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## PAUL VI'S AMBIVALENCE TOWARD CRITICAL BIBLICAL SCHOLARSHIP

### A. INDICATIONS OF APPROVAL: TEACHING INTERVENTIONS

by *Brian W. Harrison*

In the last two issues of *Living Tradition* we surveyed Pope Paul VI's efforts to implement the Council's directives for promoting the use of Scripture in the Church's official worship and in various other pastoral avenues.<sup>1</sup> We shall conclude this first major section of our study, in which we are considering the broad outlines of Pope Paul's approach to Sacred Scripture, with three issues of our publication devoted to his general attitude to certain questions that proved to be more difficult and contentious.

Paul's pontificate coincided with an upsurge in open and insistent demands coming from Catholic biblical scholars for a greater openness on the part of the Church's hierarchy and magisterium toward assumptions and methods of Scripture study which had become increasingly accepted over the previous century (or more) in Protestant – especially German – schools of thought. These have come to be commonly summed up and characterized by the term, "the historical-critical method". The whole experience of Vatican II, with its emphasis on ecumenism and *aggiornamento*, certainly acted as a catalyst for these demands; and Paul VI found himself burdened with the difficult task of guiding and regulating the Church's response to them. As with the episcopal governance of many other Catholic prelates of this era who were not themselves professional exegetes, Paul's pontificate as a whole showed some signs of uncertainty and vacillation in this area. On the one hand, his empathy for the Council's spirit of optimism regarding the relative autonomy of science, and of modern culture in general, led him to have confidence in the professional credentials of prominent biblical specialists, and to lend a fairly sympathetic ear to their pleas that Catholic biblical science be granted greater freedom from 'negative' and 'suspicious' magisterial supervision. On the other hand, the Pontiff's awareness of having inherited Peter's responsibility to 'confirm the brethren in the faith' sometimes led him to turn sharply in the opposite direction, in the face of 'higher critical' excesses that placed revealed truth itself in danger. In this article and the next we shall look at Paul's optimistic side, manifested in his words and his actions respectively. A third article, concluding Part I of our study, will then survey the contrary tendency – that which found expression in the same Pope's efforts to curb and warn against certain doctrinal deviations embedded in influential currents of modern biblical criticism.

#### 1. Cardinal Montini's Openness to Modern Biblical Scholarship

In order to fully appreciate Pope Paul's underlying or *a priori* sympathy toward modern biblical studies, we must first go back to the period prior to his election as pope. We will begin with a brief survey of the drama – in this case of

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Living Tradition*, no. 153, September, 2011 and no. 154, November, 2011.

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literally ‘biblical proportions’ – that played out on the floor of the Council during its opening session. Cardinal G.B. Montini, then Archbishop of Milan, wrote an important pastoral letter to his flock that touched on these issues, and that showed him to be an attentive observer of the heated opening debates over the initial schema on the “Sources of Revelation” (*De fontibus revelationis*). It will be especially useful to take note of the views expressed during those debates by three prelates to whom the future Pope Paul VI would soon be showing particular confidence in the area of Scripture studies: Cardinals Franz König of Vienna, Bernard Alfrink of Utrecht, and above all, Augustin Bea, former Rector of the Pontifical Biblical Institute, who had recently been named to the Pontifical Biblical Commission by Pope John XXIII.<sup>2</sup> They were all generally understood to be friends of the ‘progressive’ wing of Catholic biblical scholarship.

### 1a. The Context of Montini’s Letter of 17 November 1962

All three of these prelates spoke against the preparatory schema *De fontibus revelationis* on the opening day of the debates, 14 November 1962, only three days before Cardinal Montini wrote his own observations on the progress of the conciliar discussions on this document. The first of the three to speak was Cardinal König, who complained that the schema did not take sufficient account of unsolved problems relating to biblical inerrancy, and that it went beyond what it would be appropriate for the Council to say on such matters. Also, he said, it did not take account of different literary genres within the general category of “history”:

Everyone is aware of the kinds of unresolved problems facing modern exegesis – and I mean solidly and unquestionably Catholic exegesis – regarding the inerrancy and truthfulness of Scripture. In this matter too the schema seems to say more than what should be defined by the Council’s supreme authority. For it neglects questions regarding the possibility of multiple literary genres even in writings of a truly historical character. Moreover, this schema would have the Council come to a decision regarding the inerrancy of the “*obiter dicta*,” which is a question which everyone recognizes as not having been positively resolved yet. But it is not necessary for a council to define such matters (i.e., regarding the “*obiter dicta*” in Scripture) and impose them as matters of Catholic faith. Furthermore, as regards the qualification [theological note?], the schema goes beyond the doctrine of the Encyclicals from Leo XIII up to Pius XII. This would require serious discussion before it could be approved.<sup>3</sup>

The Cardinal went on to observe that professional exegetes considered the schema to show little progress in the light of *Divino afflante Spiritu*. His opinion was that the Council should not enter into details about modern scriptural problems, but should limit itself to a statement of basic general principles:

Furthermore, it seems to expert exegetes that the schema embodies insufficient progress, when compared with the lucid doctrine of Pius XII in the Encyclical *Divino afflante Spiritu*, from which Catholic exegesis has received new light and a new outlook. In order to guard the faith it would seem sufficient to establish the principles which need to be devoutly upheld in these matters, leaving the rest to further exegetical studies, under the vigilance of the Church’s Magisterium. For it seems that enough has been said about all these questions by the papal Encyclicals of this century. In addition, the Biblical Commission – whose work should surely be acceptable to everyone – will lend its assistance.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Bea was made a member of the Commission very soon after his elevation to the College of Cardinals by Pope John on 14 December 1959. His name first appears in the list of the Commission’s members in the 1960 *Anuario Pontificio* (p. 1003).

<sup>3</sup> “*Omnibus notum est, qualia problemata pro exegesi solida et indubitanter catholica hodie solvenda sunt circa inerrantiam et veritatem Scripturæ. Etiam in hac re schema plus videre dicere quam quod a Concilii suprema auctoritate definiendum est. Negliguntur enim questiones de possibilitate multiplicium generum litterariorum etiam in scriptis indolis vere historicæ. Decideretur insuper a Concilio – secundum schema – questio circa inerrantiam circa “obiter dicta,” quam questionem omnes positive solvendam esse censent. Sed non est necesse talia (i.e. circa “obiter dicta” in Scriptura) conciliariter definienda et de fide catholica imponenda. Insuper transgreditur schema, quoad qualificationem, doctrinam Encyclicarum a Leone XIII usque ad Pium XII. Ut hoc fieri possit, seria discussio fieri debet*” (AS I, III, 42-43). It is difficult to agree with König’s last comment here, since the schema (nn.12-13), in treating of biblical inerrancy, does not seem to have gone any further than what had already been taught clearly in the three papal encyclicals on Scripture regarding the Bible’s absolute inerrancy. Also, it was not true that the schema proposed to “define” anything at all – and certainly not the particular question of “*obiter dicta*,” which was not even mentioned in the schema – as being “*de fide catholica*.” Such terminology implies a solemn, infallible definition; and the schema certainly contained no proposal for “imposing” any such definition.

<sup>4</sup> “*Insuper peritis in re exegetica schema videtur parum progressum continere, si comparatur cum lucida doctrina Pii XII in Encyclica Divino afflante Spiritu, ex qua catholica exegesis novum lumen et novum animum exceperit. Ad fidei tutelam sufficere videtur ut in hac materia principia*

Finally, Cardinal König criticized the schema's lack of precision regarding the degree of authority to be attached to the individual affirmations included in it, recalling the fact that not everything in proposed in the schema should be considered a dogma of faith.<sup>5</sup> He concluded: "After giving serious consideration to all these points, my judgment is that the schema deserves a *non placet*."<sup>6</sup> Immediately after König's intervention, Cardinal Bernard Alfrink rose to add his own criticisms of the schema. He claimed that it was not in accord with Pope John's guidelines, since "it contains too much repetition of what can be found in all theological manuals concerning the sources of revelation, Sacred Scripture, Tradition, and the Church's Magisterium, while adding practically nothing new arising from more recent research."<sup>7</sup> Anticipating the objection that at least in chapter IV of the schema (which dealt with the New Testament) such repetition was necessary in view of certain grave errors now circulating in that field, Alfrink replied that in his estimation, "this material would need to be rewritten more clearly, with less superficiality, and with greater discrimination."

After two more interventions, both expressing dissatisfaction with the schema, Cardinal Augustin Bea took the microphone and offered the longest argument presented that day against the suitability of this document offered to the Fathers by the Preparatory Commission. Bea upbraided the schema not so much for saying anything which he thought was downright wrong, but rather, for its excessively scholastic and insufficiently pastoral style, which he found contrary to the objectives for which Pope John had called this Council.<sup>8</sup> In regard to its treatment of Scripture, he went on to argue that the schema dealt at too much length with topics which were irrelevant, both to ecumenical concerns and to modern exegesis itself:

Thus it is . . . with many things that are expressed in general terms here in the schema, but which are not applied to the questions which confront *today's* exegetes. Finally, it is scarcely necessary to point out that the question of unity – the ecumenical question – is ignored altogether in this schema. It is not enough simply to propose Catholic doctrine. We must propose it in such a way that our non-Catholic brethren can understand it and appreciate its foundations. If we speak of Sacred Scripture, it will not suffice merely to repeat what has already been said. Rather, we must speak to those difficulties which are experienced by our non-Catholic brothers. And there is practically nothing of this in the schema.<sup>9</sup>

So emphatic was Bea about the contemporary irrelevance of the schema that he used the words *hodie* and *hodiernus* three times in two lines: "Thus, the schema does not have before its eyes modern men – the souls entrusted by Christ today, today, to the Church, – but rather, the theological schools."<sup>10</sup> The Cardinal also felt that modern Catholic exegetes, as well as non-Catholics, were not given sufficiently positive attention in the schema:

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*sancte tuenda statuatur et reliqua committantur ulterioribus indagacionibus exegeseos sub vigilantia Magisterii Ecclesiae. Videtur enim in his omnibus iam sat provisum esse ab Encyclicis Pontificum huius saeculi. Insuper Commissio biblica, cuius labor omnibus cordi esse debet, adiutorium suum praestabit*" (*ibid.* 43). It is not clear why Cardinal König saw any discrepancy between the schema and *Divino afflante Spiritu*. Indeed, Chapter II of the schema specifically recalled that passage of Pius XII's encyclical (regarding the importance of understanding the Bible's literary genres) which is usually regarded as having contributed most to the progress of biblical studies. Referring to that passage in note 9, article 13 of the schema affirmed: ". . . what the author really intended to signify by what he wrote is very often not correctly understood unless due attention is paid to those customary local modes of thinking, speaking and narrating which were current at the time the sacred writers lived. (. . . *id quod auctor scribendo reapse significare voluit, saepius non recte intellegitur, nisi rite attendatur ad suetos nativos cogitandi, dicendi vel narrandi modos, qui tempore hagiographorum vigeant*)" (AS I, III, 18-19).

<sup>5</sup> "Videtur schema deficere in eo, quod nullibi clare affert quam qualificationem theologiam tribuere vult singulis suis assertis. Sed nullatenus omnia quae in schemate proponuntur ut fidei dogmata censenda sunt" (AS I, III, 43). In view of König's previous complaint that the schema "transgreditur . . . , quoad qualificationem, doctrinam Encyclicarum," and his insistence that certain points **not** be imposed as "*de fide catholica*" – criticisms which seem to imply that he understood the schema as attaching clear theological notes to its affirmations – this subsequent complaint that the schema is **not** sufficiently clear in ascribing theological qualifications to its assertions seems rather inconsistent.

<sup>6</sup> "Quibus omnibus perpensis, meo iudicio, ad schema dicendum videtur: non placet" (*ibid.*).

<sup>7</sup> ". . . fusius repetuntur quae de fontibus revelationis, de Sacra Scriptura, de Traditione, de Magisterio ecclesiastico in omnibus manualibus theologis inveniuntur, quin vix aliquid novi ex studiis recentioribus addatur" (*ibid.*, 44).

<sup>8</sup> "Schema, uti stat, non respondet scopo a Summo Pontifice Concilio ipsi proposito. . . . Ac demum dicit: ut doctrina 'ea ratione pervestigetur, exponatur quam tempora postulant nostra', 'scilicet eae inducendae erunt – sunt verba Summi Pontificis – rationes res exponendi, quae cum Magisterio, cuius indoles praesertim pastoralis est, magis congruant'. His positis, mihi videtur humiliter dicendum schema omnino carere indole pastoralis" (AS I, III, 49).

<sup>9</sup> "Et sic sunt . . . multa quae hic in schemate in genere dicuntur, sed non applicantur ad quaestiones quae hodie in exegesi adsunt. Denique vix opus est dicere quaestiones unionis, quaestiones oecumenicam in hoc schemate nullatenus omnino considerari. Non sufficit proponere simpliciter doctrinam catholicam . . . Si loquimur de Sacra Scriptura, non sufficit repetere ea quae iam dicta sunt, sed ea quae hodie respiciunt difficultates quae fratres nostri noncatholici habent. Et de hac re in schemate fere nihil habetur" (*ibid.*, 50, emphasis in original).

<sup>10</sup> "Ergo schema non habet prae oculis homines hodiernos, animas a Christo Ecclesiae hodie, hodie commissas, sed potius scholas theologicas" (*ibid.*, 49).

Only once does it say something which can be taken as a word of praise for the achievements of modern exegetes. But those achievements, as Pius XII of holy memory said in the Encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, have been immense during the last fifty years, as non-Catholic authors too have acknowledged. This schema, however, carries a certain tone of suspicion, a certain fear of errors, etc., although without really coming to grips with the problems involved.<sup>11</sup>

Bea concluded that the schema should either be withdrawn altogether, or very thoroughly revised, “so as to be shorter, clearer, less ambiguous, more pastoral and more ecumenical.”<sup>12</sup> It seems safe to say that, of all the speeches made against the preparatory schema on divine revelation, none would have been seen as more authoritative than this one (delivered on 14 November 1962) by the average conciliar Father who was not himself a specialist in Scripture. And that of course included Cardinal Montini. Not only was Bea renowned as the former rector of the *Biblicum* and as one who had been closely involved in the preparation of *Divino afflante Spiritu*; his optimistic and ecumenical emphasis must surely have resonated in the memories of his audience with the striking words of Pope John only a month earlier. Had not the Pontiff, in his speech at the opening of the Council, rebuked those “prophets of doom” who showed an excessive fear of the modern world and its new ways of thinking?

### 1b. The Letter of 17 November 1962

Certainly, Cardinal Montini would have listened attentively also to those other Fathers who on 14 November defended the initial schema from criticisms such as those we have just surveyed, especially Cardinal Giuseppe Siri and Cardinal Ernesto Ruffini, both of whom insisted that the present reappearance of modernist errors made it an urgent pastoral duty of the Council to reaffirm plainly the traditional Catholic doctrine on Scripture.<sup>13</sup> But the tone as well as the content of Montini’s comments several days later suggests that he was on the whole more in sympathy with points made by those such as the three Cardinals whose comments we have cited *verbatim*, and who were all recognized as trained Scripture scholars as well as princes of the Church.<sup>14</sup>

Although he did not himself intervene on the Council floor in the debates which resulted in a completely new draft of the schema on revelation, the then Archbishop of Milan wrote some extensive observations only three days after listening to the interventions which we have just cited. They occur in a pastoral letter of 17 November 1962 to the faithful of his Archdiocese, and are worth quoting extensively, since they reveal a good deal about the attitude towards Scripture studies (and their relation to the Magisterium) of the man who was soon to occupy the Chair of Peter. To begin with, Montini told his flock sympathetically of the anxieties expressed by some Council Fathers about how to deal with the new questions raised in biblical scholarship, and reported the view (expressed, as we have seen, by König, Alfrink and Bea) that it was not necessary for the Council to repeat what had already been said many times before. (Unlike those Fathers, however, he explicitly mentioned among those existing documents two which had been promulgated with the specific intention of rebuking, amongst other things, new and dangerous errors in biblical scholarship: the encyclicals *Pascendi* of Pius X and *Humani generis* of Pius XII.) His letter reads:

Everyone can understand how fundamental this theme is in our religion, and thus everyone can see how natural it is that the Council should speak of it with a corresponding solemnity and gravity. But only those who are keeping abreast of theological developments, of the progress in biblical studies, and of today’s ardent controversies over these questions – both inside and outside the Catholic camp – will be able to appreciate the apprehensions, the hopes and the fears that these new issues are arousing within the conciliar assembly. A whole host of questions is flooding into everyone’s minds: Was it necessary to raise this topic at all? How is it related to what has already been decided by the Councils of Trent and Vatican I on this subject? Are there not already norms and regulations laid down for our own times on these matters by the encyclicals *Pascendi* of Pius X and *Humani generis* of Pius

<sup>11</sup> “Una tantum vice habetur vox aliqua quae potest explicari in laudem laboris quem exegesis moderna fecit. Sed ille labor, ut Pius XII sanctae memoriae in Enc. *Divinae afflante Spiritu* dixit, ille labor, qui ultimis quinquaginta annis factus est, confitentibus etiam non-catholicis auctoribus, immensus est. Sed schema loquitur ex quadam suspitione, ex quadam timore errorum, etc., quin problemata omnino profunde tangat” (*ibid.*, 50-51).

<sup>12</sup> “. . . ut sit brevius, ut sit magis clarum, minus ambiguum, ut sit magis pastorale, et sit magis oecumenicum” (*ibid.*, 51).

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 37-38.

<sup>14</sup> It should be added, however, that Cardinal Ruffini, who vigorously defended the schema, was also well-known as a biblical scholar and was a long-standing member of the Pontifical Biblical Commission.

XII? And all the recent pontifical documents on biblical studies, together with those of Leo XIII – are they not sufficient to regulate the Catholic approach, both practical and theoretical, in the field of Scripture?<sup>15</sup>

Cardinal Montini also mentioned another point raised by Cardinal König – the question of how much magisterial authority the Council should give to its affirmations about Scripture – and recalled the widespread view that the pastoral scope of this Council should exclude solemn definitions carrying disciplinary sanctions. Finally, he told his readers in Milan that it was natural that questions so difficult and delicate should give rise to a great plurality of ideas:

New currents of study on biblical matters are now agitating the Catholic academies: should they be regulated by dogmatic definitions, or by dispositions of the ordinary magisterium? And what of the formidable dangers raised by certain new methods of biblical interpretation, and the extremely grave errors which can be hidden in their roots? Have not all anathemas and dogmatic definitions been excluded? And how can these matters enter into the predominantly pastoral program of the Council that has just commenced?

We advert to the insurgence of these questions so that it can be understood how the Council is entering into an extremely delicate and interesting question, and how it is not at all surprising that a great plurality of views is coming to light, expressed with great subtlety but also intensity. That is precisely because of the sense of responsibility which animates the Fathers.<sup>16</sup>

Montini shows here some apparent sympathy for certain key criticisms which had just been made of the initial schema on revelation: doubt as to whether so much detail on disputed questions is appropriate from an Ecumenical Council; the feeling that existing documents of the Magisterium have already given sufficiently clear directives on these matters; and the reluctance to see condemnations and disciplinary measures issuing from a pastorally oriented Council. Although he expresses these concerns as rhetorical questions – a personal stylistic preference which is very evident in many subsequent interventions throughout his pontificate – the general direction in which the Cardinal's sympathies lie is not difficult to detect. Those who, by way of contrast, were anxious to defend the initial schema from the severe criticisms being directed at it in those days would have reported on the current debate in a tone very different from that manifested by Montini's calm and reserved expressions in this pastoral letter. As well as the unmistakable echoes which we have noted here of the intervention by König, there are resonances also of Cardinal Bea's observations. All this would have been very fresh in the Archbishop of Milan's memory as he wrote the above lines.

### 1c. Serenity Regarding the General Condition of the Church

To conclude this section 1, it seems appropriate to note how Cardinal Montini displayed at this time a generally serene and untroubled outlook toward the state of Church affairs in general. For it is in the context of his glowing expressions of hope and confidence regarding the conciliar Church's overall health that we must understand the praise and endorsement which he directed to current biblical scholarship in particular, not long before he was driven to become ever more conscious (as we shall see in *Living Tradition*, no. 158) of the confusion and dangers to faith which were also clearly present in this field.

An apparent absence of any serious worry regarding the state of Scripture scholarship could be noted in Montini's

<sup>15</sup> *“Tutti possono comprendere come il tema sia fondamentale nell’ordine della nostra religione, e perciò tutti possono trovare naturale che il Concilio ne parli con la gravità e la solennità che gli è propria. Ma soltanto quelli che sono al corrente degli sviluppi della teologia, dei progressi degli studi biblici e del fervore delle controversie su queste questioni, sia dentro che fuori del campo cattolico, possono apprezzare le apprensioni, le speranze, i timori che il nuovo argomento mette nell’assemblea conciliare. Un frotto di interrogativi irrompe negli animi di tutti: era necessario un tale argomento? come si collega con quanto il Concilio Tridentino ed il Vaticano I hanno già sentenziato su questa materia? non è stata già regolata al tempo nostro da quanto hanno autorevolmente insegnato le encicliche Pascendi di San Pio X e Humani generis di Pio XII? e tutti i documenti pontifici circa gli studi biblici di questi ultimi anni, uniti a quelli di Leone XIII, non bastano a regolare l’atteggiamento sia speculativo che pratico dei cattolici in campo scritturale?”* (G.B. Montini, *Discorsi e Scritti sul Concilio, 1959-1963*, ed. A. Rimoldi [Brescia: Istituto Paolo VI, 1983], 193). This work will be referred to from now on as “DeS.”

<sup>16</sup> “. . . e le nuove correnti di studio, che agitano le scuole sulle materie scritturali devono essere disciplinate con definizioni dogmatiche o con disposizioni del magistero ordinario? e i formidabili pericoli che sollevano certi nuovi metodi di interpretazione scritturale e gli errori gravissimi che possono nascondersi nelle loro radici reclamano un intervento diretto e solenne del Concilio? non era stato escluso ogni anatema e ogni definizione dogmatica? e come questo argomento può entrare nel programma prevalentemente pastorale del Concilio testé inaugurato?

“Accenniamo alla insorgenza di queste domande, perché si comprenda come il Concilio entra in una questione molto delicato e molto interessante, e come nessuno debba meravigliarsi se la discussione metta in evidenza una grande pluralità di pensieri, e come questi si rivestano di espressioni molto sottili e alle volte vibranti, proprio per il senso di responsabilità che riempie gli animi dei padri” (*ibid.*, 193-194).

overview of the contemporary Church shortly before the Council began. In responding to Pope John's call to all Catholic bishops to express their minds as to what topics the forthcoming Council should deal with, the Cardinal Archbishop of Milan did not mention biblical exegesis as a problematical area as regards Catholic doctrine, or even as a theme which needed any discussion at all at the conciliar level.<sup>17</sup>

Shortly after making this submission, the Cardinal gave an address in Milan entitled "Ecumenical Councils in the Life of the Church,"<sup>18</sup> in which he manifested very clearly the spirit of joyous expectation which was soon carried over into his pontificate. Indeed, a marked sense of complacency permeates Montini's whole outlook. In the light of the profound and long-lasting upheavals that soon surged up in the postconciliar Church – in no small measure because of widespread doubts about basic beliefs springing from radical biblical criticism – the Cardinal's complacency and optimism can now be seen, with the advantage of hindsight, to reflect a remarkably superficial misreading of the real state of the Church. Looking ahead to the imminent Council, he remarked that, in contrast to previous ecumenical councils, this one was taking place at a time when the Church's life was calm and untroubled, so that she would be able to celebrate and reinforce her own interior unity and vitality:

. . . this Council, unlike many previous ones, is meeting at a peaceful and fervent time in the life of the Church. There are no negative internal problems which need to be resolved; there are positive internal advances which need to be promoted. It is not heresy, nor schism, nor any other dire problem within the bosom of the Church which now calls the bishops to gather together around the Pope; the call springs rather from the Church's desire to savor her own internal unity, from a duty to give greater effect to her sound vitality.<sup>19</sup>

Within weeks of this 1960 discourse a storm of dissension was to break out openly between different groups of biblical scholars in Rome – a dispute which continued on into the Council itself. (We shall devote some attention to this confrontation in the next issue of *Living Tradition*.) However, it seems that Montini did not regard these disputes over modern exegesis as a serious threat to the Church's faith or unity. In his diocesan pastoral letter for Lent, 1962, they were not mentioned at all, and the future Pope, in referring to current hopes for the Council, retained a completely serene outlook. Noting that "reform" usually implies the correction of evils in the Church, he asserts confidently that, thanks to the divine mercy, there are at present in the Church none of the great evils of the sort that have required the convocation of other ecumenical councils:

The characteristic . . . of this Council, while indeed it is expressly looking towards certain notable reforms, derives from the fact that the desire to do good, rather than the need to avoid evil, has been the reason for its convocation. In today's Church, by the mercy of God, there are in fact no errors, scandals, deviations or abuses of the sort that would require the convocation of a Council as an exceptional reform measure.<sup>20</sup>

His experience of the Second Vatican Council itself – first as Cardinal Montini and then as Paul VI – did not appear to change this naively optimistic vision of the contemporary Church and world to any significant degree. It seems opportune to add at this point some references to several of his subsequent general observations as Pope, in the immediate aftermath of the Council. Although these comments do not touch directly upon the specific theme of biblical studies, they

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Montini's submission of 8 May 1960 (at that time *sub secreto*) to the Council's Antepreparatory Commission, reproduced in *DeS*, 35-36. In these suggestions as to what he thought the Council should say in regard to Catholic doctrine, Cardinal Montini gave priority to the need for clarifying the relation between grace and nature, the human and the supernatural (a theme raised by the controversial "*nouvelle théologie*," certain aspects of which had been denounced in the encyclical *Humani Generis*). He wanted the Council to "define" (*definiatur*) revealed doctrine on the supernatural end of the human race and the need for grace, against merely "this-worldly" notions of salvation and the ideology of "*humanismi naturalistici*." Also mentioned were the need for doctrinal clarifications about Church-State relations, the role of the laity, the question of salvation "outside the Church," and the precise sacramental status of episcopal consecration. In the submission to the Council's Antepreparatory Commission on the part of Milan's University of the Sacred Heart ("*Sacro Cuore*"), the major centre of ecclesiastical learning within Cardinal Montini's archdiocese, nothing at all on scriptural topics was recommended as material for discussion by the Council (cf. *AD I*, IV, II, 451-456).

<sup>18</sup> "*I Concili ecumenici nella vita della Chiesa*."

<sup>19</sup> ". . . questo Concilio, a differenza di molti precedenti, si riunisce in un momento pacifico e fervoroso della vita della Chiesa; non ha problemi negativi interni da risolvere, ha incrementi positivi interni da promuovere. Non eresia, non scismi, non difficoltà drammatiche in seno alla Chiesa invitano l'episcopato intorno al Papa, ma piuttosto un desiderio di gustare la propria interiore unità, un dovere di dare maggiore efficienza alla sua sana vitalità" (Discourse of 16 August 1960, *DeS* 57).

<sup>20</sup> "*La caratteristica . . . di questo Concilio, il quale pur tende espressamente a qualche notevole riforma, deriva dal fatto che il desiderio del bene piuttosto che la fuga del male ne provoca la convocazione. Non vi sono infatti oggi nella Chiesa, per divina misericordia, errori, scandali, deviazioni, abusi tali che reclamino il provvedimento eccezionale della convocazione d'un Concilio*" (Lenten pastoral letter of 22 February 1962, *DeS* 93).

demonstrate that fundamentally positive approach which Paul VI wished to adopt towards *all* the important issues confronting the twentieth-century Church – including, therefore, the new questions arising in the field of exegesis. At the conclusion of Vatican II, as he gazed out at the modern world, we see Pope Paul displaying that same unperturbed – even joyous – spirit which we have already noted. In his final homily to the assembled Fathers on 7 December 1965, he stressed that the Council, while not unaware of the darker side of human nature, had deliberately chosen to contemplate its positive side, and to emphasize human dignity. Speaking of the Council’s long and strenuous labors over the previous three years, he said:

On what aspect of our human nature has this vast Assembly focused its attention? What has it striven to discern with the help of that divine illumination which has been granted to it? It has sought to contemplate profoundly the countenance of man, which perennially shows itself with two contrasting expressions: his weakness and his gentle dignity. In one moment we see the very evil side of man, which undeniably afflicts him like an incurable disease; but then we see the goodness which is still his – characterized by a secret beauty, an extraordinary excellence. It must be openly confessed that this Council of ours, in making its judgment about man, has turned its gaze more toward the serene, rather than the sorry, aspect of human nature, and indeed, has consciously interpreted all such matters in the best possible light. For the Council has shown a great enthusiasm and admiration for the men of our time.<sup>21</sup>

Nevertheless, Pope Paul wanted to make it clearly understood that this optimism was not one-sided. He continued by pointing out that it is a question of approach and emphasis: while the Council has indeed reproved certain errors, it has devoted more attention to offering solutions than to lamenting man’s problems, preferring to announce a message of hope and confidence, rather than of somber reproof and warning, to the modern world. In an observation reminiscent of the dictum that we are to hate sin but love the sinner, the Pope said:

*Errors* have indeed been rejected, in accordance with the demands of charity no less than of truth. But *men* have only been warned of error – and always in a way that does not violate the precept of respect and love. Thus it has truly been brought about that instead of just presenting a soul-destroying list of diseases, the Council has openly offered healthy remedies full of comfort; in this way it has avoided dire predictions of doom and has left for mankind a testimony marked by hope and confidence.<sup>22</sup>

In an address to the Roman patriarchate and nobility immediately after the Council (13 January 1966), the Pope opened his heart even more expressively. In an almost idyllic passage, stressing that the benign conciliar perspective is new – even strange – in comparison with the customary ecclesiastical teaching style, he presents the Church as having rediscovered her motherly affection for a world which even today glows with lingering rays of that primordial effulgence which once illumined Paradise. How, asks the Pontiff, does the Church in our time view the world? She has not closed her eyes to sin and evil, but she looks upon them with greater love, as the physician looks upon his patient, or as a mother looks upon her erring child:

We would draw attention briefly to a key criterion of this conciliar teaching: its optimism. That is, the conciliar Church has gazed at the world a little more in the way that God Himself, on completing the creation, contemplated the stupendous and boundless work of His hands. God, the Scripture says, saw that all He had created was most beautiful. Yes, the Church today has decided to regard the world in all its expressions – cosmic, human, historical, cultural, social, etc. – with immense admiration, with great respect, with maternal sympathy, with generous love. Yes, everything is to be seen that way! It is not that the Church has now closed her eyes to the evil in man and the world – above all to sin, which is radical ruin and death – and then poverty, hunger, pain,

<sup>21</sup> “*Quid enim amplissimus hic Consensus in humana natura perspexit, quidve, lumen Deitatis consecutus, cognoscere studuit? Os eius, duas quod semper facies praefert, penitus perspicere voluit, hominis scilicet infirmitate[m] mitemque dignitatem, tum eius summum malum quo veluti morbo insanabili neque dubio ipse laborat, tum eius quod manet bonum, arcana quidem venustate singularique praestantia distinctum. Verum id est aperte fatendum, nostrum hoc Concilium, cum suum fecerit de homine iudicium, magis in serena hac eius fronte quam in tristi contuenda esse versatum; in quo quidem res omnes in optimam sane partem scienter esse interpretatum. Multum enim studii atque admirationis in nostrae aetatis homines Concilium contulit*” (AAS 58 [1966] 56).

<sup>22</sup> “*Erroribus profecto sunt reiecti, quemadmodum caritas ipsa perinde atque veritas postulabant, sed homines, salvo semper observantiae et amoris praeepto, tantum de errore sunt admoniti. Ita nimirum factum est, ut pro morborum cognitione, quae animos frangeret, salutaria in medium proferrentur remedia plena solacii; ut Concilium, non infaustus usum ominibus, sed nuntiis spei ac fiduciae verbis, huiusce memoriae homines alloqueretur*” (*ibid.*).

discord, war, ignorance, the manifold and threatening transitoriness of life and of all human affairs. The Church has not closed her eyes to all these things, but has turned a more loving gaze upon them, as a physician looks at his sick patient, or as the Samaritan gazed at the unhappy victim, left wounded and half-dead on the road to Jericho. . . . The Church has discovered her own motherly and forgiving face.<sup>23</sup>

It is in the light of this overall optimism about the Church's new relationship with the modern world in general – especially during the first years of his pontificate – that we should understand the evidence presented above and in our next section for Paul VI's spirit of confidence toward contemporary biblical scholarship, which he saw largely as the fruit of new avenues opened up by the encyclical *Divino afflante Spiritu*. The Pope was not unaware of the dangers posed by some currents of exegesis, but it is clear that, in his judgment, they were for the most part being adequately dealt with within the community of exegetes, and did not require strong disciplinary interventions or condemnations on the part of the Council. This positive outlook would be maintained to a considerable extent throughout his entire pontificate.

## 2. Written and Spoken Interventions as Pope

### 2a. Major Interventions

One of the most important documents presenting the Pope's largely favorable attitude toward modern biblical scholars is the Apostolic Exhortation *Quinque iam anni* of 8 December 1970, marking the fifth anniversary of the closure of Vatican Council II and commenting on the state of the Church in this immediate post-conciliar period. Pope Paul observed that, along with patristic and theological studies, "biblical research . . . often furnishes very valuable assistance in explaining more clearly the truths of revelation."<sup>24</sup> He made a particular point of encouraging exegetes in the Church's community of scholars in their weighty responsibility of reflecting deeply on the sacred mysteries:

Therefore, the work of those in the Church of God, especially theologians and exegetes, who undertake the weighty task of investigating more deeply the inexhaustible riches of this [revealed] mystery, is something which will receive Our encouragement and support, so that they may be assisted to carry on with their labours, while cleaving to the great pathway marked out by Christian Tradition.<sup>25</sup>

Paul VI also praised the biblical developments which took place before the Council, paving the way for *Dei Verbum*: he observed that after the Council, "the groundwork for which was laid by a great abundance of theological and biblical studies,"<sup>26</sup> there is now a need to go further, especially in Christian anthropology, taking into account recent progress in the human sciences.

In nearly all of the major allocutions which he dedicated to biblical studies, Paul VI manifested this attitude of confidence and encouragement. His first pronouncement came during the Council, when he addressed the eighteenth *Settimana Biblica Italiana* on 25 September 1964: "We are pleased with the methods – both at the academic level and at that of divulgation – which direct your activity."<sup>27</sup> Although recognizing that due caution should be observed in promoting wider diffusion of the Bible amongst lay folk who seldom have much background knowledge for its correct interpretation, he was quick to add:

<sup>23</sup> "Notiamo soltanto un criterio informatore di questo insegnamento conciliare: l'ottimismo. Cioè la Chiesa del Concilio ha guardato il mondo un po' come Dio stesso guardò dopo la creazione la stupenda e sconfinata opera sua: vide, Iddio, dice la Scrittura, che tutte le cose da Lui create, erano bellissime. Sì, la Chiesa ha voluto oggi considerare il mondo, in tutte le sue espressioni, cosmiche, umane, storiche, culturali, sociali, eccetera, con immensa ammirazione, con grande rispetto, con materna simpatia, con generoso amore. Sì, così ogni cosa. Non già che la Chiesa abbia chiuso gli occhi sui mali dell'uomo e del mondo – il peccato soprattutto, ch'è la rovina radicale, ch'è la morte, e poi la miseria, la fame, il dolore, la discordia, la guerra, l'ignoranza, la molteplice e sempre minacciosa caducità della vita e delle cose dell'uomo, non ha chiuso gli occhi, ma li ha guardati con accresciuto amore, come il medico guarda l'ammalato, come il Samaritano il disgraziato lasciato ferito e semivivo sul sentiero di Gerico. . . . la Chiesa ha scoperto il suo volto di Madre" (AAS 58 [1966] 150).

<sup>24</sup> ". . . investigatio biblica, patristica, theologica egregium saepe adiumentum praebet ad veritates revelatas significantius proferendas" (AAS 63 [1971] 99).

<sup>25</sup> "Eos ergo, qui in Ecclesia Dei grave munus inexhaustas divitias huius mysterii penitus pervestigandi suscipiunt, praesertim theologos et exegetas, in testimonium confirmabimus et fulciemus, ita ut adiuventur ad pergendum opus suum, magnum illum Traditionis christianae cursum tenentes" (*ibid.*, 102).

<sup>26</sup> ". . . quod locupletissima rerum copia, in doctrina biblica et theologica adepta, fuit apparatus" (*ibid.*, 103).

<sup>27</sup> "Siamo felici . . . per il metodo, sia scientifico che divulgativo, che dirige la vostra attività" (AAS 56 [1964] 936).



But that should not be an obstacle to such diffusion, which has been made easier and more sought after by the advancing level of popular culture. Indeed, the spiritual renewal which the Church is promoting today by leading souls back to the wellsprings of religious life shows that this wider access to the Bible is both healthy and urgent.<sup>28</sup>

On 23 September 1966, at the next biennial *Settimana Biblica* promoted by the Associazione Biblica Italiana, similar appreciation was expressed for the work of modern exegetes, and two of the leading figures were singled out by the Holy Father for special commendation: first, “the eminent figure of Cardinal Augustin Bea, so wise as a teacher and so distinguished as a biblical scholar,”<sup>29</sup> and then another great scholar, recently deceased, “the late Father Alberto Vaccari . . . who, as you all know, was distinguished not only by his great academic competence, but also by his rare virtue and spiritual generosity.”<sup>30</sup>

In this first major allocution on biblical studies after Vatican II, the Pope noted with satisfaction that the primary theme chosen for that week of study was the conciliar Constitution *Dei Verbum*, and was quick to express high hopes regarding its future positive influence on biblical studies: “In truth, We believe that this conciliar Constitution can have a most favorable influence on biblical studies, marking out paths of investigation that are open, but at the same time straight. You have done well to express your praise and your acceptance of this document.”<sup>31</sup>

Two years later, at an international congress on Old Testament studies (19 April 1968), the Pope was particularly explicit in praising recent developments in this field, and noted the significant contribution to modern biblical studies which had been made by Pope Pius XII’s 1943 encyclical on Scripture studies, *Divino afflante Spiritu*. Pope Paul affirmed that this encyclical had opened up new avenues for biblical scholars, and strongly encouraged the assembled exegetes to make use of modern techniques:

There has been remarkable progress in Old Testament studies in recent years. In regard to the Catholic Church’s position, you all know that Our predecessor Pius XII had opened the way widely to researchers in his Encyclical Letter *Divino afflante Spiritu*, of 30 September 1943, in which he encouraged the use of solid and suitable critical methods for the elucidation of the sacred text. It is your honor to dedicate yourselves in a professional and scientific manner to the enhancement of all the resources offered by modern techniques in the fields of literature, history, and archæology, and to use those resources in order to bring about further progress in our knowledge of the Old Testament.<sup>32</sup>

This papal endorsement of the thesis that *Divino afflante Spiritu* did in fact “open the way widely for researchers” was particularly significant in the light of the animated controversy over this question which exercised Roman biblical scholars in the years immediately preceding the Council. Most of the Pope’s listeners on that day in 1968 would still have remembered vividly how, less than a decade earlier, an editorial in *La Civiltà Cattolica* by a professor of the Biblical Institute, Luis Alonso Schökel, had sparked a vehement protest from another Scripture scholar, Antonino Romeo, in *Divinitas*, the review of the Pontifical Lateran University,<sup>33</sup> mainly because Alonso Schökel had claimed that Pius XII “was very conscious of opening a new and wide door through which many novelties would be entering the precincts of Catholic exegesis – novelties that would have surprised excessively conservative minds.”<sup>34</sup> Although Pope Paul’s brief remark had a certain resonance with Alonso Schökel’s claim, it would no doubt be excessive to conclude that the Pontiff

<sup>28</sup> “Ma ciò non deve ostacolare tale diffusione, che il cresciuto livello della cultura popolare rende più ambita e più facile, e che il rinnovamento spirituale, che la Chiesa intende oggi promuovere riconducendo le anime alle sorgenti della vita religiosa, dimostra altrettanto urgente, che salutare” (*ibid.*, 938).

<sup>29</sup> “. . . l’eminente figura del Cardinale Agostino Bea, maestro tanto sapiente e tanto benemerito degli studi biblici” (*Ins.* 1966, 413-414).

<sup>30</sup> “. . . uno scomparso . . . il Padre Alberto Vaccari . . . del quale riconoscete i meriti non solo d’una grande competenza scientifica, ma anche di elette virtù e di generosità spirituale” (*ibid.*, 414).

<sup>31</sup> “Pensiamo davvero che tale Costituzione conciliare possa esercitare sugli studi biblici un influsso favorevolissimo, segnandone i sentieri al tempo stesso aperti e diritti; e bene avete fatto voi a professarvi il vostro plauso ed il vostro ossequio” (*ibid.*, 415).

<sup>32</sup> “Le progrès des études concernant l’Ancien Testament a été remarquable en ces dernières années. Pour ce qui concerne l’Eglise catholique, Notre prédécesseur Pie XII avait, vous le savez, largement ouvert la voie aux chercheurs par sa Lettre Encyclique *Divino afflante Spiritu*, du 30 septembre 1943, où il encourageait l’emploi de méthodes critiques solides et adéquates pour l’élucidation du texte sacré. C’est votre honneur de vous consacrer, de manière professionnelle et scientifique, à mettre en valeur toutes les ressources fournies par la technique moderne – dans les domaines littéraire, historique et archæologique – et à les utiliser en vue de faire progresser la connaissance de l’Ancien Testament” (AAS 60 [1968] 262-263).

<sup>33</sup> A. Romeo, “L’Enciclica ‘Divino afflante Spiritu’ e le ‘Opiniones novæ,’” *Divinitas* 4 (1960) 378-456.

<sup>34</sup> “. . . si rese ben conto di aprire una nuova ed ampia porta, e che attraverso di essa sarebbero entrate nel recinto dell’esegesi cattolica molte novità, che avrebbero sorpreso gli animi eccessivamente conservatori” (“Dove va l’esegesi cattolica?,” *La Civiltà Cattolica* 111 [1960/III] 456).

wished to express an unqualified endorsement for that side of the controversy. Nevertheless, it does indeed show an attitude of general sympathy towards post-war trends in Catholic exegesis, and an unwillingness to take the side of those exegetes who interpreted *Divino afflante Spiritu* as having brought about no change at all in the magisterium's approach to biblical studies.

Indeed, Paul VI delivered an implicit rebuke to certain exegetes of that line of thought in his first visit as Pope to the Pontifical Lateran University on 31 October 1963. Along with his words of praise and appreciation for the work of the University, Pope Paul expressed his hope that its relations with the other distinguished Roman ecclesiastical academies would be marked by sincere appreciation and fraternal cooperation, and "never" – a word repeated with emphasis – by rivalry or polemics:

May its [the Lateran University's] voice in the concert of the great and justly celebrated Roman institutes of high ecclesial culture be one of sincere appreciation, of fraternal collaboration, loyal emulation, mutual reverence and friendly concord; never one of jealous competitiveness or of annoying polemics – never!<sup>35</sup>

Given the fact that just three years earlier it had been Romeo's article in the journal published by the Lateran University which had set in motion the severe criticisms of the *Biblicum* and the heated exchanges<sup>36</sup> which eventually involved the temporary suspension of two of its professors, the above remarks made it very clear that the new Pontiff's sympathies did not lie with those who had been most critical of the Biblical Institute. However, it would perhaps be unwise to draw from those remarks any firm or specific conclusions regarding Pope Paul's own stance on the academic biblical issues involved, since his comments seem directed principally to the aggressive and polemical *style* of argumentation adopted by some of those involved in the dispute. That the newly-elected Pope was clearly trying to avoid partisanship and to show his objectivity became clear a few months later on his first visit to the Pontifical Gregorian University (12 March 1964), addressing an audience that included the faculty of the Biblical Institute (which is attached to the Gregorian University). Nevertheless, if the following remarks indicate a certain reserve toward the attitude of the *Biblicum* in the recent dispute (they suggest that relations between the Roman academic institutions need to be improved), they are not nearly so sharp as his exclamatory observations to the Lateran professors had been:

Furthermore, we greatly desire that closer bonds of fraternal harmony develop day by day between the various Roman academies, which should offer each other ever greater assistance and collaboration. Such relationships are necessary both for the good of the Church and for the benefit of the Institutes themselves, since a united effort brings more sure and certain results in attaining their common objectives.<sup>37</sup>

Indeed, in his 1978 tribute to Paul VI's support of biblical scholarship, the then Rector of the *Biblicum*, Maurice Gilbert, S.J., records that almost every year Pope Paul used to receive the Rector in audience and accept from him copies of the Institute's main recent publications. The Pope, says Gilbert, repeatedly took advantage of these meetings to express his great confidence in the *Biblicum*.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>35</sup> “. . . che la sua affermazione nel concerto dei grandi, celebri e benemeriti istituti romani di alta cultura ecclesiastica sia quella della sincera riconoscenza, della fraterna collaborazione, della leale emulazione, della mutua riverenza e dell'amica concordia, non mai d'una gelosa concorrenza o d'una fastidiosa polemica; non mai!” (Ins. 1963, 272).

<sup>36</sup> Cf. reference in n. 34 above. A reply in Latin to Romeo's article quickly appeared in the Biblical Institute's journal, "signed" only by the initials of the Institute itself: cf. "P.I.B.," "Pontificium Institutum *Biblicum* et Recens Libellus R.mi D.ni A. Romeo" (*Verbum Domini* 39 [1961] 3-17).

<sup>37</sup> "Item magnopere cupimus, ut inter varia Romana Athenaeo arctiora in dies fraternae concordiae vincula fiant, eademque magis magisque sibi invicem adiutricem sociamque operam praestent. Quod quidem postulat sive Ecclesiae bonum sive ipsorum Institutorum emolumentum, quia vis unita fortior validiorque evadit ad commune propositum obtinendum" (AAS 56 [1964] 366). That Pope Paul wanted to avoid partisanship in this dispute is suggested by his personal letter at that time to Msgr. Antonio Piolanti, Rector of the Lateran University. The exegete Francesco Spadafora, who felt himself accused by the Pope's warnings against "jealous competitiveness" and "polemics," records the following incident: "Immediately after the visit of Paul VI to the Lateran, I said to the Rector, Msgr. Piolanti, . . . that I was presenting my resignation because of those unjust words of condemnation, which were clearly directed at me. The Rector replied that I need not be disturbed, because, as he said, 'I have already presented my resignation . . .'. The result was that Paul VI not only declined to accept this resignation, but sent Msgr. Piolanti a confidential letter full of praise, in which the Pope gave advance notice that he was intending to make identical remarks during his forthcoming visit to the *Biblicum*" ("Un Caso Emblematico: il trionfo del modernismo sull'esegesi cattolica: 10. Paolo VI," *Si Si No No*, XX, 11 [15 June 1994] 2). Nevertheless, as we have seen, the tone of his remarks referring to the *Biblicum* during his address at the Gregorian University did not in fact turn out to be "identical" to that of his much more severe words at the Lateran. Furthermore, not too long after declining to accept Piolanti's resignation, Pope Paul decided not to re-appoint him as Rector of the Lateran University after his current term expired.

<sup>38</sup> Gilbert observes: "Chaque année ou presque, le Pape reçut le Recteur de l'Institut qui venait lui rendre compte de la situation de l'Institut et lui offrir un exemplaire de ses principales publications. Ce fut l'occasion, souvent répétée, pour le Pontife de manifester la grande confiance qu'il accordait au *Biblicum*" (op. cit., [cf. above, Introduction, n. 18] 462).

Let us return to Paul VI's major allocutions on specifically biblical topics. At the 1968 *Settimana Biblica* (on 27 September) the Pope again praised the assembled exegetes of the *Associazione Biblica Italiana* for their "prolific work in updating biblical studies"<sup>39</sup> and stressed the high priority given by the Council to the advancement of Scripture scholarship: "We cannot do otherwise than stress the fact that the Council has placed the biblical movement at the forefront of that sound process of renewal in the Church (*Unitatis redintegratio* 6) which consists in her ever-increasing fidelity to her own vocation before God and the world."<sup>40</sup>

On 25 September 1970, at the next *A.B.I.* "Biblical Week," the Pope again expressed optimism, stressing his "great appreciation for your studies, with sincere confidence in your educative work and with joyous hope in the progress of biblical science."<sup>41</sup> And on the last of these biennial occasions at which Paul VI gave a special address, that of 29 September 1972, he called to mind the Council's insistence that "the study of Sacred Scripture should be like the soul of all theology,"<sup>42</sup> and praised the "flourishing development" of today's biblical studies.<sup>43</sup>

In the most extensive biblical allocution of his pontificate – that addressed to a plenary session of the Pontifical Biblical Commission on 14 March 1974 – Paul VI expressed his confidence in the present and future work of the leading Catholic exegetes who had gathered together there. He spoke of the Biblical Commission as a group "whose competence and fidelity to the Church and her Magisterium are well known to Us. . . . and We must also make known the trust We place in your future labors."<sup>44</sup> More precisely, the Pope expressed his confidence that the members of the Commission would bring forth biblical studies that were not only academically more advanced, but also soundly orthodox and relevant for men and women of today. These scholarly efforts, he said,

will facilitate the attainment of a double objective: effectively promoting the advance of biblical studies within the Church, and keeping the interpretation of Sacred Scripture on a sure and straight path – faithful to that Word of God to which we are subject, and responsive to the needs of those to whom that Word is addressed.<sup>45</sup>

More specifically, the Pope drew attention to the new orientations in biblical studies which had been treated in the Commission's 1964 Instruction on the historical truth of the Gospels, emphasizing his personal endorsement of that document and his encouragement of the avenues of research which it opened up. These remarks came in the context of commenting on the increasing awareness in modern exegesis of the inseparable bond between the New Testament documents and the early Church which produced them:

It even seems that the distinctive and dominant note in contemporary exegesis is reflection on the profound relations linking Scripture to the primitive Church. Is it not within this perspective that research on the history of traditions, and on form- and redaction-criticism, is to be viewed? We have encouraged this research, along with the necessary methodological corrections, in the recent instruction *Sancta Mater Ecclesia* on the historical truth of the Gospels.<sup>46</sup>

The Pontiff went on to show his awareness of, and appreciation for, recent hermeneutical studies involving the relation between the 'diachronic' and 'synchronic' aspects of New Testament texts:

And what of the contemporary research which argues for the need to integrate a "diachronic" reading of the texts – that is, a reading which is attentive to their historical development – with a "synchronic" consideration which

<sup>39</sup> ". . . proficuo aggiornamento sugli studi biblici" (*Ins.* 1968, 493).

<sup>40</sup> "*Ma non vogliamo omettere di sottolineare che il Concilio ha posto il movimento biblico in prima linea nel sano rinnovamento della Chiesa (Unitatis redintegratio 6), il quale consiste nella sua accresciuta fedeltà alla propria vocazione in rapporto a Dio e al mondo*" (*ibid.*).

<sup>41</sup> ". . . grande riconoscenza per i vostri studi, con sincera fiducia nella vostra opera educativa, con lieta speranza nel progresso delle scienze bibliche" (AAS 62 [1970] 618-619).

<sup>42</sup> ". . . come l'anima di tutta la teologia" (AAS 64 [1972] 635). Cf. Vatican II, *Dei Verbum* 24, *Optatam totius* 16.

<sup>43</sup> ". . . rigoglioso sviluppo" (AAS *loc. cit.*).

<sup>44</sup> ". . . dont nous connaissons le compétence ainsi que l'attachement à l'Eglise et à son Magistère. . . . et Nous tenons aussi à dire la confiance que Nous mettons dans vos travaux futurs" (AAS 66 [1974] 235).

<sup>45</sup> ". . . devront permettre de réaliser un double objectif: la promotion efficace du progrès des études bibliques dans l'Eglise et le maintien de l'interprétation de la Sainte Ecriture selon une ligne sûre, fidèle à la Parole de Dieu à laquelle nous sommes soumis et répondant aux exigences des hommes auxquels elle est adressée" (*ibid.*).

<sup>46</sup> "*Il semble même que la note distinctive et dominante de l'exégèse contemporaine soit la réflexion sur les relations profondes qui relie l'Ecriture et l'Eglise de la première heure. Les recherches sur l'histoire des traditions, des formes, de la rédaction (Tradition-Form-Redaktiongeschichte) que Nous avons encouragés, avec les corrections méthodologiques nécessaires, dans la récente instruction Sancta Mater Ecclesia sur la vérité historique des Evangiles, n'entrent-elles pas dans cette perspective?*" (*ibid.*, 236).

recognizes the proper role of the literary and existential connections of each text in relation to the linguistic and cultural complex in which it is inserted? Is it not true that such research is clearly becoming part of the Church's life?<sup>47</sup>

In this same address to the Pontifical Biblical Commission, the Pope made reference to the recent change in legislation, brought into effect by the Motu Proprio *Sedula cura* of 27 June 1971, by which the Commission became attached to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. He stressed that this change in no way called in question the "irreplaceable service which [the Commission] should continue to render to the See of Peter."<sup>48</sup> The opening words of the Motu Proprio also testify to Paul VI's resolution to implement the Council's call for a greater knowledge and wider diffusion of the Bible in today's Church, as spiritual nourishment for her children:

The Church has always striven with sedulous care to acquire an ever deeper understanding of the Sacred Scriptures, so that her children may be constantly nourished with the divine word. Especially in our own times this zeal is openly shown forth in the prescriptions of the Second Ecumenical Vatican Council, which calls for the riches of God's word to be opened up more widely and fruitfully to the faithful, in order to promote more vigorously the most abundant possible Christian life.<sup>49</sup>

Pope Paul's final discourse to specialists in biblical studies was his address of 28 June 1974 to an international conference on Assyriology organized by the University of Rome and the Pontifical Biblical Institute. In this allocution the Pope made clear his awareness of the need for studies in this field. After noting their importance from the standpoint of culture and history, he continued with observations that went further than the teaching of any previous Pope in accepting the idea that God's word in the Old Testament has been transmitted to us in forms influenced by ancient cultures other than that of the chosen People itself:

We are still more conscious of the fact that your research concerns the Near East, which was in a sense the cradle of the biblical Tradition we have inherited. Many of the testimonies recorded in the Bible take on a new profile when one knows the contemporary or still more ancient neighboring traditions – We are thinking of the famous epic Ugaritic texts – with which the Hebrews came into contact, which influenced their wisdom, or which their prophets approached with a demythologizing frame of mind because of their faith in Yahweh.<sup>50</sup>

The Pope then went on to draw a parallel between this Hebrew 'purification' of ancient traditions and the future Incarnation of the Son of God. Here his praise for research into such matters on the part of the Church's most prominent centers of biblical learning in Rome and Jerusalem was explicit:

We indeed believe that it is the Spirit of the living God who has unceasingly purified and elevated their consciousness; but He has done so by means of a history, a culture, a 'raw material' firmly rooted in humanity. This is the law of the Incarnation. Just as it would be difficult to understand the work of Christ outside of the biblical Tradition which he took for granted, in the same way – in the name of the truth which must be our first concern – it appears difficult to read the Old Testament today while dismissing its cultural roots as irrelevant. The progress of Assyriological sciences helps us in this regard, and We congratulate the Biblical Institute of Rome and the *Ecole Biblique* of Jerusalem for having made the most of this opportunity.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>47</sup> "Et les requêtes contemporaines sur la nécessité d'intégrer une lecture 'diachronique', c'est-à-dire attentive aux développements historiques du texte, à une considération 'synchronique' qui donne leur place propre aux connexions littéraires et existentielles de tout texte par rapport au complexe linguistique et culturel dans lequel il s'insère, n'introduisent-elles pas clairement dans la vie de l'Eglise?" (ibid.).

<sup>48</sup> "... la service irremplaçable qu'il vous appartient de rendre au Siège Apostolique" (ibid., 241).

<sup>49</sup> "Sedula cura, qua Ecclesia altiore in dies Scripturarum Sacrarum intellegentiam consequi semper annisa est, ut filios suos divinis eloquiis indesinenter pasceret, nostris praesertim temporibus palam ostenditur, cum Concilium Oecumenicum Vaticanum II praescripserit, ut ad impensius fovendam christianam vitam amplissimam verbi Dei divitiarum largius uberiusque christifidelibus paterent" (AAS 63 [1971] 665).

<sup>50</sup> "Nous y sommes d'autant plus sensibles que vos recherches concernent le Proche-Orient qui fut en quelque sorte le berceau de la Tradition biblique dont nous sommes les héritiers. Beaucoup de témoignages, consignés dans la Bible, prennent un relief nouveau lorsque l'on connaît les traditions voisines, plus anciennes ou contemporaines – Nous pensons aux fameux textes épiques ugaritiques – avec lesquelles les Hébreux ont été en rapport, qui les ont influencés dans leur sagesse, ou au regard desquelles leurs prophètes ont pris une attitude démythifiante, à cause de leur foi en Yahvé" (Ins. 1974, 612).

<sup>51</sup> "Nous croyons, Nous, que c'est l'Esprit de Dieu vivant qui a sans cesse purifié et élevé leur conscience, mais il l'a fait à travers une histoire, une culture, une 'matière' fortement enracinées dans l'humanité. C'est la loi de l'Incarnation. De même qu'il serait difficile de comprendre l'oeuvre du Christ en dehors de la Tradition biblique qu'il a assumée, de même, au nom de la vérité qui doit être notre premier souci, il paraît difficile de lire

## 2b. Other Interventions

If we turn to the Pope's allocutions to audiences consisting mainly of non-specialists in biblical studies, the same general attitude of confidence and hopefulness toward the contemporary use of Scripture can be found expressed on a number of occasions. On 2 February 1965, referring to the forthcoming International Marian Congress in the Dominican Republic, the Pope expressed his confidence that the new christological and ecclesiological emphases in this field (resulting from the recently-promulgated *Lumen gentium*) would imprint their character on this Congress: a character which he described as "post-conciliar, renewal-oriented, both moderating and promoting Catholic Marian devotion," and which would have "the merit of seeking the true and fruitful sources of that devotion itself in the pages of Sacred Scripture"<sup>52</sup> before all else. Speaking several weeks later (15 March 1965) to a group of Roman mariologists who were about to set off for this Santo Domingo Congress, Pope Paul again praised "sound modern exegetical studies" in mariology, and expressed his confidence that these scholars would "be able to add solid, well-meditated contributions to the knowledge of the inspired texts."<sup>53</sup>

Again, "the Council opens many new horizons to biblical studies,"<sup>54</sup> said the Pope at one of the first Wednesday general audiences after the conclusion of Vatican II, that of 12 January 1966. The same sentiment was reiterated to the College of Cardinals in a Christmas address during the middle of his pontificate (23 December 1971), when Pope Paul noted that a "flourishing of biblical studies"<sup>55</sup> was one of the fruits of the Council.

Several other Wednesday audience allocutions emphasized the value of modern Catholic biblical studies,<sup>56</sup> and in greeting a congress organized by the World Federation for the Biblical Apostolate on 14 July 1971, Pope Paul remarked that "the Word of God is more deeply appreciated than in past times."<sup>57</sup> He also showed his interest in the ancillary biblical sciences by addressing a congress on Syriac studies (30 October 1972), noting that certain ancient documents in that language "hand down to us the literary expressions closest to the Aramean dialect spoken by Jesus Christ."<sup>58</sup>

In regard to ancient languages, however, Pope Paul was naturally concerned above all for the Church's official language, and showed a keen interest in promoting an up-dated version of the Latin Vulgate Bible – a work entrusted (as with certain other important scriptural matters) to the supervision of Cardinal Augustin Bea. Addressing the College of Cardinals at Christmas, 1966, the Pontiff expressed his view that the progress of biblical studies required a new and authoritative Latin text of Scripture for the Church and for the world:

We would need another entire discourse to speak adequately of the work presently being carried out under the direction of Cardinal Augustin Bea by the Commission for the preparation of a new Bible in the Latin language. This forthcoming edition – the Neo-Vulgate, as it is now called – is important both for the progress of biblical studies, and because of the need to offer the Church and the world a new and authoritative text of the Sacred Scriptures.<sup>59</sup>

In this article we have seen how, both before and after his election to the papacy, Paul VI frequently displayed in both speeches and writings a generally approbatory and encouraging attitude toward modern critical biblical scholarship, and toward the persons and institutions that promoted and diffused it. In the next issue of *Living Tradition* we shall see evidence of how this sympathetic attitude was reflected in some important administrative decisions and appointments that had important implications for the long-term future of Catholic biblical studies.

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*aujourd'hui l'Ancien Testament en faisant fi de son enracinement culturel. Le progrès des sciences assyriologiques nous y aide et Nous félicitons l'Institut Biblique de Rome et l'Ecole Biblique de Jérusalem d'avoir saisi cette chance" (ibid.).*

<sup>52</sup> "Noi confidiamo che [questo indirizzo] imprimerà al Congresso il suo carattere post-conciliare, rinnovatrice, moderatore, promotore del culto cattolico mariano, gli darà il merito di ricercare le sorgenti vere e feconde del culto stesso nelle pagine della Sacra Scrittura" (AAS 57 [1965] 251).

<sup>53</sup> "... dei sani studi esegetici odierni, Noi Ci auguriamo che possiate apportare solidi, meditati contributi alla conoscenza dei testi ispirati" (Ins. 1965, 170).

<sup>54</sup> "... il Concilio apre molti orizzonti nuovi agli studi biblici" (Ins. 1966, 699).

<sup>55</sup> "... una fioritura di studi e di contributi nell'ambito delle scienze bibliche" (AAS 64 [1972] 32).

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Wednesday allocutions of 16 April 1969 (Ins. 1969, 922-923) and 1 July 1970 (Ins. 1970, 689-693).

<sup>57</sup> Ins. 1971, 629.

<sup>58</sup> "... nous transmettent les expressions littéraires les plus proches du dialecte araméen que parla le Christ Jésus" (Ins. 1972, 1110).

<sup>59</sup> "Altro discorso esigerebbe l'opera in corso della Commissione, presieduta dal Signor Cardinale Agostino Bea, per la preparazione d'una nuova Bibbia in lingua latina, la Neo-Vulgata, come già si chiama; edizione desiderata dal progresso degli studi biblici e dalla necessità di dare alla Chiesa e al mondo un nuovo e autorevole testo della Sacra Scrittura" (AAS 58 [1966] 53).