



A Living Encounter with God

VATICAN II CONSTITUTION ON REVELATION

Sixty years on from the development of the Second Vatican Council Constitution on Revelation, *Dei Verbum* or *The Word of God*, it is difficult to imagine why its development was so vigorously debated across the four years of the Council.

Australian scripture scholar, Fr Frank Moloney reflected during a seminar for the 50th anniversary of Vatican II that adult Catholics during the 1940s and 50s had no idea what is now meant by 'the Word of God':

We lived by the words of the Church; the rare but important Encyclicals that came from the Holy Father, the instructions of our Australian Bishops, and especially of our local Bishop ... However, our day-to-day Catholic lives were ultimately determined by local authorities; our teachers, almost always Religious women and men, and our local Priest.

We learnt our Catechism by heart, and I do not think there was a serious citation from the Scriptures anywhere in the so-called 'Penny Catechism.' The Mass was in Latin, all the readings were in Latin, and the same cycle of readings was read year in and year out.

Frank Moloney goes on to point out that his brief

reflection on our not so distant past makes us aware of how our Catholic lives and all that nourishes that life have changed.

REVELATION

James Corkery SJ wrote in *Thinking Faith* in 2012:

The latin word, revelare means to 'uncover', to 'remove the veil' is always a great consolation to me. Why? Because it conveys a rich conception of revelation that follows from that definition: it is God's removing of the veil from the divine face so that men and women can come to know God - not just things about God, but God's own self - in a personal, relational way.

This understanding of revelation is elucidated most fully in a key document of Vatican II, a document which sees the character of revelation as being 'dialogical', 'personalist' and 'experiential'.

ONE REVELATION - THE WORD OF GOD

The Magisterium (the teaching office) says *Dei Verbum* n10, is not superior to the word of God, but is rather its servant. It teaches only what has been handed on to it. At the divine command and with the help of the Holy Spirit, it listens to this devoutly, guards it reverently and expounds it faithfully.

In 1969, the then Fr Joseph Razinger wrote in his commentary on *Dei Verbum*:

The Council desired to express again the character of revelation as a totality, in which Word [Scripture] and Event [Tradition] make up as one whole, a true dialogue which touches man [sic] in his totality, not only challenging his reason but, as dialogue, addressing him as a partner.

WE HEAR THE WORD OF GOD BEFORE WE PROCLAIM IT

The Prologue of *Dei Verbum* makes the important point that we *hear* the word of God before we proclaim it. This was a very significant shift from early drafts of *Dei Verbum* which used the Bible as a 'proof text' to support previously drawn conclusions, to seeing the Bible as the primary witness of God's revelation.

The Council's journey from its first, rejected reflections on revelation through to the final text of Dei Verbum, followed the 'thread' of dialogue of 'heart speaking to heart'. ... Thus the dialogical, personalist and experiential character of the relationship between God and humanity described in Dei Verbum flavoured the entire Council, and was the model to which all relationships should aspire: Catholics with one another and with other Christians and with women and men of other faiths.

Dialogue was to be the primary pathway, with no-one being coerced in matters that had to do with conscience and faith. To allow this principle of dialogue, which suffused Vatican II in general and its reflections on revelation in particular, to inform all of our relationships would surely be a true sign of our fidelity to the Council.

James Corkery *Thinking Faith* 2012

PRAYER WITH SACRED SCRIPTURE

During 2021, Pope Francis offered a series of Catechesis on Prayer during his General Audiences. In January he spoke on Prayer with Sacred Scripture.

The words of Sacred Scripture were not written to remain imprisoned on papyrus, parchment or paper, but to be received by a person who prays, making them blossom in his or her heart, ... it is a dialogue with God...through prayer a new incarnation of the Word takes place.

Pope Francis goes on to say that we do not turn to the Bible to support our own philosophical or moral view - we hope for an encounter through the Holy Spirit who will lead us in prayer.

SACRED READING - LECTIO DIVINA

Christian tradition is rich in its experiences and reflections on prayer with Sacred Scripture. Lectio Divina goes back to the early monastic tradition. There were not bibles for everyone and not everyone knew how to read. So the monks gathered in chapel to hear a member of the community reading from the scripture. In this exercise they were taught and encouraged to listen with their hearts because it was the Word of God that they were hearing.

First go to a quiet place and recall that you are about to listen to the Word of God. Then read the scripture passage aloud to let yourself hear the words. When you finish reading, pause and recall if some word or phrase stood out or something touched your heart.

If so, pause and savour the insight, feeling, or understanding. Then go back and read the passage again because it will have a fuller meaning. Pause again and note what happened. If you want to dialogue with God or Jesus in response to the word, follow the prompting of your heart.

This kind of reflective listening allows the Holy Spirit to deepen awareness of God's taking the initiative to speak with you. Whether one prays individually or in a group, *Lectio Divina* is a flexible and easy way to pray. First listen, note what is given and respond in a way that is directed by the Holy Spirit.

GOSPEL CONTEMPLATION

Saint Ignatius Loyola invited a person, when an individual made a retreat in the pattern of his Spiritual Exercises, to pray to come to know Christ so that one may love him in a more real way and following from this knowledge and love become a more faithful disciple.

In order to grow in this faith knowledge, Ignatius invited the retreatant to engage in a prayer method called contemplation. This is not some kind of mystical prayer but a prayer form in which one uses his or her senses in an imaginative way to reflect on a Gospel passage. One uses the senses, seeing, hearing, tasting, touching, and smelling to make the Gospel scene real and alive.

Here is a way of engaging in this prayer form which is relaxing and rather easy.

Select a passage from one of the Gospels in which Jesus is interacting with others.

- ◆ Recall what you are doing in engaging with the Word of God and what you desire from this encounter. God is present and because God is present you rely on God.
- ◆ Read the Gospel passage twice so that the story and the details of the story become familiar.
- ◆ Close your eyes and reconstruct the scene in your imagination. See what is going on and watch the men and women in the scene. What does Jesus look like? How do the others react to him? What are the people saying to one another? What emotions fill their words? Is Jesus touching someone? As you enter into the scene, sometimes there is the desire to be there. So you can place yourself in the scene, perhaps as an observer, as one lining up for healing, or as one helping others to Jesus.
- ◆ Vividness is not a criteria for the effectiveness of this kind of prayer. Engagement is and the result is a more interior knowledge of Jesus.
- ◆ As one finishes this time of prayer, take a moment to speak person to person with Christ saying what comes from your heart.