

VERBUM IN ECCLESIA

The Relationship Between the Bible, the Word of God and the Church

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ABSTRACT

Artikel ini membahas hubungan antara Kitab Suci, Sabda Allah dan Gereja menurut Surat Pastoral Paus Benediktus XVI, *Verbum Domini* (30 September 2010), khususnya bagian kedua yang berjudul *Verbum in Ecclesia*. Argumentasi dasarnya ialah bahwa Gereja merupakan kesatuan dari mereka yang hidup atas dasar Sabda Tuhan. Karena itu Gereja yang telah menerima dan membangun hidupnya atas dasar Sabda Tuhan wajib menghidupi danewartakan Sabda Tuhan kepada semua umat manusia, bukan hanya dalam liturgi altar tetapi juga dalam liturgi kehidupan sehari-hari.

KATA-KATA KUNCI:

The Word of God, the Bible, the Church

Introduction

On September 30th, 2010, Pope Benedict XVI promulgated an Apostolic Exhortation named *Verbum Domini*.¹ The second part of the exhortation is titled *Verbum in Ecclesia*. In this document, Benedict XVI speaks of the relationship between the Bible, the Word of God and the Church. As the title implies, *Verbum in Ecclesia* focuses on the role of the Word of God in the life of the Church [VD 50]. The Church is the

¹Benedictus XVI, *Apostolic Exhortation Verbum Domini*, 30 September 2010, (Makati: Word and Life Publication, 2011). [Henceforth, all references to this work are abbreviated VD and added at the end of the text]

communion of those who live by the “Word of God.” The Church receives, maintains and proclaims the word of God [VD 51]. The Church is formed by the Word. Therefore, the Church must base its life on the Word of God.

1. The Liturgy: Privileged Setting for the Word of God

If the Church is “the home of the word,” then the liturgy is the core action of the Word because the sacred Scripture plays an important role in the liturgical celebration [VD 52]. The liturgical celebration is meaningful because of the word of God. In the assembly of the faithful, when they gather together in the name of the Lord (liturgy), God himself is present and speaks to his people when the sacred scripture is read and explained [SC 7].² In the liturgy, the Church responds to the Word of God by praying and offering their petitions to God for their salvation. Therefore, liturgy becomes the source and the summit of the activity of the Church. In it the salvation of the people of God is done [SC 5].

Among the liturgical celebrations, the celebrations of the sacraments are very important ones. In the sacramental celebration, Christ himself is present and performing the salvation for the faithful.³ And in that celebration, the Word of God becomes the decisive element of the celebration [VD 53]. The Word of God becomes the *performative*

²Vatican II, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy Sacrosanctum Concilium* (4 December 1963), no. 24. [Henceforth, all references to this work are abbreviated SC and added at the end of the text.] Cfr. Raniero Cantalamessa, *The Mystery of God’s Word*, trans. Alan Neame (Makati City: St. Pauls, 2006), 63. See also Kenan Osborne, *Sacramental Guide Line: A Companion to the New Catechism for Religious Educators* (New York: Paulist Press, 1995), 41.

³Kenan Osborne, *Sacramental Theology: A General Introduction* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 65.

character of the sacramental celebration because the word of God explains what God does through the sacramental action.

This relationship between the word of God and the sacramental celebration becomes more unbreakable in the Eucharist as the most important sacrament because in it Christ himself is present intensively.⁴ Therefore, the Eucharist becomes the nucleus and the other sacraments gravitate and are ordered to it. Benedict XVI says, “Word and Eucharist are so deeply bound together that we cannot understand one without the other: the word of God sacramentally takes flesh in the event of the Eucharist. The Eucharist opens us to an understanding of Scripture, just as Scripture for its part illumines and explains the mystery of the Eucharist.” [VD 55] In short, the word explains the action and the action proves the word.

2. The Reader and the Preacher

The second Vatican Council strongly stated that Christ is present in his word, since he himself speaks when the Holy Scripture is read in the Liturgical celebration [SC 7]. Consequently, in order to make the word of God clear when the scripture is read, the reader of the bible in the liturgical celebration must read it clearly so that all the people of God can understand the word of God which is being read. He or she must realize that he or she is reading the word of God. Therefore, “all those entrusted with this office should be truly and carefully trained.” [VD 58]

The homily, as an integral part of the liturgy of the word, plays the important role in proclaiming the word of God. “The homily is a means of

⁴Philippe Baguerie and Claude Ducesneau, *How to Understand the Sacraments* (London: SCM Press, 1989), 59.

bringing the scriptural message to life in a way that helps the faithful to realize that God's word is present and at work in their everyday lives. It should lead to an understanding of the mystery being celebrated, serve as summons to mission, and prepare the assembly for the profession of faith, the universal prayer and the Eucharistic liturgy. Consequently, those who have been charged with preaching by virtue of a specific ministry ought to take this task to heart." [VD 59]⁵ Therefore, the preacher must prepare the homily. The preacher should be the first one to hear the word of God which he proclaims [VD 59; cfr. DV 25].

3. The Word of God and the Life of the Church

In his letter to Timothy, Saint Paul says, "All Scripture is divinely inspired and has its use for teaching the truth and refuting error, for reformation of manners and discipline in right living, so that the man who belongs to God may be efficient and equipped for good work of every kind" (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Based on these words of Saint Paul, one can say that the bible is the light for the way of life of the believers. If so, then, the bible must be the foundation for the life of the believers. The sacred Scripture is the supreme rule of faith [DV 21]. It is the power of God to build the Church.

The longing of every Christian is to encounter with Jesus Christ, who calls us to follow him. If it is true, then, the holy bible becomes an effective means to enable the believer to encounter him when the bible is read. In *Dei Verbum*, the council fathers state, "We speak to God when we

⁵Cfr. Vatican II, *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation* ***Dei Verbum*** (18 November 1965), no. 25. [Henceforth, all references to this work are abbreviated DV and added at the end of the text.]

pray, we hear God when we read the bible.” [DV 25] Therefore, knowing the bible is an obligation to all believers, because as Saint Jerome stated: “Ignorance of the scripture is ignorance of Christ.” [DV 25]

4. Bible and Pastoral Activity

Since the sacred Scripture is the supreme rule of faith [DV 21], then all the activities of the Church must be based on the Bible. This is to say that the spirit of the word of God must penetrate the pastoral activity of the Church. In other words the spirit of the bible should inspire all pastoral work [VD 73].

One of the most important aspects of pastoral activities of the Church is Catechesis [VD 74]. Catechesis is a process of transmitting the gospel to the people. It is an effective way of evangelization. Since catechesis is a pastoral activity focusing on the explanation of the truth and the doctrine of Christian faith, then, the catechesis itself must be permeated by the spirit of the Bible. Catechetical work must approach the bible in faith and in the tradition of the Church. Catechesis is the expression of the living tradition of the Church. Therefore, those who devote themselves to this office, must be trained properly [VD 75].

5. The Word of God and Vocations

All members of the Church are called to be closer to, even to be united with Christ who calls each of us personally. “Life itself is a vocation from God.” [VD 77] Each member of the Church is called to holiness. The only way to be holy is to live in accordance to the word of God. Because of their special vocation, the clergy: bishops, priests and deacon, must have a close relationship with the word of God. They are the

ministers of the word of God [VD 80]. So, they must be, first of all, the hearers of the word of God. The best way to be the hearer of the word of God is reading and meditating on the word of God [VD 79]. By doing this one becomes familiar with the Word of God. In the same way it can be applied to candidate priests. They must learn to love the word of God through *lectio divina* [VD 82]. They can be helped by scriptural prayer.

Those who are called to the consecrated life should let themselves to be guided by the Word of God. Meditation on the scripture is the best way to maintain spiritual life which leads to sanctification. The lay faithful are also called to the holy life by doing good things inspired by the spirit of the word of God. Everyone is called to be united with God by doing what God has wanted each one of us to do. In order to arrive at this point, everyone must take the word of God as the light of life.

Conclusion

The Church is formed by the Word. The sacred Scripture is the supreme rule of faith, because it functions to teach the truth and refute errors, for reformation of manners and discipline towards right living. Therefore, the Church must base its life on the Word of God.

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