

**THE KINGDOM OF GOD: EVER ANCIENT, EVER NEW:
PRESENTATIONS ON THE VATICAN II COUNCIL
PART II: HEARING THE WORD OF GOD**

I. The Church debated the extent and interpretation of Scripture from her early days. Over the course of time the Church settled what books were in the Bible and that it is the inspired Word of God, but there still remained many issues of how to interpret the Bible and what inspiration means.

A. The early Church had to decide what books make up the Bible, as well as how to interpret them. For there was much debate in the early Church about what books, both before and after Christ, were to be considered inspired by God.

1. In the early Church, there was some debate about what books should be considered part of the New Testament of the Bible. There were several lists, such as the recently discovered Muratorian Canon, and the lists in works of Eusebius, the court historian of the Emperor Constantine in the early fourth century. Some books that are in the Bible, such as the Letter to the Hebrews and the Book of Revelation, were questioned. And other books that are not in the Bible, such as the Shepherd of Hermas, made a serious bid. There were also some debates about what exactly is in the Old Testament.
2. In the 370s Pope St. Damasus consulted St. Jerome regarding what books are rightfully included in the Bible. After considering what the early Church fathers cited as canonical, and what New Testament books had an apostolic origin and were faithful to Christian teachings, they and other theologians settled on what we now revere as the Bible. St. Jerome then published the Vulgate, a translation of the Bible into common Latin, then the language of the people in the western Roman Empire. That translation became the official Latin translation of the Church for centuries; and its production, along with his other Scriptural commentaries, made St. Jerome the patron saint of Biblical scholarship. In 393, a synod of the African bishops meeting in Carthage and led by St. Augustine, the leading theologian of his day, published the same list of books as the complete Bible. Pope Innocent I gave his approval in 405. This Church has continued to use this list of books ever since.
3. From this translation, accepted by the Popes and local councils, we have our current Bible, with 46 books in the Old Testament and 27 books in the New Testament.
4. During the early Church, the two leading traditions of Scriptural interpretation were called the Antiochean and the Alexandrian, named after two of the great cities of the classical world. They complemented each other, with the Antiochan school focusing more on more plain interpretation of the text and moral lessons taken from it and the Alexandrian school emphasizing more spiritual and symbolic interpretation of the Bible. Theologians from both schools of thought, and commentators promoting other variations, produced numerous extensive commentaries and homilies on different books Scripture during the first four centuries of the Church. These commentaries form a large part of what we now call patristic literature, i.e., writings of the Church Fathers.

B. In the Middle Ages, theologians developed a four-fold method of interpreting Scriptures and strove to combine faith with reason, especially in the Scholastic tradition.

1. Theologians would often say that there are four general levels of meaning to a Scriptural text, the literal, the allegorical, the moral, and the anagogical (or eschatological, heavenly) sense. See, e.g., St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica Book I, question 1, article 10.

a. The literal sense is the sense expressed by the words themselves, as meant by the author for the audience he was writing and, by extension, by the people who were first reading it. This sense may itself be allegorical, for the author may have intended allegory, as in the case of the visions of Daniel and Revelation, the parables of Jesus, and much of the first 11 chapters of Genesis. The literal sense must be distinguished from the *literalistic* sense, that is, only the superficial meaning of the words. The literal sense of any writing may have a figurative meaning, as in “White House” meaning the Executive Branch of the federal government or “Wall Street” meaning the financial community.

b. The allegorical sense is the sense of Scripture at a deeper level as applied to Christ, and by extension, to His Church. The moral sense is the moral lessons of a passage and their application to an individual person and to his behavior. The eschatological sense is the meaning as applied to our final destiny, our journey to heaven.

2. Two common examples of these levels of interpretation are the images of Adam and Eve and of Jerusalem.

a. Although it uses a lot of symbolism, the account of Adam and Eve, the Garden of Eden and the Fall in Genesis 3 describes realities about original justice, the Fall and resulting original sin. Allegorically, St. Paul presents it as the mirror image of Christ’s redemption. See, e.g., Rom. 5:12-17. Morally, it is an allegory of sin and the resulting shame in general. The anagogical meaning presents heaven as a final Eden (which means garden or paradise in Hebrew), a realm that Satan attacks in vain.

b. Jerusalem is literally a city in the Holy Land and the capital of the ancient nation of Israel. Allegorically, it is an image of the Church, who gathers nations together for the glory of God. See, e.g., Catechism 756. Morally, it is an image of each human soul, in which God wishes to dwell as He dwelt in the Temple of old. See, e.g., 1 Cor. 3:16. Anagogically, its perfection is an image of heaven. See Rev. 21:2, 9-27.

C. Also, in the Middle Ages, the rediscovery of many of Aristotle’s works, the flourishing of philosophy and universities, and the beginning of modern science in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, brought new learning into Europe and led to more research in the broad range of academic fields. That increase in learning and scholarship questions brought about a new emphasis on the relationship of faith and reason. In the universities, there arose a type of scholarship called Scholasticism, which emphasized looking into seeming (or actually) contradictory statements and trying to establish a

balanced harmony between them. Their approach became central to Scriptural advancements in the High and Late Middle Ages.

D. In the era of the Renaissance and the Reformation (especially in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries), the Church had to respond to challenges to her authority, while being open to legitimate advances.

1. Starting in the fifteenth century, with an increase in literacy and the development of the printing press, many more people were reading Scriptures. There was also an increasing study in ancient languages, especially Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic, making a deeper analysis of the Scriptures possible. These advances could help people understand the Scriptures more. But there were also difficulties when the indiscriminate use of the methods of science could be used as a replacement for faith.
2. The deeper study of languages led to new translations of the Bible. New Latin translations began competing with the venerable Vulgate, the translation that St. Jerome had made in the 5th century and that had been dominant ever since. Furthermore, there was an increasing demand for translations into vernacular languages.
3. The early Protestants rejected seven books of the Old Testament (Tobit, Judith, 1 and 2 Maccabees, Wisdom, Sirach, and Baruch) as non-canonical. Furthermore, different translations of the Bible could lead to very different results.

D. In response to the Protestant movement and to the challenges of the new discoveries, the Church called the Council of Trent in the mid-16th century. That Council was the centerpiece of the Church's efforts to confirm and explain Catholic teachings, as well as reform practices and eliminate abuses and superstitions that had arisen. With both the opportunities for greater understanding and troubles due to greater confusion about the Bible, the issue of Sacred Scripture became central to the theological debates of the era. And so, in 1546 the Council published its Decree and Canons on Sacred Scripture, which made the Bible and its interpretation among the first issues of the Council.

1. The Council first reaffirmed that God speaks through the Sacred Scriptures and through the apostolic traditions. It then went on to affirm that the Scriptures are the word of God, written with the Holy Spirit as the Divine Author, who worked through the human authors.
2. The Council then listed once again the 73 books of Scripture translated in the ancient Vulgate of St. Jerome, and used by the Church for a millennium and more, as the authentic Bible. It also defined the Vulgate to be an authoritative translation, correct on every matter of faith or morals. It did not say that no other translation could be used, but affirmed the Vulgate as central and reliable.
3. To deal with the issue of translations, the Council insisted that every translation of the Bible be approved by ecclesiastical authorities. It likewise called upon commentaries of Scriptures to receive ecclesial approval.

4. Although Bible reading by the laity was not heavily emphasized, the Catechism of the Council of Trent did say in its commentary on the Second Commandment (You shall not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain) that reading the Bible is a good way of honoring the name of God.

II. In the two century lead-up to Dei Verbum, the Church developed her teaching on Divine Revelation in response to worldly skepticism and to excessive pietism.

A. As the so-called Enlightenment era spread in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Church was confronted with other challenges, both from those who rejected the inerrancy of Scriptures and those who would adopt a more pietistic approach now associated with fundamentalism.

1. In the eighteenth century, geological evidence was beginning to indicate that the world was at least some millions of years old. Furthermore, fossil evidence was beginning to indicate that many species had lived and died out long ago. Alone, these discoveries were not a problem for the Church, for many prominent theologians, such as Origin and Augustine, had read the creation accounts of Genesis in a metaphorical fashion. However, many people tried to pit science and philosophy against religion. These attempts reached a height with Darwin's theory of natural selection. The physical application of this theory itself did not contradict the faith; but many implications people took from it, such as the idea that man is nothing but an advanced ape, are contrary to the faith.

2. Even within the Christian faith, many theologians, exemplified by the German Lutheran Rudolf Bultmann, began to say that Scriptures may be inspired, but were erroneous in many details. They said that we have to get beyond the factual assertions to the realm of faith. Thus, for example, many people, both liberal Protestants and non-Christians, tried to downplay everything supernatural in the Bible, such as miracles, prophesy and the divinity of Christ.

B. The First Vatican Council, called in 1870, issued two decrees, one of which Dei Filius was on faith and reason.

1. In chapter II of Dei Filius, on Revelation, the Council reaffirmed that Revelation is entirely true, as intended by the author, and reveals both things we could not naturally know by reason alone, and others things accessible to reason, but so important to our salvation that God wanted to confirm them. It affirmed that the Holy Spirit is the author of all of Scripture and that, therefore, there can be no admixture of error. It also affirmed that humans, using their own industry and talents, were also authors of Scripture.

2. The Council affirmed the Church's authority to interpret Scripture definitively. But it also confirmed that the books of the Bible were inspired and inerrant when written, as opposed to the view that the Church's approval is what made them valuable. Thus the Council affirmed that the Bible is not simply a collection of good writings that the Holy Spirit guided the Church to use, but rather was inspired by God from the beginning.

C. In 1893, Pope Leo XIII took on both rationalism, which would reject all things that cannot be established by reason alone, and pietism, which would reject the role of

reason in interpreting Scriptures. See Providentissimus Deus, On the Study of Scriptures.

1. Pope Leo XIII began the encyclical letter with a clear endorsement of efforts to study Scripture and make it more available to the public, but also a warning about those who would “defile or corrupt it.”
 - He said that knowing Scripture is necessary to know the truths of the faith, and essential for oratory regarding the faith. He began a long tradition in the Church of quoting St. Jerome, “Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ.”
2. After reviewing briefly the history of Scriptural interpretation, he called for clerics and scriptural scholars to confront “our adversaries” who “defuse their deadly poison by means of books, pamphlets and newspapers.” The deadly poison is the rationalist belief that would dismiss the Bible as the inspired word of God in favor of secular thinking.
3. Recognizing the need for study of the Bible, against those who said that its meaning is always clear, he called for a careful preparation of clerics and scholars. In particular, he argued that the Church Fathers had great authority in interpreting the Bible and should be studied carefully.
4. He reiterated the need always to interpret Scripture with the “analogy of faith,” that is in the context of Church teachings, never contradicting them. Within the boundaries of Church teachings, he argued there remains a great deal of freedom.
5. Recognizing the legitimate advances of modern knowledge, he affirmed that greater knowledge of ancient languages and scientific history is very helpful. But he criticized the excessive use of such studies as though Scripture could be critiqued like any other book.
 - a. He argued very strongly that there can never be any real conflict between faith and science, and that any apparent conflict is due to a misreading of one or the other.
 - b. In particular, he affirmed that, while Scripture deals with real historical events, the authors “did not seek to penetrate secrets of nature, but rather described and dealt with things in more or less figurative language, or in terms which were commonly used at the time.”
6. He concluded by affirming strongly the inspiration and therefore inerrancy of all of Scripture, although granting that study is needed to understand the true meaning that the sacred authors were conveying.

D. In 1943, during the 50th anniversary year of Providentissimus Deus, Pope Pius XII published the next great encyclical letter on Scriptures, Divino Afflante Spiritu, in which he called for greater studies in Scripture and for care in understanding the literal sense and building upon it.

1. At this point, in the midst of World War II, Pope Pius was dealing with a different problem, namely, those who would defend the value of the Bible, but

wanted to put a primarily “spiritual” meaning on it, avoiding the historical meaning.

2. Pope Pius XII began by reviewing the progress in studies that had occurred since Providentissimus Deus, including the founding of the Pontifical Biblical Commission and increase in Scriptural studies in seminaries and among the laity.
3. Given the new advancement in understanding of archeology, linguistics, and history, Pope Pius XII called for a great use of them. He also approved of the study of ancient texts to establish exactly what the ancient codices of the Bible said and what the best translation of them would be. He argued that, when the Council of Trent said that the Vulgate was authoritative, it did not mean that there could be no improvements, but rather that it was reliable and accurate on all matters of faith and morals.
4. Pope Pius XII then emphasized strongly that one should always begin reading Scripture by understanding the literal sense, i.e. the sense that the author intended. He argued that other sciences should be used for this purpose so that the sacred texts may be more understandable. Like Pope Leo XIII, he emphasized that all interpretations must be consistent with Catholic teachings.
5. He then said that there are other spiritual senses that spring from the literal sense. The human author may not have known about these senses, but the Holy Spirit did, and thus the deeper senses are still a part of the Bible. But the Pope also warned about depending too heavily on “figurative” meanings from Scripture that have little to do with the plain meaning. He said that such meanings may be sometimes helpful, but are not as powerful as the word of God.
 - As with Leo XIII, he emphasized that one should especially consult the Church Fathers in deriving meanings from a text.
6. Pope Pius XII cautioned against getting too far afield with extraneous research so that people study about the Bible in an academic fashion, but do not draw forth the riches of the Bible itself. For Scriptures are “of themselves rich in original meaning; endowed with divine power, they have their own value; adorned with heavenly beauty, they radiate of themselves light and splendor” and offer to the intelligent “treasures of wisdom and prudence.”
7. In speaking of the literal sense, Pope Pius XII drew even more attention to the fact that one must recognize the author’s way of writing. As he said, “the ancient peoples of the East, in order to express their ideas, did not always employ those forms or kinds of speech that we use today.” He praised efforts to understand ancient ways of writing in order to understand the Bible.
8. He recognized that there will be continual difficulties in understanding Scripture and in reconciling some different passages of the Bible, or aspects of the Bible with beliefs from other fields of knowledge. But he said that such

difficulties are nothing new and are a motive for further studies. In particular, he cited St. Augustine in saying, “God wished difficulties to be scattered through the Sacred Books inspired by Him, in order that we might be urged to read and scrutinize them more carefully.”

III. Building upon these developments, the Vatican II Council took up the subject of Revelation. And, after a great deal of debate and changes to the original draft, the Council published Dei Verbum, the Constitution on Divine Revelation.

- A. When the Commission on Doctrine presented its draft on Divine Revelation entitled De Fontibus (On the Foundations), there was an immediate pushback on the grounds that the document did not recognize recent developments and seemed (at least to some of the bishops) to downplay the importance of the Old Testament and stress the teaching authority of the Church over the Scripture.
 1. The Commission presented its constitution on Divine Revelation on November 13, 1962. That draft placed a great deal of emphasis on the fact that the Bible should be interpreted in accordance with Sacred Tradition and the Magisterium of the Church. Sacred Tradition refers to the practices that have been handed on from the beginning of the Church. The Magisterium is the teaching authority of the Church.
 2. Even before the presentation, some bishops especially from German speaking countries, were objecting to the draft. Cardinal Franz Konig of Vienna, Austria consulted Fr. Karl Rahner, who drafted a proposal to reject the entire document. Other bishops consulted the more problematic Belgian Dominican Fr. Edward Schillebeeckz, who would later come to clash with the Church over his desire to downplay the inspiration and historicity of Scripture.
 3. When the document was presented, Cardinal Achille Leinhardt of Lille, France and Cardinal Josef Frings of Cologne, Germany both sharply criticized it both on substance and on stylistic grounds. Cardinal Joseph Ritter of St. Louis also said it was too negative. A week of debate with 85 speeches followed, in which more bishops called for very substantial changes.
- B. On November 20, 1962, the bishops voted 1368- 841 to send the document back to be rewritten. On the next day, Pope John XXIII decided that the document would be sent to a mixed commission with representation from both the Commission on Doctrine and the newly created Secretariat for Christian Unity.
- C. After two years, the joint commission presented a new document, still called De Fontibus, at the third session in 1964. This constitution was reasonably well received, but was sent back for more revisions, this time to emphasize the inspiration of Scripture and the importance of Tradition more.
 1. Between the second and third sessions in 1963 and 1964, there was a brief effort, particularly sponsored by Cardinal Julius Dopfner of Munich, Germany, to relegate the document to a minor status. But the bishops of the Council made it clear that they wanted a major document on this topic.

2. The mixed commission presented the new draft to the Third Session on September 20, 1964. It a similar outline as the first document, but stressed the role of Scripture more as opposed to Sacred Tradition and the Magisterium.
 3. At this point, some bishops objected that it had gone too far, downplaying Tradition as though it had little to add to Scripture. They were also concerned that the notion that its notion of progress could imply that there were errors in Scripture and Tradition. Along similar lines, some bishops said that the document should make it clearer that the faithful should always read the Bible consistently with the teachings of the Church and that written commentary should receive Church approval.
 4. One particular point of controversy was the question of whether there are truths taught by Sacred Tradition that are not in the Bible.
- D. The commission made revisions and brought its new draft to the final session in 1965. After some debate, it was further revised and then received overwhelming approval.
1. In September, 1965, the mixed commission presented its new draft constitution now entitled Dei Verbum (The Word of God.) They had responded to some of the criticisms, but many bishops thought that the language on Sacred Tradition, the Magisterium, and inspiration was still too weak.
 2. Pope Paul VI himself sent a note that he wanted the draft to emphasize the importance of Sacred Tradition more.
 3. The subcommission entrusted with making changes also tried to find middle ground on the question of whether there are truths in Sacred Tradition that are not in the Bible. The question was left largely ambiguous, although the constitution does affirm the need for Sacred Tradition.
 4. When the final draft came up for a vote on November 18, each chapter received overwhelming support, with no chapter receiving more than 26 negative votes. And the entire constitution was approved on a vote of 2344 – 6.
- E. The constitution consists of an introduction and six chapters covering: (1) Divine Revelation itself; (2) the transmission of Divine Revelation; (3) the inspiration and interpretation of Sacred Scripture; (4) the Old Testament; (5) the New Testament; and (6) Sacred Scripture and the Life of the Church. The first two chapters emphasize the interaction between Sacred Scripture, Sacred Tradition and the Magisterium. The other four chapters discuss more how to read and interpret Sacred Scripture.

IV. The brief introduction strikes a positive note on how the Council hears the word of God and wants to present it to the world. Lest anyone think that there is a break with previous teachings, it emphasizes the unity with the Council of Trent and the Vatican I Council. It then calls for an advancement through Divine Revelation from faith to hope to charity.

- V. Chapter 1 on Divine Revelation itself presents in a positive way the need for such revelation.
- A. It begins by saying that God gives us revelation to show Himself and His saving will to His people. Thus, the invisible God “from the fullness of His love, addresses men and women as His friends and lives among them, in order to invite them and receive them into His company.
 - B. Setting up the constitution’s teaching on the unity between Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition, the section 2 emphasizes how words and deeds support each other in revealing the truth of God.
 - C. Sections 3 and 4 then summarize very briefly the history of God’s revelation, from the promises made even to Adam and Eve, through the history of the Chosen People to the final revelation in Jesus Christ. Critically, section 4 says both that this “Christian dispensation” will “never pass away” and that there will be no “new public revelation.” In other words, while we will develop in our understanding of the Bible and Tradition, there will be no more books added and all subsequent traditions will build upon what has gone before.
 - D. Sections 5 and 6 then describe the calling and benefit of complete trust and obedience to this Divine Revelation. Section 5 describes the natural call to believe and obey what God reveals, and also emphasizes that divine grace is needed both for this faith and to understand it more fully. Section 6 then describes how this revelation enables us both to know truths that are beyond reason and to know truths that are in principle accessible to reason, but with more certainty and clarity than our own thought could provide.
- VI. Chapter 2 then describes the relationship between Sacred Scripture, Sacred Tradition and the Magisterium.
- A. Section 7 describes how, in the fullness of time, Jesus came to earth and then commissioned His Apostles to hand on the truths He taught by word and by deed. These words and deeds would become the basis for Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition. He also gave them teaching authority that they would hand on to their successors, the bishops. That teaching authority would become the Magisterium.
 - B. Sections 8 and 9 develops this idea of unity more by saying that the preaching of the Apostles is “expressed in a special way in the sacred books” of the Bible. It then describes at more length how Sacred Tradition is the practices handed on by the early church and developed by the contemplation of believers, guided by the bishops. As section 8 points out, we only know what is in the Bible by these Traditions handed on from the early Church. Thus, section describes these two sources of revelation as “bound closely together.” As it says, “flowing from the same divine well-spring, both of them merge, in a sense, and move towards the same goal.”
 - C. Section 10 then describes the Magisterium, the teaching authority of the Church as exercised by the bishops. Through the Magisterium, the people can reflect upon Divine Revelation ever knowing that they are faithful to it. The

Magisterium “is not above the word of God,” but instead at its service and drawing the truths from this source. As the section says, these three sources are so connected that “one of them cannot stand without the others.”

D. Although the term is not used in this constitution, this relationship between the Bible, Sacred Tradition, and the Magisterium has sometimes been called “the tripod of truth.” See, e.g., United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “The Council at 50: Vatican II’s Word on the Word of God” (October 18, 2012) at uscbb.org.

VII. Chapter 3 sets forth the teaching regarding a rightful understanding of the inerrancy of the Bible. It affirms the inspiration of the Bible and thus inerrancy in what it asserts. But it emphasizes that a full understanding about what the Bible is asserting requires knowledge of the styles used by the human authors.

A. Section 11 reaffirms that the inspired character of the Bible. The Holy Spirit guided human authors who did use their own abilities and styles to convey what the Holy Spirit wishes for them to convey. This inspiration means that each and every part of the Scripture, individually and as a whole, is the inspired word of God and thus without error regarding the truths it intends to assert. As it says, “Since everything asserted by the inspired authors or sacred writers must be held to be asserted by the Holy Spirit, it follows that the books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching solidly, faithfully, and without error the truth which God wanted put into sacred writings for the sake of our salvation.”

B. Section 12 develops this idea further by pointing out that the inspired writers used various literary forms. Appreciating the types of literature in the Bible is important to understanding what the author was really asserting, which may not be the surface level meaning. Thus, while the Bible is the inspired word of God, it sometimes takes effort to understand its full meaning. The section sets forth three principles that must be used in interpreting the Bible.

1. First, one must focus on “the content and unity of the whole of Scripture.” In other words, one part of the Bible should be interpreted in light of the rest, not in contradiction to it.
2. Second, one should interpret the Bible in the context of “the living tradition of the whole Church.”
3. Third, one should interpret the Bible consistently with the teachings of the Church, who has “the divine commission and ministry of guarding and interpreting the word of God.”

C. Building on an image of Pope Pius XII, section 13 draws an analogy to the Incarnation, saying, “Indeed the words of God, expressed in human language, are in every way like human speech, just as the Word of the eternal Father, when He took on Himself the weak flesh of human beings became like them.”

- VIII. Chapters 4 and 5 discuss the Old and New Testament and emphasize their unity.
- A. Sections 14 through 16 describe how to approach the Old Testament. There has often been a tendency to downplay the Old Testament as dated and too difficult to understand; the Council calls for a different view, that the Old Testament has great value for all people.
 1. Section 14 speaks of how the Old Testament describes God's preparation for salvation through Jesus Christ. It affirms that these books are "the true word of God" revealing the love of the one, true God.
 2. Section 15 recommends the study and reverence of the books of the Old Testament. Even though much of their material is "imperfect and provisional," they still show forth the glorious and saving Providence of God, give excellent examples and advice, and have "a wonderful treasury of prayers." In addition, one can understand the New Testament in full only with a knowledge of the background from the Old Testament.
 3. Section 16 draws the conclusion that, "the books of the Old Testament, all of them giving a place in the preaching of the Gospel, attain and display their full meaning in the New Testament and in turn shed light upon it and explain it."
 - B. Sections 17 – 20 then give a theology of the New Testament affirming its apostolic origin and historical accuracy.
 1. Section 17 describes how the word of God "is set forth and marvelously displays its power in the New Testament." For they are the primary testimony to the realities of Jesus Christ came to earth, taught, built up the kingdom of God, saved us by His death and resurrection, and sent the Holy Spirit to complete His work.
 2. Sections 18 and 19 describe the centrality of the four Gospels and the "our principle source for the life and teaching of the Incarnate Word, our Savior."
 - a. Section 18 affirms that the whole of the New Testament "had an apostolic origin." Although parts of it were written by people other than Apostles, such as Luke and Mark, those authors were directly connected to the Apostles. Likewise, some of the Pauline letters may have been written by others, but those were connected to St. Paul all the same.
 - b. Section 19 confirms the historicity of the Gospels, saying that "the four Gospels . . . , whose historical character the Church unhesitatingly asserts, faithfully hand on what Jesus Christ, while living among men really did and taught for their eternal salvation." The constitution does say that the words and deeds of Christ recorded in the Gospels are often a "synthesis," but an accurate one.
- IX. Chapter 6 then presents principles on how the Church and the faithful should use Scripture well.
- A. Section 21 praises the many uses of the Bible, alongside of Sacred Tradition, in the Church, for this Divine Revelation is "the supreme rule of faith." It describes how

the Bible is central in the liturgy and in preaching. And then the section goes on to declare, “In the sacred books the Father who is in heaven meets His children with great love and speaks with them; and the force and power of the word of God is so great that it stands as the support and energy of the Church, the strength of faith for her sons, the food of the soul, the pure and everlasting source of spiritual life.”

- B. Section 22 then calls for “suitable and correct” vernacular translations of the Bible to be widely available, while still affirming the centrality of the Vulgate and translations from the eastern Catholic churches. It even authorizes, with Church approval, common efforts with other Christians to translate the Bible. In 1965-66, the Revised Standard Version of the Bible (RSV), a translation by Protestants, became the basis for the Revised Standard Version – Catholic edition (RSV-CE), which has in turn resulted in a second edition RSV-CE and was the basis for the Ignatius Press translation.
- C. Section 23 encourages ongoing research and commentary into Scripture by Catholic scholars “under the watchful eye of the Church.” This research should help ministers of the word in teaching and help all people receive nourishment from the Bible that “enlightens the mind, strengthens the will, and fires the hearts of men and women with the love of God.” The constitution thus affirms that Scriptural theology should be consistent with Church teaching. And, as Pius XII did the Council implicitly says that Biblical research should not be a merely academic field, but rather promote deep faith.
- D. Building upon this idea, section 24 calls for scholars to recognize that the Bible is “the very soul of theology” and for ministers of the word to be sure that they receive “healthy nourishment and vitality from the word of Scripture.
- E. Section 25 then describes how clerics and all the faithful should read carefully and prayerfully the word of God. Clerics must be able to share “the boundless riches of the divine Word with the faithful committed to their care.” And all the faithful should read the word of God because, as St. Jerome said of old, “Ignorance of Scriptures is ignorance of Christ.” The section also affirms the role of bishops in guiding the use of the Bible and ensuring that translations are accurate and footnotes helpful’
- F. Section 26 concludes the document with a call that the spiritual life the faithful gain through the Eucharist will be complemented with the treasures they obtain from the word of God.