

BOOK REVIEW

Scott CARL, ed., *Verbum Domini and the Complementarity of Exegesis and Theology*, Catholic Theological Formation Series (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Wm B. Eerdmans, 2015) pp. xvi + 176. Pb. \$ 25.00.

This slender volume comes from The Monsignor Jerome D. Quinn Institute of Biblical Studies (University of St. Thomas, Minnesota, USA). It dwells on certain important aspects of Pope Benedict XVI's Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini* (2010). The book is a constructive effort to make the study of Sacred Scripture *the soul of theology* (cf. Leo XIII, Encyclical Letter *Providentissimus Deus*; *Dei Verbum*, n. 24; Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, nn. 31, 47). It carries 11 important contributions.

The editor Scott Carl offers a six-page Introduction to the scholarly articles in the book (pp. xi-xvi). The book then unfolds in two neat parts. Part I deals with "The Complementarity of Exegesis and Theology". Here we have five articles. Part II concerns "The Word of God in the Formation of Seminarians" and contains six contributions.

In the first article, Denis Farkasfalvy reflects on the analogy of "Inspiration and Incarnation" (pp. 3-11) with a view to offering "a vantage point from which the theology of inspiration may be reexamined" (p. 3). After considering the patristic parallelism between inspiration and incarnation, he traces the influence of this notion on Vatican II's dogmatic constitution on divine revelation: *Dei Verbum* (1965). In concluding his very enlightening discussion, he makes a compelling point: "The incarnational context of inspiration offers to the theology of inspiration a new chance for what Karl Rahner asked for in 1958: a complete overhaul of the concept, in order to rethink, redevelop, and repossess it for the sake of renewing biblical theology" (p. 11).

The second article, by Francis Martin, is on the "Spiritual Understanding of Scripture" (pp. 12-25). Here, the author dwells on "the ancient tradition that the Sacred Text is interpreted by means of prophetic graces" and helps us see "the manner in which this tradition is being recovered and integrated with what is sound in the historical work that has been done in recent centuries" (p. 14). What he says in conclusion is noteworthy: "Understanding human history and cognition in light of the Resurrection of Christ disposes us to encounter him in the Sacred Text, where he is uniquely present to those who seek him in faith. Those who seek this fire in the cloud of the Scriptures must persevere in an attentive and purifying search. The spiritual or mystical sense of Scripture, its inner life, is not a 'meaning' as much as it is a 'fire', a touch of divine realities" (p. 24). In the perspective of Henri de Lubac, it is *the mystical life itself*.

In the third article, Brant Pitre dwells on "*Verbum Domini* and Historical-Critical Exegesis" (pp. 26-40). Here readers will find a brief consideration of five important points about the Historical-critical Method that Benedict XVI has highlighted. Pitre takes serious cognizance of Benedict's call in *Verbum Domini*, n. 35, while admitting the immense difficulty in finding an acceptable balance between critical exegesis and

the directives of Vatican II (cf. *Dei Verbum*, n. 12). He grapples with the Church's rejection of a dichotomy between historical-critical exegesis and spiritual interpretation. He is aware of a constant danger awaiting the unwary sojourner in the world of the Scriptures: taking refuge in very subjective and overly spiritual interpretations without due regard for what significant exegetes have had to say. Of particular importance is what he mentions about the risk of "lapsing into a kind of exegetical docetism, in which the words of Scripture only appear to be fully human, but are in fact only divine" (p. 39). In conclusion, he says: "If the Church is calling for 'exegesis' to truly be 'theology', and if theology is to become 'essentially the interpretation of the Church's Scripture' [*Verbum Domini*, n. 35], then a generation of Catholic biblical scholars and theologians have a great deal of work to do before the vision of both *Dei Verbum* and *Verbum Domini* might come to its full flowering" (p. 40).

The fourth article is on "Overcoming the Hiatus between Exegesis and Theology: Guidance and Examples from Pope Benedict XVI" (pp. 41-62). Here Pablo Gadenz takes up Pope Benedict's unease with dualistic biblical interpretation. He goes on to show how dogma in essence stems from Scripture itself (pp. 45-51) and how the Church is the living subject of biblical interpretation (pp. 52-61). At least some of the anxieties expressed in the previous article are allayed here. In tune with Benedict, Gadenz says that by overcoming the hiatus between exegesis and theology one may the better integrate biblical studies with scriptural prayer (p. 62). Using the words of H. de Lubac, he reminds us that "Scripture is not just a *locus theologicus* but also a *hortus conclusus*" (p. 62). This is why all Christians must love the word of God, make it the soul of their theological formation, recognizing "the indispensable interplay of exegesis, theology, spirituality and mission" (*Verbum Domini*, n. 82).

Next, Christian D. Washburn introduces us to "The Catholic Use of the Scriptures in Ecumenical Dialogue" (pp. 63-82). In *Verbum Domini*, n. 46, Benedict XVI stresses "the centrality of biblical studies within ecumenical dialogue" aimed at the unity of all Christians. In his article, Washburn considers the importance of (1) *the theological*, (2) *the patristic*, and (3) *the ecclesial readings* of Scripture. Aware of the limits of the Historical-critical Method, he notes that "it is incumbent upon Catholic ecumenists to account for the ecclesiological, patristic, and theological readings of the Scriptures in their encounters with our separated brethren" (p. 82). This is all the more significant at a time when Protestant Christianity is increasingly rediscovering the treasures of patristic biblical interpretation as well as "the value of ecclesial structures that preserve the meaning of the word of God against the forces of a hostile culture". Washburn further avers that these essential aspects of biblical interpretation "must be seen as part of the organic structure by which divine revelation is handed on" (p. 82). Disregarding any of these aspects will do violence to the heart of the Christian message.

The sixth article discusses the issue of "Preparing Seminarians for the Ministry of the Word in the Light of *Verbum Domini*" (pp. 85-99). Here Peter S. Williamson considers how we may re-dimension the way Scripture is taught and cherished in seminaries. He takes care to distinguish between foundational scriptural formation (e.g., *lectio divina*, introductory courses) and professional preparation in the study of Scripture (e.g., training in exegesis - something specific in preparing seminarians for their priestly ministry). He laments situations where seminarians are tempted to consider

Scripture courses “as academic hoops to jump through whose relation to life and priestly ministry they do not understand” (p. 91). He outlines the tasks involved in a priest’s ministry of the word and then goes on to suggest a practical method of pastoral exegesis. When speaking of the *knowledge* of Scripture that seminarians should have, the *skills* they should gradually acquire (including sufficient familiarity with Hebrew and Greek), and the *resources* (tools) they should be acquainted with, he says that “a seminarian must have an overview of Scripture’s grand narrative, the history of salvation” (p. 96). Moreover, he should know the subtle way in which the New Testament *lies hidden in the Old* and how the Old Testament *stands revealed in the New*. Of particular importance, he says, is acquiring skill in *actualization* or in the application of Scripture to life. Scripture professors, in their turn, “must strive to teach, by word and example, an authentic biblical piety that emphasizes faith and obedience as well as delight in God’s word” (p. 98).

The next contribution comes from James Swetnam: “Searching for the Obvious: Toward a Catholic Hermeneutic of Scripture with Seminarians Especially in Mind” (pp. 100-108). Based on the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (nn. 111-114), Swetnam offers an outline of Catholic hermeneutics of Scripture, stressing the vertical or transcendental dimension, since the Holy Spirit is the Agent of Scriptural inspiration and the One who guarantees the proper interpretation and application of Scripture. Seminarians will profit much from his tips on how to profit from the Scripture courses they attend. Swetnam stresses three important tasks before students: (1) a deepening of their knowledge of Christ and of his insertion into time; (2) a deepening of their respect for all persons, both human and divine; and (3) a deepening of their awareness of the Catholic faith they have received. There is a need also to prepare themselves for the study of Scripture by doing their philosophical and related studies well.

Mary Healy helps us reflect on “*Verbum Domini* and the Renewal of Biblical Preaching” (pp. 109-122). Heeding the invitation of Benedict XVI, she challenges us (1) to take biblical inspiration and authority seriously, and (2) to rediscover the fourfold sense of the Scriptures. She illustrates her point by showing how one may homiletically approach the sacred text of Numbers 13-14. With Benedict XVI, Healy reminds us that part of the homilist’s task is to assist the faithful to enter into the ‘inner drama’, where the Spirit is personally engaged (cf. *Verbum Domini*, n. 38). She tells us that a homily must be christocentric and kerygmatic. Again, the homilist must remain close to the biblical text and aim at harmony between what he preaches and what he lives.

Stephen Ryan takes up the complex and technical issue of “The Word of God and the Textual Pluriformity of the Old Testament” (pp. 123-150). He demonstrates how the patristic tradition (as in Origen, Jerome, Augustine, for instance), the official teachings of the Church (as in *Dei Verbum* and *Liturgiam Authenticam*, for instance), and the liturgical practice of the Church show us how the Word of God revealed to the prophets and the apostles is received by the Church in several authentic forms (for instance, Greek, Hebrew and Latin – coming to the Church as part of her pluriform Bible). Alongside the Hebrew text (cf. *Hebraica veritas!*), the Septuagint has had a hallowed place in Christian tradition (see pp. 146-147). Now, after offering some examples of the pluriform nature of the Old Testament, Ryan proposes nine important theses about inspiration and textual pluriformity. Of these, we may stress

just one here: "... God used and continues to use the various authentic forms of Scripture, the unique wordings and particular features of the Hebrew, Greek, and Latin texts, to reveal aspects of the richness of the deposit of faith in ways that speak to diverse cultures in their own linguistic idioms. This can be seen as part of the divine accommodation or syncretism" (p. 150).

Kelly Anderson handles a very practical subject: "How the Liturgy of the Hours Provides an Effective Means for Teaching the Book of Psalms" (pp. 151-162). She suggests that, as far as Psalm study is concerned, a good method would be to integrate both new and ancient methods of interpretation, especially insights from the Liturgy of the Hours (LOH). For a seminarian, who will eventually move into a parish context, "learning the psalms in the context the LOH may be the most fruitful and sensible of all possibilities" (p. 152). Her article shows why teaching the psalms thus is to be recommended and gives practical guidelines for effectiveness. Readers will surely appreciate her concise overview of modern research on the psalms, her views on the Church's Christological reading of the psalms, and the practical observations she makes. She suggests that "the LOH is meant to be an actualization of the Paschal Mystery with the pray-er intimately entering into the Passion of Christ, living his experiences and, via the psalms, discovering his life, inner emotions, and thoughts. It is the voice of Christ that resonates within the psalms. This daily, profound contact with the word of God is meant to enable the person to make decisions to live as Christ, treading the path of daily conversions, or to refuse him" (p. 159). As far as priests [and religious] are concerned, "reading the psalms within the movement of the LOH" may be a profitable spiritual exercise.

Finally, Michael Magee engages the specific issue of "Combining Synchronic and Diachronic Methodology in Teaching the Pentateuch" (pp. 163-172). Speaking from his own teaching experiences in seminaries, he suggests that adopting one consistent synchronic reading style for the basic structure of a course on the Pentateuch and appropriately interposing it with diachronic readings of selected passages may prove helpful. Such an approach "is called for by the seminarians' openness to their own future ministry, in which they know they will be called upon to unfold for God's people, not the prehistory of the biblical text, but rather its divine unity and its everlasting message" (p. 172).

This work does not have a separate bibliography, but carries a 3-page Index (pp. 174-176). Had the book been enriched with two or three more articles on Part III of *Verbum Domini*, namely 'Verbum Mundo', it would perhaps have been more comprehensive and benefited a wider readership. Nonetheless, it is indeed a timely book and its contributions are all very relevant. It is the first published volume in the Catholic Theological Formation Series. We eagerly look forward to more such valuable volumes.

Abraham M. Antony, SDB

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