

fashion that they told us the honest truth about Jesus.³⁴ Their intention in writing was that from their own memory and recollections, or from the witness of those who “themselves from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word,” we might know “the truth” concerning those matters about which we have been instructed (cf. *Lk.* 1, 2-4).

Other New Testament Writings

20. In addition to the four Gospels, the canon of the New Testament also contains the epistles of St. Paul and other apostolic writings, composed under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. By these writings, according to the wise plan of God, those matters concerning Christ the Lord are confirmed; His true teaching is more and more fully stated; the saving power of His divine work is preached; the story is recounted of the beginnings of the Church and its marvelous growth, and its glorious fulfillment foretold.

For the Lord Jesus was with His Apostles as He had promised (cf. *Mt.* 28, 20) and He sent them the advocate Spirit to lead them into the fullness of truth (cf. *Jn.* 16, 13).

CHAPTER VI

SACRED SCRIPTURE IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

21. The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as it venerates the body of the Lord, since from the table of both God's word and Christ's body it unceasingly receives and offers to the faithful the bread of life, especially in the sacred liturgy. It has always held and continues to hold that together with Sacred Tradition they are the supreme rule of faith. Inspired by God and committed once and for all to writing, they impart the word of God Himself without change, and make the Holy Spirit's voice resound in the words of the Prophets and

³⁴ Cf. Instruction *Sancta Mater Ecclesia* edited by Pontifical Biblical Commission: *AAS* (1964) p. 715 [cf. *TPS X*, p. 88].

Apostles. Therefore, like the Christian religion itself, all the preaching of the Church must be nourished and regulated by Sacred Scripture. In the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven comes to His children with great love and speaks with them. The force and power in God's word is so great that it stands as the support and energy of the Church, the strength of faith for sons of the Church, the food of the soul, the pure and everlasting source of spiritual life. Consequently these words are perfectly applicable to Sacred Scripture: "For the word of God is living and active" (*Heb.* 4, 12) and "it has power to build you up and give you your heritage among all those who are sanctified" (*Acts* 20, 32; cf. *1 Thes.* 2, 13).

Translation of the Scriptures

22. Sacred Scripture should be made easily accessible to all the Christian faithful. For this reason the Church accepted as its own from the very beginning that very ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament which is called the Septuagint, and it has always given a place of honor to the other Eastern translations and to the Latin ones, especially that known as the Vulgate. But since the word of God should be available at all times, the Church, by its authority and with maternal concern, sees to it that suitable and correct translations are made into different languages, especially from the original texts of the sacred books. If the opportunity arises for these translations to be produced in cooperation with the separated brethren as well, and the Church authorities approve, then all Christians will be able to use them.

23. The Spouse of the Incarnate Word, the Church, taught by the Holy Spirit, desires to move toward a deeper understanding of the Sacred Scriptures in order to nourish its sons continually with the divine words. Therefore, it also encourages the study of the holy Fathers of both East and West and of the sacred liturgies. Catholic exegetes and other students of Sacred Theology, working diligently together and using appropriate means, should devote their energies to an exploration and exposition of the divine writings, under the watchful care of the sacred teaching office of the Church. This should be done in such a way that as many ministers of the divine word as possible will be able effectively to provide the nourishment of the Scriptures for the people

of God, to enlighten their minds, strengthen their wills, and inflame their hearts with the love of God.³⁵ The sacred Synod encourages the sons of the Church who are biblical scholars to continue energetically the work they have so well begun, with a constant renewal of vigor³⁶ and in accord with the mind of the Church.

Their Importance to Sacred Theology

24. Sacred Theology rests on the written word of God together with Sacred Tradition, as on a perpetual foundation. It is most powerfully strengthened and constantly rejuvenated by that word while scrutinizing in the light of faith all truth stored up in the mystery of Christ. The Sacred Scriptures contain the word of God and, being inspired, really are the word of God; and so the study of the sacred page can be considered the soul of Sacred Theology.³⁷ The ministry of the word — pastoral preaching, catechetics, and all Christian instruction, in which the liturgical homily must hold the foremost place — also takes wholesome nourishment from that same word of Scripture and flourishes in a holy way.

25. Therefore, all the clergy — especially the priests of Christ and others, such as deacons and catechists, who are legitimately active in the ministry of the word — must hold fast to the Scriptures through diligent sacred reading and careful study, so that none of them will become “an empty preacher of the word of God outwardly, who is not a listener to it inwardly.”³⁸ They must share with the faithful committed to them the abundant wealth of the divine word, especially in the sacred liturgy. The sacred Synod also earnestly and particularly urges all the Christian faithful, especially Religious, to learn the “excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ” (*Phil.* 3, 8) by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures.

³⁵ Cf. Pius XII, Encyc. letter *Divino Afflante Spiritu*: EB 551, 553, 567. Pontifical Biblical Commission, *Instruction on Proper Teaching of Sacred Scripture in Seminaries and Religious Colleges*, May 13, 1950: AAS 42 (1950), p. 495-505.

³⁶ Cf. Pius XII, *ibid.*: EB 569.

³⁷ Cf. Leo XIII, Encyc. letter *Providentissimus Deus*: EB 114; Benedict XV, Encyc. letter *Spiritus Paraclitus*: EB 483.

³⁸ St. Augustine, *Sermons*, 179, 1: PL 38, 966.

"For ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ."³⁹ They should gladly familiarize themselves with the sacred text itself, whether it be through the liturgy, which is rich in the divine word, through devotional reading, or through suitable instructions and other aids which in our time are commendably available everywhere, with the approval and active support of the bishops. Let them remember that prayer should accompany the reading of Sacred Scripture, so that God and man may talk together, for "we speak to Him when we pray; we hear Him when we read the divine sayings."⁴⁰

Responsibility of Bishops

It devolves on bishops, "who have the apostolic teaching,"⁴¹ to give the faithful entrusted to them suitable instruction in the right use of the divine books, especially the New Testament and above all the Gospels. This can be done through translations of the sacred texts, which should be provided with the fully adequate explanations necessary if the sons of the Church are safely and profitably to grow familiar with the Sacred Scriptures and be penetrated with their spirit.

Furthermore, editions of the Sacred Scriptures provided with suitable notes should be prepared also for the use of non-Christians and adapted to their situation. Bishops and Christians generally should see to the wise distribution of these in every possible way.

26. In this way, then, through the reading and study of the sacred books, "the word of God may spread rapidly and be glorified" (2 *Thes.* 3, 1) and the treasure of revelation entrusted to the Church may increasingly fill the hearts of men. Just as the life of the Church is strengthened through steady participation in the Eucharistic mystery, similarly we may hope for a new surge of spiritual life from an increased

³⁹ St. Jerome, *Commentary on Isaiah, Prol.*: PL 24, 17. Cf. Benedict XV, Encyc. letter *Spiritus Paraclitus*: EB 475-480; Pius XII, Encyc. letter *Divino Afflante Spiritu*: EB 544.

⁴⁰ St. Ambrose, *On the Duties of Ministers* I, 20, 88: PL 16, 50.

⁴¹ St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* IV, 32, 1; PG 7, 1071; (Same as 49, 2) Harvey, 2, p. 255.

reverence for God's word, which "lasts forever" (*Is* 40, 8; cf. *1 Pt.* 1, 23-25).

Each and every thing said in this Constitution has met with the approval of the Fathers of the Sacred Council. And We, by the Apostolic power handed on to Us by Christ, together with the Venerable Fathers, approve them, declare them, and establish them in the Holy Spirit; and We command that what has thus been decreed by the Council be promulgated for the glory of God.

Rome, at St. Peter's, November 18, 1965.

I, PAUL, Bishop of the Catholic Church

(The signatures of the Fathers follow.)