

Synod of Bishops: interventions during the 14th General Congregation

Synod on the Word of God

The following are summaries of the Synod Fathers' interventions, given on Tuesday morning, 14 October, during the 14th General Congregation.

The Bible and youth

Cardinal TARCISIO BERTONE, S.D.B.
Secretary of State, Vatican City

"My dear young friends, I urge you to become familiar with the Bible, and to have it at hand so that it can be your compass pointing out the road to follow". This is the practical conclusion to Pope Benedict XVI's Message to the youth of the world on the occasion of World Youth Day in 2006. This message confirms the one given at World Youth Day in Cologne in 2005 and was further developed by the Holy Father during a meeting with young Christians in St Peter's Square on 6 April 2006 when a young man asked what place the Bible should have in the lives of a young believer.

These statements form a triptych in which are manifest the Pope's precise conviction: if the Holy Book is consulted with due attention, young believers will find an indispensable guide (compass); and the encounter with the Bible will also become a meeting with Christ.

By itself, the Bible cannot rouse particular interest and affection in the young, especially adolescents. Compared to the living testimony of a believer, a faith transmitted through the Holy Scripture largely provokes only indifference, indifference which is accompanied by a large dose of ignorance and above all by a great difficulty in perceiving its vital value. Among all those who practically never come into personal contact with the Bible (and these are 80% of Italians) the highest numbers are for teenagers between 14 and 19. Only 13% of these consider that "one who believes in God must read and meditate on the Bible and other sacred texts", placing this reading only 11th out of 16 activities; 7% practice "prayer while reading and meditating on the Bible or other religious texts" (cf. *La religiosità in Italia*, various authors, Mondadori, Milan, 1995).

Nevertheless, one notices that many of these young people show a surprising interest in the Bible when a harmony is reached not so much through the authority of a biblical page called the Word of God, at least in the beginning, but more so by adults approaching them as patient teachers and credible witnesses of the greatest figure, Jesus; in other words, people who when they speak the Word of God, demonstrate it with their own life. If the adult as teacher-friend manages to persuade the youth to open their heart, then the Scripture will be seen as a gift which brings with it all the qualities of the Word of God according to Biblical codification, with special concern for the young person's soul. In this way a young person will grow and appreciate the role young people played in the Bible, especially in the Gospels; they will put Jesus in their "diary of the soul" (we have many examples in young people's diaries); they will also appreciate the many athletic images in the Bible with their original applications for the virtuous life (Eg. Michel Quoist).

From the extensive intervention by Benedict XVI in St Peter's Square mentioned above, which somewhat astonished everyone by its simultaneous clarity and powerful conviction, we may extract a pedagogical approach that the Holy Father summarized as

follows: "I think that we should learn to do three things: to read it in a personal colloquium with the Lord; to read it with the guidance of teachers who have the experience of faith, who have penetrated Sacred Scripture; and to read it in the great company of the Church, in whose liturgy these events never cease to become present anew and in which the Lord speaks with us today. Thus, we may gradually penetrate ever more deeply into Sacred Scripture, in which God truly speaks to us today".

Peace and security for Iraq

Cardinal EMMANUEL III DELLY
Patriarch of Babylon for
Chaldeans, Iraq

I am a son of the land of Abraham, Iraq. I am certain that this blessed assembly in large part wishes to have some information about the situation in Iraq, this tortured and bloodied country.

My intervention will not be a political reading, but a short flashback of a father who has lived with his spiritual sons for the last half century and who sees his citizens suffering and dying – a father who feels the sacred duty to defend the rights of the Church and of her faithful and feels his own duty to admonish those responsible for the situation to follow the just paths of peace and security. Let us speak the truth: we have tried everything to obtain peace and serenity for the country.

The situation in some parts of Iraq is disastrous and tragic. Life is a Calvary: peace and security are lacking, as are the fundamental elements of daily life. Electricity, water and fuel continue to be lacking; telephone communication is ever increasingly difficult; whole roads are blocked; schools either closed or in continuous danger; hospitals function with a reduced staff; the people fear for their own safety. All fear kidnapping, abduction and intimidation. What to say then of all these unjustified kidnappings that occur every day, ruining entire families and depriving them of their dear ones, despite having paid over thousands of dollars for a freedom never given? Not to mention the ever growing number of deaths caused by car bombs and kamikazes wearing explosive belts.

To live the Word of God means to us to bear witness to it with the cost of our own lives, as has occurred and still occurs till now with the sacrifice of the

Bishops, priests and faithful. They remained in Iraq, strong in faith and love of Christ, thanks to the fire of the Word of God. Because of this, I beg of you to pray the Lord Jesus, the Word of God, for us and with us, and share our concern, our hopes and the suffering of our wounded, so that the Word of God made flesh may stay in his Church and with us as good news and as support. Sixteen of our priests and two Bishops have been kidnapped and were released after paying a very high ransom. Some of them belong to a line of new martyrs that today pray for us from the Heavens: the Archbishop of Mosul, Faraj Rahho, Father Raghd Ganni, two other priests and six other young people.

Integrating the historical-critical method

Archbishop MARIAN GOLEBIEWSKI
of Wrocław, Breslavia, Poland

For a number of decades the historical-critical method has been a dominant approach in Biblical exegesis. This method has led to many positive fruits in Bible Studies. It has been noted today, however, that this method is insufficient. This is why in the last few years other methods of research on the inspired text have been developed. Among these, linguistic methods – narrative and structural, as well as the reading of the Bible in the spirit of the psychology of the profound – become more important. Thus the results of exegetic research will reveal to the eyes of the reader the multi-dimensional sense of the analyzed fragment.

However, the duty of the exegete does not end in uncovering that multi-dimensional sense of the fragment analyzed (literal, historical, symbolic, allegorical and spiritual). A very practical question remains: how to connect that text whose meaning has now been discovered to the lives of each believer? How to pass from the text to life and from life to the text?

The contemporary reader of the Bible asks exegetes and theologians to learn to draw principles and criteria from Scripture, which should be binding in the areas of personal and community life. The most important of these would be general principles and criteria; from these more detailed principles have to be drawn, capable of answering the questions raised by bioethicists, environmentalists, doctors, psychologists, sociologists and even politicians.

Movement in the opposite direction is also important: from life to the Bible. It becomes an ever clearer request that the believer not only read the Bible but that the Bible become the interpretive factor in his life, that is, that the Bible should "read" the human being. The believer needs to not only draw the principles for actions from the Sacred Scripture but also how to look at oneself in the Bible as in a mirror.

Greater attention to confession

Bishop
RETRO HERKULAN MALCHUK, O.F.M.
Titular Bishop of Media
Auxiliary of Odessa-Simferopol, Ukraine

In my report I refer to point 21 where it is said that in light of the Second Vatican Council and successive Magisterium necessary attention and specific reflection must be given to biblical senses, that is historical-literal and theological-spiritual.

A divergence can occur where one group discovers the historical-literal sense and stops, while others go on to discover the theological-spiritual sense. The main point therefore of my intervention is the theological-spiritual sense.

St Jerome said and Vatican II repeated: "Sacred Scripture must be read and interpreted in the same Spirit in whom it was written... they must be read and interpreted with the help of the Holy Spirit through whom they were written".

It seems ridiculous that the very people called to the service of the Word can be an impediment to it.

See how topical the admonition of St Francis was when he said to his brothers: "the letter killeth, but the spirit quickeneth".

Therefore, my proposition is, pay more attention not only to the official Documents of the Church but above all grant the proper place in pastoral life to the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Make use of it and put it to work especially in the seminaries and pastoral activities. The analysis highlights the fact that in the communities and especially in the parishes where Confession is missing, attendance drops and spirituality becomes less profound.

Listen with the heart

Bishop RUY RENDÓN LEAL
Prelate of El Salto, Mexico

First of all, we find the Word of God in the Sacred Scriptures, when with faith and humility we receive and bring it into prayer. God speaks to us through the created works, as well as through the liturgy, above all the Eucharistic celebration. Other presences of the salvific Word can be found in what is occurring in the Magisterium of the Church and in our neighbour, especially the most poor and suffering.

Seek and listen to the Word. In its pastoral activity the Church must favour reading the Bible and knowledge of it. All the baptized must commit themselves and others to aspire to a deep encounter with Jesus Christ, the Eternal Word of the Father, to grow in the experience of God and in true conversion. This encounter with the Word requires attentive listening, listening with the heart.

Pray and celebrate the Word. Through different methods, in particu-



Cardinal Emmanuel III Delly, Patriarch of Babylon for Chaldeans, Iraq

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lar with the *Lectio divina*, the Word which is brought into prayer becomes the source of living water for us. Equally in the liturgy of the Word, the Word proclaimed with its redeeming strength is able to transform lives.

3. Living and transmitting the Word. Contemporary society demands that Christians witness who we are and what we do. It is not sufficient to call us Christian Catholics, it is not sufficient to pray and participate in the sacraments. The witness of unity and life suitable with the Gospel should be the distinctive signs of all the baptized. The commitment to share our experience of faith will undoubtedly lead to transmitting the Word of God to others by our words, works and behaviour.

The Saints are the essence of the Gospel

Archbishop ANGELO AMATO, S.D.B.
Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, Vatican City

Jesus says: "Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Mt 11:29).

For more than 2,000 years men and women, old and young, wise and ignorant, in the East as in the West, applied themselves to the school of the Lord Jesus, which caused this sublime commandment to echo in their hearts and minds: "You must therefore be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:48). This does not mean that a man-made perfection is the goal to be reached, rather the goal is the height of divine perfection. With simplicity and humility, even youth – like 14-year-old Domenic Savio and 13-year-old Laura Vicuña – have taken the Lord's words seriously and have become Saints.

Their library was largely composed of the life and the Words of Jesus: blessed are the poor, blessed are those who mourn, blessed are the gentle, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for uprightness, blessed are the merciful, blessed are the pure in heart, blessed are the peacemakers, blessed are those who are persecuted.

The Saints, who understood that the Beatitudes are the essence of the Gospel and the portrait of Christ himself, imitated him.

Sunday four new Saints from three different continents were canonized. Among these was a young nun, Sr Alfonsa Muttathypadathu, the first Indian Saint, a noble figure of a joyful and strong woman. The perfection of her sanctity was also measured by the words of Jesus: "If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Mk 8:34). Sr Alfonsa accepted her physical illnesses and moral afflictions – such as incomprehension and contempt – living *sine glossa* her own *via crucis* following the Lord Jesus. At the end of her short existence, Sr Alfonsa could repeat with St Paul: "It makes me happy to be suffering for you now, and in my own body to make up all the hardships that still have to be undergone by Christ for the sake of his body, the Church" (Col 1:24).

Like yesterday, today, too, there are countless faithful who daily let the words of Christ become flesh and blood. And in so doing, they sanctify themselves.

The local language in the liturgy in Croatia

Archbishop MARIN BARIŠIĆ
of Split-Makarska, Croatia

The local language has been used in the liturgy in the Croatian Church since the ninth century. The Encounter between the Word of God and the local language can be reflected by the Croatian word "*pošteno*" – which means honest, human, sincere and just. This word comes from "*poštenje*" that is to say *according to the reading*. The norms of human life came from attentive reading and hearing of the Word of God (*Instrumentum laboris*, n. 27).

This human and Christian lifestyle arises from the Word of God, whose identity is reflected and expressed in the listening Church, the Church in prayer and service.

The listening Church corresponds and responds to the Word of God, able to hear the specific problems of our times (cf. GS, n. 1), and give the Word that is appropriate and necessary to the world and culture today.

The creative and renewing power of the Word should be discovered, in a special way, in the liturgical celebration. From this source, the Word enters into daily life.

What the Church hears and celebrates is translated into the evangelizing mission. The fullness of joy that comes from obedient listening and from the celebration of the Word of God cannot leave us dumbfound, rather it must transform us into hopeful protagonists of the credibility of the Gospel, to live "*pošteno*" – according to the reading.

Prayer

Bishop
JAVIER ESCHERRIA RODRIGUEZ
Titular Bishop of Cilibia,
Prelate of Opus Dei

In the life of the Saints the encounter with Word of God through the reading of Holy Scripture produced a radical existential change. We must all, priests and lay persons, seek to have a profound thirst for Jesus Christ, living every scene from the Gospel as one character among the others.

The Bible calls for the faithful interlocutor to respond: the response of prayer. It is appropriate for Pastors during the Sacrament of Confession to frequently advise the faithful to read the Gospel, teaching how to participate in what is told there and urging those who confess to give the same advice to colleagues, family members and friends.

It is not enough to think upon ideas or scenes that may arouse our admiration for the truth, goodness or beauty they reflect; what all Christians must do, like the Saints, is seek to bring these texts into our daily, personal life so that it may be transformed. Men and women have ever greater and more urgent need not of vain and ephemeral words but of the Word of God, the only one capable of giving an authentic meaning to life. It would be advantageous to promote initiatives fostering the spread of this attitude of prayer and interior concentration towards the Gospel, so that real impact on our daily life can be made. Furthermore I believe it would also be appropriate to make sure that the texts of the Mass are read well, that is to say truly lived, not as rhetoric but with the certainty that God is speaking to them and to the community.

The pastoral work of evangelization

Bishop KURT KOCH
of Basel, Switzerland

"The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord" (DV 21). In general, this orientation still was not understood enough by the religious conscience, as can be seen above all by today's four central points.

In Switzerland and in Europe in general, many members of the Church are baptized catechumens, to whom not only the language of faith in the Church, but also the biblical world is foreign. Because of this, today, not only is there a need for new ways to access the Word of God, but the entire pastoral ministry must be, in a decisive way, a pastoral ministry of evangelization and cannot continue being only a pastoral ministry of sacramentalization.

The Holy Scripture can be spoken about only if the Church is also spoken about as subject of the same. Thus, we touch upon the central ecumenical point. In this area, the dispute concerns ecclesiastical institutes, such as the Magisterium and the ministry itself. Controversy arises due to the dichotomy between the Word of God and the witnesses of those officially entrusted with this Word.

Not only in the general awareness of the faith, but also in the reflections, one increasingly perceives Marcionite tendencies, inasmuch as the unity of the Old and New Testament seems to have become fragile. However, Christianity could learn a great deal from Judaism, as for example a less forced approach to Scripture and Tradition, since for the Jews the Hebrew Bible is not merely a printed book, but a living reality.

In interreligious dialogue, today, the Holy Scriptures of men are spoken of openly. Thus, one forgets that Christianity is not, first of all, a religion of the Book, like Judaism and Islam. In fact, the Word of God is a Person, the Son of God made man, and thereby precedes Holy Scripture. Without an intimate relationship in friendship with this Person, even the letter of the Holy Scripture remains mute. The representation of the Word of God in the life of the Church, therefore, is upheld and demonstrated with the renewal of faith in Christ today.

Church strengthens in adversity

Bishop JOSEPH NGUYEN CHI LINH
of Thanh Hóa, Vietnam

Last Friday, my dear Vietnamese brother, Bishop Joseph Võ Đức Minh, gave a summarized history of the evangelization of our people. I would like to continue his report by referring to n. 28 of the *Instrumentum laboris*, beginning with the role of the Word of God in the history of the Church, to show how this role developed in the life of the Vietnamese Church.

The Gospel was proclaimed for the first time on our land at the beginning of the 16th century in the painful context of an internal war between two kingdoms ruled by brothers who were enemies. Marvellously, thanks to this coincidence, the faith became a great comfort for the first baptized persons and ever since, it has not ceased being the moral and spiritual support, for the Church in Vietnam which is one of the most suffering Churches due to bloody and consecutive persecutions.

Immersed in this history woven of hatred, ideological wars and discriminatory restrictions, our Christians are always more convinced that only the

Word of God can keep them in love, joy, peace, communion and tolerance.

It is painful for me to tell you that Vietnam, until now, has the highest rate of abortions. However, this catastrophe, paradoxically, inspired the Pro Life Movement among Catholics, which consists mainly in looking for the aborted babies in the hospitals, baptizing them if there is any sign of life, creating cemeteries to bury them. At the beginning, these actions were accused by the civil authorities and the hospital management as crimes, obliging them to act clandestinely. Now, it is still not authorized, but it is at least tolerated.

Some film makers even made documentaries about this and reporters praise these efforts in the media. Why this progress? Answer: the witness of Christians is being recognized more as those who live the Word of God and in light of this Word, respect life. I would like to repeat this certitude, mentioned in *Gaudium et spes*, n. 44: "The Church herself also recognizes that she has benefited and is still benefiting from the opposition of her enemies and persecutors".

Another sign worthy of mention which demonstrates that the Word of God continues to sustain the Church in Vietnam is the mass conversion of the thousands of persons of ethnic minorities shortly after the canonization of the 117 Martyrs of Vietnam in 1988.

What is curious about this is that many admitted to listening to the Protestant Radio in Manila, in the Philippines, but converted to Catholicism in Vietnam. Thus, the Protestants sow the seed and the Catholics harvest. The Word of God echoing from afar, reaching their ears, has become the source of hope for these persons lost in the mountains, deprived of everything and without a future.

In conclusion, I would like, as a Vietnamese Christian, to repeat the certitude that in persecutions, our greatest grace is faithfulness to the Word of God.

Christ calls us to be new men

Bishop JUAN MATOGO OYANA, C.M.F.
of Bata, Equatorial Guinea

Geographically, Equatorial Guinea occupies a favourable position which, already in the 15th century, facilitated the arrival of some missionaries. Just four centuries later, evangelists had established themselves in the country. Given the small dimensions of the country, it was very easy for them to bring the Word to all inhabitants.

With this period of evangelization, relegated to the past we faced the challenge to deepen the study of the Good News which we had received, and more specifically, to illuminate our cultural roots and our traditions with the light of the Gospel so as to become the "new man" to which Christ calls us, and also to escape poverty and move toward better conditions of life without fatalistic pessimism or selfish materialism, so as to live with dignity as children of Christ.

Many voices offer attractive options which claim to be the right solution in every moment. But their proposals reveal themselves as incomplete and ephemeral.

Being Christian, according to one's own roots and cultural traditions means being enlightened by the Gospel.

The permanent task of evangelists is to imitate the sower who abundantly spreads the seed of Word (cf. Mt 13:1 ff.), and like the vine dresser seek new opportunities and offers new strategies in order to support the growth of the planted seed and, consequently, to await with faith the corresponding fruit (cf. Lk 13:8-9).