the judgment of the Church,  
8c which carries out the divine commission and ministry of serving and interpreting the Word of God.