

## THE WORD OF GOD IN THE LIFE AND MISSION OF THE UKRAINIAN CATHOLIC CHURCH<sup>1</sup>

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**Editor's Note:** This address by the head of the Patriarchal Catechetical Commission of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, Australia, is an invited submission for AEJT.

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**L**et me begin by recounting an incident that demonstrates my theme. Under the heading *Unscholarly view of Scripture*, a letter to the editor of the Tablet by an Australian Biblical Scholar, Francis J. Moloney, SDB, raised an incisive and difficult question regarding biblical interpretation. It is also an important question, because the answer says “who Jesus is in the Gospels.” He wrote:

. . . it saddens me to find a Catholic scholar who reads the Gospels as if they were twenty-first century history books, . . . conclude(s) that Jesus “is the Pantocrator, the Alpha and the Omega, living in time and transcending time”. . . . But did the pre-Easter Jesus of Nazareth *know* all that? If so, then Chalcedon had it hopelessly wrong (fully human and fully divine). Such a man would not be human.”<sup>2</sup>

Professor Moloney was taking exception to an article published some weeks earlier in the same Catholic weekly by Andrew Thomas Kania, a Ukrainian Catholic theologian and Research Fellow at Blackfriars Hall at Oxford University. In a book review, Dr Kania suggested that, using a *sola scriptura* approach, “. . . it is quite evident from sacred scripture that Christ, being not only true man but true God, had the capacity to see into the future.”<sup>3</sup> He then went on to offer examples of Christ's prescience, such as: he knew the woman at the well better than she knew herself (John 4:1-42); he saw Nathaniel before he came to the physical location (John 1:48); he knew that Judas would betray him

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1 I acknowledge with gratitude the assistance given to me in preparing this address by my theological advisor, Rev. Dr Brian J. Kelty.

2 *The Tablet*, (3 January 2009).

3 *The Tablet*, (29 November 2008), p. 14.

(John 6:70-71); he knew the same with Peter (Luke 22:34); he knew he would be seated at the right hand of the Father (Luke 22:69).

The views of these two Catholic theologians are diametrically opposed. They illustrate well the divergent views of East and West regarding sacred scripture. It is, I think, clear that Professor Moloney gives emphasis to the human expression of the divine Word in Jesus Christ, whereas Dr Kania clearly emphasizes the divinisation of Jesus of Nazareth. These days, theologians in the West generally begin their Christology with what has been popularly described as theology “from below,” whereas in the East it would be usually the case to simply assume a theological framework “from above.” Christology “from below” takes the Jesus of history as its starting point: his proclamation of the reign of God eventually leads him to the Cross, from which the Father raised him up. This emphasis is found in the Synoptic Gospels and the Antiochene School. Differently, Christology “from above” begins with the pre-existent Word of God, who comes down to earth and takes human flesh to redeem us by dying on the Cross, rising from the dead, and returning as the exalted Lord in heaven. The Alexandrian school took this “from above” approach, as did the Gospel of John and the writings of the Apostle Paul.<sup>4</sup>

In the exchange of views I began with, Fr Moloney makes his theological starting point Jesus “from below,” while Dr Kania on the other hand, is forcefully committed to Jesus “from above.” Is a meeting of minds so divided possible? Kipling's famous ballad begins:

*Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet.*

At the very least, this conflict of respected academic opinions demonstrates that there are different approaches to the interpretation of biblical narrative in East and West. Is it possible to bring the divergent approaches together in a reciprocal approach that respects the integrity of each? I will presently have more to say about each approach before briefly making a few comments about the recent Synod on the Word of God held in Rome in October last year. I will then draw some conclusions for the Ukrainian Catholic

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4 Richard Mc Brian, *Catholicism*, Revised edition (San Francisco: Harper, 1994), 493f.

Church. Firstly, let me turn to the Christianity of the East and its approach to the Word of God.

## 1. THE WORD OF GOD IN THE BYZANTINE CHURCHES

The Word of God dominates the spirituality of the Byzantine Eastern Churches. Byzantine spirituality simply assumes that the faithful are immersed in the narrative and symbolic world of the Bible. When we worship in the Byzantine tradition, we participate in the events commemorated, as if we were present to those events. Without that world-view of Sacred Scripture, it would be simply impossible to live within the Byzantine milieu. Let me refer to four dimensions of Byzantine spirituality, in which it is possible to see how Scripture provides the world-view which the faithful are invited to inhabit:

1. **The Liturgy and the Holy Mysteries.** Most especially, the Divine Liturgy but also the Holy Mysteries presume that one is enabled to gaze at the heavenly kingdom; the anaphora of the Divine Liturgy of St Basil lays out the entire plan of salvation.<sup>5</sup> The Church believes that the Holy Mysteries are not mere symbols of divine things but that the gift of a spiritual reality is attached to the sign perceptible to the senses. The recent Synod of the Bishops of the Catholic Church, held in Rome in October of 2008, took as its topic, “*The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church.*” In an intervention on October 11, Byzantine Archbishop Basil Schott (of Pittsburgh) and recently appointed Consultor to the Roman Curia's Congregation for Oriental Churches, told the Synod that the Byzantine tradition's *Akafist Hymn to the Mother of God* is filled with biblical images that can lead the faithful back to the sacred texts.<sup>6</sup> Archbishop Schott said that this hymn highlights particularly the Old Testament stories that foreshadowed the coming of Christ and his Incarnation in the womb of Mary: "Using the mother of God as a model, the

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5 Catechetical Commission of the Ukrainian Catholic Church, *Catechetical Directory of the Ukrainian Catholic Church*. Svichado Publishers, Lviv, 2000. Par.#15

6 The **Akafist Hymn** (Ἀκάθιστος Ὕμνος, *unseated hymn*) is a Byzantine Christian Hymn dedicated to a saint, holy event, or one of the persons of the Holy Trinity. The name derives from the fact that during the chanting of the hymn, or sometimes the whole service, the congregation is expected to remain standing in reverence, not being allowed to sit down (Ancient Greek ἀ- (a), [without, not] + κάθισις (káthisis), [sitting]). The akafist *par excellence* is that written in the 6th century to the Mother of God.

faithful must not only read the Scriptures but listen to what the Spirit is saying in the present moment."<sup>7</sup>

Historically, the Byzantine liturgy reads the New Testament in its entirety through following the cycle of readings in the liturgical Book of the Gospels (Evangelion) and Book of the Epistles (Apostolos). Thus, the New Testament is heard in the course of the year by those who attend the daily liturgy. In this way, the entire message of the New Testament is presented for the spiritual nourishment of the faithful. This has been our traditional way of presenting the Word of God. But, unfortunately for many reasons, the faithful are unable to come to their church on a daily basis. Many are unable consistently to be present, even on Sundays, so that now the cycle of readings is rarely heard as a connected set of readings. The Congregation for Oriental Churches was mindful of the change in the mindset of the faithful, which makes the fuller Liturgical expression of the Word of God so difficult, when it stated:

These considerations do not take away from the rightful exigency to express, as much as possible, the Gospel in a plain and clear way for the contemporary man and woman. Every formula necessitates, therefore, unceasing vigilance to remain alive under the breath of the Spirit. But Tradition, even in its literal expression – as is the case for Scriptures – contains unrenounceable treasures; its strengths are received, assimilated, and utilized to transmit to mankind the fullness of the Mystery of God.<sup>8</sup>

2. **Feasts and seasons.** These events presume that the faithful are participants in them in a realistic way. A lucid explanation may be found in an essay which has become a classic on the subject. It will be no surprise that these are words penned by Archimandrite Robert Taft, SJ. In this passage, he will use the Greek term *anamnesis*,<sup>9</sup> which may be understood as memory. But it has a stronger sense than that. It is the kind of memory that both now recalls and now makes present a past event:

Liturgical feasts have, therefore, the same purpose as the Gospel: to present this new reality in “*anamnesis*” as a continual sign to us, not of a

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7 Assumption Province, OFM Newsletter, No. 85, November 15, 2008.

8 Congregation for the Oriental Churches, *Instruction for Applying the Liturgical Prescriptions of the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, Repr. (Fairfax, VI, Eastern Christian Publications, 1996).

9 An excellent sociological background to *anamnesis* is found in: Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, edited and translated by Lewis A. Coser. (University of Chicago Press, 1992).

past history but of the present reality of our lives in him. “Behold *now is* the acceptable time; *now is* the day of salvation” (2Cor 6:2). It is this vision of the mysteries of Christ's life now that we see in the festal homilies of the golden age of the Fathers, such as those of St. Leo the Great (440-461), which always stress the present salvific reality of the liturgical commemoration.<sup>10</sup>

3. **Icons.** Throughout the history of the Church, icons have represented and still represent the great figures of the Biblical world, from Adam to the Apostles Peter and Paul as well as to the many countless holy witnesses to the Trinity. These many persons, but especially Jesus the Pantocrator and the Holy Theotokos, are experienced as present to us. Because of this presence, we are likewise able to be with them and to address them. To enter our church buildings is to enter a world, where we are surrounded by the presence of the biblical narrative. The parables of Jesus are depicted, and the twelve great feasts of the liturgical year are brought to life for us through icons. These images make the communion of the saints present to us. Our life of prayer is thereby thoroughly enriched by the visual representation of the Word of God. In an age before the printing press made mass production possible and affordable, the icons *were* the Bible to the people. Before universal literacy was common, icons were able to convey the message of the Word of God to the ordinary people. The highly respected Canadian Orthodox theologian Archbishop Lazar Puhalo concludes as follows:

In time a large portion of the Scripture would be set to paint on the walls of churches, and in many cases, there would be no bare spots left on a church wall. Every nook and cranny would be filled with sound portrayals of the Scripture. Ikonography became another language into which the Scripture was accurately translated, and in which it was accurately interpreted.<sup>11</sup>

4. **The Church Fathers and their Scriptural Commentaries.** Our church was formed by many of these great personages. It was around the fourth century

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10 Robert F. Taft, *Beyond East and West: Problems in Liturgical Understanding*. Second revised and enlarged edition (Rome, Edizione Orientalia Christiana, 2001) 27.

11 Archbishop Lazar Puhalo, *The Ikon as Scripture: A Scriptural and Spiritual Understanding of Orthodox Christian Ikonography*. (Dewdney, B.C., Canada: Synaxis Press, 1997) 2

that the Chrysostom Liturgy began to take shape, probably as a revision of the already existing Basil Liturgy. Both of these Fathers left behind commentaries on the Gospels and other books of the Bible. To this day, homilists frequently consult the great commentaries of the Patristic era, that period, strictly speaking, from the beginning of the second century to the eighth century. One has only to consult a standard work like that of Johanna Manley to see how our lectionary readings emerged from a Patristic understanding of the seasons of the year and the liturgical calendar.<sup>12</sup> It must be remarked that the exegetical methods of the Fathers basically followed the two great exegetical schools of Antioch and Alexandria. Antioch was the centre of a relatively critical approach, at least in contrast to Alexandria's allegorical approach. The Antiochenes did give more attention to the literal sense, but they also proposed a more-than-literal sense. For them the visionary aspect was not overlooked.

*Theoria* was an intuition or vision, by which the Old Testament prophet could see the future through the medium of his present circumstances. After such a vision it was possible for him to phrase his writing in such a way as to describe both the contemporary meaning of the events and their future fulfillment.<sup>13</sup>

The task of biblical commentary (exegesis) for Antiochenes was, therefore, to find meanings, contemporary and future, in the words of the prophets. They differed from the Alexandrians in that they took into account the awareness of the human authors, who tended to see the future in symbols and events. To some degree, St John Chrysostom is a representative of this Antiochene School.

Alexandria's richly symbolic approach is understood today as the typical sense. This approach sought out the secret knowledge of the biblical passages, often in the form of an allegory. A widely accepted definition of this approach to biblical interpretation (exegesis) is thereby given in terms of the typical sense.

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12 Johanna Manley, *The Bible and the Holy Fathers for Orthodox: Daily Scripture readings and Commentary for Orthodox Christians*. (Crestwood, NY, St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1990).

13 Raymond Brown and Sandra Schneiders, "Hermeneutics." In *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1990) 71: 37.

The typical sense is the deeper meaning of the “things” written about in the Bible when they are seen to have foreshadowed future “things” in God’s work of salvation.<sup>14</sup>

Although the typical sense is still appreciated, in contemporary biblical studies the revival of patristic approaches is not as active as it was in the early twentieth century. The current discussion in literary criticism largely takes place under the categories of metaphor and symbol. This is problematic for us in the East, if we are to recover our patristic heritage. Because our theological approach and our liturgy depend on it for their survival, we must make a determined effort to recover the so called “more-than-literal” approach to Biblical commentary in a manner consistent with contemporary scholarship. .

5. **Theosis or Deification and the Word of God.** In this matter, we deal with a basic concept in Byzantine theology. The concept is commonly attributed to St Athanasius, who expressed it in these words: “God became man in order that man might become god.” This is the idea that our destiny is to have participation in the divine nature (1 Peter 1: 4). The idea is expressed more eloquently by Maximus the Confessor:

In the same way in which the soul and the body are united, God should become accessible for participation by the soul and, through the soul’s intermediary, by the body, in order that the soul might receive an unchanging character, and the body immortality; and finally that the whole man should become God, deified by the grace of God-become-man, becoming whole man, soul and body, by nature, and becoming whole God, soul and body, by grace.<sup>15</sup>

This concept corresponds closely with the New Testament concept of metanoia. This is the Greek word, which the New Testament puts into the mouth of St John the Baptist and is so central to the preaching of the Gospel. In these contexts, it is repentance from sin, and it is linked to that faith by which God leads us to salvation.<sup>16</sup> It is the reason why, in the East, we prefer

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14 Ibid. 71: 47.

15 Cited in John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*. Revised 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. (New York: Fordham University Press, 1983) 164.

16 Nigel Turner, *Christian Words*, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1980) 376.

not to talk of death, because talk of death does not correspond with this idea of deification. It is also for us a far stronger concept than the imitation of Christ. Deification is indeed, as the fourteenth century Greek layman and theologian Nicholas Casabilis (d.1387?) described it, life in Christ. In other words, our redemption is not just a matter of history, something that can be done by our own efforts. Redemption is a saving event, in which each person is called to participate here and now. When we respond to this event in the body as well as the intellect, we do not die but we live in Christ.<sup>17</sup>

For us in the Byzantine tradition, the problem is not the lack of a vivid awareness of the Word of God. It is more the case that there is no theological method for interpreting the Word of God that is comparable to what has emerged in the Latin Church over the last forty years. In the West, this discipline of interpretation is called hermeneutics or hermeneutical theology. For that reason, in a moment, I will turn to the Latin approach to the Word of God. Let me add that Our Ukrainian Church is acutely aware of the problem. Our catechetical Directory declares:

Responding to the needs of today, the Ukrainian Catholic Church, basing itself on its rich patrimony, is engaged in formulating contemporary methods of catechesis. Foremost among these methods is biblical catechesis.<sup>18</sup>

In order to formulate this biblical catechesis, we must now develop our own school of Byzantine biblical theology. That is quite a challenge today, when one considers the history of our Church. We are a Church proud of our tradition. We have celebrated a millennium of history in continuity with the Byzantine tradition first handed to our forefathers by Saints Cyril and Methodius in the tenth century. Persecution and repression occurred for us too, which has meant that we have not always experienced the advance of history as has much of Western Europe. Elsewhere, most of Europe had to face and to respond to the enormous challenge to Christian faith it encountered, because of the cultural change brought about by the seventeenth century Enlightenment.

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17 Nicholas Casabilis, *The Life in Christ*, (Crestwood, N.Y.: St.Vladimir's Seminary Press,1974).

18 *Catechetical Directory of the Ukrainian Catholic Church*. par. 46.

Succinctly stated, this was a movement from consciousness centred in the other as ultimate reality (heteronomy) to consciousness centred in the self as ultimate reality (autonomy). If, as expressed by the thirteenth century scholastics, God had been the central force in human awareness during the Catholicism of the high middle ages, then after Enlightenment, human self-consciousness took centre stage. “Dare to know!” became the rally cry of a European culture, which then had to find a new starting point and methodology for theology. Most Western minds, henceforth, were to think in a way that relied upon rational thought to an extent that is entirely independent, self reliant and self directed.

That the Enlightenment took a very different course in Ukraine may be seen as something of a blessing. For instance, with his reforms in education and especially in his theological writings, Peter Mohyla might now be seen as a precursor of what was to come. After the break-up of the Soviet Union, the Ukrainian Catholic has only very recently emerged from the underground existence consequent upon the persecution and repression of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In turn, this has allowed a period of growth and re-assertion of our Greek Catholic identity during the last twenty years. The phoenix has risen from the ashes, but not without having to face new difficulties. Many years of Soviet persecution attempted to wipe out the faith and moral sense of the people. As a consequence, we now have a generation, which lacks a genuine religious education. Total freedom for them has been at the cost of their God-centredness.

A poor economic climate and immigration difficulties have aggravated these problems. Along with the rest of Europe, Ukraine has had to face a more secularized world. The faith of some has been severely shaken by this. In the future, evangelization for us will need to employ new methods. As uniquely attuned to a Byzantine approach to the Word of God, they must also fully incorporate the critical methods of modern biblical scholarship. For a Church so much imbued by the Word of God, we lack a biblical theology from which we might draw the strength and resources to face this new world-view. More precisely, we lack a hermeneutic to more readily enable us to interpret the Word of God for our day.

As an aide to describing how we might begin to approach Evangelization, let us for a moment consider what has been referred to as movement from the “first naivete” to the

“second naivete.” This is a concept first devised by French philosopher, Paul Ricoeur. At first, the word “naïve” might seem a little strange in meaning. The Oxford Dictionary gives its meaning as “unaffected, unconsciously artless or even foolishly credulous or simple.” It is the anglicized borrowing of a French word now commonly used in philosophy as in “**naïve realism**.” Used in this way, it is “the belief that an object of perception is not only real but has in reality its perceived attributes.”<sup>19</sup> In the following brief passage, the biblical scholar, Sandra Schneiders, more clearly explicates the thought of Paul Ricoeur in this regard.

The first naivete is a spontaneous immediacy of *reader to subject matter* through a text that is so totally transparent that one is not aware of its existence, much less any deficiencies it might have. (italics added) 20

It would appear, then, that the first naivete clearly corresponds with the consciousness of many a Byzantine Christian surrounded by concepts, images and symbols derived from the Word of God and made so vividly present in our cultural heritage. Obviously, modern consciousness is not the exclusive possession of Western culture. Scientific rationality imposes its questions about cause and effect. With the onslaught of autonomous critical thought in scientific rationality, it is inevitable that first naivete can be eroded. Some common examples of first naivete can be cited and easily understood.

- A child listening to a fairy tale.
- A member of a preliterate society participating in the ritual re-enactment of the founding myths of the tribe.

These and other first naivete experiences contain this “immediacy to the subject matter” of the text, as if one were there. The text itself is transparent, in the sense that it takes us to the place of enchantment, where a wondrous reality is.<sup>20</sup> That is, until one leaves the enchanted forest under the thrall of reason. This is not dissimilar to the account of Adam and Eve’s departure from the Garden of Eden told in the book of Genesis.

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19 Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, Fifth edition, (Oxford University Press, 2002), Vol. 2, 1881.

20 For a thorough presentation of the sociology of enchantment see, Kieran Flanagan, *The Enchantment of Sociology: Study of Theology and Culture*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996).

Partaking of the fruit of the tree led to a certain disenchantment (see Genesis 3: 22). Similarly, since the Enlightenment, modern readers see text as a medium that performs in two ways. It both conveys insight and distorts what is conveyed. Seen in this modern way of exclusive rationality sans enchantment, the text necessarily intervenes, and it therefore distorts.

Think of our youth hearing a modern interpretation of the Genesis account of Adam and Eve for the first time and concluding that they have been deceived, because Adam and Eve are now perceived not to be “real” persons. Again, it is common today for people to question aspects of Christian tradition such as the Virgin Birth on purely biological, that is, rational grounds. In so doing, we ignore the “reality” of divine intervention in the human story. According to Schneiders:

They raise the question of whether the text is accurately, fairly, honestly, adequately and so on conveying the subject matter and whether itself, in its truth claims, it is worthy of acceptance. In short the modern reader is critical of the text and its content.<sup>21</sup>

Today, this is exactly the dilemma faced by anyone who would proclaim the Word of God.

How does one move into second naivete? Perhaps the major difficulty is that the second naivete looks just like the first. After raising all manner of critical questions and wandering around in a state of skepticism, one recovers and is recovered by the original text in all its wonder and beauty. How this occurs is a challenge to the contemporary Evangelist. Not to face this challenge is to leave our faithful and especially our youth in a kind of no man’s land of doubt and scepticism.

Let me clarify second naivete by revisiting a popular New Testament text, namely, the Journey of the Disciples to Emmaus (Luke 24: 13-35). There are all sorts of questions one might ask regarding the historicity of this story. Eventually, one gets to the core of its meaning by recognizing that it is essentially a Eucharistic encounter with Jesus. The two disciples incredulously listened to the stranger, as he took them through the history of salvation. It was at the evening meal, we are told, “When he was at table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it and gave it to them. Then their eyes were

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21 Ibid.

opened and they recognized him” (v.30). The two disciples essentially represent us as we come to second naivete and recognize Jesus present in the bread blessed and broken. (“He had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread” v.35). The necessity of proof has receded from centre stage, and we finally meet Jesus.

## **2 THE WORD OF GOD IN THE LATIN CHURCH**

Any discussion of the role of the Word of God in the Latin Church today must acknowledge the great renewal of interest in reading and studying the Bible. Much of this flows from the Second Vatican Council’s Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (*Dei Verbum*). A central statement of this document goes as follows:

The sacred authors, in writing the four Gospels, selected certain of the many elements which had been handed on, either orally or in written form; others they synthesized or explained with an eye to the situation of the churches. They retained the preaching style, but always in such a fashion that they have told us the authentic truth about Jesus. Whether they relied on their own memory and recollections or on the testimony of those who “from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word,” their purpose in writing was that we might know the truth concerning the things of which we have been informed (see Lk 1: 2-4).<sup>22</sup>

Clearly, a change of approach had taken place. The process whereby the gospels were composed was now understood to involve a three-step process: Firstly, the words and deeds of Jesus; secondly, the oral and later written traditions, which handed these on to succeeding generations; and finally, the writing of recollections and testimonies about Jesus. There was plenty of scope in this process for accommodation to local churches by preaching style and other embellishments, which shaped each of the four Gospels in different ways. A strictly literal eyewitness account is not what we have.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Pontifical Biblical Commission (PBC) had been set up by Pope St. Pius X as a kind of watchdog over Catholic attitudes to the Bible. This was and remains a commission of cardinals and scholars of the Universal Church. Decrees issued in 1905 and 1915 and in 1933 covered the Pentateuch, Genesis, Isaiah, and Psalms from the Old Testament and each of the four Gospels, Acts

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22 The Second Vatican Council, *The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (Dei Verbum)*. Editor and translator Austin Flannery, O.P.(Dublin, Ireland, Dominican Publications, 1996) par. 19, p.110.

and the Pauline Writings in the New Testament as well as certain questions about historicity. A rather literal approach was demanded on most questions. Matthew, in particular, was an historically accurate account of the lives and deeds of Jesus, while the chronological order of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John was original. The PBC required that John must be recognized as the author of John and that the discourses were authentically the very words of Jesus. A clarification from the PBC in 1955 finally admitted “the interpreter of Sacred Scripture can pursue his scientific investigations **with full liberty** and accept the results of these investigations, provided always that he respects the teaching authority of the church.”<sup>23</sup>

More recently, statements emerging from the Pontifical Biblical Commission have been progressive and strongly supportive with regard to Catholic Biblical Studies. The critical literary approach has become main stream. The 1964 statement on Gospel historicity was a landmark statement, which provided ample material that found its way into Vatican II’s *Dei Verbum*. The passage I quoted earlier demonstrates that this is the case. In the same document, PBC praises biblical scholars as “faithful sons (and daughters) of the church.” Significant recent PBC documents include: *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (1993), *Study on Christology* (1983), *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible* (2002). This sampling of PBC documents, I hope, makes clear that the scientific study of the Word of God is of central importance in the life of the Universal Catholic Church. Surely, one of the great successes of the Second Vatican Council is the intensification of the Biblical movement.

Perhaps, this is one of those cases where we must admit that there is something that we in the East can learn from modern biblical studies, which is essentially a Western phenomenon. Let me repeat to you some astute remarks about this matter made by Archimandrite Robert Taft, SJ some years ago:

The Churches must learn again to breathe with both lungs, Eastern and Western, and that is true of the East as well as the West. The widespread notion that the West has a lot to learn from the East but not vice-versa is simply ridiculous. Furthermore, the only way the Christian tradition, Eastern or Western, will be preserved in a modern and intelligent way that can maintain its respectability in dialogue with the modern secular world

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23 Raymond Brown & Thomas Collins, “Church Pronouncements” in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, Prentice Hall, 1990) 72:25-26.

of scholarship and science, is if we study it objectively, scientifically, from an historico-critical point of view.<sup>24</sup>

### 3. THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS ON THE BIBLE

Seven bishops from the Eastern Churches were present for the meeting at the General Synod of Bishops on Sacred Scripture during October, 2008. Amongst these, two were Bishops of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, the Most Reverend Lawrence Huculak, O.S.B.M., Archbishop Metropolitan of Winnipeg of Ukrainians in Canada and the Most Reverend Dionisio Lachovicz, O.S.B.M., at that time bishop of the Curia of Kyiv-Halych of the Ukrainians in Ukraine. Both bishops made interventions, but that of Archbishop Lawrence concerns us most forcefully in this respect.

The Holy Gospel must penetrate the mind through the heart. To do this requires a warmth and a life giving presentation. It cannot be done mechanically nor carelessly. These same qualities apply to the homily as well, which presents and applies the gospel message. The proclamation of the Gospel must enlighten the participants also to awe inspired fear of God, for this is the same God who created light out of darkness. The participants must encounter the theophany of who Jesus is, namely the Son of God as announced by the voice of the Father.<sup>25</sup>

Homiletics, therefore, must be a central dimension of the biblical formation of all our clergy: bishops, priests, deacons, and catechists.

These Synods of the Universal Church usually conclude by drawing up a list of proposals for the Holy Father to peruse, as he prepares to write an Apostolic Exhortation based on these proposals and his own insights into the theme of the synod. At present, we await the response of Pope Benedict XVI on the theme of *the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church*. We do know that he has a personal interest in this topic, as he made an intervention during the course of the synod that amounted to a personal proposal. This proposal is of great interest to all of us in the Eastern churches. The Pope

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24 *The Jesuits and the Christian East: An Interview with Robert Taft, S.J., 1991* (updated 2004) first published in *Diakonia* 24 (1991) 45-78; available from <http://vselenstvo.narod.ru/library/rftin04e.html>; accessed 18<sup>th</sup> January 2009.

25 Lawrence Huculak, *Eastern Catholic Hierarchs Intervene at the Papal General Assembly of Bishops on Sacred Scripture*. *Ukrainian Catholic News Progress* (No. 22/2151 Winnipeg, Canada, November 30, 2008) 8.

tells us that his experience of writing a book recently on Jesus made him very aware of the problems of an historical critical approach to the Bible without an awareness of the divine intervention. He clearly lays out a graphic description of the consequences of such a sterile approach. He concludes as follows:

Therefore for the life and mission of the Church, for the future of faith, this dualism between exegesis and theology must be overcome. Biblical theology and systematic theology are two dimensions of the one reality, what we call theology. Due to this, I would hope that in one of the propositions the need to bear in mind the two methodological levels indicated in Dei Verbum 12 be mentioned, where the need to develop an exegesis not only on the historical level, but also on theological level is needed.<sup>26</sup>

There was also a proposal about the Roman Lectionary which concluded with a reference to the Eastern Churches:

It's hoped that the problem of the lectionary in the liturgies of the Oriental Catholic Churches will be taken authoritatively under examination.<sup>27</sup>

This is not a new issue. Here, I simply refer you to a journal article by Archpriest David Petras dealing with the reform of the Gospel Lectionary.<sup>28</sup> It is not to say that you will find the last word on the lectionary here; it does offer a place to start.

#### **4. CONCLUSIONS**

I offer here some of the conclusions I take from these reflections:

- Know your own tradition, and know it well.
- Approach the historical scholarly study of the Word of God from a Byzantine point of view.
- Know and understand that there are differences of approach and consider that these will enrich your understanding of your own tradition.
- Bishops, priests, deacons and catechists need to be aware of the scholarly approach to the Bible, imbued with a Byzantine perspective.

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26 Synod: Official text of pope's reflection. The National Catholic Reporter, October 19, 2008 at <http://ncrcafe.org/node/2210> accessed 17/01/2009.

27 Proposal 16 in *Synod: Final Propositions of the Synod of Bishops and the Bible*. The National Catholic Reporter, October 27, 2008 at <http://ncrcafe.org/node/2228> accessed 17/01/2009.

28 David Petras, *The Gospel Lectionary of the Byzantine Church*, St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly, Vol. 41, No. 2/3, 1997 113-140.

- Candidates for higher studies in scripture need first to be well versed in Byzantine theology.
- As noted above, the Lectionary needs attention, but it must be the source of biblical catechesis.
- The Catechetical Directory of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, mentioned earlier, is probably the most under-read and under-used document available to our Church, and yet it contains the kind of insights necessary in order to face the issues we are discussing. Also, it also provides a template for how to proceed in addressing the necessary nexus between historical-critical method and the patristic approach to scripture, which is so necessary for the survival of our tradition.
- In Ukraine, we need to deal with the escalation from various Evangelical Christians of fundamentalist challenges to our traditional approach. This would be all but impossible without a thorough understanding of the historical-critical method.

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