

The Pontifical Biblical Commission becomes more conservative in its Attitude toward the Bible: A Look at the Document *The Inspiration and Truth of Sacred Scripture* (2014)¹

By Thomas Schirrmacher

Translated from the German by Dr. Richard McClary, edited by Prof. Dr. K. Johnson

The Pontifical Biblical Commission is a part of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which in a certain sense is the Vatican's theological commission. The Congregation is under the leadership of the Gerhard Ludwig Cardinal Müller, who along with this oversees the Commission on the Bible. The Commission elects its own head and is semi-independent in its publications.

There are clear differences compared to the 1993 document by the Pontifical Biblical Commission, entitled *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*.² The historical-critical methods are no longer so wholeheartedly elevated to almost canonical rank. Rather, historical-critical methods are relativized.

Indeed, the new document points to the “methods” discussed in 1993 (§ 105, pp. 124-125), but the fact cannot be hidden that there has been a clear distancing from the line taken in the 1993 document.

However, the new document is only able to rhetorically but not truly bridge the tension between an almost complete license for the results of historical-critical methods and protection of the historical foundations of the confession of faith and the affirmation of the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures.

Most quotes from the document are bible texts, then followed by *Dei Verbum* (English: *Word of God*) according to frequency, one of the four constitutions of the Second Vatican Council issued in 1965. Finally, what follows is *Verbum Domini* (*Word of the Lord*), a post-synodal apostolic exhortation composed by Pope Benedict and dating from 2010. The Council of Trent is quoted four times. However, each time it is quoted, it is with the same decision as to the extent of the canon.

¹ Pontifical Biblical Commission. *Inspiration und Wahrheit der Heiligen Schrift: Das Wort, das von Gott kommt und von der Welt spricht, um die Welt zu retten*. Februar 22, 2014. Statements by the Apostolic See No. 196. Secretariat of the German Bishops' Conference: Bonn, 2014 (English version: *The Inspiration and Truth of the Sacred Scripture: The Word that comes from God and speaks of God for the Salvation of the World*. Liturgical Press: Collegeville (MN), 2014; the German version is free and can be downloaded at www.dbk.de).

² Pontifical Biblical Commission. *Die Interpretation der Bibel in der Kirche*. 23.4.1993. Statements by the Apostolic See No. 115. Secretariat of the German Bishops' Conference, 1996². English version cited here: *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*. Pauline Books & Media: Boston (MA), 1996. Download of the English version: http://catholic-resources.org/ChurchDocs/PBC_Interp.htm. German version available at www.dbk.de as a pdf file. The original version in Latin and other translations can be found at www.vatican.org.

Inspiration

The description of inspiration is clear and well stated: “The inspiration of Sacred Scripture refers, therefore, to each of the texts that constitute it, as well as to the canon as a whole. To affirm that a biblical book is inspired means to recognize that it constitutes a specific and privileged vehicle of God’s revelation to humankind and that its human authors were impelled by the Spirit to express truths of faith in a historically located text and received as normative by believing communities” (§ 57, p. 60).

Evangelicals can only agree with the following section, which point out that the faith of the reader today and the action of the Spirit correspond to inspiration:

“God’s solicitude should be received with a deep gratitude, manifested in a keen interest and great attention, to hear and to understand what God wants to communicate to us. The Spirit in which the books were written, however, should be the Spirit in which we listen to them. True disciples of Jesus, profoundly moved by faith in their Lord, wrote the books of the New Testament. These books are meant to be heard by true disciples of Jesus (cf. Matthew 28:19), filled with living faith in him (cf. John 20:31). It is with the risen Jesus, according to the teaching that Jesus gave his disciples (cf. Luke 24:25-27, 44-47) and from his perspective, that we are called to read the writings of the Old Testament. For the scientific study of the biblical writings too, conducted not in a neutral way but with a truly theological approach, it is essential to take account of inspiration. Indeed, the criterion of an authentic reading is indicated by *Dei Verbum* when it affirms that ‘Holy Scripture must be read and interpreted in the same Spirit in which it was written’ (n. 12). Modern exegetical methods cannot take the place of faith, but, when applied within the framework of faith, they can be very fruitful for the theological understanding of the texts” (§ 53, p. 55).

The differentiation between revelation and inspiration (as also in *Verbum Domini* and *Dei Verbum*) is also something carried out by most Evangelicals. In my opinion, however, what the Pontifical Biblical Commission emphasizes too little is that if the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures is only one particular form of a broader revelation, 1. the Scriptures still remain revelation and 2. they remain the only binding and unchanging form of revelation for all time.

I have formulated it as follows: “In the course of this, the Holy Spirit, after the testimony of Holy Scripture within the environment of revelation, plays a much more comprehensive role than only in the - admittedly central - authorization of the written collective instrument of Christian faith. Differentiations can be made for the following aspects of the operation of the Spirit with respect to the Word

1. direct revelation to people (2 Samuel 23:2; Revelation 4:2),
2. the written record and editing of this revelation³ (Acts 1:16; Zechariah 7:12; 2 Timothy 3:16),
3. the understanding, interpretation, and taking to heart of the Word by the reader or the hearer (Acts 10:44; 1 Thessalonians 1:6),
4. implementing the Word in everyday life (Romans 8:2-4);
5. the authority of the Word proclaimed for evangelization and community (Acts 4:31; 1 Thessalonians 1:5).“⁴

³ 1. and 2. can coincide, for instance in the composition of one of Paul's letters.

⁴ Thomas Schirrmacher. "Bibeltreu oder der Bibel treu?", pp. 93-132 in: Thomas Schirrmacher (ed.). *Bibeltreue in der Offensive?!: Die drei Chicagoerklärungen zur biblischen Irrtumslosigkeit, Hermeneutik und Anwendung*. 3rd Revised Edition with a new Introduction. 2009. Bonn: VKW; 2009, p. 117.

The segment entitled “The Testimony of 2 Timothy 3:15–16 and 2 Peter 1:20–21” (the heading above 55, p. 56) is central to the discussion, well worked out, and encouraging from an Evangelical point of view. Therein one reads the following:

“The two letters 2 Timothy and 2 Peter play important roles in the first outline of a Christian canon of Scripture. They hint at a closure of a body of Pauline and Petrine letters, impede any later addition to these letters, and prepare for the closure of the canon. The text of 2 Peter in particular points toward a two-testament canon and an ecclesial reception of the Pauline letters, an important factor in the reception of these writings in the Church” (§ 58, p. 60).

In summary, the following is established: “The Writings of the New Testament Attest the Inspiration of the Old Testament and Interpret it Christologically” (heading above § 54, p. 55).

What was very pleasing to note is the fact that as far as inspiration and truth are concerned, the Old Testament is viewed on equal terms with the New Testament.

Salvific Revelation

The Theological Commission writes the following regarding 2 Timothy 3:16-17: “The Theological Commission had eliminated the expression ‘saving truth’ (*veritas salutaris*), introducing a longer formulation: ‘the truth which God wanted put into the sacred writings for the sake of our salvation’ (*veritatem quam Deus nostrae salutis causa Litteris Sacris consignari voluit*). Since the same Commission explained that the parenthetical clause ‘for the sake of our salvation’ refers to ‘truth,’ this means that when one speaks of the ‘truth of the Sacred Scripture,’ one has in mind the truth that concerns our salvation. This must not, however, be taken to mean that the truth of Sacred Scripture concerns only those parts of the Sacred Book that are necessary for faith and morality, to the exclusion of other parts (the expression *veritas salutaris* of the fourth schema had not been accepted precisely to avoid such an interpretation). The meaning of the expression ‘the truth which God wanted put into the sacred writings for the sake of our salvation’ is rather that the books of Scripture, with all their parts, insofar as they are inspired by the Holy Spirit and have God as their author, intend to communicate the truth insofar as it relates to our salvation, which is, in fact, the purpose for which God reveals himself” (§ 63, p. 70-71)

What is viewed here as central is indeed that the Scriptures reveals our salvation. However, at the same time, it is declared that the Scriptures *not only* refer to texts which directly speak about salvation.

This clear statement, however, stands in a certain contradiction to a certain foundational tone found in the document, and that is that the infallibility of the Scriptures only refers to questions of salvation (e.g., § 144, pp. 162-163, which is quoted in the following section).

Inerrancy

The Pontifical Biblical Commission continues to use the term ‘inerrancy.’ In connection with this, one reads: “Theologians have had recourse to the concept of ‘inerrancy,’ apply-

ing it to Sacred Scripture. If it is taken in its absolute sense, this term would suggest that there can be no error of any kind in the Bible” (§ 63, p. 70).

However, immediately in the next sentence this statement is again taken up and actually turned into its opposite: “But with the progressive discoveries in the field of history, philology, and the natural sciences, and because of the application to biblical research of the historical-critical method, exegetes have had to recognize that not everything in the Bible is expressed in accordance with the demands of the contemporary sciences, because the biblical writers reflect the limits of their own personal knowledge, in addition to those of their time and culture” (§ 63, p. 70).

It is astonishing how such an important document can at this point cast about a number of questions and levels of discussion and not hold them cleanly apart in their various fine points.

Is it 1. only a question of the fact that the Bible was not composed in modern scientific language and for that reason may not be read so, but that is to be read as correct within the framework of the language of its time; or is it 2. a question of the fact that the Bible’s lack of modern knowledge means it falsely reports and describes (which would not have been changed by using modern, scientific language!); or is it 3. a question of the fact of cultural differences, such that we have to understand formulations within the framework of culture at that time and misunderstand when we employ the standards of our culture?

“In this way, it is made clear that the truth of Scripture is that which has the salvation of believers as its goal. The objections – raised in the past and still current today – because of inaccuracies and contradictions of a geographical, historical, and scientific nature, which are rather frequent in the Bible, purport to call into question the reliability of the sacred text and hence its divine origin. These, however, are rejected by the Church in the affirmation that ‘the books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching firmly, faithfully, and without error that truth which God wanted put into the sacred writings for the sake of our salvation’ (DV, n. 11). It is this truth which gives full meaning to human existence, and it is this which God wanted to be made known to all peoples” (§ 144, p. 163).

Inerrancy is here again invoked as testimony against doubts in reliability, albeit simply so, by standing up to factual criticism relating to the Scriptures. Is that not just too simple?

The Apocrypha

The deuterocanonical books of the Old Testament (called the ‘Apocrypha’ by Protestants) naturally count as part of the Holy Scriptures for the Pontifical Biblical Commission. In particular, the books Jesus Sirach (18-20) and Tobit (128-129) are discussed.

It is repeatedly emphasized that the Council of Trent set down the extent of the Canon, including the deuterocanonical writings.

“On the basis of a general consensus of the churches, expressed in numerous declaration of the Magisterium and attested in important pronouncements of various local synods, the Council of Hippo (at the end of the fourth century) fixed the Canon of the New

Testament, which was then confirmed by the dogmatic definition of the Council of Trent” (§ 61, p. 67).

“In the Catholic Church it was the Council of Trent that decided to approve the longer canon against the reformers who had returned to the shorter one. The majority of Orthodox Churches do not differ from the Catholic Church, but some divergence exists among the ancient Eastern Churches.” (§ 60, pp. 65-66; similarly § 61, p. 66-68; cf. Tobit § 109, p. 128-129). [With respect to the Orthodox churches, this is not so simple since there the Canon varied amongst the individual churches and over the course of history and, for instance, the 1839 Longer Catechism imposed the Jewish-Hebrew canon.⁵]

In keeping with good Catholicism, it is within the church’s purview to decide the Canon. However, the formulation is much more reserved than in the past. The church only recognizes and accepts the Canon, but it is not able to set the extent of the Canon on the basis of the power of its own authority: “Their authority, on account of their inspiration, must be recognized and accepted by the community, whether it be the synagogue or the Church” (§ 60, p. 62).

A Walk through selected Biblical Books

The Pontifical Commission takes a walk through Biblical books and authors and inquires after truth and inspiration. The Commission writes “that, in the Bible, only two New Testament writings speak explicitly of divine inspiration, and they relate it to some writings of the Old Testament” (§ 6, p. 2-3), namely 2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:20-21. “Studying the biblical texts closely, however, we perceive a noteworthy fact: the relationship between their authors and God is constantly made explicit. This happens in various ways, each of them capable of making it clear that the respective writings come from God. The task of our investigation will be to identify in the texts of Sacred Scripture the indications of the relationship between human authors and God, showing thereby the divine provenance of those books, in other words, their inspiration.” (§ 6, p. 3).

At this point in the document, the Commission states: “We have chosen a number of books representative of the Old and New Testaments . . .” (§ 11, p. 7).

The section on Jesus, the Word of God, and personal faith sounds very Evangelical: “According to what we have gathered from the gospels, living faith in Jesus, the Son of God, is the principal goal of the formation given by Jesus to his disciples, and in this faith their fundamental relationship with Jesus and with God is expressed. This faith is a gift of the Holy Spirit (cf. John 3:5; 16:13) and is lived in an intimate, conscious, and personal un-

⁵ Comp. Thomas Schirmacher. *Die Apokryphen*. VTR: Nürnberg, 2005, pp. 69-70 = *The Apocrypha*. VTR: Nürnberg, 2005; Elias Oikonomos. “Die Bedeutung der deuterokanonischen Schriften in der orthodoxen Kirche,” pp. 26-40 and Hans Peter Rüger. “Der Umfang des alttestamentlichen Kanons in den verschiedenen kirchlichen Traditionen,” pp. 137-144 in: Siegfried Meurer (ed.). *Die Apokryphenfrage im ökumenischen Horizont*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1989.

ion with the Father and the Son (cf. 17:20– 23). By means of this faith, the disciples are united to the person of Jesus, who is ‘the mediator and the fullness of all revelation’ (*DV*, n. 2) and they receive from him the elements of their apostolic testimony in its oral or written expression. Because it comes from Jesus, the Word of God, such testimony can only be a word that comes from God. The personal relationship of faith (1) with the source through which God reveals himself (2) are the two decisive elements which guarantee that the words and deeds of the apostles come from God” (§ 10, p. 6).

The gospels show “Jesus, Culmination of God’s Revelation for All Peoples” (§ 23, p. 22).

One reads the following about the Old Testament: “The idea of a divine origin of the biblical texts is developed in the account of the Pentateuch on the basis of the concept of writing, or setting something down in writing. Thus, at particularly significant moments, Moses receives from God the task of putting into writing, for example, the founding document of the Covenant (Exod 24:4), or the text of its renewal (Exod 34:27); elsewhere he seems to fulfill the sense of these instructions, putting other relevant things into writing (Exod 17:14; Num 33:2; Deut 31:22), to the composition of the entire Torah (cf. Deut 27:3; 8; 31:9). The book of Deuteronomy gives particular importance to the specific role of Moses, presenting him as an inspired mediator and authorized interpreter of the divine Word. From this starting point, the traditional idea developed that Moses was the author of the Pentateuch, so that the books of Moses not only speak of him but are even held to be his compositions” (§ 11, p. 8).

Regarding the Pentateuch one reads: “In the Pentateuch, Moses appears as the person instituted by God as the sole mediator of his revelation” (§ 51, p. 52).

One reads the following regarding the Old Testament prophets: “In short, the prophetic books present themselves entirely as the Word of the Lord. This idea occupies a predominant place in the historical books as well. Both groups, especially the historical books, specify that the Word of the Lord has an infallible efficacy and calls to conversion” (§ 16, p. 14).

The section on the Psalms is also excellent (§ 17-19, pp. 14-18).

To At the “conclusion” of the section on the Old Testament, the following is stated: “Having finished the review of selected texts from the Old Testament, we can now look back at them from a synthetic perspective. The writings examined, although different as to date and place of composition, as well as to specific content and particular literary style, agree in presenting a single, great basic message: God speaks to us. The same unique God, in the multiplicity and variety of historical situations, seeks man and woman, reaches them, and speaks to them. And the message of God, different in form because of the concrete historical circumstances of revelation, constantly tends to promote a loving response in them. The writings that express this marvelous design of God are themselves permeated with God. Such divine infusion renders them inspired and inspiring, capable, that is, of illuminating and encouraging the understanding and passion of believers” (§ 21, pp. 20-21).

The final sentence confirms the ‘claritas scripturae,’ the perspicuity of the Scriptures through the Spirit of God, as it was taught by Martin Luther and John Calvin.

In a long section (§ 39-42, pp. 38-41), Paul is addressed. “Paul attests the divine provenance of the Scriptures of Israel, of his gospel, of his apostolic activity, and of his letters” (p. 38).

The section on the letter to the Hebrews (§ 43-44, pp. 41-46) is also very good, in particular on Hebrews 1:1-2 & 2:1-4. I would like to particularly emphasize the section on the parallelism between “word” and “salvation” in Hebrews 2:2-4 (§ 44, pp. 44-46).

Just as impressive is the presentation of the Revelation of John: “The term ‘inspiration’ is not present in the book of Revelation, but the reality of what the term means is found there, where there is a recognition in the text of a relationship of close, direct dependence on God” (§ 45, p. 46). An impressive testimony for the truth of Revelation is given (§ 96-100, pp. 109-117).

The following had already been said somewhat prior about John and his Revelation: “Then, when the great decisive ‘sign’ of the New Jerusalem is shown, which presents the ineffable relationship of love between the Lamb Jesus Christ and the Church who has become his bride, there will be a further call to the Spirit for John (21:10), which will open him to the highest understanding of Jesus Christ. This broadening by the Spirit to perceive ‘something more’ of Jesus Christ will pass from John to his written work and will tend to place itself in the reader-hearer” (§ 46, p. 48).

In the case of all New Testament examples which are dealt with, what is repeatedly pointed to is the fulfillment of the Old Testament (generally: § 103, p. 119-121; § 29, p. 28-29; for the Gospels, § 37, p. 36-37 & § 38, p. 38, and § 54, p. 55-56; for Luke and Acts, § 31, p. 30-31 & § 57, p. 59-60; for John § 38, p. 38; for Matthew § 54, p. 55-56), and on the whole the word “fulfillment” is one of the favorite words of the document. It is intended 1. as the concrete fulfillment of the Old Testament, 2. generally to mean Jesus as the fulfillment of Israel’s Old Testament salvation history, and 3. the final fulfillment of the story of salvation in the return of Jesus.

The Authors of the Biblical Books

Without exception, the Pontifical Biblical Commission felicitously presents the formulation of the relationship the human authors of the Biblical writings to the actual originator of the Scriptures, God and the Holy Spirit, respectively.⁶

“In the writings of the Old Testament, the relationship between the various human authors and God is expressed in various ways” (§ 51, p. 51).

“We have seen that God is the only author of revelation and that the books of Sacred Scripture, which serve for the transmission of divine revelation, are inspired by him. God is the ‘author’ of these books (*DV*, n. 16), but through human beings whom he has chosen. These do not write under dictation but are ‘true authors’ (*DV*, n. 11) who employ their own faculties and abilities.” (§ 6, p. 2).

⁶ For me it is a matter of the relationship. I am aware that according to the Catholic notion, the number of Biblical writers is greater owing to the so-called ‘Apocrypha’ than from the Jewish-Protestant point of view, as the last quote’s appealing to the Council of Trent makes clear.

“According to the testimony of the biblical writings, inspiration presents itself as a special relationship with God (or with Jesus), whereby he grants to a human author to relate – through his Spirit – that which he wishes to communicate to human beings. In this way, what *Dei Verbum* asserts (n. 11) is confirmed: the books are written through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit; God is their author, because he employs chosen people, acting in and through them; these, however, write as true authors” (§ 52, p. 54).

“From the testimony of the biblical writings, we can gather only a few indications about the specific relationship between the human author and God with regard to the activity of writing” (§ 7, p. 4).

“We find in the biblical writings, then, a wide spectrum of testimony about their divine providence, and thus we can speak of a rich phenomenology of the relationship between God and the human author” (§ 51, p. 53).

“According to the testimony of the biblical writings, inspiration presents itself as a special relationship with God (or with Jesus), whereby he grants to a human author to relate – through his Spirit – that which he wishes to communicate to human beings (§ 52, p. 54).

“With a solemn and normative pronouncement at the Council of Trent (*EB*, 58-60), the Catholic Church accepted the canon of sacred books, thus defining the fundamental parameters of its belief. The Church set forth which texts are to be regarded as written ‘under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit’ (*DV*, n. 11) and therefore indispensable for the formation and edification of the believer and the entire Christian community (cf. 2 Timothy 3:15-16). If, on the one hand, one is fully aware that these writings were composed by human authors who left on them the stamp of their own particular literary genius, on the other hand, one equally recognizes in them a unique divine quality variously attested by the sacred texts and variously explained by theologians over the course of history” (§ 137, p. 157).

The historical-critical Method

Astonishingly, the historical-critical method is mentioned only once and indeed not by chance only in connection to the 1993 document (§ 63, p. 70), although the word “historical,” according to my count, appears 31 times with a positive meaning in the entire document. One time the term is used in reversed order: How does one explain “narratives, which appear to be improbable and incapable of standing up to a serious critical-scientific examination” (§ 135, p. 154)?

Individual results of historical-critical research are accepted and indeed almost exclusively so for the Old Testament. However, this is no longer done as if they were themselves a type of truth. Rather, the results are mentioned in connection with repeated formulations such as “the majority of biblical exegetes” (§ 58, p. 60, 2 Peter and 2 Timothy “pseudepigraphical”), “the majority of exegetes (§ 106, S. 125, post-exilic final redaction of patriarchal history), “according to many [exegetes]” (§ 94, p. 107, letter to the Ephesians by the later Pauline school) “Scholars consider it possible” (§ 60, p. 63, early beginning for the collection of Old Testament documents, and “today, the tendency” (§ 60, p. 65, late final redaction of the Old Testament canon).

Let us choose a number of quotes which contain acceptance of the results of critical biblical interpretation:

"The opinion that the gospels are essentially a chronicle of facts, of which the witnesses furnish an exact account, is still a widespread opinion. The idea is based on the just conviction that the Christian faith is not ahistorical speculation but is founded on events that really happened. God acts in history and shows his presence in an eminent way in that of his incarnate Son. But a view which sees the gospels solely as a type of chronicle can lose sight of their theological significance and thereby overlook all their richness precisely as a word which speaks of God" (§ 123, S. 142). A document by the Pontifical Biblical Commission dating from 1964 is then referred to. "Based on new studies . . ."? The church fathers already knew this, for instance St. Augustine! As did the Reformers. And many later Catholic exegetes.

"This traditional form of reception was followed also for the New Testament writings, which are all seen as coming from the inner circle of the apostles. Today, thanks to the converging results of researchers using literary and historical methodologies, we cannot maintain the same perspective as the ancients; the science of exegesis has actually demonstrated with convincing arguments that the various biblical writings are not the exclusive product of the author indicated in the work's title or recognized as such by the tradition. The literary history of the Bible postulates, rather, a plurality of interventions and, therefore, a collaboration of different authors, for the most part anonymous, throughout a rather long and trying period of redaction. This obligatory employment of an interpretive model in relation to the origin of the sacred writings is not diametrically opposed to the traditional concept, sometimes hastily censured as hermeneutical naivety" (§ 140, p. 159).

"Biblical scholars have reasonably conjectured the existence of currents, schools, and religious groups capable of guarding, in a viable way, literary traditions considered sacred and which later flowed into the channel of Sacred Scripture, so that – although pointing out the usefulness of determining a history of the composition of biblical texts – one cannot and must not attribute either a different value or a different authority to that which was 'original' compared to that which has a secondary origin" (§ 143, S. 161).

Now here are a number of examples of reports considered to be historically unreliable.

Essentially one has the following: "In the Bible, we encounter contradictions, historical inaccuracies, implausible narratives, and, in the Old Testament, moral precepts and behavior in conflict with the teachings of Jesus" (§ 104, p. 123).

"Without doubt, when the biblical narrator or narrators describe the divine promises and the Patriarch Abraham's response of faith (Gen 15:1-6), they do not refer to facts whose secular transmission would have been absolutely secure. It was, rather, their experience of faith which allowed them to write in the way they did, to present the global significance of those events, and to invite their compatriots to believe in the power and faithfulness of God, who permitted them and their ancestors to pass through often dramatic historical periods. The interpretation of the concrete facts, the sense which emerges from their interpretation of the 'today' of the rereading, counts more than the facts themselves. Indeed, it is only with time that the meaning of a historical period which lasted for centu-

ries can be understood and written down in the form of a theological account or a hymnic poem" (§ 107, pp. 126-127).

"The Exodus account does not intend primarily to transmit a record of ancient events in a manner of an archival document but rather to call to mind a tradition which attests that today, as yesterday, God is present along with his people to save them" (§ 108, p. 128).

Regarding the account of Jericho, the following is stated: "From the outset, it is necessary to note that these narratives do not have the characteristics of a historical account: in a real war, in fact, the walls of a city do not come crashing down at the sound of trumpets . . . (Josh 6:20)" (§ 127, p. 146).

The size of Ninevah counts as "hyperbole," the story of the fish and the conversion of Nineveh are viewed as "implausible" (§ 110, p. 130). "In the account, however, there are not only details, but also structural elements which we cannot consider as historical events and which lead us to interpret the text as an imaginary composition with deep theological content. A few improbable details – as, for example, that Nineveh was an extremely large city, a three-day journey across (Jonah 3:3) – may be considered hyperbole; among the structural elements, however, some are implausible – the fish which swallows Jonah and keeps him alive in his belly for three days and three nights before vomiting him up (2:1, 11) and the supposed conversion of the entire city of Nineveh (3:5-10), of which there is no trace anyway in Assyrian records" (§ 110, p. 130).

Regarding 2 Timothy and 2 Peter, one reads the following: "The majority of biblical exegeses consider the two letters as 'pseudepigraphical' works (attributed to the apostles but actually produced by later authors). This does not jeopardize their inspired character and does not diminish their theological significance" (§ 58, p. 60). Essentially, the following is stated regarding pseudepigraphs: "Several books of Scripture carry indications of the period in which they were written; in other cases, scientific exegesis plausibly places them in various historical periods" (§ 146 p. 164).

The earthquake in Matthew is a literary motive that is not intended to direct attention to the earthquake but rather to God (§ 120, S. 139-140). That is logical. It is only difficult to follow the conclusion that it does not matter whether the earthquake happened or not. The stories of the crucifixion are also not meant to direct attention to the wooden beams but rather to Jesus. However, that does not exclude the fact that the wooden beams of the cross existed!

On the gospels one reads the following: "This means that while the theological affirmations about Jesus have a direct and normative import, the purely historical elements have a subordinate function." (§ 123, S. 142) That is also obvious. It is only that 'subordinate' does not automatically mean unhistorical, does it?

Besides, Pope Benedict XVI, in his three-volume work entitled *Jesus*, ventured much farther forward and emphasized the reliability of the Gospels much more strongly. As much as Pope Benedict's influence is felt in the document, one is disappointed at the end at how often the logic is as follows: The accuracy of the accounts is completely secondary.

In 2008, a Catholic theologian presented the thesis - and not as the first one to do so! - that all the New Testament documents were authored prior to 70 A.D. He did so in an introduction to the New Testament. It was via the renowned Austrian publishing house Böhlau-Verlag and as part of the series Reihe UTB that Professor Karl Jaros authored the book *Das Neue Testament und seine Autoren: Eine Einführung* (English translation of the title: *The New Testament and Its Authors: An Introduction*). I dream of the day where historical-critical theology, also that which is Catholic, grapples with how the dogma of a late composition of the New Testament arose, when critical arguments and authors for and against are impartially weighed, and when certain theses and authors are not dismissed from the outset.

Traditional Author Attributions

In addition, however, there are also examples of a traditional manner of attributing biblical documents which Evangelicals also consider to be sound and well-argued.

God consigned the Ten Commandments to “Moses” (§ 51, S. 52). “Moses is then given the task of writing other words of God (Exod 24:4; 34:27), becoming ultimately the Lord’s mediator for the entire Torah (cf. Deut 31:9)” (§ 51, S. 52). “In the Pentateuch, Moses appears as the person instituted by God as the sole mediator of his revelation” (§ 51, S. 52).

All of Jesus’ words are simply quoted as genuine. Jesus is as he presents himself in the Gospels (clearly, for instance, in § 54, pp. 55-56), his self-statements are direct revelation.

John wrote the Gospel of John: “the whole Johannine work” (§ 31, p. 30), “John” (§ 31, S. 30). “On two occasions the Evangelist explicitly underlines that he was an eyewitness of what he writes.” (§ 32, p. 31).

The Book of Acts is attributed to Luke (§ 34, p. 33; § 51, pp. 52-53).

“John” (25 times in § 45-49, pp. 46-51; 2 times in § 96-100, pp. 109-117) is designated the “the author of Revelation . . .” (§ 96, S. 110, ähnlich § 97, p. 112) 27 times. The following is stated: “. . . the interpreting angel who follows John speaks in these terms” (§ 100, p. 116) and “in this way Revelation enters into contact with John” (§ 45, S. 47).

The historical-critical point of view is taken as a basis for the development of the Old Testament canon in a very guarded manner (§ 60, pp. 62-66). The terminus a quo, or earliest possible dating, applies to 2 Maccabees 2:13 (§ 60, pp. 64-65), and the terminus ad quem, or latest possible date applies to Sirach 44-50 (thus “in the first decades of the second century BC,” § 60, p., 64-65). Contrary to this is the statement: Today, the tendency is to date the closure of the rabbinic canon to the second century AD, or even later . . .” (§ 60, S. 65).

The Canon

The summary on the early history of the canon of the New Testament is thorough (§ 61, pp. 66-68).

The “Conclusion” of the segment on the canon fittingly describes the position: “The reader of Sacred Scripture cannot but be impressed by the manner in which texts so different in their literary form and historical roots have been united in a single canon and mani-

fest a concord of truth which finds its full expression in the person of Christ" (§ 101, S. 117, "Conclusion").

"The canon of Scripture, therefore, gives access, at the same time, to the dynamic by which God communicates himself to human beings through the prophets, biblical writers, and finally in Jesus of Nazareth and also to the process by which the community receives this revelation in the Spirit and delivers its contents in writing." (final sentence, Part 2, § 103, p. 121).

The 1993 document by the Pontifical Biblical Commission did not give much regard to canonical methods.⁷ At the latest, Benedict's work *Jesus* was the time when a positive appraisal became clear, above all in the section entitled "The Need and the Methods of a Canonical Approach to Scripture" (heading, § 103, pp. 119-121).

A weak Part Three

Part One addresses "The Testimony of the Biblical Writings and Their Origin from God" (p. 1). Part Two addresses "The Testimony of the Biblical Writings to Their Truth" (p. 69).

Much weaker than Part One and Part Two is the shortest, Part Three: "The Interpretation of the Word of God and Its Challenges" (p. 123). "The truth of the Word of God in the Sacred Scriptures is intimately linked to their inspiration: the God who speaks cannot, in fact, deceive. Notwithstanding this broad declaration, various pronouncements of the sacred text create difficulties. The Fathers of the Church were already aware of these . . ." (§ 63, p. 69)

The section entitled "The Miracle Narratives" (§ 115-123, pp. 134-142) is particularly weak. The reports of miracles are not denied, and it is also stated that the zenith of all signs and wonders is the resurrection (§ 118 ff., p. 138 ff.). However, it is also not recognizable that the biblical miracles are possible and worthy of belief. Rather, it allows Western skepticism to shine through. There is no reference to whether miracles continue to occur today, and that that also influences the historical question. (And this occurs while the Catholic Church, in other areas, above all in the question of beatifications and canonizations indeed virtually demands miracles as necessary and also presently confirms such by an associated commission!)

The sections "Violence in the Bible" (§ 125-131, pp. 143-150) and the shorter "The Social Status of Women" (§ 132-134, pp. 150-154) make more problems than provide answers, let alone helpful answers. At this point, one could learn a lot from Evangelical theologians.

Fundamentalism

The opening sentence by Cardinal Müller reads: "The life of the church is founded on the Word of God" (p. xiii). Strikingly frequently the document speaks positively about "foundations," "fundamental," etc. (I counted 30 times).

⁷ *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, op. cit., pp. 44-45.

In contrast, fundamentalism is hardly addressed. On the one hand, subsequent to the 1993 document, skepticism is to be overcome. On the other hand, fundamentalism (§ 4, p. xxi-xxii), is to be overcome without there being anything more said in detail as to what is meant. It remains as nebulous as in the 1993 document regarding who is meant (see the attachment below for comments relating to this issue).

“The duty of the interpreter is to avoid a fundamentalist reading of Scripture so as to situate the various formulations of the sacred text in their historical context, according to the literary genres then in vogue” (§ 146, pp. 164-165). Who or what is meant here? In any case, Evangelical exegesis cannot be meant, for it has never done anything else than to interpret the Biblical text according to its genre.

Just as in 1993, the Pontifical Biblical Commission remains silent on the question of who is meant by this. The Jehovah’s Witnesses? Certain Evangelicals? All Evangelicals? The question is so central, and the delineation so sharp, that one would surely like to know who or what is meant beyond this ‘cardboard cutout.’

Besides, Pope Francis uses the term fundamentalism differently in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, which is similar to my use of the term in my book *Fundamentalism*: It is the attempt to forcibly impose one’s own truth on other people.

Dialogue with other Religions

The document reinforces *Dominus Iesus* with respect to interreligious dialogue (§ 148, pp. 165-166).

Please also note which section coincidentally or purposely is found directly above the section on the holy books of other religions: “It is clear, however, from a Christian perspective, the truth of the biblical writing is handed on in the testimony on the *Lord Jesus*, the ‘Mediator and at the same time the fullness of all revelation’ (*DV*, n. 2), he who defines himself as ‘the way, the truth, and the life’ (John 14:6). This essential centrality of the mystery of Christ does not exclude but rather exalts the ancient traditions, which, as Christ himself asserts, speak of him (cf. John 5:39) and of the definitive salvation accomplished in his death and resurrection. In his infinite mystery, Christ is the center which sheds light on the whole of Scripture.” (§ 147, S. 22)⁸

Appendix: The 1993 Pontifical Biblical Commission: Fundamentalist Biblical Interpretation is dangerous and incapable of Thought

This appendix was published in 1993.

The Pontifical Biblical Commission is part of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, to some extent a theological commission for the Vatican. For a long time, the Congregation was under the direction of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger who at the same time supervised the Biblical Commission. The Commission, however, chooses its leaders on its own and is semi-independent in its publications. In 1993, the Secretary was the Ratzinger critic Albert Vanhoye, who from 1984-1990 was also the Rector of the Pontifical Biblical Institute. Thus it is not surprising that the 1993 document is furnished “with a rather chilly

⁸ The Commission does not go into other problematic aspects of *Dominus Iesus*. However, they are not the topic of this essay.

preface”⁹ by Ratzinger in which he emphasizes that the Commission is not a component of the teaching office of the Catholic Church.

To a certain extent, the Pontifical Biblical Commission raised the historical-critical method to a canonical rank in its 1993 missive “The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church.”¹⁰ Also, at the same time, it approved all of the methods deriving from it, such as feministic exegesis. However, it only condemned “fundamentalist” exegesis of Scripture as dumb and dangerous.¹¹ Regarding the historical-critical method, the following is stated:

“The historical-critical method is the indispensable method for the scientific study of the meaning of ancient texts. Holy Scripture, inasmuch as it is the ‘word of God in human language,’ has been composed by human authors in all its various parts and in all the sources that lie behind it. Because of this, its proper understanding not only admits the use of this method but actually requires it.”¹²

In the missive authorized by John Paul II, innumerable methods of exegesis are described and acknowledged, i.e., even when criticism is expressed. In each case, how they still emphasize an important aspect and make a useful contribution is presented. This even applies to feminist exegesis,¹³ which does not make widespread claims to presenting a truly correct historical assessment of the original text and knowingly seeks to establish an aggressive antithesis to Catholic theology.

The closer the methods come to a fundamentalist understanding of Scripture, the more critical they are viewed, even if they enjoy an excellent reputation. For instance, Brevard S. Childs’¹⁴ ‘canonical approach’ is indeed presented. However, it is not particularly emphasized, although he was very amiable to the Catholic understanding that everything is to be seen from the viewpoint of the teaching office of the Church, that one is not to go around the decisions of the Church, and that this was clearly shared by the head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Cardinal Josef Ratzinger. It was not coincidental that Ratzinger wrote a foreword in which he was not at all favorable regarding the document and declared that the Pontifical Biblical Commission is not a part of the teaching office of the Catholic Church.

A true and vehement section entitled “Fundamentalist Interpretation”¹⁵ ironically follows the recommendation of feminist exegesis and condemns fundamentalist exegesis lock, stock and barrel. Also, with respect to this and only this form of exegesis, there is nothing good to be extracted.

⁹ Hansjürgen Verweyen. Joseph Ratzinger - Benedikt XVI.: *Die Entwicklung seines Denkens*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2007, p. 91.

¹⁰ Pontifical Biblical Commission. *Die Interpretation der Bibel in der Kirche*. April 23, 1994. Statements by the Apostolic See No. 115. Secretariat of the German Bishops' Conference, 1996² (English version: *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*). Out of print but a download of the German version is available at www.dbk.de as a pdf file. The original version in Latin and other translations can be found at www.vatican.org.

¹¹ Comp. first Thomas Schirrmacher. *Eugen Drewermann und der Buddhismus*. VTR: Nürnberg, 2000¹; 2002², pp. 6-13 Pontifical Biblical Commission. *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*.

¹² Op. cit., p. 30.

¹³ Ibid., pp. 58-60.

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 44-45.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 61-63.

What is astonishing is the following: It remains completely up in the air as to what is actually meant at this point. The Jehovah's Witnesses? Anyone faithful to the Bible? Evangelical theology? It is in any event for certain that a 'straw man' has been set up and shot down, which in my opinion does not even exist as a propagated method.

If, however, Evangelical exegesis is generally meant in this section, the varieties of which are otherwise not mentioned in the document, that would be more than just a caricature of Evangelical theology. Nothing indicates that Evangelical theology has been thoroughly examined, as is the case with other schools, or that any acquaintance has been made with its hermeneutics, its academic series of commentaries, and innumerable exegetical dissertations.

It is maintained with exaggeration that the Bible "should be read and interpreted literally in all its details,"¹⁶ as if "fundamentalists" (whoever is meant) knew nothing about parables, prophetic images, and words' figurative meanings. This view applies – and even then it only applies in a qualified manner - with respect to older dispensationalism in the Evangelical realm and even there in only a limited manner as it relates to the area of prophecy (although in the end even this approach only calls for being 'as literal as possible and as figurative as necessary'), and not, however, for the broad mass of Lutheran, Reformed, Baptist, Methodist, Brethren, Pentecostal, or other Evangelicals. The use of strong exaggeration produces a hostile image which does not exist in that form.

In what follows, we want to put together some central statements about the fundamentalist understanding of Scripture and then comment cohesively on them.

"The fundamentalist interpretation had its origin at the time of the Reformation, arising out of a concern for fidelity to the literal meaning of Scripture. . . . Fundamentalism is right to insist on the divine inspiration of the Bible, the inerrancy of the word of God and other biblical truths included in its five fundamental points. But its way of presenting these truths is rooted in an ideology which is not biblical, whatever the proponents of this approach might say. For it demands an unshakable adherence to rigid doctrinal points of view and imposes, as the only source of teaching for Christian life and salvation, a reading of the Bible which rejects all questioning and any kind of critical research."¹⁷

"The basic problem with fundamentalist interpretation of this kind is that, refusing to take into account the historical character of biblical revelation, it makes itself incapable of accepting the full truth of the incarnation itself."¹⁸

"Fundamentalism likewise tends to adopt very narrow points of view. It accepts the literal reality of an ancient, out-of-date cosmology simply because it is found expressed in the Bible; this blocks any dialogue with a broader way of seeing the relationship between culture and faith. Its relying upon a non-critical reading of certain texts of the Bible serves to reinforce political ideas and social attitudes that are marked by prejudices—racism, for example—quite contrary to the Christian Gospel."¹⁹

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 61.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 62.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 63.

“Finally, in its attachment to the principle 'Scripture alone,' fundamentalism separates the interpretation of the Bible from the tradition, which, guided by the Spirit, has authentically developed in union with Scripture in the heart of the community of faith. It fails to realize that the New Testament took form within the Christian church and that it is the Holy Scripture of this church, the existence of which preceded the composition of the texts. Because of this, fundamentalism is often antichurch . . .”²⁰

“The fundamentalist approach is dangerous, for it is attractive to people who look to the Bible for ready answers to the problems of life. It can deceive these people, offering them interpretations that are pious but illusory, instead of telling them that the Bible does not necessarily contain an immediate answer to each and every problem. Without saying as much in so many words, fundamentalism actually invites people to a kind of intellectual suicide. It injects into life a false certitude, for it unwittingly confuses the divine substance of the biblical message with what are in fact its human limitations.”²¹

One has to just think about that for a moment: “The fundamentalist approach is dangerous, for it is attractive to people who look to the Bible for ready answers to the problems of life.” Whoever is meant by this question can only understand that to be a compliment! What the Commission overlooks is the question as to whether the Bible's own self-understanding does not at a foundational level precisely have the goal of offering God's help to people in need – for the main problem is the lack of peace with God – as well as concrete questions which the Bible addresses (2 Timothy 3:16-17; Romans 12:1-2; Romans 5:1-2). And to name just one example, does not the book of Proverbs, with its nuggets of wisdom, belong to the Bible?

Fundamentalists are not only “dangerous.” Rather, they also practice “a kind of intellectual suicide.” Are there not enough people who charge every form of theology and specifically Catholic theology of precisely this? Is it not cheap polemics, regardless of whom it is directed against? Who is actually defending such a thing? This is a matter of hermeneutics: Which group goes out and produces works of non-fiction and operates educational institutions because they want to abandon thinking?

And finally, fundamentalists confuse “the divine substance of the biblical message with what are in fact its human limitations.” In the case of the infallible papal teaching office, the Catholic Church teaches that the ex cathedra declared will of the pope is identical with the will of God. And in the case of the Scriptures, such an identity is supposed to be dangerous and inconceivable?

The Commission maintains that the fundamentalist understanding of the Bible is rooted in the “Reformation” and in “sola scripture.” However, it is astonishing that one allows all sorts of Biblical interpretation to stand but then suddenly mentions “not biblical,” “antichurch” (isn't feminist exegesis arguably just that?), “rigid doctrinaire attitudes” (is this unknown in the Catholic Church?), “tendency to express spiritual narrowness,” “blocks any dialogue,” is indeed “dangerous,” “illusory,” “false,” and leads to a “kind of intellectual suicide.”

²⁰ Ibid., p. 63.

²¹ Ibid., p. 63.

However, I would like to note the following: Firstly, there are such tendencies everywhere, but no other forms of exegesis are charged with this tendency. Secondly, the Catholic Church is at least just as doctrinaire, just not with the Biblical text but rather with the papal teaching office. Thirdly, the Catholic Church itself, despite all interpretive differences, conducted this method of interpretation for 1800 years and still defended it in 1943 in Pope Pius XII's encyclical on bible study – and was that dangerous and deceptive?

In the process, the Bible Commission,²² just like the authorizing pope, Pope John Paul II,²³ and the supervising cardinal, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger,²⁴ have attempted to gloss over the major contradiction between two papal encyclicals, at which anniversaries the missive appeared. In particular, Pope Leo XIII published his encyclical against modernism and Biblical criticism in 1893,²⁵ and in 1943 Pope Pius XII published his encyclical on Biblical studies that officially recognized the historical-critical methods rejected by his predecessor. The Pope himself wrote:

“First, one notes an important differences [sic] in these two documents, namely, the polemical, or to be more exact, the apologetic part of the two encyclicals. In fact, both appear concerned to answer attacks on the Catholic interpretation of the Bible, but these attacks did not follow the same direction. On the one hand, *Providentissimus Deus* wanted especially to protect Catholic interpretation of the Bible from the attacks of rationalistic science; on the other hand, *Divino Afflante Spiritu* was primarily concerned with defending Catholic interpretation from attacks that opposed the use of science by exegetes and that wanted to impose a non-scientific, so-called ‘spiritual’ interpretation of Sacred Scripture.”²⁶

The fact is, however, that the Catholic Church threw every thought about disavowals and warnings in the 1893 encyclicals over board and praised every type of historical-critical treatment of the Bible, with the exception of approaches which also hold the word to be God's or which place the Word of God above tradition and the science of interpretation. And that is the case, although the acknowledgment that the Bible is the Word of God inspired by the Holy Spirit was never reversed and still belongs to the infallible teachings of the Catholic Church. Even if the equivalency between revelation in Scripture and tradition is emphasized in the Catechism of the Catholic Church²⁷ (CCC 80-83) and both are called the ‘Word of God’ (CCC 85+97) and even if it emphasizes that the teaching office of the Church is allowed the sole authentic interpretation of both of these parts of God's word (CCC 85-88; comp. 77), what still applies is that the teaching office does not stand

²² *Ibid.*, pp., 26-28.

²³ Johannes Paul II. "Ansprache über die Interpretation der Bibel in der Kirche," pp. 7-20 in: S. 7+9-16. Pontifical Biblical Commission. *Die Interpretation der Bibel in der Kirche*. April 23, 1994. (English version: *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*). Statements by the Apostolic See No. 115. Secretariat of the German Bishops' Conference, 1996², pp. 7+9-16.

²⁴ Pontifical Biblical Commission. *Die Interpretation der Bibel in der Kirche* (English version: *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*), op. cit., pp. 23-24.

²⁵ This Encyclical led in the end to the so-called 'anti-modernist dispute,' i. e., the dispute surrounding the the Oath against Modernism, an oath introduced by Pope Pius X in 1910 against Modernism, above all in the areas of papal criticism and Biblical criticism, and which all Catholic clerics had to take. In 1967 the Oath against Modernism was abolished.

²⁶ Johannes Paul II. "Ansprache über die Interpretation der Bibel in der Kirche," op. cit., p. 9.

²⁷ *Katechismus der katholischen Kirche*. München, among others: Oldenbourg Verlag, Benno Verlag, Paulusverlag, Veritas, 1993 – quoting the KKK (CCC, or Catechism of the Catholic Church) + paragraph.

above the Word of God (CCC 86). And at the same time, it is still valid that the New Testament marks the closing of God's revelation (CCC 66-67) and a situation where "we now await no further new public revelation" (CCC 66, from the Constitution of the Second Vatican Council *Dei Verbum*) and where God is the author of the Holy Scriptures (CCC 105; cf. 105-110). Since God inspired human authors through his Spirit, (CCC 106 + 109), what applies is that one should hear and behold!:

"The inspired books teach the truth. Since therefore all that the inspired authors or sacred writers affirm should be regarded as affirmed by the Holy Spirit, we must acknowledge that the books of Scripture firmly, faithfully, and without error teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the Sacred Scriptures" (CCC 107, again quoted from *Dei Verbum*).

Also, in Germany Catholic bishops have agreed to the following ecumenical declaration:

"1. Our faith

We Christians believe in the Triune God. We hear his Word in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. These authentically testify to what God says and does.

God created the world through his Word (Genesis 1); he revealed himself to his people in the Old Testament in the Word of the Law and through the prophets (cf. Hebrews 1:1 f); he created us anew through his Word to become his people (1 Peter 1:23-25; James 1:18); his word announces the fulfillment of all promises . . . In the center of God's revelation stands the Son, the Crucified One and Risen One. He is himself God's Word from all eternity (Joh1 1:1; cf. Hebrews 1:2) and as a historical person in whom the judging and newly creating operation of the Triune God finds its end. (Ecclesiastes 1:14; cf. 2 Corinthians 1:20; Revelation 19:11 ff.) . . .

Together we call the Holy Scriptures God's Word because in it the testimony of the prophets and apostles, whom God entrusted with his Word, is validly summarized . . .

Speaking of the Holy Scriptures as God's Word is itself testified to in the New Testament; it has its origin in the Word of God as a living proclamation, above all in the proclamation of the gospel (1 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Peter 1:16-21; cf. 2 Timothy 3:13-17). Precisely so God has demonstrated its power and effect in the history of the Church.'

In this sense the Holy Scriptures of the Triune God is God's Word, through which he authoritatively acts. The Scriptures have their primary position in the worship of God in the Christian community; at this point they exercise their spiritual operation, through which the community is gathered, edified, and consummated."²⁸

That is the extent of my comments on the 1993 document.

²⁸ "Gemeinsame Erklärung des Ökumenischen Arbeitskreis evangelischer und katholischer Theologen," pp. 371-397 in: Wolfhart Pannenberg, Theodor Schneider (eds.). *Verbindliches Zeugnis I: Kanon – Schrift – Tradition. Dialog der Kirchen 7*. Herder: Freiburg & Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht: Göttingen, 1992, pp. 371-372, using a 1984 declaration which the Deutsche Bischofskonferenz (German Bishops' Conference) and the Vereinigten Ev.-Lutherischen Kirchen Deutschlands (VELKD, or United Evangelical Lutheran Churches of Germany) agreed to.

In my opinion, the document by the 1993 Pontifical Biblical Commission can in no way be reconciled with the just quoted commitments regarding the Holy Scriptures, and it is no accident that the Catholic Church has slowly been reversing the 1993 position, at the latest since the Jesus trilogy by Pope Benedict XVI. The most recent document from 2014 is a vivid demonstration of this point. In his Apostolic Letter *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis, in his sharp criticism of Catholic preaching, has conceded high priority to the daily study of the Holy Scriptures by Catholic clergy and desires that the Church be renewed by the Scriptures. To this end, 'Biblical criticism,' on the one hand, naturally has to be overcome. On the other hand, the Scriptures have to be able to exercise 'criticism' on the Church and its theology. For this reason, the desire for the Catholic Church is that a less critical view of the Bible not simply make the Catholic Church more conservative but rather that the Scriptures as the Word of the Holy Spirit will also be allowed to judge and correct – or establish and back - dogma and lead to true renewal.