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PAUL VI'S AMBIVALENCE TOWARD CRITICAL BIBLICAL SCHOLARSHIP

C. INDICATIONS OF DISAPPROVAL: ATTEMPTS TO COUNTERACT HETERODOXY

by *Brian W. Harrison*

We have already seen in sections A and B of this essay¹ that Paul VI's "optimism" was never unilateral or one-sided: even in his most appreciative expressions about the modern world, he also mentioned the reality of sin and evil. And in spite of his marked good will and openness in principle to modern developments in exegesis, Pope Paul grew increasingly concerned about the state of contemporary biblical scholarship as his pontificate progressed, and came to give more attention to the dangers whose existence he had always recognized, but which became more pressing and evident to him as time went on. We shall now turn to consider this aspect of Paul's overall approach to the new challenges being presented to orthodox Catholic faith: first, the post-conciliar explosion of doubt and dissent from the Church's magisterium in general, and secondly, the particular manifestations of this crisis which the Pope saw occurring in modern biblical studies.

This issue of our publication completes the first of the three major sections of our overall study of Paul VI's teachings and decisions relating to the use and study of the Bible in the life of the Catholic Church. In it we have surveyed the broad outlines of the approach toward Sacred Scripture taken by the man who steered Peter's barque through Vatican II and its immediate aftermath, prior to considering his interventions touching on more specific questions of biblical hermeneutics and doctrine, and in particular, the historical value of the Gospels. Therefore, for the reader's convenience, we shall conclude this essay with a brief summary of the main points that have been covered in the whole of Part I, that is, in nos. 153 to 158 of *Living Tradition*.

1. Response to the General Post-Conciliar Crisis of Faith

Although Pope Paul's vibrant hopes and expectations for the fulfillment of the Council's program of renewal and *aggiornamento* never left him throughout his pontificate, such confidence in the future became more and more tempered with deep consternation – even alarm – as he saw the conciliar renewal increasingly vitiated by dissidence, confusion and division in important sectors of the Church. On this point we have the revealing testimony of one of the Pope's closest and longest-standing friends, the French philosopher Jean Guitton. In an interview with the Italian weekly journal *Il Sabato*, Guitton recalled how Paul VI, within a few short years of the Council, confided to him his perception that an unprecedented "calamity" was causing upheaval in the Church, at the very time when so many were rejoicing in the Council's call for renewal. This "calamity," the Pope believed, consisted in the fact that the post-conciliar commitment to

¹ Cf. *Living Tradition*, no. 156, January 2012, and no. 157, March 2012

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dialogue with non-Catholics – which he himself was vigorously encouraging – was turning out to be seriously counter-productive: instead of drawing large numbers of non-Catholics closer to “the sources of the faith,” it was injecting alien and un-Christian thought into the bosom of the Church herself – especially that of Freud and Marx. According to Guitton, the Pope repeatedly commented to him with great anguish that this penetration of unbelief (an “atheist Christianity”) into the Church was plunging her into the worst internal upheaval ever in her history – yet without her being conscious of this critical situation. In response to *Il Sabato*’s question as to how Paul VI identified this calamitous penetration of non-Catholic thought into the Church, Guitton replied:

The Church coming out of the Council is the Church of dialogue. That was the grand idea of Paul VI: 20th-century Christians must dialogue with non-Christians. But there can be good and bad dialogue. Dialogue is always a relationship between two minds. Dialogue will be good if it induces the non-Catholic to come closer to the sources of faith. Paul VI saw with a sense of affliction that the opposite was happening. Christians had been conducting their dialogue with two extraordinary men – two Jews – Freud and Marx. The former explained the conscious mind in terms of the unconscious, while the latter put himself at the head of the conflict between the rich and the poor. And in the post-conciliar period it was they who emerged victorious: very often it has been Freud and Marx who are shaping Catholic thought. Paul VI could see this and it left him shaken. From 1969 onwards he said to me, “Never has there been such confusion within the Church – and without the Church herself being aware of it!” He suffered great anguish over this state of affairs, perceiving in it the advent of a “Christian atheism.”²

Guitton mentioned 1969 as the year in which this state of mind in Paul VI began to assume particular prominence; but already in much earlier major documents of his pontificate, published during the Council, it was evident that the Pope’s optimism was not unqualified. Already in his closing address for the second session of Vatican II (4 December 1963), the Pope spoke of the tasks still facing future sessions of the Council, and singled out “the question of divine Revelation,” which would have to be guarded carefully:

... the question of divine Revelation, which the Council will treat in such a way that on the one hand the sacred deposit of the truths bequeathed to us by God are protected from errors, abuses, and doubts which would subvert their intrinsic force; while on the other hand it gives appropriate direction to certain areas of study – Sacred Scripture, patristics and theology – which are constantly promoted with zeal, prudence and faith by Catholic scholars who, while making use of all suitable modern resources, remain loyally attached to the Church’s magisterium.³

In the basic program for his pontificate outlined in his first Encyclical, *Ecclesiam suam*, Pope Paul concentrated on his hopes for renewal and dialogue with the non-Catholic world; but he also had very strong words of warning in regard to widespread dangers to the faith in a world where rapid cultural and scientific change was leading to fundamental confusions within the Catholic fold. Like a vessel lurching perilously on a storm-swept sea, said the Pope, the Church was being gravely disturbed by rash and unacceptable demands for radical change:

All these things are surrounding and shaking the Church herself like the ocean waves. And when the conditions of this world carry a great force and momentum among those who undertake to govern the Church, the danger arises of a kind of dizzy intoxication and agitation which is capable of shaking the Church to her very foundations, impelling many to embrace utterly extraordinary opinions – as if it were the Church’s task to abdicate her responsibilities and to introduce totally novel and unheard-of ways of living. We may go on to give an example. Consider the errors of modernism, as it is called, which we

² *Il Sabato*: *E qual è la calamità?*

Guitton: *È la penetrazione del pensiero non-cattolico nella Chiesa.*

Il Sabato: *Paolo VI come identificava questo “pensiero”?*

Guitton: *La Chiesa che esce dal Concilio è la Chiesa del dialogo. È la grande idea di Paolo VI: i cristiani del XX secolo devono dialogare coi non-cristiani. Ma c’è un dialogo buono ed uno cattivo. Sempre il dialogo è rapporto tra due spiriti. Sarà buono il dialogo che indurrà il non-cattolico ad avvicinarsi alle sorgenti della fede. Paolo VI constatava con dolore che accadeva il contrario. Con due uomini straordinari, con due ebrei, i cristiani avevano dialogato: Freud e Marx. Il primo ha spiegato la coscienza attraverso l’inconscio; il secondo si è posto dinanzi al conflitto tra i ricchi e i poveri. E nel post-Concilio hanno vinto loro: sono stati Freud e Marx a dare molto spesso la forma al pensiero cattolico. Paolo VI vedeva e ne era sconvolto. Sin dal 1969 mi disse: “Non c’è mai stato un tale scombussolamento all’interno della Chiesa stessa e senza che se ne abbia la percezione.” Egli deplorava vivissimamente questo stato di cose. Intravedeva l’avvento di un “cristianesimo ateo” (*Il Sabato*, 19-25 March 1988, 11).*

³ “. . . *questio de divina Revelatione, quam Concilium eo modo persolvat, ut hinc sacrum depositum veritatum a Deo traditarum tueatur adversus errores, abusiones, dubitationes, quibus vis earum subiectiva infringatur, illinc studia Sacrorum Biblorum, operum Patrum ac theologicæ disciplinæ recte dirigat, quæ docti catholici viri, magisterio Ecclesie fideliter inhaerentes et quibusvis aptis huius ætatis subsidiis usi, alacriter, prudenter, fidenterque promovere pergunt*” (AAS 55 [1963] 36).

now see being revived in certain novel theories of religious life – theories which in fact are alien from the Catholic religion. Do not these errors exemplify that ideological struggle whereby tendencies emanating from the profane doctrines of this world are striving to corrupt the sound doctrine and discipline of Christ's Church?⁴

One of the perennial tendencies of this “profane” or worldly thought has been to minimize or abolish the great mystery at the heart of Christian worship. In the following year, in his Encyclical *Mysterium fidei* on the Eucharist (3 September 1965), Paul VI denounced the “virus of rationalism”⁵ which was being displayed in the increasing diffusion of opinions which, in his judgment, disturbed the faithful and emptied the Church's doctrinal definitions regarding the Real Presence of their true meaning:

We have become aware that among those who treat of this most holy Mystery in speech or in writing, there are some who . . . are spreading opinions which disturb faithful souls, and unsettle their minds with no little confusion regarding matters of faith, as if each individual had the right to consign to oblivion a doctrine defined once and for all by the Church, or to interpret it in such a way as to weaken the genuine meaning of the words, or the approved sense of the concepts.⁶

It was above all in the years immediately following Vatican II, however, that Pope Paul felt the need to issue vigorous, repeated, and solemn warnings against widespread errors. Less than a year after the Council's conclusion, on 1 October 1966, the Pope warned an international Congress dedicated to the theology of Vatican II that “the authentic nature and notion of theology itself” were being “subverted”⁷ in some Catholic circles by a growing tendency to minimize or even deny the authority of the Church's magisterium on the basis of an exaggerated confidence in the unaided powers of human reason.

Almost as if to illustrate how well-founded was the Pope's concern, the so-called “Dutch Catechism” (*De Nieuwe Katechismus*) was published within a week or so of this allocution. Because of its doctrinal ambiguities and inadequacies, this work immediately aroused controversy throughout the Catholic world, especially since it was quickly translated into the several most widely diffused languages. The Pope's efforts to reach a mutually agreeable series of corrections to the catechism proved fruitless, and eventually a special papal Commission of Cardinals was obliged to declare what amendments would have to be made in subsequent editions.⁸

The Dutch Catechism had ramifications which went far beyond these specific measures to secure a corrected edition of the book itself. It was in effect a catalyst which moved Pope Paul to set in motion a positive pastoral program aimed at strengthening authentic faith at a time of doubt and confusion. For he could see that the Dutch publication was simply an acute manifestation of tendencies which were in reality spreading throughout Catholicism in many Western countries.

Very soon after becoming aware in late 1966 of the problems raised by *De Nieuwe Katechismus*, the Pope issued an Apostolic Exhortation, *Petrum et Paulum* (22 February 1967),⁹ in which he proclaimed a “Year of Faith” in honour of the nineteenth century of the death of the two great apostles of the Roman Church. Calling on the world's bishops for special efforts to reinvigorate and restore in all its purity the Apostolic faith, the Pontiff criticized in this Exhortation those who promote a so-called “post-conciliar mentality”¹⁰ marked by a vain hope of giving new and rash interpretations of

⁴ “*Hæc omnia veluti maris fluctus Ecclesiam ipsam obvolvunt et commovent; cumque apud eos, qui se Ecclesiæ moderamini committunt, huius mundi condiciones multum vim habeant atque momentum, exinde fit, ut veluti vertiginis, stuporis ac trepidationis periculum impendeat, quod ipsam ecclesiasticæ compaginis firmitatem in discrimen adducere possit, multosque impellat ad singulares prorsus opinionationes amplectendas, tamquam si Ecclesiæ opus sit se munere suo abdicare ac novas omnino et inopinatas vivendi formas inducere. Ceterum, ut exemplo utamur, modernismi, ut aiunt, errores, quos etiam nunc reviviscere cernimus in novis quibusdam religiosæ vitæ rationibus a germana religione catholica alienis, nonne specimen exstant contentionis illius, qua profanæ huius sæculi doctrinæ atque inclinationes sinceram Ecclesiæ Christi doctrinam ac disciplinam vitare conantur?*” (AAS 56 [1964] 618).

⁵ “. . . rationalismi virus” (AAS 57 [1965] 756).

⁶ “*Compertum namque habemus inter eos, qui de hoc Sacrosancto Mysterio loquendo scribendoque disserunt, esse nonnullos qui . . . tales vulgent opiniones, quæ fidelium animos perturbent inque eorum mentes non modicum de rebus fidei ingerant confusionem, quasi cuique doctrinam semel ab Ecclesia definitam in oblivionem edducere liceat aut eam ita interpretari ut genuina verborum significatio seu probata conceptuum vis extenuetur*” (*ibid.*, 755).

⁷ “*Haud difficile est perspicere his opinionibus non modo debitam Ecclesiæ reverentiam detrectari, sed ipsam theologiæ germanam naturam et notionem subverti*” (AAS 58 [1966] 890).

⁸ Cf. *Declaratio* of the *ad hoc* Commission of Cardinals dated 15 October 1968, AAS 60 (1968) 685-691. The history of the negotiations which took place during the two-year period preceding this Declaration are well recorded in E. Kevane, *Creed and Catechetics* (Westminster, Maryland: Christian Classics, 1978) 62-66.

⁹ AAS 59 (1967) 193-200.

¹⁰ “. . . *mentis habitus . . . quem post-conciliarem appellant*” (*ibid.*, 198, emphasis in original).

doctrine contrary to the magisterium. It is noteworthy that Pope Paul saw the whole question of hermeneutics – with its appeal to a novel “interpretation” of the traditional faith rather than outright denial of it – as the key area needing elucidation (a point we shall consider in detail in another essay). The vehemence of the Pope’s language is notable as he inveighs against those who strive to bring about

the destruction of our precious inheritance of zeal for fidelity to the Church, propagating instead the vain hope of bestowing upon the Christian religion a new interpretation – an interpretation, however, which would inevitably be nothing other than rash and sterile. What would remain of the truths of our faith, or of the theological virtues by which we believe them, if these sorts of endeavours, bypassing the authority of the Church’s magisterium, should ever come to prevail?¹¹

This “Year of Faith” culminated on 30 June 1968 with the promulgation of what Paul VI regarded as the most weighty document of his entire pontificate, the *Sollemnis Professio Fidei*, generally known as the “Credo of the People of God.”¹² In the preamble to this Profession of Faith, Pope Paul set out his reasons for promulgating it, rebuking in article 4 those Catholics who advocate dangerous innovations:

Such persons have not detached themselves from the love of a world which is bringing upon itself the most radical changes – a world wherein so many truths are either called in question or totally denied. Indeed, we are seeing some Catholics seized by a kind of lust for change and innovation. The Church does indeed consider it part of her duty to continue her efforts to ponder again and again over the arcane mysteries of God, and to present them more suitably in her day-by-day teaching to the men of each successive age. But at the same time the greatest caution is necessary to ensure that, in the course of fulfilling this necessary duty of research, the truths of Christian doctrine are not impaired. If this should happen – and, alas! it is exactly what we see happening today – multitudes of faithful souls are plunged into doubt and anguish.¹³

In spite of these vigorous efforts during the “Year of Faith,” dissent and doctrinal confusion continued, and it is doubtless in this context that we should view Guitton’s testimony regarding the note of extreme consternation that characterized the Pope’s privately-communicated outlook from 1969 onwards. This found public expression the following year, when he issued the Apostolic Exhortation, *Quinque iam anni* (8 December 1970), to mark the fifth anniversary of the Council’s closure. The tone of this document was far from celebratory or complacent; rather, it displays a markedly sober – even penitential – mood, warning of the continuing prevalence of doubt and error, and exhorting all Bishops (including himself) to examine the way in which they have been discharging their solemn duty to teach the faith, pure and entire.¹⁴

Several years later, continuing dissension and turmoil in the Church prompted Paul VI to dedicate the Holy Year (1974-1975) in a special way to the goal of reconciliation. Once again he issued an Apostolic Exhortation on the anniversary of the Council’s closure,¹⁵ and stressed that the Holy Year’s principal purpose was “the healing . . . of those

¹¹ “. . . ut translaticium fidelitatis studium erga Ecclesiam pessumdetur atque inanis propagetur spes christianam religionem nova interpretatione donandi, quae tamen nonnisi temeraria ac sterilis esse posset. Quid superesset de nostrae fidei veritatibus aut de theologali virtute, qua easdem credimus, si huiusmodi conatus, auctoritati magisterii ecclesiastici subducti, aliquando praevalerent?” (AAS 59 [1967] 198-199).

¹² AAS 60 (1968) 436-445. The Index to this volume of AAS, on p. 833, ranks this document ahead of both the Decretal Letters and Encyclical Letter published in the same year. Moreover, the Pope implicitly confirmed this evaluation of its importance ten years later in his last public homily. Reviewing the major acts of his pontificate, he recalled how he had constantly sought to hand on the authentic and orthodox faith, and mentioned a number of leading Encyclicals and Apostolic Exhortations. But then he added: “But above all We do not wish to forget our ‘Profession of Faith’ – the ‘Credo of the People of God’ – which, just ten years ago, on 30 June 1968, We solemnly pronounced in the name of the whole Church and as a commitment of the whole Church. This was in order to recall, reaffirm, and re-emphasize the main points of the Church’s own faith, as they have been proclaimed by the most important Ecumenical Councils, at a moment when facile experimentations in doctrine seemed to be shaking the faith of both priests and laity, thus calling for a return to the sources. (*Ma soprattutto non vogliamo dimenticare quella nostra ‘Professione di fede’ che, proprio dieci anni fa, il 30 giugno del 1968, noi solennemente pronunciammo in nome e a impegno di tutta la Chiesa come ‘Credo del Popolo di Dio’, per ricordare, per riaffermare, per ribadire i punti capitali della fede della Chiesa stessa, proclamati dai più importanti Concili Ecumenici, in un momento in cui facili sperimentalismi dottrinali sembravano scuotere la certezza di tanto sacerdoti e fedeli, e richiedevano un ritorno alle sorgenti*)” (Homily for Feast of SS. Peter and Paul, 29 June 1978, AAS 70 [1978] 396).

¹³ “*Qui quidem affectionem mundi sese penitus mutantis non effugerunt, in quo tot veritates vel prorsus negantur, vel in controversiam vocantur. Immo vel nonnullos catholicos homines videmus aut mutandarum, aut novandarum rerum quadam quasi cupiditate capi. Ecclesia sane ad officium suum pertinere putat, nisus non intermittere, ut arcana Dei Mysteria, unde in omnes tot salutis fructus manant, etiam atque etiam perspiciat, pariterque secutura aetatis hominibus aptiore cotidie ratione proponat. Sed simul maximopere cavendum est ne, dum necessarium investigandi officium usurpat, christianae doctrinae veritates labefactentur. Quod si fiat – videmusque, pro dolor, hodie id reipsa fieri – perturbationem et dubitationem fidelibus multorum animis afferat*” (AAS 60 [1968] 437).

¹⁴ Cf. AAS 63 (1971) 97-106.

¹⁵ *Paterna cum benevolentia*, 8 December 1974, (AAS 67 [1975] 5-23).

divisions and disturbances which today are afflicting human society, and even the ecclesial community.”¹⁶ Here too, the Pontiff’s language was very strong, as he decried the danger of widespread “infidelity to the movement of the Holy Spirit”¹⁷

Perhaps the most striking and impassioned of all Paul VI’s warnings came as the Church was celebrating the beginning of the tenth year of his pontificate. In his homily for the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul on 29 June 1972, the Pontiff opened his heart to reveal that he saw the post-conciliar Church besieged by the powers of darkness, and struggling desperately against a tidal wave of doubt and internal division. He remarked first on the terrible loss of faith which marked Western society at large, singling out the rise of new false prophets and the confusion and crisis of values in education:

We see around us doubt, uncertainty, problems, uneasiness, dissatisfaction, confrontation. The Church is no longer trusted. Rather, people trust the first profane prophet who announces his message from some newspaper or social movement; they run after him to ask if he has the answer to life’s problems. And we [in the Church] fail to advert to the fact that we ourselves are already the custodians and teachers of that answer. Doubt has seeped into our consciousness; and it has entered by the very windows that should have been open to the light. From the sciences, which are developed in order to bring us truths which do not tear us away from God but encourage us to search for Him and celebrate Him with greater intensity, has come just the contrary: criticism and doubt. . . . The academy has become a seed-bed of confusion and of frequently absurd contradictions.¹⁸

But it is the observations which Pope Paul dedicated more specifically to the crisis within the Church herself which attract one’s attention in a particular way. He confesses that instead of the “sunny day” in the Church’s history which was expected after the Council, we have witnessed the arrival of a gloomy tempest of uncertainty, and that for all our efforts at unity among Christians, greater divisions among us are arising:

This state of uncertainty holds sway even within the Church. We believed that after the Council a sunny day would dawn in the history of the Church. But instead that day has proved to be dark, cloudy and stormy – a day of searching and uncertainty. We preach ecumenism, and yet more than ever we are drifting apart: we seek to carve out abysses instead of filling them in.¹⁹

Most memorably of all, the Pope affirmed that this upheaval within the Church has a preternatural origin: the mysterious and ancient enemy of mankind whose name is the Devil, and who is bent on destroying the work of the Ecumenical Council. In a dramatic phrase which has since become famous, he said it seemed that “through some fissure the smoke of Satan has entered the temple of God.”²⁰ This crisis, the Pope affirmed, makes more urgent than ever the task of Peter’s Successor: confirming his brethren in the faith:

How has this come about? Here the Pope confides to those present his intuition: that there has been an incursion of an enemy power. His name is the Devil, that mysterious being mentioned also in the Letter of St. Peter. . . . “We believe,” observes the Holy Father, “in something preternatural that has come to this world in order to sow discord, to smother the fruits of the Ecumenical Council, and to prevent the Church from breaking out into that hymn of joy at having fully rediscovered her self-consciousness. Precisely for that reason, We wish to be more than ever capable in this moment of carrying out the task assigned by God to Peter – confirming the brethren in the Faith. We want to communicate to you that charism of certainty which the Lord gives to him who, in spite of his unworthiness, represents Him on this earth.”²¹

¹⁶ “. . . ad sananda . . . discidia atque perturbationes, quibus hominum societas, quae hodie est, atque ipsa ecclesialis communitas laborant” (ibid., 6).

¹⁷ “. . . infidelitas erga Spiritus Sancti motus” (ibid., 11).

¹⁸ “C’è il dubbio, l’incertezza, la problematica, l’inquietudine, l’insoddisfazione, il confronto. Non ci si fida più della Chiesa; ci si fida del primo profeta profano che viene a parlarci da qualche giornale o da qualche moto sociale per rincorrerlo e chiedere a lui se ha la formula della vera vita. E non avvertiamo di esserne invece già noi padroni e maestri. È entrato il dubbio nelle nostre coscienze, ed è entrato per finestre che invece dovevano essere aperte alla luce. Dalla scienza, che è fatta per darci delle verità che non distaccano da Dio ma ce lo fanno cercare ancora di più e celebrare con maggiore intensità, è venuta invece la critica, è venuto il dubbio. . . . La scuola diventa palestra di confusione e di contraddizioni talvolta assurde” (Insegnamenti di Paolo VI, Vatican City: Tipografia Poliglotta Vaticana, 1972, 707-708). (This annual publication is abbreviated hereafter as “Ins”.)

¹⁹ “Anche nella Chiesa regna questo stato di incertezza. Si credeva che dopo il Concilio sarebbe venuta una giornata di sole per la storia della Chiesa. È venuta invece una giornata di nuvole, di tempesta, di buio, di ricerca, di incertezza. Predichiamo l’ecumenismo e ci distacciamo sempre di più dagli altri. Cerchiamo di scavare abissi invece di colmarli” (ibid. 708).

²⁰ “. . . da qualche fessura sia entrato il fumo di Satana nel tempio di Dio.” (ibid., 707).

²¹ “Come è avvenuto questo? Il Papa confida ai presenti un suo pensiero: che ci sia stato l’intervento di un potere avverso. Il suo nome è il diavolo, questo misterioso essere cui si fa allusione anche nella Lettera di S. Pietro . . . ‘Crediamo – osserva il Santo Padre – in qualcosa di preternaturale

From our present standpoint this generalized crisis of faith, and the broad measures taken by Paul VI in an effort to overcome it, are important principally as the historical background and context of those interventions in which the Pope expressly mentioned dangers in biblical interpretation. We shall now consider those more specific warnings before proceeding in subsequent essays to examine his positive teaching on this matter, and its concrete application to various disputed questions.

2. The Danger of Unorthodoxy in Exegesis: Major Interventions

2a. General Observations

Immediately in the wake of the “Dutch Catechism,” in the Apostolic Exhortation *Petrum et Paulum* proclaiming 1967-1968 as a “Year of Faith,” came a rebuke to those currents in biblical studies which, in the name of adaptation to modern times, undermine the historical trustworthiness of Scripture:

While we see among modern men a diminishing of that religious sense which constitutes a natural basis for faith, novel opinions in exegesis and theology – often drawn from bold but foolish philosophical theories – are invading the field of Catholic doctrine. Not only do such opinions call in question or distort the genuine meaning of truths which the Church teaches authoritatively, but, on the pretext of accommodating religion to the spirit of our times, the norm of the Church’s magisterium is neglected, theological research becomes thoroughly conformed to the tenets of *historicism*, as it is called, the sacred character and historical reliability of the biblical testimony is rashly denied, and every effort is made to foster among the People of God a so-called *post-conciliar* mentality.²²

Pope Paul returned to the same area of concern in the Apostolic Exhortation *Quinque iam anni* (8 December 1970), which, as we noted above, analyzed the state of the Church five years after the Council in terms that were very largely critical and apprehensive. After observing that fundamental dogmas – those concerning the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Eucharist and the Church, for instance – are now being called in question, the Pope adds, “Even the divine authority of Scripture is called in question by the radical application of what is commonly called demythologization.”²³ He goes on to warn against a reductionist hermeneutic which relies so much on merely human knowledge that it excludes the supernatural element in Scripture: “The use of the human sciences in hermeneutical studies is one way in which the revealed deposit may be studied; but the latter cannot be reduced to the level of such investigations, since revelation surpasses them in its origin and in its very content.”²⁴ The Pontiff adds that in view of the “disaster” (*perniciēs*) caused by opinions which disturb the faith, he sees it as his duty to recall the Council’s insistence that “true theology has as its perennial foundation the written word of God, inseparable from holy Tradition.”²⁵

In all of the major allocutions on specifically biblical themes, the Pope mentioned the need for fidelity to the Magisterium²⁶ and Tradition;²⁷ and in some of them was more specific. In his first address to the Italian Biblical Association’s *Settimana Biblica* – that of 1964 – he reminded the assembled exegetes that the recently published *Instructio* on the historical truth of the Gospels, while paying respect to the efforts of modern exegesis, also points out “the dangers and limitations” of these modern approaches, and “defends in a special way, with a calm and vigorous

venuto nel mondo proprio per turbare, per soffocare i frutti del Concilio Ecumenico, e per impedire che la Chiesa prorompesse nell’ inno della gioia di aver riavuto in pienezza la coscienza di sé. Appunto per questo vorremmo essere capaci, più che mai in questo momento, di esercitare la funzione assegnata da Dio a Pietro, di confermare nella Fede i fratelli. Noi vorremmo comunicarvi questo carisma della certezza che il Signore dà a colui che lo rappresenta anche indegnamente su questa terra” (*ibid.*, 708-709). Apart from the section in quotation marks, the words in the citations given here and over notes 17-19 above are a paraphrase or report of the Pope’s homily – “*un resoconto*,” as the editor’s introductory note calls it (*ibid.*, 703).

²² “*Dum autem apud nostrae aetatis homines religionis sensus minuitur, quo fides veluti suo naturali fundamento innititur, opinioniones novae ad exegesim vel ad theologiam attinentes, saepe sumptae a philosophicis doctrinis audacibus sed ineptis, huc illuc in catholicae doctrinae campum irrepunt. Quibus opinionibus non solum in dubium vocatur vel depravatur germana veritatis significatio, quam Ecclesia cum auctoritate docuit, sed, ficta causa religionem ad nostrorum ingenium accomodandi, magisterii ecclesiastici norma neglegitur, investigationis theologicae studia ad placita historicismi, quem vocant, prorsus conformantur, audetur Sacrarum Scripturarum testimonio indolem sacram et historiae fidem denegare, et vel eo contenditur, ut apud Populum Dei illud habitus inducatur, quem post-conciliarem appellant*” (AAS 59 [1967] 198, emphasis in original).

²³ “*Quin immo ipsa divina auctoritas Sacrae Scripturae in controversiam vocatur nimia illa rei mythicae amotione, quam ‘demythizationem’ vulgo appellant*” (AAS 63 [1971] 99).

²⁴ “*Usus . . . disciplinarum humanarum in studiis hermeneuticis est modus quidam pervestigandi depositum revelatum, quod tamen ad eorum indagaciones redigi nequit, cum suapte origine suoque ipso argumento eas excedat*” (*ibid.*, 103).

²⁵ “. . . *veram theologiam verbo Dei scripto inniti, a sancta Traditione inseparabili, velut fundamento perenni*” (*ibid.*).

²⁶ e.g., address to Italian Biblical Association, 25 September 1970 (AAS 62 [1970] 617, 619).

²⁷ e.g., address to Italian Biblical Association, 29 September 1972 (AAS 64 [1972] 637).

clarity, the historical truth of the holy Gospels.”²⁸ In an observation which underlined the essential continuity in the Church’s Magisterium on scriptural matters, the Pope clearly implied in this same address that the most recent Encyclical on sacred Scripture, Pius XII’s *Divino afflante Spiritu* (1943), could not be understood in opposition to *Providentissimus Deus*, (1893): “We shall be content to remind you of how the papal teachings – contained especially in the two great documents ‘*Providentissimus Deus*’ of Leo XIII and ‘*Divino afflante Spiritu*’ of Pius XII – are still valid and worthy of the study and adherence of everyone involved in biblical studies.”²⁹

Pope Paul went on to stress the importance of fidelity to the Church’s magisterium in biblical studies, and used surprisingly stern language about the difficulties involved, describing these as “immense,” “grave,” and “dangerous.” This was in the context of his observation that such dangers are increasing, not decreasing, with the advance of biblical research:

Persevere, above all, in your application to the task of studying Sacred Scripture, taking great care to stay on the right path, which is that marked out by Holy Church. All of us know what new and immense difficulties lie across that path. We know that they are all the more grave and dangerous for being intimately linked to the development of biblical research itself, which is at times tempted to circumscribe the immense and mysterious field of biblical truth within merely human and personal perimeters, even to the point of robbing it of its sacred character and of its transcendent values.³⁰

The Pontiff went on to warn against the disintegrating tendencies of the Protestant outlook, which, by trying to make the Bible (interpreted privately) into the whole substance of religion, unwittingly shows the need for an authority capable of deciding on its correct interpretation. However, he also insisted that the exercise of authority does not obstruct the exegete’s vision, but actually broadens it so as to be capable of seeing more clearly both the natural and supernatural objects of his research:

This [anti-supernatural hermeneutic] produces the sad effect of nullifying the reality and power of that Sacred Scripture which some decided unilaterally to claim as the sole substance of religion, thereby unwittingly bearing witness to the providential necessity of a living magisterium which can safeguard and clarify the authentic meaning of the divine Book. Doctrinal orthodoxy, which the Church both requires and shows forth amid today’s dangerous and attractive exegetical explorations, does not obscure the faithful exegete’s vision in his arduous and complex task of studying the Bible; rather, it allows him to learn everything without losing anything: that is, to know what the ancient and modern sciences can rationally offer us in studying the Bible; and yet not to lose what the wisdom of faith assures us is contained in it.³¹

At the first *Settimana Biblica* after the Council, that of September 1966, Pope Paul laid great emphasis on the heavy responsibilities of the exegete as a *teacher* in the Church, calling this “the most obvious, the most insistent, the most grave consideration that you must take into account.”³² Once more the Pope highlighted the danger of “private interpretation,” and the liberating influence of the magisterium’s necessary vigilance over exegesis. In making this point, he again referred back to the great Encyclical of 1893 which gave the modern Catholic biblical movement its initial impetus:

Now this office [that of interpreting Scripture], in its decisive insistence on the true value of that transcendent Word, is greater than any human being: it requires a charisma, it requires a rule, a faithfulness. “Let there be no private interpretation” (2 *Peter*, 1: 20). You all know this. Hence, your own office is a participation in the Church’s magisterium; and it must adhere

²⁸ “. . . i pericoli ed i limiti . . . si difende in modo speciale con calma e vigorosa chiarezza la verità storica dei santi Vangeli” (AAS 56 [1964] 937).

²⁹ “A Noi basti ricordarvi come gli insegnamenti pontifici, contenuti specialmente nei due grandi documenti, le Encicliche ‘*Providentissimus Deus*’ di Leone XIII e ‘*Divino afflante Spiritu*’ di Pio XII, siano tuttora validi e degni dello studio e dell’osservanza di ogni cultore delle discipline scritturali?” (*ibid.*).

³⁰ “Continuate, innanzi tutto, la vostra applicazione allo studio e all’impiego della Sacra Scrittura con grande sollecitudine di camminare sulla via buona, ch’è quella segnata dalla santa Chiesa. Sappiamo tutti quali nuove e immense difficoltà attraversano cotesto cammino, e come esse siano tanto più gravi e pericolose quanto più intimamente legate allo sviluppo stesso degli studi biblici, tentati a volta di restringere nel perimetro della teoria umana e personale il campo immenso e misterioso della verità biblica, fino a privarla del suo carattere sacro e dei suoi valori trascendenti, . . .” (*ibid.*).

³¹ “. . . col triste risultato di vanificare la realtà e la potenza di quella Scrittura Sacra che sola e da soli pretendevano costituire sostanza della religione, e di dare, senza volerlo, testimonianza all’provvidenziale necessità d’un magistero vivo che tuteli e rischiarì il senso autentico del Libro divino. L’ortodossia dottrinale, che la Chiesa raccomanda ed esibisce nelle pericolose e attraenti esplorazioni esegetiche moderne, non preclude lo studio, non offusca lo sguardo nelle più ardue e complesse ricerche bibliche, ma consente all’esegeta fedele di tutto conoscere e di nulla perdere; di conoscere ciò che le scienze antiche e nuove ci sanno razionalmente offrire in campo scritturale; e di non perdere ciò che la sapienza della fede sa esservi contenuto” (*ibid.*, 937-938).

³² “. . . la considerazione più ovvia, più insistente, più grave a vostro riguardo” (*Ins.* 1966, 417).

to that magisterium if it is not to turn the Word of God into a subjective, private word, stripped of its inherent power. However, We would add at the same time with Leo XIII: “By this most wise law the Church in no way retards or imprisons biblical science, but rather guarantees its freedom from error, and so greatly assists its true advancement” (“Providentissimus”).³³

The Pope concluded by noting that even the strictly scientific nature of the exegete’s task – exploring the objective meaning of the text and its author’s intention – does not exempt that task from the magisterium’s vigilance:

Moreover, you all know that while the Council, following the lead of Pius XII, recognizes the exegete’s competence to explore objectively the true sense and intention of the sacred texts, it also requires his acceptance of the sacred magisterium’s vigilance, and his conformity to the sense which the Church discovers in Sacred Scripture (cfr. *Dei Verbum* 23).³⁴

Only ten days after this allocution, the publication in Holland of *De Nieuwe Katechismus* set in motion the dramatic chain of events we have noted in the foregoing pages. By the time of Paul VI’s next allocution to the *Associazione Biblica Italiana* in September 1968, it was clear that the problems crystallized in, and symbolized by, this provocative work were still far from resolved, in spite of the “Year of Faith” which had recently culminated in the solemn promulgation of the “Credo of the People of God.” These problems would thus have been very prominent in the mind of the Pontiff as he exhorted the assembled Italian exegetes to remember that while the Church took fully into account their valuable contribution to a deeper understanding of God’s Word, making use of up-to-date scientific research, their most important duty was fidelity to the Church’s magisterium in their interpretation of Scripture:

Now, . . . your renewal should not consist only in the use of new methods of scientific investigation and in more advanced research, with all the techniques that recent progress in biblical studies has placed at your disposal. Above all, it should consist in an increasingly enlightened and conscious faithfulness to your task as Catholic exegetes who trust sincerely in the vigilance of the sacred Magisterium (*Dei Verbum*, 23). This Magisterium holds in great esteem the invaluable contribution of exegetes toward a deeper understanding of the Word of God, for the good of the Church (*Dei Verbum*, 21), and exhorts them to renew their energy so as to continue their work “according to the sense of the Church” (*ibid.*).³⁵

The Pope went on to urge the virtue of humility, the mark of true wisdom, and to remind the Scripture scholars that the Church in every age – and by implication, not only since World War II and *Divino afflante Spiritu* – has understood the true sense of the Scriptures.³⁶

³³ “Ora questo ufficio, nella sua istanza decisiva sul vero valore di quella trascendente Parola, è più grande dell’uomo; esige un carisma; esige una regola, una fedeltà. ‘Propria interpretatione non fit’ (2 Petr. 1,20). Voi lo sapete. Partecipa cioè il vostro ufficio al magistero della Chiesa; occorre che a quel magistero sia aderente, se non vuole convertire la Parola di Dio in parola soggettiva, umana, priva della forza sua propria. Diremo però subito con Leone XIII: ‘Qua plena sapientiae lege nequaquam Ecclesia pervestigationem scientiae biblicae retardat aut coërcet, sed eam potius ab errore integram praestat, plurimumque ad veram adiuvat progressionem’ (‘Providentissimus’)” (*ibid.*, 417).

³⁴ “E voi sapete come il Concilio, seguendo le orme di Pio XII, riconosca all’esegeta il compito dell’esplorazione oggettiva del vero senso e dell’intenzione dei sacri testi, ma come anch’esso gli raccomandi l’accettazione della vigilanza del magistero sacro e la conformità al senso che la Chiesa scopre nella Sacra Scrittura (cfr. ‘Dei verbum’, 23)” (*ibid.*, 417-418).

³⁵ “Ora, anche il vostro rinnovamento deve consistere non soltanto nell’uso dei nuovi metodi d’indagine scientifica e nell’avanzamento della ricerca, con tutti i sussidi che il moderno progresso degli studi biblici ha messo a vostra disposizione, ma innanzi tutto in una sempre più illuminata e consapevole fedeltà al vostro compito di esegeti cattolici, i quali si affidano con sincerità alla vigilanza del sacro Magistero (*Dei Verbum*, 23), che tiene in gran conto il prezioso contributo degli esegeti alla più profonda intelligenza della Parola di Dio a vantaggio della Chiesa (*Dei Verbum*, 21) e li esorta a rinnovare le proprie energie per continuare nel lavoro ‘secondo il senso della Chiesa’ (*ibid.*)” (*Ins.* 1968, 493-494).

³⁶ “Faith in the Word of God, and in its mysterious, superhuman efficacy, must be joined to the profound conviction that the Church . . . is in every age able to present it in its true meaning. Your service to the Word of God, therefore, must – like all service worthy of the name – be motivated and undergirded by devotion and humility. That humility, moreover, which is the mark of true wisdom: the humility which leads to acceptance of the sacred Magisterium; which prevents one from trusting solely in human resources in an undertaking linked to the mystery of God and His revelation; which suggests respect for others, not only in the academic field but also in pastoral ministry – that is, respect for the learned and unlearned alike. All Catholics need further instruction, but they also have the right to receive it without untimely and disturbing factors, and in such a way that sound doctrine ‘illumines minds, strengthens wills, and sets men’s hearts aflame with the love of God’. (*Dei Verbum*, 23). (*La fede nella Parola di Dio e nella sua misteriosa, sovrumana efficacia, sia congiunta alla profonda convinzione che la Chiesa . . . è in ogni tempo in grado di poterla offrire nel suo esatto significato. Il vostro servizio alla Parola di Dio sia dunque, come ogni servizio degno di questo nome, animato e sorretto da devozione e umiltà; quella umiltà che, del resto, è la virtù distintiva del vero sapiente. L’umiltà che fa accettare la guida del sacro Magistero, che impedisce di fare assegnamento alle sole forze umane in una impresa che riguarda il Mistero di Dio e della sua Rivelazione, che suggerisce il rispetto degli altri non soltanto nel campo della scienza, ma anche nel ministero pastorale, rivolto ai sapienti come agli ignoranti. Tutti hanno bisogno di essere illuminati, ma hanno anche il diritto che ciò avvenga senza inopportuni turbamenti e in modo che la buona dottrina ‘illumini le menti, corroboli le volontà, accenda i cuori degli uomini all’amore di Dio’* [*Dei Verbum*, 23])” (*ibid.*, 495-496).

In the last and longest of his major allocutions on Sacred Scripture, Paul VI once again emphasized the danger of rationalism and doctrinal deviation in modern exegesis. Addressing the Pontifical Biblical Commission on 14 March 1974, he invoked the warning of M. J. Lagrange, probably the most celebrated Catholic exegete of the era of *Providentissimus Deus* and *Spiritus Paraclitus*, in order to explain the grave responsibilities of the Church's biblical scholars. Père Lagrange, said the Pope, had diagnosed the errors of liberal exegesis as springing from several root causes: "doctrinal opportunism," which led many to "bend the texts according to the fashion of the day"; one-sided research; and "a narrowly rationalist method" which deliberately refused to accept the supernatural:

In order to illustrate this responsibility, and to warn you of the false and deviant paths into which exegesis often runs the risk of being sidetracked, We shall make use of the words of a great master of exegesis, a man outstanding for his critical wisdom, his faith, and his loyalty to the Church: we are referring to Père Lagrange. In 1918 (after having outlined the negative balance-sheet of the various schools of liberal exegesis), he denounced the roots of their failure and weakness in the following causes: doctrinal opportunism, research of a one-sided character, and a narrowly rationalist method. "From the end of the 18th century," he wrote, "Christianity placed itself in the tow of reason; one had to bend the texts according to the fashion of the day. This kind of opportunism inspired the commentaries of the rationalists."³⁷

Pope Paul went on to endorse Lagrange's insistence that such rationalism is itself irrational and unscientific, because of its one-sidedness and because it rules out *a priori* the possibility of a supernatural dimension:

And he [Lagrange] continues: "All we ask of this independent exegesis is that it be purely scientific. And it will by no means be scientific unless it corrects another fault which is common to all the schools we have enumerated. They have all been *einseitig* – looking at only one side." Père Lagrange challenged another characteristic of these critics: the self-imposed blinkers by which they refused to see the supernatural.³⁸

2b. The Reorganization of the Pontifical Biblical Commission

In the final paragraph of his address to the Biblical Commission Paul VI made explicit reference to the most important administrative document of his pontificate touching on biblical matters: the Motu Proprio *Sedula cura* of 24 June 1971, which placed the Pontifical Biblical Commission under the direct authority of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Even though this document began by reaffirming the Church's commitment to encourage modern biblical research,³⁹ it also expressed serious concern about dangers to the faith in this field, as we shall see shortly. The Pope now took advantage of his address to the Commission's plenary session in order to allude to this concern, informing the assembled scholars that in placing the Biblical Commission (along with the International Theological Commission) directly under the authority of the former Holy Office, he had had in mind the advantages of interdisciplinary contact, including the essential link between Catholic exegesis and the Church's Tradition:

Dear sons and venerable Brothers, what We have said about the contemporary tasks of exegesis in the life of the Church, and its opening to other theological disciplines, as well as the necessity, by way of reciprocation, of reading the Bible within the Tradition of the Church – this explains the decision We have taken in our Motu Proprio *Sedula Cura*, to attach the Biblical Commission from now on to the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, to which the International Theological Commission has also been attached – although in a different way.⁴⁰

³⁷ "Pour illustrer cette responsabilité et pour vous défendre des fausses pistes dans lesquelles l'exégèse risque souvent de se fourvoyer, Nous allons emprunter les paroles d'un grand maître de l'exégèse, d'un homme dans lequel ont brillé de façon exceptionnelle la sagacité critique, la foi et l'attachement à l'Église: Nous voulons dire le Père Lagrange. En 1918 (après avoir tracé le bilan négatif des diverses écoles de l'exégèse libérale), il dénonçait les racines de leur échec et de leur faillite dans ces causes: opportunisme doctrinal, caractère unilatéral de la recherche et étroitesse rationaliste de la méthode. 'Dès la fin du XVIIIème siècle, écrivait-il, le christianisme se mettait à la remorque de la raison; il fallut plier les textes à la mode du jour. Cet opportunisme inspira les commentaires des rationalistes'" (AAS 66 [1974] 237).

³⁸ "Et il continue: 'Tout ce que nous demandons de cette exégèse indépendante, c'est qu'elle soit purement scientifique. Elle ne le sera tout à fait qu'en se corrigeant d'un autre défaut commun à toutes les écoles que nous avons énumérées. Toutes ont été *einseitig*, ne regardant que d'un seul côté'. Le Père Lagrange mettait en cause un autre caractère des critiques: le dessein arrêté de ne pas accepter le surnaturel" (*ibid.*, 237-238). Here, and in the passage cited in note 37, the Pope is quoting Lagrange's book, *Le sens du Christianisme d'après l'exégèse allemande* (Paris: Gabalda, 1918, 323, 324, and 328).

³⁹ cf. *Living Tradition*, no. 156, January 2012, section 2a, citation over n. 50.

⁴⁰ "Chers fils et vénérés Frères, ce que Nous vous avons dit sur les tâches modernes de l'exégèse dans la vie de l'Église et sur son ouverture aux

The Pope's words suggest that some biblical scholars may have had difficulty in understanding or appreciating the new disposition brought into effect by *Sedula cura*, since they bear a certain apologetic note. After all, the reorganization meant in practice that the Biblical Commission, no longer being independent of the Holy Office, as it was before the Council, could not now issue decisions which, enjoying the status of magisterial documents, would have a binding disciplinary force over the work of exegetes. So Pope Paul insisted to the assembled members of the Commission that the Motu Proprio did not imply any "levelling which would offend against the specialized character of your research,"⁴¹ and assured them that the reorganization was intended to promote a healthy interdisciplinary collaboration between exegetes and other theologians. Nevertheless he took the opportunity to remind the Commission that their work as experts must be seen as a "service" to the Magisterium:

It is a question rather of maintaining the essential role assigned to your Commission by our predecessor Leo XIII, while at the same time fostering within the organisms of the Holy See a healthy collaboration – We would gladly call it a certain "interdisciplinary" environment – between specialists in exegesis and those in other theological disciplines, in the common service of our Magisterium.⁴²

Indeed, the 1971 Motu Proprio itself made clear the Pope's worries in regard to biblical studies; and its publication must certainly be seen in the context of the sober warnings contained in the Pope's most recent Apostolic Exhortation, *Quinque iam anni*, issued only six months previously. Now, with *Sedula cura*, he was taking a practical step which would help the Church to deal with this problem. He affirmed:

But since the advancing scholarship of our times is constantly raising new issues which are not easily dealt with, the task entrusted to those who specialize in the Sacred Writings is proving to be a very difficult one. These biblical specialists, while they must indeed pursue their studies in accordance with the methods and criteria of modern scientific investigation, nevertheless realize that God has entrusted the Sacred Scriptures to His Church, and not to the private judgment of scholars. It will always be necessary, therefore, to interpret the Bible according to the norms of Christian tradition and hermeneutics, under the safe vigilance of the Church's Magisterium.⁴³

The Pope goes on to state openly that these are the considerations which have motivated him to revise the laws of the Pontifical Biblical Commission. As the fruits of this change, he hopes to see not only a closer collaboration between exegetes, theologians, and the Holy See, but also more sound biblical doctrine and a more effective vigilance against dangerous exegetical opinions:

Therefore, in the interests of promoting more effectively the advance of sound doctrine in scriptural matters, of keeping biblical interpretation free from rash opinions of any sort, and of coordinating more effectively the collaboration of exegetes and theologians with the Holy See, We have judged it opportune to give special care and consideration to the Pontifical Biblical Commission. . . . And so that from now on the Church may continually receive more fruitful results [from such scholarship], it seems to Us eminently opportune and worthwhile to establish new and more suitable laws for this Pontifical Commission.⁴⁴

autres disciplines théologiques, et réciproquement de la nécessité de lire la Bible dans la Tradition de l'Église, explique la décision que Nous avons prise, dans notre Motu Proprio Sedula cura, de rattacher désormais la Commission Biblique à la Sacree Congrégation pour la Doctrine de la Foi, à laquelle aussi se rattache, bien que d'une autre manière, la Commission Théologique Internationale" (AAS 66 [1974] 240).

⁴¹ ". . . un nivellement qui porterait atteinte au caractère spécialisé de vos recherches" (*ibid.*, 241).

⁴² "Il s'agit plutôt de maintenir la tâche essentielle assignée à votre Commission par notre Prédécesseur Léon XIII, toute en favorisant, à l'intérieur des organismes du Saint-Siège, une saine collaboration – Nous dirions volontiers une certaine 'interdisciplinarité' – entre les spécialistes de l'exégèse et ceux des autres disciplines théologiques, dans un service commun de notre Magistère" (*ibid.*).

⁴³ "At cum horum temporum eruditio progrediens quaestiones in hisce disciplinis proponat cotidie novas easque explicandum non faciles, inde fit ut perarduum evadat munus iis concreditum, qui Sacris Litteris sint dediti; qui quidem, etsi opus habent haec studia excolere ratione ac via, quae cum recentioribus scientificis pervestigationibus congruant, norunt tamen Deum non privato doctorum iudicio, sed Ecclesiae suae Sacras commisisse Scripturas, quae proinde ad normam christianae traditionis et hermeneuticae semper interpretandum erunt, sub tutela et custodia Magisterii ecclesiastici" (AAS 63 [1971] 665-666).

⁴⁴ "Consilio igitur permoti efficaciore ratione sanæ doctrinae progressum in re biblica iuvandi et Scripturarum interpretationem a quavis opinionum temeritate servandi integram, necnon exegetarum et theologorum collaborationem cum Sancta Sede et ad invicem aptius coordinandi; opportunum duximus curas cogitationesque Nostras peculiari modo conferre in Pontificium Commissionem Biblicam . . . Quo vero maiores usque fructus exinde Ecclesia capere possit, nihil aptius ac validius videtur esse Nobis, quam Pontificiam hanc Commissionem novis aptioribus legibus ordinare" (*ibid.*, 666).

3. The Danger of Unorthodoxy in Exegesis: Other Interventions

If we turn to those more general papal interventions addressed to audiences consisting of non-specialists in biblical exegesis, we find repeated warnings about the necessity of obedience to the Magisterium in biblical studies. We have seen that even in the earlier days of Paul VI's pontificate, when he more frequently stressed positive developments in the life of the Church, he showed his awareness of dangers in this area. Again and again in Wednesday audiences – from immediately after the Council until the last twelve months of his life – Pope Paul emphasized the correct norm of biblical interpretation for Catholics, warning against tendencies which neglect the Church's magisterium and fall into a Protestant, *sola Scriptura* approach or a false pluralism.⁴⁵ In other Wednesday allocutions he was more specific, mentioning again “demythologization” (*demitizzazione*) as one of the modern errors “which, like a tremendous wave, are submerging the faith in so many people of our time”⁴⁶ and denouncing the “hermeneutical vivisections” (*vivisezioni ermeneutiche*) by which some exegetes maltreated biblical texts.⁴⁷

Shortly after the publication of the “Dutch Catechism,” and his own subsequent proclamation of the “Year of Faith,” Paul VI expressed his deep concern to the Italian Episcopal Conference on 7 April 1967, lamenting the fact that some – “even among those who know and study the Word of God” – were accepting and promoting “subversive” ideas harmful to the faith, and indeed, displaying an inexplicable “spirit of giddiness” in their speculations.⁴⁸

In the following year, as the Pope approached the end of his pontificate, his final words directed specifically to Scripture scholars were a warning against human respect, as well as the dangers of false ideologies and “hermeneutical distortions” in the interpretation of the Gospels. These words from his allocution of 22 September 1976, so representative of what Paul VI said in so many other documents and discourses, can well serve as a conclusion to our survey of his interventions on the imperative need for orthodoxy in biblical studies. After encouraging the exegetes gathered for this *Settimana Biblica*, he added:

Now, We wish to say to you scholars and specialists in Sacred Scripture that your contribution in this field is more important than ever. Yours is the task of announcing and explaining the words of the sacred texts with lucidity and rigor, under the guidance of the Church's Magisterium. You must keep the evangelical word far removed from hermeneutical distortions and from strange and deviant ideological manipulations, so that the message of Jesus maybe presented to mankind in all its purity and fruitfulness. Be faithful servants of the Word of God that is entrusted to you, administering it “not so as to please men, but to please God, who scrutinizes our hearts” (*I Thess. 2: 4*).⁴⁹

4. Conclusion to Part I

It will be useful at this point to summarize what we have seen in this first part of our study (“Pope Paul's General Approach to Scripture”).

After our introductory essay,⁵⁰ we began to build up in *Living Tradition*, nos. 154 and 155, an overview of Paul VI's basic approach to the role of Sacred Scripture in today's Church, in the light of Vatican Council II's directives. With

⁴⁵ Cf. the following allocutions: 12 January 1966 (*Ins.* 1966, 699-700); 11 January 1967 (*Ins.* 1967, 674); 5 July 1967 (*ibid.*, 821-822); 14 May 1969 (*Ins.* 1969, 957); 15 April 1970 (*Ins.* 1970, 315); 28 August 1974 (*Ins.* 1974, 766); 28 January 1976 (*Ins.* 1976, 63-64); and 10 August 1977 (*Ins.* 1977, 758).

⁴⁶ “. . . che come una tremenda ondata sommergono la fede in tanti uomini del nostro tempo” 12 June 1968 (*Ins.* 1968, 817).

⁴⁷ 28 August 1974 (*Ins.* 1974, 767).

⁴⁸ “Qualche cosa di molto strano e doloroso sta avvenendo, non soltanto nella mentalità profana, areligiosa e anti-religiosa, ma altresì nel campo cristiano, non escluso quello cattolico, e sovente, quasi per inesplicabile ‘spirito di vertigine’ (Is. 19,14), anche fra coloro che conoscono e studiano la Parola di Dio: . . . si altera il senso della fede unica e genuina; si ammettono le aggressioni più radicali a verità sacrosante della nostra dottrina, sempre credute e professate dal popolo cristiano; . . . si prescinde dall'autorità insostituibile e provvidenziale del magistero. . . . Certe persone e pubblicazioni, che avrebbero la missione d'insegnare e di difendere la fede, non mancano purtroppo anche da noi in Italia di far eco a quelle voci sovvertrici. . . . Tocca a noi Vescovi per primi, maestri e testimoni della fede quali siamo, di prendere posizione: con l'affermazione positiva della Parola di Dio e dell'insegnamento della Chiesa che ne deriva; e dove ciò non bastasse, con la calma e sincera denuncia degli errori, circolanti talvolta come un'epidemia” (AAS 59 [1967] 408-409). Also, in a letter of 13 September 1975 to the Rector of Louvain University, the Pope stressed again the Church's role as “the authentic interpreter of this Word of God” at a time of “deviations which leave the Church deeply troubled (. . . l'authentique interprète de cette Parole de Dieu . . . déviations qui laissent l'Église profondément troublée)” (*Ins.* 1975, 917).

⁴⁹ “Ebbene a voi studiosi ed esperti di Sacra Scrittura diciamo che il vostro contributo in questo campo è quanto mai importante: avete il compito di enunciare e spiegare con lucidità e rigore, sotto la guida del Magistero ecclesiastico, la parola dei testi sacri, tenendo lontano il verbo evangelico da storture ermeneutiche e da plessi ideologici estranei e fuorvianti, affinché il messaggio di Gesù sia presentato agli uomini in tutta purezza e fecondità. Siate servitori fedeli della Parola di Dio che vi è affidata, amministrandola ‘non quasi hominibus placentes sed Deo qui probat corda nostra’ (I Thess. 2,4)” (*Ins.* 1976, 729-730).

⁵⁰ Cf. *Living Tradition*, no. 153.

the advantage of hindsight, and at a time when these developments have now been familiar to Catholics for nearly half a century, we might be tempted to think that the concrete steps and general policies we surveyed in those two issues of this publication were more or less inevitable and were really nothing more than footnotes, as it were, to what the Council itself called for. But this would be a mistake. Given the fullness of authority which pertains to the Roman Pontiff, the way in which even an ecumenical council is implemented after its completion depends to an enormous extent on the Pope's personal decisions. It must be remembered that even the relatively minor interventions of Paul VI that we have noted in these two essays – that is, his allocutions to various groups visiting Rome – were usually addressed to national and international leaders in their respective fields. Thus, his constant encouragement of their various pastoral and scholarly labors, and his reminders of the Council's directives regarding the role of Sacred Scripture, expressed the highest possible Church approval of such initiatives to those who in turn were best situated to give them concrete expression at local and more popular levels throughout the universal Church, and in relations with other Christians as well as Jews.

In his far-reaching pastoral program, Paul VI's initiatives to implement the Council's call for a greater and more fruitful use of Scripture throughout the Church were, as we have seen, both vigorous and enthusiastic. The most historically significant of these initiatives – and the one with most influence at the level of ordinary Catholics' experience – was certainly the introduction of a much more extensive selection and use of Scripture readings into the eucharistic liturgy of the Roman rite, thereby giving hundreds of millions of worshippers direct weekly (and for some, daily) exposure to a far greater variety of biblical readings than had ever been presented to Catholics in the entire history of the Church.

After that, Pope Paul's program for the more fruitful use of Scripture in the Church consisted in bringing similar changes into the Liturgy of the Hours; in ordering the revision of the Vulgate Bible in accordance with recent scholarship; in urging a truly effective use of the Bible in catechesis, preaching and personal formation for all clergy, religious and laity; in fostering inter-church biblical studies and common translations in the interests of Christian unity; and in highlighting the central role of Scripture in the renewal of theological studies – especially moral theology.

All of this bespeaks a notable pastoral zeal on the part of Paul VI toward everything which could make the Word of God more fruitful in the lives of Christians, both personally and in their communal life in the Church. Nevertheless, it remains true that this Pope, exercising his role as the Church's supreme teacher, actually said far more about the more academic side of the modern biblical movement than about the practical question of making Scripture more present in the life of the Church. These abundant and authoritative contributions of Pope Paul to modern biblical interpretation – in the form of explicit teaching, decisions, interventions, and biblical citations – are to constitute the main material of our overall study of the direction he gave to the Church in this field.

In *Living Tradition*, nos. 156, 157 and 158 we have commenced our analysis of these more strictly 'magisterial' interventions by starting out with those that were more general or comprehensive in character. Pope Paul VI's attitude to biblical questions can in fact be seen as consistent with – and indeed as an aspect of – his overall doctrinal and pastoral guidance of the Church in the years during and after Vatican Council II. By disposition and training, Giovanni Battista Montini, who as a young priest had been deeply impressed by Jacques Maritain's profoundly influential work, *Integral Humanism*,⁵¹ was deeply convinced of the need for the Council and its pastoral aims, and became a strong supporter of many of the orientations which came to the surface before and during Vatican II.

These dispositions included a burning desire for dialogue with all men of good will, especially separated Christians; an openness to the positive elements in modern secular thought in its scientific, cultural and political aspects; and above all, the confident hope that this path of fraternal conversation and persuasiveness, rather than confrontation and a heavy dependence on defensive discipline, would be the most effective means of renewing the Church from within, and of making her an effective and credible sign of Christ in an increasingly secularized world which stood in desperate need of evangelization and grace.

Nevertheless, these marked dispositions of sympathy and confidence towards modern man and his world were only one aspect of a rather complex personality. They were rooted in a deep and unshakeable Catholic faith which, as if instinctively, was repelled by any suggestion of compromise with the revealed deposit of faith or the permanently valid norms of Christian morality. Once he had been raised to the Chair of Peter, this insistence on the perennial truths became more publicly prominent, particularly in view of the widespread and radical challenge to traditional faith and morals which increased and circulated very rapidly after the Council, thereby doing much to leave the Pontiff's hopes largely

⁵¹ Cf. P. Chenu, *Paul VI et Maritain* (Rome: Studium, 1994); G.B. Fappani-Molinari, *G.B. Montini giovane: 1897-1944* (Casale: Marietti, 1979); G. Galeazzi, "Papa Montini e Jacques Maritain: un rapporto di cultura e amicizia," *Notes et Documents* (Rome: Istituto Maritain, no. 12, 1978, 10-17); *Id.*, "Paolo VI e Maritain," *Notes et Documents* (Rome: Istituto Maritain, no. 9, 1977, 15-19).

unfulfilled, and to vitiate very seriously the authentic renewal which he was striving to encourage and implement in the Church.

The result of these differing aspects of Paul VI's basic outlook and disposition was a style of ecclesial leadership which, while it can be seen as consistent in its own way, often seemed paradoxical – especially to the Pope's critics at opposite extremes, ranging from those led by Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre on one side to the exponents of the "Dutch Catechism" and dissenters from *Humanae Vitae* on the other. On the one hand, Pope Paul never lost his positive and benign empathy toward modern culture and the challenge of new ideas, and always retained a reluctance to use anything savoring of repressive discipline. As he made clear in his first encyclical, *Ecclesiam Suam*, as well as in various allocutions and in his customary style of governance, dialogue was his preferred mode of dealing with the great challenges and problems facing the contemporary Church. On the other hand, his awareness that the very foundations of the faith were being shaken by alien ideological trends in a dangerously wide sector of the Church's intellectual leadership led him to denounce – at times with great vehemence – these various contemporary errors.

The Pope's approach to Scripture, as we have said, formed part of this overall vision. From the beginning, his openness toward new trends in biblical scholarship was balanced by his conviction that the Church had always possessed a substantially correct understanding of the Bible, and that therefore any radical reinterpretations were *ipso facto* to be rejected as false.

It is noteworthy, for instance, that in the very letter of November 1962⁵² wherein Cardinal Montini implied some sympathy with those criticisms of the initial conciliar schema on Revelation which were soon to result in its being discarded by the assembled Fathers, the then Archbishop of Milan also mentioned the importance of several "anti-modernist" magisterial documents which few of the other critics seemed anxious to recall. He reported sympathetically to his northern Italian flock the questions being raised at the Council as these difficult and delicate scriptural matters were being opened for new debate: were not the encyclicals *Pascendi* and *Humani Generis* sufficient, not to mention the ensemble of encyclicals on biblical studies going back to that of Leo XIII?⁵³ Even while speaking of "the progress of biblical studies," and voicing his doubts about the opportuneness of precise condemnations and definitions on such matters in an avowedly pastoral council, Montini recognized "the formidable dangers raised by certain new methods of scriptural interpretation and the very grave errors which can lie hidden in their roots."⁵⁴

This letter to Milanese Catholics, written only seven months before Cardinal Montini's election to the Church's supreme office, contains already the essential elements of a scriptural 'policy' which was developed and applied in the fifteen years of his pontificate. On the one hand he displayed a greater openness to new and ecumenical currents in biblical scholarship than any previous pope had shown (an openness made very concrete by his restoration of two suspended exegetes to their teaching positions in the Church's leading centre of biblical scholarship), and a deep love for the Scriptures which inspired his various projects – notably the liturgical reform – for implementing the Council's pastoral program laid down in Chapter VI of *Dei Verbum*. On the other hand he also showed an increasing awareness of dangerous rationalistic errors appearing in critical exegesis and hermeneutics. As we have seen in this article, Pope Paul felt it his duty not only to deplore these heterodox trends in numerous allocutions and written interventions, but also to resist them administratively by eliminating the magisterial status of the Pontifical Biblical Commission – which during the 1960s appeared to become uncertain and internally divided over these problematic historical-critical issues – and making it a merely advisory body under the direct supervision of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

⁵² Cf. *Living Tradition*, no. 156, January 2012, section 1(b), passage cited in note 16.

⁵³ *DeS* 194.

⁵⁴ “. . . i formidabili pericoli che sollevano certi nuovi metodi di interpretazione scritturale e gli errori gravissimi che possono nascondersi nelle loro radici” (*ibid.*).