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## PAUL VI'S AMBIVALENCE TOWARD CRITICAL BIBLICAL SCHOLARSHIP

### B. INDICATIONS OF APPROVAL: ADMINISTRATIVE DECISIONS

by *Brian W. Harrison*

Having surveyed in *Living Tradition*, no. 156, what might be called the 'theoretical' side of Pope Paul VI's basic attitude of openness and confidence toward contemporary trends in Catholic biblical scholarship – that is, his writings and speeches expressing that attitude – we will turn now to consider the 'practical' side of the same coin. Here we will be looking at the Pope's exercise of his governing authority rather than his teaching authority. His concrete decisions regarding the 'hiring and firing' of certain clerics who would occupy key ecclesiastical positions relating to biblical studies were to have significant ramifications that were perhaps to some extent unexpected by Paul himself.

#### 1. 1960-1962: Tensions within the Vatican over Biblical Studies

Probably the most important of these administrative decisions was one taken within the first year of Pope Paul's pontificate. As a result of controversies over biblical studies in the last years of John XXIII's pontificate, two prominent Scripture scholars, Maximilian Zerwick, S.J., and Stanislas Lyonnet, S.J., had in 1961 been suspended from teaching at the Pontifical Biblical Institute on account of their exegetical opinions, some of which, in the estimation of the Holy Office, were not in accord with the Church's Magisterium. However, within one year of the election of Pope Paul VI, both of these professors were re-appointed to teach at the 'Biblicum' with the express approval of the new Pontiff. Some background information on this case will be helpful at this point.

The suspension of Lyonnet and Zerwick took place at a moment when the members of the Church's principal organism governing Scripture studies, the Pontifical Biblical Commission, were not unanimous in their evaluation of some recent developments in biblical scholarship. The exegete F. Spadafora, an outspoken defender of the more traditional orientations, is critical of the Commission's President during the twenty-five years leading up to Vatican Council II, Cardinal Eugene Tisserant. He complains that by the 1950s the PBC was no longer registering any opposition to opinions "condemned" by earlier Popes and by the Commission itself.<sup>1</sup>

It is true that during Tisserant's time the PBC remained relatively silent in comparison with its many disciplinary decrees published in the earlier part of this century. Indeed, it is generally agreed – and we have seen Paul VI himself affirm – that the period after the publication of *Divino afflante Spiritu* in 1943 was one in which, *de facto* if not *de jure*,

<sup>1</sup> “. . . condannati da Leone XIII, san Pio X, Benedetto XV e dalla stessa Pontificia Commissione Biblica sotto Pio XII [XI?] fino alla prefettura (1937) del Cardinale Tisserant” (F. Spadafora, *Leone XIII e gli Studi Biblici* [Rovigo: Istituto Padano Arti Grafiche, 1976] 183).

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new avenues were opened up for Catholic biblical scholars.<sup>2</sup> A leading exegete more sympathetic than Spadafora to these recent trends, Pierre Grelot, has suggested that the apparent inactivity of the Biblical Commission during the preparation of the schema on divine revelation was probably due to lack of unity among the Cardinals composing it. His understanding appears to have been that the viewpoint of the President and Secretary of the Commission was not shared by the majority of other members.<sup>3</sup>

Grelot's view seems to be in harmony with the evidence brought to light in a private memorandum of John XXIII to the Cardinal Secretary of State in May 1962, only five months before the Council was due to begin. Pope John here shows marked dissatisfaction with the Biblical Commission, owing to its perceived failure to provide the clear and helpful advice which he expected on the difficult scriptural questions which would inevitably be raised at the Council in connection with its proposed document on divine revelation. A lack of internal agreement within the Commission, which Grelot suggested existed at that time, would certainly be a reasonable explanation for this hesitancy, and for what Pope John saw as apparent "uncertainties" and "fears" in regard to practical decisions which had to be made. He even raised the possibility of disbanding and reorganizing the PBC:

If the Biblical Commission does not intend to get moving and working so as to provide the Holy Father with appropriate preparatory suggestions corresponding to the needs of this moment, it would be better to dissolve it, so that Superior Authority could provide in Domino for a reconstitution of this organism. But it is at all costs necessary to remove the widespread impression of uncertainty, which does no credit to anybody, as well as the impression of fearfulness regarding clear-cut positions which should be taken regarding the approaches of certain persons or schools, and in regard to a prudent distribution of tasks and responsibilities.

In the meantime we must give the impression that the one who bears responsibility for the honor and respect due to the divine Book is not failing to live up to his vocation. The Bible, after all, alongside of and after the apostolic Tradition, is the sacred treasure on which rests the Holy Church of Christ.<sup>4</sup>

Pope John's concern indicates the extent to which, on the eve of the Council, the implications of modern trends in biblical scholarship remained a bone of contention and an occasion of some disunity among those, even at the highest levels of the Church, who were entrusted with maintaining the correct understanding of the written Word of God. The exegetes who were consultants to the Biblical Commission had not indeed played much part in drafting the preparatory schema on divine revelation during 1960 and 1961. This had been entrusted to a sub-commission (under the presidency of Msgr. Salvatore Garofalo) of the theological commission presided over by Cardinal Ottaviani, Prefect of the Holy Office. It seems that only two of the eleven members (L. Cerfaux and the Rector of the 'Biblicum,' E. Vogt) were known to favour the innovative tendencies over which the Biblical Commission found itself divided.<sup>5</sup> The Church historian M. Pesce seems justified in commenting that the non-involvement of the latter body "constituted in itself a grave institutional problem and was a symptom of the struggle that was being waged against the orientation which by now was prevalent internationally among Catholic exegetes."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Living Tradition*, no. 156, January 2012, section 2(a), over n. 33. In an essay commemorating the 75th anniversary of Benedict XV's encyclical on biblical studies, *Spiritus Paraclitus*, the present writer has questioned whether this 'opening' was truly Pius XII's intention, and has argued that in *Divino afflante Spiritu* that Pontiff intended to permit nothing at all to exegetes which had been forbidden by his predecessors. Cf. B.W. Harrison, "The Encyclical *Spiritus Paraclitus* in its Historical Context," *Faith & Reason* 23/1 (Spring, 1997) 23-88. (The article first published in *Living Tradition* 60 [Sept. 1995] 1-11 and 61 [Nov. 1995] 1-18, is accessible online at [www.rtforum.org/lt/lt60.html](http://www.rtforum.org/lt/lt60.html) and [www.rtforum.org/lt/lt61.html](http://www.rtforum.org/lt/lt61.html)).

<sup>3</sup> "We see something paradoxical: the activity of the Biblical Commission seemed to be lethargic at the very time when it should have been occupied with the burning questions confronting it. Was it perhaps pushed to one side? Or were others handling those issues instead of the Commission? Or, perhaps more probably, the position taken by its president (Cardinal Tisserant) and by its secretary (Dom. A. Miller, OSB) was not shared by the majority of its members. (*Chose paradoxale: l'activité de la commission biblique paraissait en sommeil, alors qu'elle aurait dû s'occuper de ces questions brûlantes qui étaient de son ressort: en était-elle dessaisie? Ou d'autres s'en occupaient-ils pour elle? Ou bien peut-être l'orientation prise par son président {le cardinal Tisserant} et son secrétaire {Dom A. Miller, osb} n'était-elle partagée par la majorité de ses membres . . .*)" (P. Grelot, "La Constitution sur la Révélation, I: la préparation d'un schema conciliaire," *Études*, 324 [January 1966] 102).

<sup>4</sup> "O la Commissione Biblica intende muoversi, lavorare, e provvedere suggerendo al Santo Padre apprestamenti opportuni, alle esigenze dell'ora attuale, o val la pena che si sciolga e l'Autorità Superiore provveda in Domino ad una ricostituzione di questo organismo. Ma occorre assolutamente togliere la impressione circa le incertezze che circolano qua e là, e non fanno onore a nessuno, di timori circa posizioni nette che conviene prendere circa indirizzi di persone, o di scuole, e circa una oculata distribuzione di compiti e di impegni.

"Intanto occorre dar l'impressione che chi ha la responsabilità sopra l'onore e circa il rispetto del Libro divino, come tesoro più sacro, accanto e dopo la Tradizione apostolica, su cui riposa la santa Chiesa di Cristo, non manca alla sua vocazione" (John XXIII, memorandum to the Cardinal Secretary of State, 21 May 1962, in L. F. Capovilla [ed.], *Giovanni XXIII: Lettere 1958-1963* [Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1978] 536-537). In the last sentence the Pope seems to be referring to himself as the chief guardian of Sacred Scripture: he appears to feel conscious that if the Biblical Commission is not functioning well, this reflects badly on the discharge of his own "vocation" as Pope.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. M. Pesce, "Il rinnovamento biblico" (Ch. XVI of E. Guasco *et al* [eds.], *Storia della Chiesa*, [Milan: Edizioni Paoline, vol. XXV, part II, 1994] 189).

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

## 2. Reinstatement of the Two Suspended ‘Biblicum’ Professors

Before long, however, the pendulum was to swing more in the direction of these new approaches in biblical scholarship: on 20 November 1962 the majority of the Council Fathers voted against the preparatory schema, *De fontibus revelationis*, which had been drafted by the aforesaid sub-commission. This new situation needs to be kept in mind in understanding the next Pope’s decision to reinstate Lyonnet and Zerwick; for it appeared that the Council itself was now favoring a different orientation regarding biblical studies to that which had led to the disciplinary decision affecting the Biblical Institute.

There is no reason to suppose that Paul VI acted precipitously in reversing the decision which had been taken by the Holy Office with the approval of his predecessor. The process leading to the reinstatement of the two ‘Biblicum’ professors was never officially made public, and indeed, was carried out with the very greatest discretion. However, one of the main protagonists in this case was the Canadian Fr. Roderick MacKenzie, S.J., who was appointed to succeed Fr. Vogt as Rector of the Biblical Institute in mid-1963, and who has left an account of the audience with Paul VI in which he requested the rehabilitation of the two professors. The suspension of Lyonnet and Zerwick had aroused indignation among many Catholic exegetes in the U.S.A. and other countries, and in August 1963 the Catholic Biblical Association (of North America) pointedly expressed the discontent of its members with the Holy Office decision by electing Lyonnet and Zerwick as honorary members.<sup>7</sup>

The American Church historian Gerald P. Fogarty has noted that this display of professional solidarity with the two European professors was intended to strengthen MacKenzie’s hand in his efforts to secure their reinstatement.<sup>8</sup> Several months after requesting an audience with the recently elected Pontiff, MacKenzie was able to speak personally with Pope Paul in March 1964, and described his recollections of this audience many years afterwards in a personal letter to Fogarty. The latter describes the contents of this letter as follows: “On that occasion the Pope declared himself to be in the dark (*all’oscuro*) regarding the suspension of the academics, but . . . ‘he listened attentively, took notes, did not express any opinion (*non si dichiarò*), but affirmed that he would have the case examined.’ He entrusted the inquiry into this matter to Cardinal Bea, who interrogated Lyonnet and Zerwick and exculpated them of every charge (*li scagionò di ogni accusa*).”<sup>9</sup>

Whether Cardinal Bea was in fact the only one entrusted by the Pope with re-examining the case is not clear. When MacKenzie mentioned Bea alone, he was writing twenty years after the event. The French commentator Henri Fesquet, whose reports were generally regarded as well-informed, wrote during the Council itself that after Fr. MacKenzie’s approach to Pope Paul on behalf of the two professors, the Holy Father named a three-member commission of cardinals, headed by Bea, to re-investigate the matter. According to Fesquet, it was this commission which recommended that both men be reinstated.<sup>10</sup> It is clear that the cardinals of the Biblical Commission were not consulted formally as a group about this case, for Cardinal Franz König, who had become a member of the Commission by the time the Lyonnet-Zerwick question was being reinvestigated, told the present writer he knew nothing about it at the time.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Cf. F.H. Seper, “Report of the Twenty-Sixth General Meeting” (*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 25 [October 1963] 432, 434).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. G.P. Fogarty, “America del Nord” (ch. XXIV in *Storia della Chiesa*, *op. cit.* [cf. n. 5 above] 463).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, with reference to Fogarty’s n. 68 (letter of MacKenzie to Fogarty, 14 August 1984). The numeral 68 is placed in the text at the end of the above quotation (i.e., after the word *accusa*), and not after the direct quotation of MacKenzie’s words (i.e., “he listened . . . examined” in our translation above). Presumably this means that MacKenzie’s letter also included the statement about what Paul VI and Cardinal Bea did after his audience with the Pope.

<sup>10</sup> Fesquet was probably the best-known French journalist covering the events of Vatican II and wrote regularly for *Le Monde*. The substantial truth of Fesquet’s version has been corroborated orally to the present writer by the Irish exegete Malachi Martin, who was on the staff of the Biblical Institute at that time and worked with Cardinal Bea. He said he understood that there were others beside Bea involved in the case. F. Spadafora told me he understood Cardinal Tisserant as well to have been involved – which would seem logical in view of his position as head of the Biblical Commission. Fesquet wrote in the French newspaper *Le Monde*, which is not accessible to the present writer. Pierre Grelot relates Fesquet’s version as follows, without recording which number of *Le Monde* it appeared in: “*La réintégration des deux professeurs est un fait de notoriété publique. Sur ses causes, je n’ai pour information que le communiqué de H. Fesquet dans Le Monde, fondé lui-même sur des renseignements provenant de Rome. On disait là-bas: 1) que le P. McKenzie, nouveau recteur, avait posé au pape Paul VI la question des deux professeurs suspendus, dès la première audience qu’il avait pu obtenir; 2) que le pape avait nommé une commission cardinalice de trois membres présidée par le cardinal Bea, ancien recteur de l’Institut biblique; 3) que la commission avait conclu à la nullité des accusations portées en haut lieu contre les deux intéressés; 4) qu’en conséquence la mesure imposée par le Saint-Office avait été immédiatement levée. On ne disait pas ce qu’il était advenu des accusateurs. Mais je donne ces renseignements sous toute réserve*” (Grelot, *op. cit.*, 112-113 [n. 3 to 112]). In the light of nn. 25 and 26 below, one may reasonably question the accuracy of the statement that the Commission concluded anything so one-sided as “*la nullité des accusations*.” The fact of the two professors’ reinstatement is compatible with other possibly more nuanced judgments on the part of the Commission.

<sup>11</sup> Cardinal König responded as follows to the question as to what part, if any, he played in the re-examination of the case of Lyonnet and Zerwick: “In this question I was never asked by the Pope, nor by the Vatican about my opinion. I got to know it [the decision] – like all the others – from the

What, precisely, were the substantive exegetical issues at stake in this controversy? The pertinent records have not been made accessible to scholars, and in fact first-hand information on the case seems very difficult to obtain.<sup>12</sup> One of the historians who best covers this and other disputes over exegetical orthodoxy at this time is M. Pesce. He observes that the suspension of Lyonnet and Zerwick on 1 September 1961<sup>13</sup> occurred not only in the immediate wake of a front-page *L'Osservatore Romano* article by Cardinal Ernesto Ruffini sharply criticizing certain current appeals to the concept of literary genres,<sup>14</sup> but also, and more specifically, in the context of articles published during the previous year by F. Spadafora and A. Romeo which called in question the orthodoxy of the two professors.

In the case of Lyonnet, says Pesce, “the concern that historical exegesis did not take account of the traditional interpretation of the New Testament had been expressed shortly before this by F. Spadafora, directed toward . . . S. Lyonnet in regard to Rom. 5: 12.”<sup>15</sup> Spadafora himself claims that it was, in particular, an article by Lyonnet on this biblical verse which the Holy Office found unacceptable.<sup>16</sup> His own critique of Lyonnet alleged that this article interpreted Scripture contrary to a definition of the Council of Trent by claiming that Romans 5: 12 does not teach the Catholic doctrine of Original Sin, i.e., that “death” spread to all men because of Adam’s sin, but rather, that it occurs only because of the universality of their own personal sins. There seems no evidence that any other published work of Lyonnet had been accused of unorthodoxy – by the Holy Office or anyone else – prior to his suspension.

In regard to Zerwick, it seems that the limits of legitimate criticism of the Gospels was the main disputed point. Pesce records: “At Padua in September 1959 there took place the third Convention of northern Italian Scripture teachers. The main speaker was the Jesuit Father Maximilian Zerwick, . . . on the theme of ‘New Testament literary criticism in Catholic exegesis of the Gospels.’ It was above all his presentation of A. Vögtle’s interpretation of Matthew 16: 13-20, the celebrated episode of Cæsarea Philippi, which seems to have provoked the reaction of the Italian exegete F. Spadafora and of Msgr. A. Romeo, who was then an adjutant of the Congregation for Seminaries and a professor at the Pontifical Lateran Athenæum.”<sup>17</sup> Spadafora himself, evidently with these Padua lectures in mind, claims that according to the

obligatory publications. I am convinced that Cardinal Bea had the greatest influence with his judgment” (Letter to the present writer of 29 March 1996). If even Cardinal members of the Biblical Commission knew nothing about this affair until the decision was made public, it seems clear that the matter had been treated with great secrecy during the four-month period while it was being negotiated.

<sup>12</sup> In May 1996 the present writer requested permission from the Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to have access to the Holy Office archives relating to the suspension and reinstatement of Lyonnet and Zerwick. He was subsequently informed, in the name of His Eminence, that this would not be possible, since the Congregation’s standing policy at that time was that none of the said archives after those of the pontificate of St. Pius X (i.e., since 1914) were open to inspection by scholars. Given the importance of this case, it seems surprising that even very comprehensive works say nothing about it. It is not mentioned, for instance, in P. Hebblethwaite, *Paul VI: the First Modern Pope* (London: Harper Collins, 1993), which is the most complete biography (749 pp.) so far published. Perhaps even more surprising, given the role played by Cardinal Bea, is the total absence of any mention of this case in the massive (950 pp.) and definitive biography by his personal secretary: S. Schmidt, S.J., *Agostino Bea: il cardinale dell’unità* (Rome: Città Nuova, 1987). Both Lyonnet and Zerwick are mentioned many times in this volume, but never in connection with their suspension and subsequent reinstatement at the ‘Biblicum.’ Nor is there any allusion to the case in the 30 issues of *Notiziario* (published by the Istituto Paolo VI of Brescia) that this writer has had the opportunity to consult.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. M. Pesce, *op. cit.* [cf. above, n. 5], 184. It is stated here that this was the precise date on which the two Biblicum professors were suspended, but no source is given for this detail. Pesce adds at this point: “One of the objectives of the conservatives had been attained (*Uno degli obiettivi dei conservatori era stato raggiunto*)” (*ibid.*). Pesce gives a useful coverage of the tensions between Church authorities and various exegetes teaching in Rome and the United States which occupied the years from 1955 until the period of Vatican Council II. However, in the present writer’s opinion his account is rather too polemical (cf. the comment just cited and the title of this section of the chapter: “Conservative Attacks on International Catholic Exegesis, 1959-1962” [*ibid.*, 168]). Pesce seems excessively dismissive and severe toward those scholars and Church authorities who were then concerned about the dangers in recent biblical trends. As we shall see in *Living Tradition*, no. 158, and in further articles in this series, Paul VI himself frequently felt the need to warn against such dangers, even while maintaining a generally open stance toward contemporary biblical scholarship.

<sup>14</sup> E. Ruffini, “Generi letterari e ipotesi di lavoro nei recenti studi biblici” (*L'Osservatore Romano* [24 August 1961] 1). Pesce (*op. cit.*, 184) tells us that this article was circulated and recommended to all Italian seminaries by the Vatican Congregation for Seminaries.

<sup>15</sup> M. Pesce, *op. cit.*, 183. Spadafora himself, who was a consultor to the Holy Office during the proceedings against the two professors in 1961, claims that the Holy Office had more extensive charges against both of them, but he cites no specific evidence to support this claim. He asserts that, when summoned by the said Congregation to explain their views, “the two Fathers . . . could not deny the charges against them: erroneous teaching (and articles) on inspiration, **on the inerrancy of the Holy Books, and on the historicity of the Gospels.** (. . . *i due Padri, ascoltati dal S. Officio, non poterono negare gli addebiti loro attribuiti: insegnamento erroneo (e articoli) sulla ispirazione, sulla inerranza dei Libri Santi, sulla storicità degli Evangelii*)” (*La Tradizione contro il Concilio* [Rome: Ed. Pol.–Volpe, 1989] 49, emphasis in original). It seems unfortunate that, as the title of this book indicates, an exegete who contributed much of value to biblical studies over nearly half a century reacted so strongly in the last years of his life against certain abusive interpretations of Vatican II as to impugn the Council itself as being opposed to “Tradition.”

<sup>16</sup> F. Spadafora, *loc. cit.* The article in question by Lyonnet was “Le péché originel et l’exégèse de Rom., 5, 12” (*Recherches de Science Religieuse* 44 [1956] 63-84). Spadafora had responded critically to this article: cf. “Rom. 5, 12: esegesi e riflessi dogmatici” (*Divinitas* 4 [1960] 289-298).

For the Tridentine doctrine with which Lyonnet’s article was said to be incompatible, cf. DS 1512, 1521. The former canon, after pronouncing an *anathema* against those who say that Adam’s sin affected himself only, or that it transmitted to his descendants only physical death and not “sin, which is the death of the soul,” affirms that such opinions “contradict what the Apostle says” in Rom. 5:12 (which is then quoted in the text).

<sup>17</sup> Pesce, *op. cit.*, 171-172. Pesce goes on to note (*ibid.*, n. 22) that Spadafora accused Zerwick’s lectures of unorthodoxy in two articles in November

judgment of the Holy Office (as well as the judgment of himself and Romeo) Zerwick was applying the principles of form-criticism to the Gospels in a way that did not uphold their authenticity and historicity.<sup>18</sup> As in the case of Lyonnet's article on Rom. 5: 12, it seems that no publication of Zerwick at this time was accused of unorthodoxy other than these lectures which drew fire from the two Lateran professors; so it seems very likely that they were indeed one of the principal bases for the Holy Office's decision to withdraw Zerwick from teaching at the 'Biblicum.'

What, if anything, can we know of Paul VI's position with regard to the doctrinal issues at stake in this controversy? In regard to Original Sin, his major intervention was a discourse on 11 July 1966 to a symposium of Roman theologians which was dedicated to this theme. In the course of this allocution the Pope reminded exegetes that they must not "imprudently go beyond [the] limits . . . set by the living Magisterium of the Church, which is the proximate norm of truth for all the faithful,"<sup>19</sup> and mentioned that the reason Vatican II had added no further dogmatic teaching on Original Sin was that the correct understanding of this doctrine had been "already sufficiently declared and defined"<sup>20</sup> by the Councils of Carthage, Orange and Trent. Indeed, the Pope went on to confirm explicitly the Tridentine definition that in that very verse to which the Holy Office had devoted its attention several years earlier (i.e., Rom. 5:12), the transmission of Adam's sin to his descendents is "revealed by God."<sup>21</sup>

With respect to the Petrine profession of faith and primacy, we shall see in a future *Living Tradition* essay that on dozens of occasions Pope Paul referred to Christ's words to Peter in Mt. 16: 17-19 as truly and historically pronounced by our Lord. This is a text which the Church has always seen as of primary importance for sustaining the divine origin of the papacy and of the Catholic Church as such. Indeed, a denial of its historicity would seem difficult to reconcile with the solemn teaching of Vatican Council I regarding the divine institution of the papacy in Blessed Peter.<sup>22</sup> (The historicity of this passage is also presupposed in numerous affirmations of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.<sup>23</sup>) Therefore, while it would lie beyond the scope of this essay to examine in detail the dispute as to whether Zerwick's position did or did not sufficiently uphold Catholic orthodoxy in regard to this pericope,<sup>24</sup> we cannot reasonably suppose that Pope Paul would have endorsed any administrative decision which he believed would in effect endanger the transmission of such a vital cornerstone of the Catholic faith among the Church's future leaders in biblical scholarship.

The same could be said regarding the need to ensure authentic Catholic teaching regarding Original Sin and its foundations in Sacred Scripture. Indeed, there seems to be no evidence that either Lyonnet or Zerwick, after being reinstated in their teaching positions at the Biblical Institute, repeated in any conspicuous way the controversial views for which they had recently been suspended by the Holy Office. There is clear evidence, in fact, that Lyonnet's reappointment

1959: "La critica e gli evangelii" (*Settimana del Clero* 22 [1959] 7, and 29 [1959] 6-7). Romeo's denunciation of Zerwick came a year later, in his *Divinitas* article replying to L. Alonso Schökel (cf. A. Romeo, "L'Enciclica 'Divino afflante Spiritu' e le 'Opiniones novæ'," *Divinitas* 4 (1960), 436-437, n. 116). Romeo, who had been a Scripture professor at one of Italy's regional seminaries, carried some influence as an official of the Holy See: contemporary documents emanating from the Sacred Congregation for Seminaries and Universities, when they happened to touch on biblical matters, reflected his marked anti-modernist concerns.

The lectures by Zerwick which these two authors were criticizing so severely were later duplicated (and advertised for sale in *Rivista Biblica* 8 [1960] 80-82), as *Critica letteraria del N.T. nell'esegesi cattolica dei Vangeli (Conferenze tenute al Convegno Biblico di Padova 15-17 settembre 1959)*, S. Giorgio Canavese, 1959. Spadafora denounced them again two years later – immediately after Lyonnet and Zerwick had been suspended – in the context of a commentary on the 1961 Holy Office *Monitum*: cf. "Un documento notevole per l'esegesi cattolica," *Palestra del Clero* 40 (15 September 1961) 969-981.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Spadafora, *La Tradizione . . .*, *op. cit.*, 111. Spadafora claims that, at the request of the Holy Office, he and Romeo supplied documentation to that Congregation for use in its inquiry into the teaching of the two 'Biblicum' professors (cf. *ibid.*, 48).

<sup>19</sup> "Vi sono, però, dei limiti, che l'esegeta, il teologo, lo scienziato, che vogliono veramente salvaguardare ed illuminare la propria fede e quella degli altri cattolici, non possono e non devono imprudentemente oltrepassare. Questi limiti sono segnati dal Magistero vivo della Chiesa, ch'è norma prossima di verità per tutti i fedeli" (AAS 58 [1966] 653).

<sup>20</sup> ". . . già sufficientemente dichiarata e definita" (*ibid.*, 652).

<sup>21</sup> "Convinti, pertanto, che la dottrina del peccato originale, sia quanto alla sua esistenza ed universalità, sia quanto alla sua indole di vero peccato nei discendenti di Adamo e alle sue tristi conseguenze per l'anima e per il corpo, è una verità rivelata da Dio in vari passi dei Libri dell'Antico e del Nuovo Testamento, ma specialmente nei testi a voi notissimi del Genesi 3, 1-20 e della Lettera ai Romani, 5, 12-19, abbiate somma cura, nell'approfondire e precisare il senso dei testi biblici, di attenervi alle norme impreteribili, che scaturiscono dalla analogia fidei, dalle dichiarazioni e definizioni dei Concili sopra ricordati, dai documenti emanati dalla Sede Apostolica" (*ibid.*, 654). As a young priest, G.B. Montini had dedicated some study of his own to this passage of Romans 5, and held in high esteem throughout his life the commentary of F. Prat, S.J., *La théologie de Saint Paul*, vols. 1 and 2, (Paris: Beauchesne, 1920 & 1923). His personal notes made in 1929 on Romans 5 and original sin (in clear conformity with the doctrine of Trent) have been published in *Notiziario* 30 (Brescia: Istituto Paolo VI, 1995) 7-24, with editorial comments by Renato Papetti.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Chapters 1 and 2 of the Dogmatic Constitution *Pastor aeternus* of Vatican I (DS 3053-3058).

<sup>23</sup> In the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* the historicity of the dialogue recorded in Mt. 16:16-18 is implied or presupposed in no less than sixteen articles. In nos. 153, 424, 440, 442, 443, 552, 553, 554, 555, 567, and 586 this is by direct affirmation, while the dialogue's historicity is expressed more indirectly in nos. 862, 869, 881, 936, and 1444.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. the Appendix to this article for a summary of the arguments for and against Zerwick's views.

was on the condition that he would no longer teach the exegesis of Rom 5: 12 to the students of the ‘Biblicum’.<sup>25</sup> (If this is so, then the reports of MacKenzie and Fesquet to the effect that no fault whatever was found by those re-investigating the teaching of these professors would probably need to be qualified.) Zerwick’s published works after his return to the ‘Biblicum’ were predominantly of a philological nature, as well as an exposition of the teaching of *Dei Verbum* on Scripture and some commentaries on the Pauline epistles.<sup>26</sup> Only once did he subsequently publish any reference to that passage of Mt. 16 which had been involved in the previous controversy, and while his comment on this occasion was no doubt debatable from an exegetical standpoint, it was also very brief and general: he told the ‘Biblicum’ students that a comparison of Mt. 16: 16ff with Mk 8: 29 illustrates “the liberty with which the apostolic tradition and the subsequent composition of the Gospels treated the Gospel material.”<sup>27</sup>

In short, while the details of the resolution of this case are not accessible to scholars as yet, the available evidence would lead us to suppose that Paul VI, acting in consultation with his advisers in this matter, was satisfied that the conditions under which the two Jesuit professors could return to the ‘Biblicum’ would be such as to exclude any eventual future teaching on their part of doctrinal opinions not in harmony with Trent and Vatican I. Nevertheless, they were not required to *renounce publicly* the published views that they would no longer be allowed to teach, and this restriction on their teaching was never made public. And it is undeniable that the Pope’s decision, which must have appeared to the general public as a complete reversal of a disciplinary measure taken only three years previously by the Supreme Congregation of the Holy Office, was very surprising, coming as it did from a pope; for it indicated an unfamiliar inclination to lenience rather than severity when it was a question of those delicate problems likely to arise in the task of harmonizing modern biblical research with Church doctrine. It seemed to show a certain confidence that difficult and ‘dangerous’ areas of exegesis – those touching even on defined dogmas – could often be resolved without harming the deposit of faith by Catholic exegetes themselves, if they were allowed to study and discuss such issues without feeling themselves to be under constant supervision or suspicion by higher ecclesiastical authority. Indeed, in his letter to the

<sup>25</sup> The text which Lyonnet used for teaching the exegesis of Romans 1-8 after he was reinstated at the Biblical Institute was *Exegesis Epistolae ad Romanos* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1963-1966), in two volumes. Each bears on the cover the words “*Ad usum privatum auditorum*,” indicating that it is not strictly a published work, only ‘*dispense*’ for the internal use of the professor’s students at the Institute. Volume 1 covers chapters 1-4, and on the cover of Volume 2 the sub-title reads “*Cap. V ad VIII / exc. Rom. 5, 12-21.*” And indeed, on p. 25 of this volume the detailed verse-by-verse commentary on chapter 5 is interrupted and the readers are referred for the exegesis of verses 12-21 to two other publications of Lyonnet, neither of which is the 1956 article for which he was delated to the Holy Office. The Old Testament scholar Malachi Martin, who had taught at the ‘Biblicum’ till the summer of 1964 and continued to have a good deal of informal contact with the Institute in the twelve months after that, told the present writer in April 1996 that he remembers having heard from his former colleagues there that both Lyonnet and Zerwick had been reinstated on the condition that they would not lecture on those biblical passages concerning which their exegetical opinions had previously been found unacceptable. This, Martin added, appeared to be commonly known at that time among the professors of the Institute.

In any case it appears that Lyonnet eventually returned to that exegesis of Rom. 5:12 which he had sustained prior to the 1956 essay which prompted the charges of unorthodoxy (cf. above, n. 16). In his last published work on Romans, which is a collection of essays previously published elsewhere (*Études sur l’Épître aux Romains*, [Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1989]), chapter 11 (185-202) is a reproduction of a 1955 article (“Le sens de ερ ω εν Rom 5,12 et l’exégèse des Pères grecs,” *Biblica* 36 [1955] 436-456). In this article Lyonnet recommends St. Cyril of Alexandria’s interpretation of verse 12, according to which *both* the personal sins of Adam’s descendants *and* the sin inherited from him are the cause of the universality of death, physical and spiritual (cf. 195-197, 201). The causality of the former (i.e., personal sins) is, he says, “real, but subordinate to, and not simply juxtaposed with, that of Adam’s sin” (*ibid.*, 202). He concludes by stating that in the context of St. Paul’s parallelism in this passage between Fall and Redemption, “the causality due to man’s [personal] action is in no way opposed to the causality due to the heads of the race: Adam on the one hand and Christ on the other” (*ibid.*). This exposition is clearly in accord with the Tridentine teaching; and presumably Lyonnet would not have wished to republish it after more than thirty years if he thought its exegesis was mistaken.

<sup>26</sup> A computer search through the catalogues of all the main ecclesiastical libraries in Rome reveals that of the twenty books published by Zerwick after 1964 (he died in 1975), not one is on the Gospels. Zerwick was noted mainly as a philologist, and many of the twenty are different editions and translations of his noted works in this field, such as *Analysis philologica Novi Testamenti graeci* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1966); *Biblical Greek* (Rome: PBI 1990); and *Gracitas biblica Novi Testamenti exemplis illustratur* (Rome: PBI, 1966). Also listed are various editions and translations of his commentaries on Ephesians (*Der Brief an die Epheser*, Geistliche Schriftlesung, 1962) and Galatians (*Die Brief an die Galater*, Die Welt der Bibel, 1964). Zerwick also co-authored a volume commenting on *Dei Verbum* with O. Semmelroth (*Vatikanum II über das Wort Gottes*, Stuttgarter Bibelstudien 1966). As regards journal articles, Zerwick published a commentary on *DV* in the Biblical Institute’s journal (“De S. Scriptura in Constitutione dogmatica ‘Dei Verbum’,” *Verbum Domini* 44 [1966] 17-42), but his only contributions regarding Gospel criticism were the article referred to in our next footnote and two book reviews: one is of X. Léon-Dufour’s *Études d’Évangile* (“Laboratorium synopticum,” *Verbum Domini* 45 [1967] 113-119); and the other is of F. Mussner’s *Die johanneische Sehweise* (“‘Visio’ joannea,” *Verbum Domini* 46 [1968] 80-87). Neither of these mentions the passage from Mt. 16 regarding which his views had come into conflict with the judgment of the Holy Office.

<sup>27</sup> “*Alia instructiva exempla pro libertate qua traditio apostolica et subsequens compositio evangeliorum tractabat materiam evangelicam potuerit esse confessio Petri in Caesarea Philippi secundum Mt 16,16ss comparata synoptice cum Marco 8,29, vel ambulatio Iesu super aquas et imprimis tam diversus eius effectus in Apostolos apud Mt 14,33 . . . et apud Mc 6,52*” (“Per homines more hominum” in *Evangeliiis*,” *Verbum Domini* 46 [1968] 75). A note at the beginning of the article (*ibid.*, 65) says that this was originally presented as a discourse at the Biblical Institute on 4 Feb. 1968, as part as a series of conferences on the conciliar Constitution *Dei Verbum* during the 1967-1968 “Year of Faith.”

present writer,<sup>28</sup> Cardinal Franz König recalled: “The reestablishment of the two Jesuits Lyonnet and Zerwick caused much astonishment at that time and was understood by witnesses that Paul VI did not agree with the decisions of the Holy Office.”

In short – and to put it rather bluntly – whatever Pope Paul’s own thinking and intentions may have been, his resolution of this *cause célèbre* amounted to a private slap on the wrist for the two ‘Biblicum’ professors, and a public slap on the face for Cardinal Ottaviani and the Holy Office.

Whether the Pope’s apparent confidence in the self-regulating and self-correcting potential of the community of biblical scholars was well founded seems open to discussion, in the light of later developments. It is arguable that the *de facto* message sent to theological faculties around the world by this papal reversal of the previous Holy Office decision – a message reinforced in the post-conciliar era by the similarly benign, ‘hands-off’ approach adopted by Roman authorities toward controversial exegetes – has been that Catholic biblical scholarship is now entitled to feel pretty much free of hierarchical constraint in its interpretation of magisterial teaching on Scripture, and in adopting innovative hypotheses in such fields as form- and redaction-criticism. Certainly (as will become apparent in the next issue of *Living Tradition*) we have the Pope’s own firm and repeated testimony that radical demythologization and other exegetical novelties were becoming more widespread and often endangering the very substance of the faith.

This recognition, however, seems never to have shaken Paul VI’s conviction that a good deal of leeway in dialogue, rather than severity of discipline, was in most cases a more appropriate way to deal with such questions. Many would have agreed with the commentator who observed at the time of Lyonnet’s and Zerwick’s reappointment to the ‘Biblicum’ in July 1964, some four months after its new Rector had drawn their case to the attention of Paul VI: “The reinstatement at this time of the two outstanding professors of the Biblical Institute is a manifest confirmation, and an invitation to continue along the path of renewal delineated by *Divino afflante Spiritu*.”<sup>29</sup>

Given the importance of this decision in the recent history of the Catholic Church’s approach to biblical studies, it will be convenient to conclude our survey of what has so far been publicly documented by giving a brief chronology, in summary form, of the main events involved:

1. 1956: S. Lyonnet publishes “Le péché originel et l’exégèse de Rom., 5, 12” (*Recherches de Science Religieuse* 44 [1956] 63-84).
2. 1959 (September): M. Zerwick speaks on recent critical exegesis of Mt. 16: 16-19 at the third convention of northern Italian Scripture teachers, held at Padua.
3. 1959 (November): F. Spadafora accuses Zerwick’s lecture of unorthodoxy in two articles: “La critica e gli evangelii” (*Settimana del Clero* 22 [1959] 7, and 29 [1959] 6-7).
4. 1960 (May) Spadafora claims Lyonnet’s 1956 article is incompatible with Tridentine doctrine: “Rom. 5, 12: esegesi e riflessi dogmatici” (*Divinitas* 4 [1960] 289-298).
5. 1960 (3 September): L. Alonso Schökel (Biblical Institute) publishes editorial on recent exegetical trends: “Dove va l’esegesi cattolica?” (*La Civiltà Cattolica* 111 [1960/III] 449-460).
6. 1960 (December): A. Romeo attacks Alonso Schökel’s editorial in an article which also denounces Zerwick’s 1959 statements on Mt. 16 and claims that another ‘Biblicum’ professor (unnamed, but apparently Lyonnet) is undermining belief in the NT records: “L’Enciclica ‘Divino afflante Spiritu’ e le ‘Opiniones novæ’” (*Divinitas* 4 [1960] 378-456).
7. 1961 (February): Biblical Institute replies to Romeo, claiming he has calumniated the two professors: “Pontificium Institutum Biblicum et Recens Libellus R.mi D.ni A. Romeo” (*Verbum Domini* 39 [1961] 3-17).
8. 1961 (soon after publication of aforesaid *Verbum Domini* article): Holy Office under Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviani prohibits further public interventions from either side to this dispute, and examines the charges against Lyonnet and Zerwick.
9. 1961 (June): Holy Office issues a *Monitum* warning against recent trends calling in question the historical value of the words and deeds of Jesus in the Gospels, and places *La Vie de Jésus*, by Jean Steinmann, on the Index of Forbidden Books.
10. 1961 (24 August): Cardinal Ernesto Ruffini, on front page of *L’Osservatore Romano*, denounces as “heretical” recent tendencies to classify some Gospel passages as non-historical (article entitled “Generi letterari e ipotesi di lavoro nei recenti studi biblici”).

<sup>28</sup> Cf. n. 11 above.

<sup>29</sup> “Ora la reintegrazione dei due insigni docenti dell’Istituto Biblico è una evidente conferma e un invito a procedere sulla strada del rinnovamento esegetico tracciata dalla ‘Divino afflante Spiritu’” (*La Stampa*, 24 July 1964, 9).

11. 1961 (1 September): Lyonnet and Zerwick suspended from teaching at 'Biblicum' by order of Holy Office.
12. 1961 (September): Spadafora, in commenting on the recent Holy Office *Monitum*, again challenges the orthodoxy of Zerwick's 1959 lecture: "Un documento notevole per l'esegesi cattolica," *Palestra del Clero* 40 (15 September 1961) 969-981.
13. 1962 (November): first draft of Vatican II schema on Revelation, reflecting current approach of Holy Office toward biblical scholarship, is rejected by the majority of conciliar Fathers.
14. 1963 (summer): Paul VI succeeds John XXIII as Pope; Canadian Fr. Roderick MacKenzie, S.J., becomes Rector of 'Biblicum';
15. 1963 (August): Catholic Biblical Association (of North America) elects Lyonnet and Zerwick as honorary members.
16. 1963 (31 October): Paul VI, with the writings of Spadafora and Romeo clearly in mind, publicly warns the assembled Lateran University professors never to engage in "jealous competitiveness or annoying polemics."
17. 1964 (March): MacKenzie asks Paul VI in private audience to review the decision against Lyonnet and Zerwick, and the Pope agrees to do so.
18. 1964 (21 April): Paul VI approves and orders publication of PBC Instruction on the Historical Truth of the Gospels.
19. 1964 (July): News is published that Lyonnet and Zerwick will resume teaching at Biblical Institute in new academic year.
20. 1964 (October): Lyonnet and Zerwick return to teach at 'Biblicum' (although they do not thereafter publish those opinions which the Holy Office had found unacceptable).

### 3. Appointments to the Holy Office and Pontifical Biblical Commission

Apart from his decision regarding the 'Biblicum' professors, Paul VI made three more important appointments which manifested this desire to show confidence in Scripture scholars who were known to be well in tune with modern developments involving new and at times difficult and risky orientations. One of these appointments was to the Holy Office and two were to the Biblical Commission.

Father Augustin Bea had already been raised to the College of Cardinals by John XXIII in 1959, when he was already 78 years old. Like Pope John himself, therefore, who was elected to the See of Peter at almost 77 years of age, this extraordinary churchman thereby began a new and vital aspect of his long career at an age when most men have long since retired from their life's labors. After Paul VI succeeded Pope John in 1963, the first of those many signs of great confidence which he had in Cardinal Bea's wisdom and erudition as a biblical scholar was made public within the first months of his pontificate: on 1 October 1963 Bea was named by the new Pontiff as a member of the Holy Office.<sup>30</sup> While he had long been a consultant to this 'Supreme Congregation,' he was now in a position to participate directly in all its major decisions. This nomination by Paul VI of a prelate who, less than a year earlier, had been one of the leading critics of the original conciliar schema on Revelation prepared under the ægis of that same Holy Office, was rightly seen at the time as indicating the new Pontiff's sympathies toward tendencies now coming into prominence as a result of Vatican Council II.<sup>31</sup>

Exactly six months later Pope Paul made two more appointments of the same general character: Cardinals Bernard Alfrink (Archbishop of Utrecht) and Franz König (Archbishop of Vienna) were named as members of the Pontifical Biblical Commission.<sup>32</sup> These two prelates were also known as biblical scholars, and by the time the Pope named them to the Commission, both had already made it clear during the Council debates that their outlook was marked

<sup>30</sup> Cf. AAS 55 (1963) 965.

<sup>31</sup> The Italian newspaper *La Stampa* commented on this nomination as follows "One of the first acts of Paul VI, in September last year, was to appoint Cardinal Bea as a member of the Holy Office. Thus, alongside the traditionalist tendency personified by Ottaviani, the innovative tendency (*la tendenza innovatrice*) has come to be represented in this supreme Congregation. Furthermore, Cardinal Bea is the only exegete to form part of the Holy Office" (24 July 1964, 9).

<sup>32</sup> The names of Cardinals Alfrink and König appear for the first time as members of the Pontifical Biblical Commission in the 1965 *Annuario Pontificio* (Vatican City: Tipografia Poliglotta Vaticana, 1965). The *Annuario* appears at the beginning of each year, and incorporates changes of this sort which have already been made in the previous year. (Cf. the previous year's listing of the same Commission, *Annuario Pontificio* 1964, 973.) Together with the Dutch and Austrian prelates, Paul VI named to the Commission Cardinal Ildebrando Antoniutti, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for Religious. Cardinal Antoniutti, unlike the other two new members, had not played a prominent part in the conciliar discussions regarding the schema on divine revelation: his name does not appear in the index of F. Gil Hellin (ed.), *Concilii Vaticani II Synopsis: Constitutio Dogmatica de Divina Revelatione Dei Verbum* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1963).

by a sympathy for modern exegetical trends that was by no means shared by all of the conciliar Fathers. As we have seen,<sup>33</sup> both had been prominent during the memorable debates in November 1962 by virtue of their forceful and frank *non placet* given to the initial schema on divine revelation, *De fontibus revelationis*, on the grounds that it was insufficiently positive in tone and content toward the work of modern exegetes.

Pierre Grelot has voiced the opinion<sup>34</sup> that the nomination of Alfrink and König to the Biblical Commission may have played a role in the publication of the Commission's 1964 document on the historical truth of the Gospels, in which for the first time the Church's Magisterium expressly acknowledged the possibility that in the method of form criticism there might be "sound elements" which Catholic exegetes could seek and make use of.<sup>35</sup> In fact, these two cardinals (along with Cardinal Ildebrando Antoniutti) were named to the Commission on 1 April 1964<sup>36</sup> and Paul VI approved the Instruction less than three weeks later, on 21 April;<sup>37</sup> so there would scarcely have been sufficient time for the new members to have had much influence in the document's actual composition. The present writer was informed by Cardinal König, in the personal letter already cited, that in fact he played no part in either the composition or the approbation of *Sancta Mater Ecclesia*; so presumably the other two cardinals appointed the same day (both of whom had predeceased König) were not consulted either.

This Instruction was the last document issued by the Pontifical Biblical Commission in its original status as an organ of the Church's Magisterium; and Paul VI, after naming König, Alfrink and Antoniutti as members shortly before the Instruction was promulgated, made no further appointments<sup>38</sup> to the Commission before it ceased in 1971 to enjoy that status and was restructured as an advisory body composed of full-time biblical scholars rather than Cardinals.<sup>39</sup> Therefore it might seem that there was little opportunity for these new members to exercise any influence over biblical studies during their seven years on the Commission. Even if this were so – which remains an unproved speculation, given the unavailability to scholars of the Commission's internal documents – Pope Paul's very choice of two men whose orientation in biblical matters was so definite and public as that of the Archbishops of Utrecht and Vienna was, like his reinstatement of the two 'Biblicum' professors, a notable gesture of encouragement toward modern Catholic biblical scholars, the majority of whom by this time would very probably have shared the generally open and 'progressive' outlook of these two prelates.

#### APPENDIX MAXIMILIAN ZERWICK AND THE HISTORICITY OF MATTHEW 16: 13-20

The essential points in the dispute over Zerwick's orthodoxy were as follows. In his *Divinitas* essay, Antonino Romeo<sup>40</sup> rebuked the 'Biblicum' professor for telling his Padua audience (in reference to the parallel accounts of Peter's profession of faith in Mk. 8:27-30 and Mt. 16:13-20 respectively): "It is useless to deny that they are profoundly different and historically incompatible (*Inutile negare che sono profondamente diverse e storicamente incompatibili*)."<sup>41</sup> Zerwick went on to affirm that in Matthew's Gospel the kerygmatic and soteriological concern for the person of Jesus "outweighs the concern to record faithfully the historical and biographical data (*supera l'interesse per una fedele registrazione di dati storici e biografici*)."<sup>42</sup> Accordingly, he said, the words "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock, etc." are "the work of the evangelist, who places on the lips of Jesus a fictitious phrase, yes, but in full conformity with the explicit teaching of Jesus expressed elsewhere (*l'opera dell'evangelista, che mette nella bocca di Gesù una frase fittizia, sì, ma in piena conformità con l'esplicita dottrina di Gesù altrove espressa*)."<sup>43</sup> (Zerwick added that the affirmation attributed to Peter in the Matthæan version – 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God' (v.16) – "is not historically *probable* before the Ascension of Jesus (*non è probabile storicamente prima dell'Ascensione di Gesù*)."<sup>44</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Cf. *Living Tradition*. No. 156, January 2012, 2-4 (section 1a).

<sup>34</sup> "Mais il est notable que deux nominations de membres de la C.B. intervinrent, sous Jean XXIII puis sous Paul VI, et c'est seulement après la seconde que la C.B. prit position sur les questions d'actualité en publiant l'Instruction dont je parlerai plus loin" (*op. cit.* [cf. above, n. 3] 102, n. 3).

<sup>35</sup> Cf. *EB* 647.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. *AAS* 56 (1964) 472.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 718 (*EB* 659).

<sup>38</sup> This can be verified by an inspection of the lists of members of the Biblical Commission in subsequent editions of the *Annuario Pontificio*: cf. 1966 (1001); 1967 (1025); 1968 (1060); 1969 (1080); 1970 (1064) and 1971 (1068).

<sup>39</sup> This change was by virtue of the Motu Proprio *Sedula Cura* of 27 June 1971: cf. discussion in the next issue of *Living Tradition*.

<sup>40</sup> *Loc. cit.* (cf. n. 17 above).

<sup>41</sup> Zerwick, *op. cit.* (cf. above, n. 17 for reference), 3.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 6 (emphasis in original).

In regard to this last affirmation, Romeo commented: “in other words, [Peter’s profession] has nothing to do with Jesus himself (*è estranea a Gesù stesso*), who was no longer here after the Ascension, and therefore reflects only ‘the faith as it lives in the Christian community (*la fede tal quale vive nella comunità cristiana*)’ (Zerwick, p. 4). In short, the faith of the Christian community is the source of Matthew’s narrative, according to these affirmations, which differ very little from those of Bultmann”.<sup>45</sup> Romeo’s critique, as well as citing the above passages of Zerwick’s paper, cited recent works of the noted biblical scholars Oscar Cullmann and F. M. Braun as having convincingly rebutted all the arguments to the effect that the relevant passages of Mk. 8 and Mt. 16 are historically incompatible.<sup>46</sup>

The ‘Biblicum’ professors’ reply to this severe critique made no mention of Cullmann and Braun and simply accused Romeo of “*concordismus*”.<sup>47</sup> Nor did they reply to his critique of Zerwick’s understanding of verse 16. Rather, they stressed that their colleague had not called in question the historicity of Christ’s promise of primacy to Peter as such, but only whether this promise was given at the time and place mentioned by Matthew. They argued that while there were clearly dangers in this area, such questioning of older views was legitimate, since their colleague had “grave reasons” for doubting that the evangelist was here intending to write in the genre of a “chronicler” (“*propter graves rationes in dubium vocatur indoles “chronistica” pericopæ Matthæanæ*”).<sup>48</sup>

Among those dangers admitted by the “P.I.B.” professors, a notable one, it would seem, would be that once we relegate to the genre of “fiction” this Matthaean pericope which Catholic tradition has so strongly and explicitly relied on for our doctrine of the Petrine and papal office, how confident can we still feel about the historical reliability of the *other* Gospel sayings Zerwick says we should fall back on as a basis for that doctrine?<sup>49</sup> Moreover, even supposing these other Petrine texts really do contain Christ’s own teaching, another danger would appear to be their much lower probative force for the doctrine in question. Zerwick, as we saw above, hastened to reassure his audience and readers that there was a “full conformity” of doctrine between Matthew’s “fictitious” primacy saying and these other sayings. But two statements can be in “full conformity” with each other, in the sense of there being no discrepancies or mutual contradictions between them, even while one of them is much less specific and informative than the other. (To tell a man he is gravely ill is in “full conformity” with telling him he is suffering from advanced pancreatic cancer.) And it is undeniable that nowhere apart from Matthew 16: 13-20 – the passage Zerwick claimed is “fictitious” – do we find those specific promises to Peter which the Church has always seen as fundamental for the dogmas of papal infallibility and primacy as they were defined at Vatican Council I: the promises regarding the building of the Church, the ‘keys of the kingdom’, the ‘gates of Hell’, and a divinely guaranteed ‘binding and loosing’ power that Peter can exercise *by himself* (as distinct from that promised to all the apostles collectively in Matthew 18). Indeed, in the parallel passages of the Synoptics (Mk 8: 27-30 and Lk 9: 18-21), we find no hint of any promises given to Peter by our Lord: they record only his profession of faith that Jesus is indeed the Christ. The only suggestion here of any kind of Petrine *primacy* is the fact that, as we read in some other passages, he is the disciple who takes the initiative in speaking for the Twelve as a group.

In two other Gospel texts Jesus singles out Peter in a special way. First, in Lk 22:31-32, Peter is told that his faith will not fail, and that after his imminent threefold denial he must “strengthen [his] brothers”. Secondly, in Jn 21:15-17, Jesus elicits Peter’s threefold confession of love, with the corresponding repeated injunction, “Feed my sheep”. But it is largely in the light of the Mt. 16 dialogue that Catholic scholars have traditionally discerned in these Lucan and Johannine texts implications for a divinely bestowed Petrine primacy. For the ‘special treatment’ of Peter by Jesus that they record could otherwise be understood quite reasonably as arising mainly – or even wholly – from the fact that he, rather than some other member of the Twelve, happened to be the one who denied the Lord three times. After all, strengthening one’s brethren in the faith and feeding Christ’s sheep are, in themselves, tasks that any shepherd (apostle, bishop or priest) is expected to carry out.

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<sup>45</sup> Romeo, *op. cit.*, 437, n. 116 (present writer’s translation).

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 436.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. “P.I.B.,” “Pontificium Institutum *Biblicum* et Recens Libellus R.mi D.ni A. Romeo” (*Verbum Domini* 39 [1961], 12).

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>49</sup> As anecdotal evidence that Zerwick’s reservations about the historical reliability of Matthew were not limited to the dialogue between Peter and Jesus in ch. 16, it seems worth noting that the late Fr. Malachi Martin, in the 1996 conversation mentioned in note 25 above, told the present writer that he remembered how, in an informal common-room discussion with other ‘Biblicum’ professors in the late ‘50s or early ‘60s, Zerwick made no secret of his skepticism about the historicity of the visit of the Magi to Bethlehem (cf. Mt. 2: 1-12). Since Vatican II, many Catholic biblical scholars have not hesitated to state publicly and in print what Zerwick expressed only privately to his colleagues.