

DIALOGICAL REVELATION? ON THE RECEPTION OF *DEI VERBUM* 12 IN *VERBUM DOMINI*

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Introduction[♦]

The Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum* is generally seen as a climax¹ in the church's magisterium on the significance of the Word

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¹Cf. VD 2. In this study we use the abbreviation DV for *Dei Verbum* and VD for *Verbum Domini*. We cite the text of DV according to *Constitutio dogmatica De divina revelatione*, in *Sacrosanctum Oecumenicum Concilium Vaticanum II: Constitutiones, decreta, declarationes*, Rome: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1966, 1974, 421-456 and in English translation according to http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html. See also

of God in the life of the church. *Dei Verbum* 1 describes its own relationship to the previous statements of the church as follows: "... following in the footsteps of the Council of Trent and of the First Vatican Council, this present council wishes to set forth authentic doctrine on divine revelation and how it is handed on." In the almost 50 years since the Council there have been relatively few official documents on revelation, Scripture and Tradition. In fact the only texts of the Magisterium to be listed here are the document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church" of 1993² and the apostolic exhortation *Verbum Domini* of 2010.³ By comparison we see that in the area of Catholic social teachings since *Gaudium et Spes* no less than seven encyclicals appeared in the same time period. In this study, we will compare the understanding of revelation, Sacred Scripture and the interpretation of Scripture in *Dei Verbum* with "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church" and especially with *Verbum Domini*. In doing so our goal is to study aspects of the effective history and the reception of *Dei Verbum*. Our focus will be on the question how the understanding of revelation as dialogue evolved.

1. Theology of Revelation

In chapter 1 ("Revelation Itself," DV 2-6) the text of DV makes use of chapter 2 ("De revelatione") of the *Constitutio dogmatica "Dei Filius" de fide catholica* of Vatican I (DF).⁴ A careful comparison of these two

Walter M. Abbott, *The Documents of Vatican II. All Sixteen Official Texts Promulgated by the Ecumenical Council 1963-1965 Translated From Latin*, Chicago IL: Guild Press, 1966. The Latin citations of VD are from http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20100930_verbum-domini_it.pdf and the English translation is from http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20100930_verbum-domini_en.html.

²Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, in *Origins. CNS Documentary Service* 23 (1994) 499-524; original French text : *L'interprétation de la Bible dans l'Église*, in *Biblica* 74 (1993) 451-528.

³See VD 2: "In the last forty years, the Church's magisterium has also issued numerous statements on these questions." In footnote 8 this is illustrated with a list of official statements on this subject. A careful reading of this list reveals, however, that in the past 40 years there have been surprisingly few statements by the magisterium "on these questions."

⁴Reimund Bieringer, *Biblical Revelation and Exegetical Interpretation According to Dei Verbum 12*, in M. Lamberigts & L. Kenis, ed., *Vatican II and Its Legacy* (BETL, 166), Leuven - Dudley MA: University Press - Peeters, 2002, 25-59, 26-27.

texts reveals not only the continuity, but also significant differences.⁵ Here we shall give a description of the most important differences. For DF revelation as supernatural is opposed to natural reason. The understanding of revelation of DV sees natural human reason as part of a comprehensive perspective on revelation. The content of revelation is theocentric according to DF. God reveals “himself and the eternal decrees of his will.” In DV the content of revelation is strongly Christological (“through Christ”) and pneumatological (“in the Holy Spirit”); for access to God is made possible “through Christ, the incarnate Word” (DV 2). According to DF the goal of revelation is “participating in the divine goods.” In DV 2 the goal is formulated more in personal terms as making people sharers (*consortes*), as addressing them as friends (*amici*), as inviting “to communion (*societas*) with him” and as accepting into communion with him. This is implicitly announced in the introductory paragraph by the choice of 1 John 1:3 (NRSV): “and truly our fellowship (*societas*) is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.” The juridical tone of DF gives way to a more personal tone in DV. In DV revelation is not just the information about “eternal decrees of his will,” but an invitation to communion (or fellowship) with God. The more monological understanding of revelation in DF is reinterpreted in a dialogical way in DV. The model is no longer that of a lawgiver who promulgates laws, but rather the model of personal communication.

In the document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission “The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church” (IBC) of 1993 the theology of revelation is not the explicit focus. This is already reflected in the fact that despite the many references to DV, no single reference to DV 2 or 6 is found in this document. The IBC text uses the word “dialogue” frequently, but never in its revelation-theological meaning. However, in the apostolic exhortation *Verbum Domini* of 2010 revelation theology is discussed in detail in articles 6-16. We note that *Verbum Domini* interprets DV 2 from the very beginning by using the word “dialogue”. *Verbum Domini* 6 begins as follows: “The novelty of biblical revelation consists in the fact that God becomes known through the dialogue which he desires to have with us.” This is followed by a quotation of the key sentence of DV 2. In VD the leading Scriptural quotation which gives orientation to the theology of revelation is not the prologue of the First Letter of John as in DV (1

⁵See appendix.

Jn 1:2-3), but the prologue of the gospel itself (Jn 1:1, 14). This is foundational for the goal of the theology of revelation which is developed in VD. This goal consists of demonstrating that the invitation to dialogue has its foundation in the inner Trinitarian dialogue. We quote again from VD 6:

God makes himself known to us as a mystery of infinite love in which the Father eternally utters his Word in the Holy Spirit. Consequently the Word, who from the beginning is with God and is God, reveals God himself in the dialogue of love between the divine persons, and invites us to share in that love.

In the subsequent text VD 7-16 develops a theology of the word. First the Pope uses the expression "symphony of the Word" to explain that the expression "Word of God" is part of an analogous use of language.⁶

The text underlines that the "Word" is "the foundation of all reality" (VD 8). *Verbum Domini* 8 quotes one of the works of Bonaventure who says that "every creature is a word of God, since it proclaims God." The text also gives a quotation from DV 3: "God, who creates and conserves all things by his word (cf. Jn 1:3), provides constant evidence of himself in created realities." Hereby VD shows that it is in line with DV where revelation is presented as happening in and through creation as opposed to Vatican I where revelation was still restricted to Scripture and substantially different from creation which was seen as separate from revelation. In VD 9 creation is described as, "Creation is the setting in which the entire history of the love between God and his creation develops." In an extensive part which is entitled "Christology of the Word" (VD 11-13) the apostolic exhortation interprets the entire Christ event as word event.

Under the title "The eschatological dimension of the word of God" VD 14 emphasizes that Jesus is "the definitive Word of God." This is underlined with a quote from St. John of the Cross:

"Any person questioning God or desiring some vision or revelation would be guilty not only of foolish behaviour but also of offending him, by not fixing his eyes entirely on Christ and by living with the desire for some other novelty." Here the idea of "dialogue" as a

⁶See VD 7: "The Synod Fathers pointed out that human language operates analogically in speaking of the word of God."

model of revelations seems to have reached its limit. On the other hand VD 22 strongly emphasizes:

By this gift of his love God bridges every distance and truly makes us his “partners,” in order to bring about the nuptial mystery of the love between Christ and the Church. In this vision every man and woman appears as someone to whom the word speaks, challenges and calls to enter this dialogue of love through a free response.

In sum, we saw that VD is in line with DV and that it extrapolates some lines of the Dogmatic Constitution. The two-storey doctrine (“Zweistockwerklehre”) and the notion of “supernatural” revelation was still present in the text of Vatican I.⁷ The departure from this type of theology during the process of composition of DV is further consolidated in VD. The Trinitarian dimension of revelation is strengthened. The emphasis on revelation as a personal and not a juridical concept is intensified. In DV we found the foundation for a dialogical theology of revelation built on communication, friendship and community. In VD the word “dialogue” is central, even in the structure of the text. Nevertheless content wise the focus is above all on the interpretation of revelation as “Word of God” while it remains rather unclear what is meant by dialogue. Even though the historical, earthly, interpersonal dimension is not denied, in the approach to “revelation” in VD the emphasis is on the divine dimension, and this is up to a certain extent at the cost of the human dimension.

2. Revelation and Sacred Scripture

As we saw above, in DV and VD revelation is understood in a much broader sense than Scriptural revelation. Nor is Sacred Scripture linked directly with revelation, but only by way of the Tradition, and hereby at least implicitly by way of the events themselves which are transmitted in Tradition. Scripture is therefore seen as a part of the tradition of revelation (cf. DV 7). In DV 11 God is presented as the author of the books of the Old and New Testaments. At the same time, however, the text states that the human persons

⁷See *Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith Dei Filius*: “The same holy mother church *holds and teaches* that God, the source and end of all things, can be known with certainty from the consideration of created things, by the *natural* power of human reason : ever since the creation of the world, his invisible nature has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. It was, however, pleasing to his wisdom and goodness to reveal himself and the eternal laws of his will to the human race by another, and that a *supernatural*, way.” (Source: <http://www.piar.hu/councils/ecum20.htm#Chapter%20%20On%20revelation>).

who “while employed by Him... made use of their powers and abilities” (DV 11) are “true authors.” In DV 12 this leads to the formulation that “God speaks in Sacred Scripture through men (sic) in human fashion.” This is the reason why DV 21 states:

The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord... She has always maintained them, and continues to do so, together with sacred tradition, as the supreme rule of faith, since, as inspired by God and committed once and for all to writing, they impart the word of God Himself without change, and make the voice of the Holy Spirit resound in the words of the prophets and Apostles.⁸

Here it is important to remark that the Scriptures themselves are not the Word of God, but that they transmit the Word of God, they testify to the Word of God. The “divine Scriptures” (*divinae Scripturae*) are compared with “the body of the Lord” (DV 21) (cf. “flesh”). This seems to imply that the word of God that is expressed in the Scriptures are understood in analogy with the Word of God. Here the mediating character of Sacred Scripture is evident, but in this regard there also remains a certain ambiguity. For in DV 21 there is *de facto* only little difference between the Scriptures and the word of God. For instance, we read there that the divine Scriptures are venerated and are “the supreme rule of faith” (DV 21). But is this true of the Scriptures themselves or of the process of divine human communication which the Scriptures put in motion?

We encounter a similar ambiguity in the document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission “The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church.” We need to first note that this extensive document does not reflect anywhere on the relationship between revelation and Sacred Scripture, something which one would actually justifiably have expected in a document on questions of method and hermeneutics. As a result, the unreflected presuppositions come to the fore in various places in various ways. In the general conclusion at the end of the document its authors take for granted that the “Bible, in effect, does not present itself as a direct revelation of timeless truths but as the written testimony to a series of interventions in which God reveals himself in human history. In a way that differs from tenets of

⁸See also DV 13: “For the words of God, expressed in human language, have been made like human discourse, just as the word of the eternal Father, when He took to Himself the flesh of human weakness, was in every way made like men [sic].”

other religions, the message of the Bible is solidly grounded in history.”⁹ Earlier in the document, however, there are some formulations which presuppose a closer link between Sacred Scripture or the Bible and the Word of God or revelation. Towards the end of the third chapter we read: “Inasmuch as it is the word of God set in writing, the Bible has a richness of meaning that no one systematic theology can ever completely capture or confine.” In the introduction to chapter IV, the Bible and the Word of God are rather closely identified: “The church, indeed, does not regard the Bible simply as a collection of historical documents dealing with its own origins; it receives the Bible as word of God, addressed both to itself and to the entire world at the present time.”

The most recent document VD does not provide an extended explicit systematic treatment of the relationship between revelation and Sacred Scripture either. However, the exhortation does contain some important statements about this relationship. Here also there is a text which presupposes the quasi-identity of the Word of God and Sacred Scripture.

“Finally, the word of God, attested and divinely inspired, is sacred Scripture, the Old and New Testaments” (VD 7). A number of texts, however, do express very clearly the mediating function of Sacred Scripture for revelation. At the end of VD 17 the relationship between revelation and Sacred Scripture is described explicitly and in a rather nuanced way: “Although the word of God precedes and exceeds sacred Scripture, nonetheless Scripture, as inspired by God, contains the divine word (cf. 2 Tim 3:16) ‘in an altogether singular way.’”¹⁰ According to this quotation, it is clear that the Word of God and Sacred Scripture are not identical, but that they are closely related. The text of VD 17 reflects their relationship in terms of the “container model.” This is significant, even if one understands the word “content” metaphorically. The divine word is the “content” of Sacred Scripture. At the end of VD 18 the same metaphor is used again, but now accompanied by the metaphor of witness: “Indeed, the word of God is given to us in sacred Scripture as an inspired testimony to

⁹Interpretation of the Bible in the Church. See also in the preceding paragraph: “Anyone who desires to understand the word of God should humbly seek it out there where it has made itself visible and accept to this end the necessary help of human knowledge.”

¹⁰“Licet Dei Verbum sacram Scripturam praecedat et excedat, tamen, quippe quae a Deo inspirata sit, ipsa divinum Verbum (cfr 2 Tim 3,16) ‘ratione specialissima’ continet.”

revelation; together with the Church's living Tradition, it constitutes the supreme rule of faith." This is even more clearly expressed in VD 29 where the text emphasizes that it is necessary that "exegetes, theologians and the whole people of God... approach it [Sacred Scripture] as what it really is, the word of God conveyed to us through human words" (cf. 1 Th 2:13). In one and the same sentence, this text identifies the word of God with Sacred Scripture ("what it really is"), but then distinguishes them again by pointing out that the word of God comes to us "through human words."¹¹

Thus we have noted that neither in *Dei Verbum* nor in the two official documents which belong to its reception there is an explicit and extended reflection on the relationship between revelation or the word of God and Sacred Scripture. In addition to the more traditional position which identifies the two, in these three documents we also come across the position which consider Sacred Scripture to be a mediation, e.g., a witness of revelation. A more precise analysis of VD brings to light, however, that in the statement "Sacred Scripture is word of God in human words" the dimension of "word of God" is emphasized more and to a certain extent at the cost of the dimension of the "human words." In the reception of DV in the years immediately after Vatican II the dimension "human words" had received more attention. It seems that the difference of emphasis is a consequence of the historical situation. In 1965 the starting point was a centuries-old tradition which had neglected the human and more specifically historical dimension of Sacred Scripture. In 2010 the starting point was quite different, namely a situation in which, in the opinion of Joseph Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI, people ran the risk of losing sight of the revelatory dimension.¹² This needs to be studied in greater detail in the future.

3. The Interpretation (Hermeneutics) of Sacred Scripture

Dei Verbum devotes an entire chapter (namely chapter 3, nos. 11-13) to "Sacred Scripture, its Inspiration and Divine Interpretation" (*De*

¹¹See below, pages 46-47.

¹²See Joseph Ratzinger, *Biblical Interpretation in Crisis: On the Question of the Foundations and Approaches of Exegesis Today*, in Richard J. Neuhaus, ed., *Biblical Interpretation in Crisis. The Ratzinger Conference on Bible and Church* (Encounter Series), Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1989, 1-23 and Joseph Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, trans. by Adrian J. Walker, New York: Doubleday, 2007.

Sacrae Scripturae divina inspiratione et de eius interpretatione). In preparing this chapter in DV 10, the text already states that the “living Magisterium of the Church (*vivum Ecclesiae Magisterium*) can interpret the word of God authentically. “But the task of authentically interpreting the word of God, whether written or handed on, has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office of the Church whose authority is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ. This teaching office is not above the word of God, but serves it, teaching only what has been handed on, listening to it devoutly, guarding it scrupulously and explaining it faithfully in accord with a divine commission and with the help of the Holy Spirit, it draws from this one deposit of faith everything which it presents for belief as divinely revealed” (DV 10). Based on this statement one would actually have to assume that DV 12 is referring to the magisterium when it speaks of *interpres Sacrae Scripturae*. Towards the end of this article (12,7) the text clarifies that already in DV 12,1 exegetes are referred to: “It is the task of exegetes to work according to these rules toward a better understanding and explanation of the meaning of Sacred Scripture, so that through preparatory study the judgment of the Church may mature.”¹³ The text which follows is about the relationship between the exegetes and the magisterium: “For all of what has been said about the way of interpreting Scripture is subject finally to the judgment of the Church, which carries out the divine commission and ministry of guarding and interpreting the word of God” (12,8). We note, however, that in DV 12,7-8 the text does not speak about the “living magisterium of the Church” (*vivum Ecclesiae Magisterium*) as in DV 10, but simply about the Church (*Ecclesia*).

In DV 12, 1-6 the dogmatic constitution describes the double task of the exegetes, first the historical-critical task (12,1-5) and then the biblical-theological task (12,6).¹⁴ In 12,1-5 the intention of the author is central and is expressed in three slightly different ways:

12,1d quid **hagiographi** ... *significare* **intenderint** (vgl. 12,2a ad **hagiographorum intentionem**)

12,4 sensum ... quem ... **hagiographus** ... *exprimere* **intenderit** et *expresserit*

12,5a id quod **sacer auctor** scripto *asserere* **voluerit**

¹³Vgl. VD 17 “The living Tradition is essential for enabling the Church to grow through time in the understanding of the truth revealed in the Scriptures.”

¹⁴Bieringer, *Biblical Revelation*, 28-30.

To refer to the human author the text uses *hagiographus* thrice and once *sacer auctor*. The two expressions are obviously intended to be synonymous. According to DV 12,2-5 access to the intention of the authors is possible via the literary genre: “the customary and characteristic styles of feeling, speaking and narrating” and “the patterns men (sic) normally employed at that period in their everyday dealings with one another.” This illustrates that the Council is referring to the method of form criticism which was prevalent in the 1950s. Faithful to the historical-critical method the emphasis is here on the time of the authors (*sui temporis et suae culturae, illo tempore, illo aevo*).

The second task of the exegetes is expressed in DV 12,6 in a sentence with a parallel structure, but admittedly in a less detailed way. This second task is not focused on the author, but on the meaning of the text (*sacrorum textuum sensus*). The conviction that the meaning of the text is not always identical with intention of the author had already been presupposed when the distinction was introduced between what the author “intended to express and actually expressed” (12,4b). While the key for access to the intention of the author was seen in the literary genre, the key for a proper understanding of the meaning of the text can be found in “the content and unity of the whole of Scripture.” The text continues by adding in a rather vague connection that one would also need to take into account (*ratione habita*) “living tradition of the whole Church” and the *analogia fidei*” (12,6d). The latter two are without doubt not on the same level as “the content and unity of the whole of Scripture.”¹⁵ In the last part of DV 12, the task of the exegetes is presented as “to work according to these rules toward a better understanding and explanation of the meaning of Sacred Scripture, so that through preparatory study the judgment of the Church may mature.” All exegetical interpretations are subject to the judgment of the Church due to the conviction that the task of guarding and interpreting the word of God is entrusted not to the exegetes, but to the Church.

The document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission “Interpretation of the Bible in the Church” is completely focused on the double task of the exegetes described in DV 12,1-5 and 12,6 respectively. With regard to the first task the document gives an extensive overview of a

¹⁵For the prehistory of the text, see Bieringer, *Biblical Revelation*, 39-41.

large number of methodologies, albeit from the point of view of the historical-critical method. The document motivates the indispensable character of historical criticism in the second conclusion of the entire document as follows:

The Bible, in effect, does not present itself as a direct revelation of timeless truths but as the written testimony to a series of interventions in which God reveals himself in human history. In a way that differs from tenets of other religions, the message of the Bible is solidly grounded in history. It follows that the biblical writings cannot be correctly understood without an examination of the historical circumstances that shaped them.

Concerning the second task of the exegetes the document gives a detailed account of the hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur and Rudolf Bultmann. Here the emphasis is more on hermeneutics than on Biblical theology. The specific hermeneutical rules of DV 12,6 are not mentioned. The apostolic exhortation *Verbum Domini* also discusses extensively the interpretation of Sacred Scripture. In doing so its purpose is the same as what "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church" had formulated as follows:

In their work of interpretation Catholic exegetes must never forget that what they are interpreting is the *word of God*. Their common task is not finished when they have simply determined sources, defined forms or explained literary procedures. They arrive at the true goal of their work only when they have explained the meaning of the biblical text as God's word for today.

In VD 33 this text is quoted in full length. VD discusses the questions which are related to the interpretation of Scripture in no. 29-49 under the title "The Hermeneutics of Sacred Scripture in the Church." Before VD presents in art. 34 what DV 12 says, Pope Benedict XVI develops first in no. 29-33 a number of principles concerning hermeneutics. He begins with "a fundamental criterion of biblical hermeneutics: *the primary setting for scriptural interpretation is the life of the Church*" (VD 29). At the end of this paragraph the following reason is given: "The Bible is the Church's book, and its essential place in the Church's life gives rise to its genuine interpretation." The strong emphasis on the life of the Church as the origin of "true" hermeneutics in such an explicit form is new in texts of the Church's magisterium. However, DV 10 already pointed to the significant role of the Church: "Sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture form one sacred deposit of the word of God, committed to the Church." Since

Gadamer it has been commonly accepted in the hermeneutical discussions that texts have social dimensions, are embedded in communities and have to be understood in the perspective of their effective history. Nevertheless we have to address the following question of the text of VD 29: What do you mean by "Church"? Do you mean the Roman-Catholic Church exclusively, or do you also include other Christian traditions? Do you mean the pope, the bishops, priests and deacons or all baptized and confirmed believers? Do you take into account that important changes happened in the course of the centuries, and that one cannot simply assume that the Church today is in complete continuity with all the aspects of the Church of centuries ago?

An answer to these questions can be found in VD 30 where in the place of the "Church" the expression "the pilgrim people of God" is used. In the following sentence the pope clarifies what he means with the expression the "Catholic Church". "An authentic interpretation of the Bible must always be in harmony with the faith of the Catholic Church." This reminds us of DV 12,6 where there is also a reference to faith, but where the formulation is much more careful. There the link with faith is only found in the second, the biblical-theological movement of interpretation (not with the historical-critical movement). For there we read that we have to take into account the analogy of faith. But the text that does not specify whose faith this refers to, even though the technical expression *analogia fidei* probably implies that it is the faith of the Church as it has come to us through Tradition.

The difference between VD and DV can be illustrated by means of an example from VD 29 where the *cum*-clause of DV 12,6 is cited literally, but receives a new main clause.

DV 12,6	VD 29
"Sed <i>cum</i> sacra Scriptura eodem Spiritu quo scripta est etiam legenda et interpretanda sit" But, since Holy Scripture	"Quapropter, ' <i>cum</i> sacra Scriptura eodem Spiritu quo scripta est etiam legenda et interpretanda sit' "Consequently, ' <i>since</i> sacred Scripture

must be read and interpreted in the sacred spirit in which it was written,	must be read and interpreted in the light of the same Spirit through whom it was written” ¹⁶
no less serious attention must be given to the content and unity of the whole of Scripture if the meaning of the sacred texts is to be correctly worked out.”	exegetes, theologians and the whole people of God ¹⁷ must approach it as what it really is, the word of God conveyed to us through human words (cf. 1 Thess 2:13).” ¹⁸

The direct quote of the cum-clause in DV 12,6 in the Latin text of VD 29 is marked by quotation marks. A precise comparison of the main clause in DV 12 with the one in VD 29, however, reveals a shift in emphasis. DV 12,6 contains a hermeneutical rule for the interpretation of the meaning of sacred texts (“*ad recte sacrorum textuum sensum eruendam*”). The addressees of this rule is not specified here. But in the context of DV 12,1-5 and 12,7 and because of the parallel structure of DV 12,1-5 and 12,6 it is highly likely that the hermeneutical rule is intended for the exegetes (“*interpretes sacrae Scripturae*”). In VD 29, however, the addressees are not only exegetes, but also “theologians and the whole people of God.” In VD 29 the focus is on the faith conviction that Sacred Scripture is truly the word of God, which, but this seems less important, is “conveyed to us through human words.” This is further stressed by the reference to 1 Thes 2:13: “We also constantly give thanks to God for this, that when

¹⁶The English texts of DV 12 and VD 29 are quoted from the Vatican website. The text of the since-clause in the English version of VD 29 is obviously not a direct quote from the English translation of DV 12. The difference between the two texts is quite significant. As can be seen above, the Latin text is identical.

¹⁷The English adjective “whole” translates “*universus*”.

¹⁸Cfr the complete Latin text: “Quapropter, ‘cum sacra Scriptura eodem Spiritu quo scripta est etiam legenda et interpretanda sit’, exegetae, theologi et universus Dei Populus accedant oportet ad eam propter id quod revera est, scilicet quatenus Verbum Dei qui per verba humana nobiscum loquitur (cfr 1 Thes 2: 13).”

you received the word of God that you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word but as what it really is, God’s word, which is also at work in you believers” (NRSV).

In VD 34 Pope Benedict XVI extensively quotes DV 12. In the preceding context he is quick to “acknowledge the benefits that historical-critical exegesis and other recently-developed methods of textual analysis have brought to the life of the Church” (VD 32). Then, quoting the text of the document on the “Interpretation of the Bible in the Church,” he stresses that exegetes “arrive at the true goal of their work only when they have explained the meaning of the biblical text as God’s word for today” (VD 33). This gives us the hermeneutical key which the pope uses in his interpretation of DV 12. In VD 24-49, the pope develops the implications and consequences of this hermeneutics. The following table is intended to illustrate the way in which VD 34 takes up and reinterprets the text of DV 12.

DV 12	VD 34	VD 34 English
	Hoc praevis prospectu, pluris aestimari possunt notissima interpretationis principia propria exegesis catholicae et declarata in Concilio Vaticano II, praesertim in Constitutione dogmatica <i>Dei Verbum</i> :	“Against this background, one can better appreciate the great principles of interpretation proper to Catholic exegesis set forth by the Second Vatican Council, especially in the Dogmatic Constitution <i>Dei Verbum</i> :
Cum autem Deus in sacra Scriptura per homines more hominum locutus sit, interpres sacrae Scripturae, ut perspiciat, quid Ipse nobiscum	“Cum autem Deus in sacra Scriptura per homines more hominum locutus sit, interpres sacrae Scripturae, ut perspiciat, quid Ipse nobiscum	“Seeing that, in sacred Scripture, God speaks through human beings in human fashion, it follows that the interpreters of sacred Scripture, if they are to ascertain what God has wished to

<p>communicare voluerit, attente investigare debet, quid hagiographi reapse significare intenderint et eorum verbis manifestare Deo placuerit</p>	<p>communicare voluerit, attente investigare debet, quid hagiographi reapse significare intenderint et eorum verbis manifestare Deo placuerit.”</p>	<p>communicate to us, should carefully search out the meaning which the sacred writers really had in mind, that meaning which God had thought well to manifest through the medium of their words.”</p>
<p>12,2 Ad hagiographorum intentionem eruellendam inter alia etiam <i>genera litteraria</i> respicienda sunt.</p>	<p>Concilium in luce collocat elementa fundamentalia ad sensum ab hagiographis optatum eruellendum per studium generum litterariorum</p>	<p>On the one hand, the Council emphasizes the study of literary genres and historical context as basic elements for understanding the meaning intended by the sacred author.</p>
<p>12,3-4 Aliter enim atque aliter veritas in textibus vario modo historicis, vel propheticis, vel poeticis, vel in aliis dicendi generibus proponitur et exprimitur. Oportet porro ut interpres sensum inquirat, quem in determinatis adiunctis hagiographus, pro sui temporis et suae culturae condicione, ope</p>		

<p>generum litterariorum illo tempore adhibitorum exprimere intenderit et expresserit.</p>		
<p>12,5 Ad recte enim intelligendum id quod sacer auctor scripto asserere voluerit, rite attendendum est tum ad suetos illos nativos sentiendi, dicendi, narrandive modos, qui temporibus hagiographi vigeant, tum ad illos qui illo aevo in mutuo hominum commercio passim adhiberi solebant.</p>	<p>et ambitus contextualis.</p>	<p>and historical context.</p>
<p>12,6 Sed, cum Sacra Scriptura eodem Spiritu quo scripta est etiam legenda et interpretanda sit, ad recte sacrorum textuum sensum eruendam, non minus diligenter respiciendum est</p>	<p>Praeterea, cum Scriptura interpretanda sit eodem Spiritu quo scripta est, Constitutio dogmatica denotat tria elementa methodologica fundamentalia ut mens vertatur ad divinam Bibliorum dimensionem, scilicet</p>	<p>On the other hand, since Scripture must be interpreted in the same Spirit in which it was written, the Dogmatic Constitution indicates three fundamental criteria for an appreciation of the divine dimension of the Bible:</p>

<p>ad contentum</p> <p>et unitatem totius Scripturae,</p> <p>ratione habita vivae totius Ecclesiae Traditionis et</p> <p>analogiae fidei.</p>	<p>1) textus interpretandus est, dummodo perpendatur <i>unitas totius Scripturae,</i> quod hodie appellatur exegesis canonica;</p> <p>2) ratio habenda est de <i>viva totius Ecclesiae Traditione,</i> ac denique</p> <p>3) servanda est <i>analogia fidei.</i></p>	<p>1) the text must be interpreted with attention to <i>the unity of the whole of Scripture;</i> nowadays this is called canonical exegesis;</p> <p>2) account is to be taken Of the <i>living Tradition of the whole Church;</i> and, finally,</p> <p>3) respect must be shown for <i>the analogy of faith."</i></p>
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The introductory sentence in VD 34 represents the content of DV 12 in summary fashion as a statement of the important principles of the interpretation of Catholic exegesis. Verbum Domini 34 begins with a literal citation of DV 12,1 in using quotation marks.¹⁹ The last sentence in DV 12,7 is present in VD. VD 34 paraphrases DV 12,2-6 with very few elements of the council text being taken over literally. Here we have to analyze which elements of DV are left out and what is added. The two-part structure with the emphasis on the intention of the author (12,2-5) and on the meaning of the text (12,6) is preserved, but the balance between the two parts in DV is lost due to substantial omissions in the first part and additions in the second part. Concerning the first part, the text speaks of fundamental principles ("*elementa fundamentalia*")²⁰ and concerning the second part of three methodological fundamental principles ("*tria elementa methodologica fundamentalia*"). The detailed description of the historical-critical approach in DV 12,2-5 is reduced to two

¹⁹The translations of DV 12,1 and of the citation of this text in VD 34 almost always misrepresent the original Latin and go against the explicit intention of the council fathers. The mistake is that they translate the text as if it read: "quid hagiographi reapse significare intenderint et *quid* eorum verbis manifestare Deo placuerit." The second "quid" is not in the promulgated text, even though some council fathers had requested it to be added. The reason why their request was not granted, is that with the second "quid" the text could easily be understood as approving the *sensus plenior* interpretation. For this discussion see Bieringer, *Biblical Revelation*, 38-39.

²⁰The official English translation uses "basic elements".

expressions, the study of the literary genres and of the context ("*per studium generum litterariorum et ambitus contextualis*"). In the place of the four references to the intention of the author in DV, VD paraphrases "for understanding the meaning intended by the sacred author."

While in DV 12 the attention is mostly on the description of the historical-critical method, in the reception of DV 12 by VD 34 the emphasis is clearly on the second part which DV 12,6 describes as the study of the meaning of the text. After the citation of DV 12 in VD 29 here in VD 34 the cum-clause of DV 12,6 is taken up again, but now in an abbreviated and rearranged form and this time without quotation marks. The omission of the words "sacra" and "etiam legenda et" seems rather stylistic. The anticipation of "interpretanda sit" is a rather minimal adaptation which emphasizes interpretation slightly more. The more important changes happen in the main clause where the focus is on "the meaning of the sacred texts" is replaced by the emphasis on the "divine dimension of the Bible." According to DV 12,6 the interpreters need to pay attention to "the content and unity of the whole of Scripture" in order to investigate the meaning of the sacred texts and they need to take into account the living Tradition of the whole Church and the *analogia fidei*. In the text of DV the council fathers opted deliberately for a hierarchy between the first element on the one hand and the other two on the other hand.²¹ As we already pointed out, VD 34 claims that "the Dogmatic Constitution [i.e., DV 12,6] indicates three fundamental criteria for an appreciation of the divine dimension of the Bible." Together with the numbering in the text this introduction creates the impression that the three criteria are on the same level. The description of the three criteria in VD 34 is almost literally taken over from DV 12,6. However, the three criteria are each introduced by "*dummodo perpendatur*," by "*ratio habenda est*" and by "*ac denique servanda est*" respectively.²² These introductions also contribute to the impression that we are dealing with three successive methodological steps on equal footing. We also note that in the representation of the first criterion of DV 12,6 in VD 34 the reference to "the content" is

²¹See Bieringer, *Biblical Revelation*, 41, n. 50.

²²By the fact that each of the three elements has its own verb in VD 34 ("*dummodo perpendatur*"; "*ratio habenda est*"; "*ac denique servanda est*") increases the impression that we are dealing with three successive and equally important steps.

dropped. The motivation for this omission is not clear to the interpreter. Finally in VD 34 Pope Benedict identifies the approach of taking into consideration “the unity of the whole of Scripture” with “canonical exegesis.”²³

Regrettably the above described changes in the text of DV 12,2-5 and 12,6 are marked as such in VD 34. Rather in the context there is an explicit claim in VD 34 that the text is a representation of what the conciliar document stated in DV (“*Concilium in luce collocat*”; “*Constitutio dogmatica denotat*”). The *relecture* of DV 12 in VD 34 weakens without further ado the historical-critical and the biblical-theological dimensions, the latter by way of the omission of the aspect of taking into consideration the “content” of the Biblical text and by presenting the three hermeneutical criteria as all being on the same level. This shift favours the more dogmatic dimensions of the interpretation of the Biblical text.²⁴ In VD 34 the emphasis is explicitly on the “divine dimension.” Ultimately this is also the intention of DV 12, but it is not said explicitly. In DV 34 the emphasis is explicitly on the “divine dimension.” This meaning is originally also found in DV 12, but it is not stated explicitly. Rather DV 12,6 achieves this by putting the emphasis on “the meaning of the texts”.

Conclusion

The model of dialogue as the foundation for the interpretation of divine revelation is new in the theology of revelation of DV. However, in the text of the council we not only find the dynamic dialogical understanding of revelation (see DV 2), but also the static monological understanding of revelation which is close to Vatican I (see DV 6). Our contribution is an intertextual study of DV 12 and two post-conciliar texts, namely “The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church” and VD. The post-conciliar documents witness to the fact that the language of dialogue is firmly established in ecclesiastical discourse. *Verbum Domini* is proof of this. However, the question

²³In the apostolic exhortation there is no additional explanation concerning the meaning of “canonical exegesis”. In exegetical circles the expression “canonical criticism” is connected to the work of Brevard Childs. See Brevard Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis*, Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1970 and Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1979.

²⁴See Joseph Ratzinger, *Schriftauslegung im Widerstreit. Zur Frage nach Grundlagen und Weg der Exegese heute*, in Ratzinger, ed., *Schriftauslegung im Widerstreit* (Quaestiones Disputatae, 117), Freiburg – Basel – Wien: Herder, 1989, 15-44 (see also my analysis in Bieringer, *Biblical Revelation*, 49-50).

remains what is meant by dialogue and how Scripture can be part of the dialogue between God and humans. In VD the divine dimension of Sacred Scripture is emphasized so much that the question arises whether dialogue is still possible, or if it is possible whether it is not reduced to God speaking and humans listening. A similar issue arises when we focus on the relationship between Scripture and revelation. If there is less attention for Scripture as a historical, human witness to divine revelation, there is also less emphasis on the historical-critical approach to Scripture, as we saw in VD. It is hard to deny that the reception history of DV led to a neglect of the divine dimension of Scripture. We wonder, however, whether the needed balance between divine and human dimensions of Scripture can be reached by an emphasis of the divine dimension at the cost of the human dimension. We suggest that it would be better to strive for a theology of revelation without competition between divine and human dimensions, but where both have their legitimate place.

Appendix

The texts given in italics are taken over into *Dei Verbum* from *De revelatione*. The Latin original texts are identical, when the English translations of these texts differ, it is because of the fact that the translations which we use differ.

Vatican I: <i>De revelatione</i> 5-7 (Tanner)	Vatican II: <i>Dei Verbum</i> 2 and 6 (www.vatican.va)
<i>De revelatione</i> 5	<i>Dei Verbum</i> 2
5a. The same holy mother church holds and teaches that God, the source and end of all things, can be known with certainty from the consideration of created things, by the natural power of human reason :	see DV 6
5b. <i>“ever since the creation of the world, his invisible nature has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made”</i> (Rm 1:20).	
5c. It was, however, pleasing to his wisdom and goodness to reveal himself	2. In His goodness and wisdom God chose to reveal Himself and to make known to us

and the eternal laws of his will to the human race by another, and that a supernatural, way.	the hidden purpose of His will (see Eph 1:9)
5d. This is how the Apostle puts it: "In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son" (Heb 1:1-2a).	by which through Christ, the Word made flesh,
	man might in the Holy Spirit have access to the Father and come to share in the divine nature (see Eph 2:18; 2 Pet 1:4).
	Through this revelation, therefore, the invisible God (see Col 1:15, 1 Tim 1:17) out of the abundance of His love speaks to men as friends (see Ex 33:11; Jh 15:14-15)
cf. that is a sharing in the good things of God	and lives among them (see Bar. 3:38), so that He may invite and take them into fellowship with Himself.
<i>De revelatione</i> 5-8	<i>Dei Verbum</i> 6
5c. It was, however, pleasing to his wisdom and goodness to reveal himself and the eternal laws of his will to the human race by another, and that a supernatural, way. (...)	6. Through divine revelation, God chose to show forth and communicate Himself and the eternal decisions of His will regarding the salvation of men.
7. It is not because of this that one must hold revelation to be absolutely necessary; the reason is that God directed human beings to a supernatural end,	
that is a sharing in the good things of God that utterly surpasses	That is to say, He chose "to share with them those divine treasures which totally transcend

<p>the understanding of the human mind; indeed <i>"eye has not seen, neither has ear heard, nor has it come into our hearts to conceive what things God has prepared for those who love him"</i> (1 Cor 2:9).</p>	<p>the understanding of the human mind."</p>
<p>8. Now this supernatural revelation, according to the belief of the universal church, as declared by the sacred council of Trent, is contained in written books and unwritten traditions ...</p>	
<p>5a. The same holy mother church holds and teaches that God, the source and end of all things, can be known with certainty from the consideration of created things, by the natural power of human reason:</p>	<p>As a sacred synod has affirmed, "God, the beginning and end of all things, can be known with certainty from created reality by the light of human reason" (see Rm 1:20);</p>
<p>5b. <i>"ever since the creation of the world, his invisible nature has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made"</i> (Rm 1:20).</p>	
<p>5c. It was, however, pleasing to his wisdom and goodness to reveal himself and the eternal laws of his will to the human race by another, and that a supernatural, way.</p>	
<p>5d. This is how the Apostle puts it: "In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son" (Heb 1:1-2a).</p>	
<p>6. It is indeed thanks to this divine revelation, that those matters concerning God which are not of themselves beyond the scope of human reason, can,</p>	<p>but teaches that it is through His revelation "that those religious truths which are by their nature accessible to human reason can</p>

***even in the present state
of the human race,
be known by everyone
without difficulty,
with firm certitude
and with no intermingling of error.***

***be known by all men
with ease,
with solid certitude
and with no trace of error,
even in this present state
of the human race."***