

An Introductory Survey of the Pontifical Biblical Commission's 2014 Document: *The Inspiration and Truth of Sacred Scripture*

MARK REASONER
Marian University
Indianapolis, Indiana

THE PONTIFICAL BIBLICAL COMMISSION'S document *The Inspiration and Truth of Sacred Scripture: The Word That Comes from God and Speaks of God for the Salvation of the World* presents itself as a follow-up to Benedict XVI's call in *Verbum Domini*, §19, for more study regarding the inspiration and truth of Scripture. The Commission makes it clear that their document is not an official declaration of the Church's magisterium on Scripture, nor does it intend to set forth a complete doctrine regarding inspiration and the truth of Scripture.

Paragraph 3 describes how the document delivers on its title: it will consider God's Word both in regard to its origin from God and in regard to what it says about God. In this same paragraph it describes the Bible's "primary and central theme: God himself and salvation" (xx).¹

The document comes in three parts: part 1 concerns the "inspiration of Sacred Scripture," including its origin from God; part 2

¹ In this article, paragraph numbers are identified either with the word "paragraph" or the symbol §. Numbers in parentheses unaccompanied by those markers represent page numbers in the Pontifical Biblical Commission's *The Inspiration and Truth of Sacred Scripture: The Word That Comes from God and Speaks of God for the Salvation of the World*, trans. Thomas Esposito, O.Cist., and Stephen Gregg, O.Cist. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014). Paragraph numbers and page numbers may also appear within the same parentheses or in notes, in that order and separated by a semicolon.

concerns “the message about God and his project of salvation”; and part 3 concerns “some challenges that arise from the Bible itself, because of certain aspects that appear to contradict its quality of being the Word of God” (§4; xxi). These challenges include historical discrepancies and a significant amount of violence in Scripture’s contents.

Within paragraph 6, at the beginning of section 1.2 of the “Introduction,” we read that the books of the Bible are inspired, and *Dei Verbum* is cited to support this:

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 beings whom He has chosen.

This seems to represent a suggestion for development in the Church’s understanding of Scripture, at least from what Newman thought the state of affairs was in 1870. While the First Vatican Council convened, Newman wrote that the doctrine of scriptural inspiration “was very high” but not defined. From Irenaeus through to the Council of Trent, the Church taught that God was the author of the covenants, which came to mean both Old and New Testaments. As Newman writes:

It has never been defined that the books are inspired. The Council of Trent says, that—the Apostles, from whom comes both written and unwritten tradition, were inspired—but is silent about the books which contain the written tradition. They are the composition of inspired men; but inspired men in no sense wrote the speeches of Pilate and of the Pharisees, or “Crucify Him” except as narrators; and we may conceive and (as I believe) hold (unless this Council determines otherwise) that Moses did not write a word of the Pentateuch, but merely put it together, and his inspiration was that which guided him *in his selection*, and the effect of it is that the book has the seal of veracity put upon it, a warrant of its being true, and that this is the outcome of the word “inspiration.”²

² John Henry Newman, Letter of April 27, 1870 to Richard Holt Hutton, in *The Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman*, vol. 25, *The Vatican Council, January 1870 to December 1871*, ed. Charles Stephen Dessain and Thomas Gornall,

Dei Verbum, §16, however, simply says that God is the “inspirer and author of both Testaments,” and it is not fully clear whether this means that the covenants are inspired, as Newman understood Trent’s formulation, or, as this document—*The Inspiration and Truth of Sacred Scripture*—seems to accept, that Old and New Testament as books are inspired.

Paragraph 6, in section 1.2, while admitting that only two New Testament texts explicitly address inspiration (2 Tim 3:16 and 2 Pet 1:20–21), asserts that, since the collection gives plenty of evidence of its authors’ relationships with God and how the writings come from God, “We intend to present a kind of phenomenology of the ‘God-human author’ relationship” (3). This constitutes part one of the document, which goes on to sample various books of the Old Testament, describing what can be learned from the biblical text regarding the human authors’ relationships with God, in order to provide a description of the divine provenance of the text.

In paragraph 10, within section 1.4 of the outline, the commission writes: “The respective biblical writing comes from God through its author’s living faith in God and through the relationship of this author with a specific form (or with different forms) of divine revelation. It is not rare that a biblical text bases itself on an earlier inspired text and participates in this way in the same divine provenance” (7). This last sentence is significant because it admits to intertextuality within the Scriptures and directly implies that understanding the intertextuality helps us to understand the Scriptures better.³ Here the commission has summarized a point it developed more fully in its 1993 *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*.⁴

S.J. (Oxford, UK: Clarendon: 1973), 112 (emphasis original).

³ See also item 1.1 in the “General Conclusion” of this same document, where the phrase “literary history of these books born from the assimilation and innovative restating of ancient materials” is also well tuned to intertextuality within the Bible’s books (§141; 160). There are many and various branches of intertextuality in Scripture. Those interested in intertextuality in the Old and New Testaments related to the canonical book of Isaiah might consult Benjamin D. Sommer’s *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40–66* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998) and J. Ross Wagner’s *Heralds of the Good News: Isaiah and Paul “in Concert” in the Letter to the Romans*, Supplements to Novum Testamentum 101 (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

⁴ See Section III.A.1, “Rereadings” (or in French, “Relectures”). The English translation of this section is accessible in *The Scripture Documents: An Anthology of Official Catholic Teachings*, ed. Dean P. Béchard, S.J. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002), 285.

Paragraph 13 (under 2.2.1a in the outline) deals with how the prophets give evidence of their divine origin. For the prophets, the formulae they use to introduce or conclude prophetic oracles (“Thus says the Lord”) shows that the text is claiming to be ultimately from God (11). In paragraph 14 (under 2.2.1b of the outline), the document considers the accounts of how the prophets were commissioned to speak for God. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Amos are named in this section. These call narratives are taken as further evidence of how we can see the divine provenance of these texts (12). Paragraph 15 deals with “the historical books,” Joshua–2 Kings. This section describes how God tells Joshua or the judges what to do. It also includes narratives in which God announces what will happen and then makes certain events happen (12–13). Paragraph 16 describes Chronicles as containing many “discourses of the Lord” that announce events that later do occur. Chronicles also “appears to suggest” that it comes from God because, in places like 2 Chronicles 36:12, 15–16, and 21–22, it documents its use of books of the prophets (14). Paragraph 16 summarizes the document’s phenomenological look at the prophets and historical books by saying that these books “specify that the word of the Lord has an infallible efficacy and calls to conversion” (14).

Paragraph 17 begins the phenomenological look at the Psalms and claims that they give evidence for three kinds of relationships: 1) God participates in the believer’s life; 2) God is present in the sanctuary; 3) God is the source of wisdom. A programmatic statement is then offered: “These three types of relationship with God are lived on the basis of the Sinai covenant, which includes the promise of God’s active presence in the daily life of the people and in the temple” (15). Psalms 17 and 50 are taken as evidence of God’s presence in the sanctuary. The sanctuary liturgy evokes the theophany at Sinai, according to the document’s reading of Psalm 50 (§18; 16–17). This is consistent with the repeated mention of the Sinai covenant elsewhere in this document’s treatment of the Old Testament.

Section 3.5 within Part One covers Paul’s letters. The document’s approach is to consider the Pauline corpus under the following headings: “Paul’s Witness to the Divine Origin of the Scriptures” (§39; 38); “Paul Attests the Divine Origin of His Gospel” (§40; 39–40); “Paul’s Apostolic Ministry and Its Divine Origin” (§41; 40–41); “Paul Attests the Divine Origin of His Letters (§42; 41).” In 191 words, this section states that, on the basis of (a) the letter greetings

(where Paul identifies himself as a divinely chosen apostle), (b) his directions at the end of one letter that his letters be exchanged and read (Col 4:16), (c) the way that he seems in 1 Corinthians 7:17b and 14:37 to present his disciplinary rulings as coming from the Lord, and (d) sections where he interprets or clarifies his gospel (Rom 1–11 and Gal 1–4 are the cited texts), Paul’s arguments “present themselves somehow as a new and authoritative interpretation of the Gospel itself.” This short section does admit that, in 1 Corinthians 7, Paul distinguishes between what are his ideas and what are commands of the Lord, a significant piece of evidence for the variety of ways that inspiration works within Scripture (§42; 41).

Section 3.6, on Hebrews, includes a useful explanation of the eschatology of the letter, showing how it differs from Old Testament texts in viewing its temporal position after the coming of Christ (3.6.1; §§43–44; 41–46). The section on Hebrews may be summarized with its concluding sentence, which highlights the parts of Hebrews that form the foundation for the document’s explanation of it: “Having outlined in synthesis the whole history of revelation (Heb 1:1–2), the author shows (Heb 2:1–4) that he, and consequently his work, is linked to the Son and to God through the ministry of those witnesses who had heard the Lord” (§44; 46).

The section on Revelation (3.7.5 in the document’s outline; §45–49; 46–51) closes with the following two paragraphs that occur after the document has described how Revelation views itself as a sacred text that cannot be changed by addition or subtraction and how Revelation contains an inner power of prophecy:

This complex set of characteristics, to be kept together always, allows us to see how the author of the book of Revelation senses and understands the elements of what we call today inspiration: there is an enduring intervention on the part of God the Father; there is an enduring intervention of Jesus Christ, particularly rich and well-structured; there is an intervention, also an enduring one, of the Spirit; there is an intervention of the angel interpreter; there is also, in the text’s contact with humanity, a specific intervention on John’s part. In the end, this text, the Word of God which has come into contact with humanity, will not only succeed in making its illuminating content known but also know how to radiate it in life. It will be inspired and inspiring.

It is striking that this last book of the New Testament, which has the greatest number of references to the Old Testament and can be seen as its synthesis, attests its provenance from God and its inspired character in a most precise and well-structured way. And a new dimension springs from this contact with Christ: the Old Testament also becomes inspired and inspiring when read in Christological terms. (§49; 50–51)

Part One closes with a section entitled “The Reception of the Biblical Books and the Formation of the Canon” (4.5). This section contains five parts: the pre-exilic period, the post-exilic period, the Maccabean period, the Old Testament canon in patristic sources, and the formation of New Testament canon. These sections contain short surveys of the formation of Old Testament and New Testament canons, referring to evidence for the process from biblical books and summarizing key steps in the formation of these canons (§§60–61; 63–68).

Part Two is called “The Testimony of the Biblical Writings to Their Truth.” Its first section seeks to illustrate *Dei Verbum*, §3, on how the Old Testament prepares for the Gospel. Section 1.1 in the outline for Part Two opens with a discussion of the concept “truth” as explained in relation to Scripture in *Dei Verbum*, §11. Special attention is given to the phrase “the truth which God wanted put into sacred writings for the sake of salvation” (*veritatem quam Deus nostrae salutis causa Litteris Sacris consignari voluit*). The new document explains that “saving truth” (*veritas salutaris*) was omitted and this longer phrase put in its place in order to express that more is true in the Bible than simply what relates to faith and morality. *Dei Verbum*’s references to Augustine and Aquinas are repeated here to underscore the foundation for this idea of truth that is focused on leading the readers to salvation (§63; 69–71).⁵

Paragraph 64 goes on to exegete the notion of “truth” as found in *Dei Verbum* in the context of other Second Vatican Council documents. It notes that “truth,” in the Council’s documents, is understood in the same “Trinitarian, Christological, and ecclesial setting” as that found in Scripture.⁶ This paragraph explains these perspectives

⁵ Citing Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram* 2.9.20; *Epistle* 82.3; Thomas Aquinas, *De veritate* q.12, a.2.

⁶ §64; 72. Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum*, §§2, 7, 8, 19, and 24; *Gaudium et Spes*, §3; *Dignitatis Humanae*, §11.

with the following definition: “the Son in person reveals the Father, and his revelation is communicated and confirmed by the Holy Spirit and handed on in the Church” (§64; 72).

The document then goes on to explore the truth that is found in select bodies of literature within the Scriptures. I will note where these occur in this section and either summarize or offer representative quotations from these varied, Scriptural corpora.

Section 2.1 in the outline of this section (or §67 of the whole document) deals with the creation accounts in Genesis 1–2. The first creation account is said to narrate “not *how* the world came into being but *why* and *for what purpose* it is as it is” (§67; 74; emphasis original). After a description of the second creation account, the document summarizes the point of both accounts: “the created world is a gift of God, and the divine plan has the good of humanity as its goal (Gen 2:18), as is clear . . . from the frequent recourse to the adjective ‘good’” (§67; 75).

Section 2.2 in the outline of this section deals with the Decalogue as found in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5.⁷ These paragraphs in the document emphasize how the Decalogues in Exodus and Deuteronomy get developed in the laws that follow and what the Decalogues teach in regard to the vision of God that they provide: “The Decalogues manifest the way in which God the Creator reveals Himself also as a Savior in history and invites every member of the community to enter, in turn, into this logic of salvation by putting into effect a demanding community ethic” (69).

Section 2.3 in the outline of this section (§70; 77–78) deals with the historical books, a designation of books within the Old Testament that is given to us from the Septuagint. According to this section of the document, “the theological program of biblical historiography . . . seeks to show that God is faithful in his relationship with humanity” (§70; 78).

Section 2.4 of this section deals with the prophets. The section includes an exploration of “The Faithful God” (section 2.4.1; §71; 79); “The Just God (2.4.2; §72; 79–80); and “The Merciful God” (2.4.3; §73; 80–82).

Section 2.5, on the Psalms, begins with this summary assertion: “The prayers of the Psalms presuppose and make clear this essential truth about God and salvation: God is not an absolute impersonal

⁷ §§68–69; 75–77. There is no mention of the so-called “J Decalogue” (Exod 34:11–26).

principle but a Person who hears and responds” (§74; 82). The first part of this section focuses on Psalm 46 to illustrate the theme of “The Omnipotent God” (2.5.1; §74; 82–83). Then the section focuses on Psalm 51 to illustrate the theme of “The God of Justice” (2.5.2; §§75–76; 83–86).

Section 2.6 of this section considers the Song of Songs: “The Song poetically celebrates human love, real love, in its physical and, at the same time, spiritual dimensions. But it does so in a form that is open to a more mysterious and theological dimension” (§77; 86–87).

In section 2.7, the document considers the wisdom literature of the Old Testament. Wisdom and Sirach are described as communicating the truth of “The Philanthropy of God” (2.7.1; §§79–80; 88–90). Then Job and Ecclesiastes are considered as exempla of “The Inscrutability of God” (2.7.2; §§81–82; 90–92).

Section 3.1 introduces the Gospels as the culmination of divine revelation within Scripture. The Synoptic Gospels are first considered under the headings “The Truth about God” (3.2.1; §85; 94–96) and “The Truth about Human Salvation” (3.2.2; §86; 96–98). The Gospel of John is described as communicating truth under three headings: “The Son’s Relationship with the Father” (3.3.1; §88; 98–100); “The Relationship of the Son and Savior with Humankind” (3.3.2; §89; 100–103); and “Human Access to Salvation” (3.3.3; §90; 103–104).

Next, the Pauline letters are presented as communicating truth under four headings: “Paul Knows Revelation from His Own Call and from the Church’s Tradition” (3.4.1; §92; 105–06); “God Reveals Himself in the Crucified and Risen Christ” (3.4.2; §93; 106–07); “Salvation Is Received and Lived within the Church, the Body of Christ” (3.4.3; §94; 107–08); and “The Fullness of Salvation Consists in the Resurrection of Christ” (3.4.4; §95; 108–09).

The commission’s members introduce the book of Revelation with the phrase “A Revealed, Unique, and Evocative Truth” (3.5.1; §96; 109–10). The next section on the final book of the New Testament is called “Global Truth: The Kingdom of God as Realized by a Creative and Salvific Design” (3.5.2; §97; 111–13). After this, we encounter a section, “In-Depth Study of the ‘Veracity’ That Leads to the Entire Truth,” that explores how Revelation includes ten instances of the word “true,” considered under headings related to the Father, Christ, and the inspired words of the text (3.5.3; §98–100; 113–17).

In the conclusion to Part Two, we read that “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 manifest a concord of truth which finds its full expression in the person of Christ” (§101; 117). The conclusion here goes on to cite *Dei Verbum*, §12, and *Verbum Domini*, §§40–41, to emphasize that every text of Scripture must be read in light of the whole canon (§103; 119–21).

Part Three is entitled “The Interpretation of the Word of God and Its Challenges.” This may prove to be the most stimulating reading for many exegetes, for here we find the commission dealing with texts that are difficult to interpret. The introduction to this section highlights John Chrysostom’s “*condescension* of eternal Wisdom” that was used as a resource in *Dei Verbum*, §13, and the recognition of the significance of literary genres that was emphasized in Pope Pius XII’s *Divino afflante Spiritu*, §20 (§104; 123–24).

The specific cases begin with “Historical Problems,” section 2 of Part Three. First considered is the Abraham material in Genesis (section 2.1 in outline, §§106–107; 125–27). The commission is careful to avoid undue claims for the historical value of the material, concluding with an emphasis that it must be read in light of Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 10:11—“These things happened to them to serve as an example, and they were written down to instruct us, on whom the ends of the ages have come” (§107; 127).

The second problem to be considered is the crossing of the Red Sea as narrated in Exodus 14. The commission members here seem to be very sensitive to the post-exilic compilation of the Pentateuch and the significance of these texts for those shaken by the Babylonian exile. Here is a representative statement: “The biblical text, therefore, combines in inseparable fashion, an *ancient account*, transmitted from generation to generation, with an *actualization* called for later” (section 2.2; §108; 128; emphasis original).

Section 2.3 focuses on the books of Tobit and Jonah. Tobit is identified as a “popular religious fable with a didactive and edifying purpose, which, by its nature, places it in the sphere of the wisdom tradition” (section 2.3.1; §109; 129). With regard to Jonah, the text’s “details” and “structural elements” lead the commission “to interpret the text as an imaginary composition with deep theological content” (section 2.3.2; §110; 130).

Section 2.4 concerns the infancy narratives in Matthew and Luke. While the differences between the two are not minimized, the commission writes that these Gospels’ differences “reveal a reciprocal independence on the part of the two evangelists; this makes their agreements all the more significant” (section 2.4.1; §111; 132).

After an examination of the discontinuities and continuities between the narratives (sections 2.4.1–2; §§111–14; 131–34), the concluding statement comes in a section called “The Message” (section 2.4.3; §§113–14). The ending of this section provides a useful representation of the general approach here:

In light of the differences and agreements which we find in the infancy narratives of the two evangelists, it must be said that salvific revelation consists in all that is said about the person of Jesus and about his relationship with the history of Israel and the world as an introduction to and an illustration of his saving work recounted in the rest of the gospel. The differences, which can be harmonized in part, refer to secondary aspects common to the two evangelists that relate to the central figure of Jesus, the Son of God and Savior of humanity. (§114; 134)

In regard to the Gospel of Matthew, the new document deals with it in a tone that is different from that found in the commission’s ruling published in 1911, “On the Authorship, Date of Composition, and Historicity of the Gospel of Matthew,”⁸ while consistent with and developing the implications of the commission’s statements in its 1964 statement on the historical truth of the gospels, *Sancta Mater Ecclesia*, §§8–9.⁹

Section 2.5 considers the Bible’s accounts of the miraculous. First, such events in the Old Testament are considered. In the end:

⁸ *Responsa de auctore, de tempore compositionis, et de historica veritate Evangelii secundum Matthaeum* (June 19, 1911), in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* (hereafter, *AAS*) 3 (1911): 294–96; Béchard (*Scripture Documents*, 197–99) presents the commission’s response in English translation and notes that the response can also be found in *Enchiridion symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*, ed. Heinrich Denzinger and Adolf Schönmetzer, 37th ed. (Freiburg/Basel/Rome/Vienna: Herder, 1991), 3561–67 (hereafter *DS*), and in *Enchiridion Biblicum: Documenti della Chiesa sulla Sacra Scrittura*, ed. Alfio Filippi and Erminio Lora, 2nd ed. (Bologna: Dehoniane, 1993), 383–89 (hereafter *EB*). See especially the commission’s response to question 7 on “the historical authenticity” of the first two chapters of Matthew and later sections unique to Matthew that witness to Christ’s divinity, Peter’s primacy, and the great commission.

⁹ *Instructio de historica Evangeliorum veritate* (April 21, 1964), *AAS* 56 (1964): 712–18; *DS*, 4402–07; *EB*, 644–59. The official English translation of this document is reproduced in Béchard, *Scripture Documents*, 227–35.

It does not seem possible to ascertain with certainty what actually happened. Through these traditions, people remember, express themselves, and recognize that God acts in history and that he guided and saved his people with power and fidelity. (section 2.5.1; §116; 136)

Then the miracles of Jesus are considered. There is an emphasis in this section on how both the miracles in the Synoptics and the signs in the Gospel of John point beyond themselves to key truths about Jesus and the kingdom he announces (section 2.5.2; §117; 136–38). The Resurrection of Jesus is the culmination of the miraculous in the Gospels, confirming the closest possible relationship between Jesus and God the Father, which signals the victory over death that those who follow Jesus will experience (§118; 138).

The next unit in the historical problems section deals with the narratives of the Easter events (section 2.6). The commission treats these according to three narrative panels: “The Earthquake” (2.6.1; §120; 139–40); “The Behavior of the Women” who witnessed the Resurrection (2.6.2; §121; 140); and “The Source of the Easter Message” (angels to women in the Synoptics; Jesus to Mary Magdalene in John; 2.6.3; §122; 141). In a concluding unit on the theological worth of the Gospels, the commission writes that “while the theological affirmations about Jesus have a direct and normative import, the purely historical elements have a subordinate function” (2.6.4; §123; 142). The commission’s direct attention toward historical problems and the range of problems it considers are impressive.

The next category of difficulties to be addressed is “Violence in the Bible” (section 3.1; §§125–31; 143–50). Of particular note here is the attention paid to commands for the annihilation of peoples, or holy war. With admission that they are following the Church fathers, the commission writes that:

The narration of the conquest epic should be seen as a sort of parable presenting characters of symbolic value; the law of extermination, for its part, requires a nonliteral interpretation, as in the case of the command of the Lord to cut off one’s hand or pluck out one’s eye, if they are a cause of scandal. (§127; 146)

And at the end of the same section, the commission reiterates that the story of the conquest:

must . . . be integrated with other biblical passages which announce the compassion and forgiveness of God as the scope and goal of every historical action of the Lord of all the earth, as well as the model for just actions on the part of human beings. (§127; 147)

The topic of violence in the Bible ends with section 3.1.3, which considers “Prayer Requests for Vengeance.” The imprecatory psalms need to be understood in light of their literary genre and should not be literally imitated as models for prayer (§128). Other useful perspectives on such prayer requests include an identification of who is doing the praying, the actual object of such imprecatory prayers, and the enemies of the one who is praying (§§129–31).

The final category of difficult texts is “The Social Status of Women.” Under the first subcategory of this section, “The Submission of Wives to Their Husbands,” the first-century Mediterranean social context is brought into full view. The conclusion of this subcategory begins with a candid admission:

We can still regret that Paul in these letters did not clearly assert equality of social status for believing spouses, but his way of proceeding was perhaps the only one possible at that time; otherwise, Christianity could have been accused of undermining the social order. On the other hand, though, the exhortation to husbands has not lost any of its actuality and its truth. (3.2.1; §132; 152)

The second subcategory, “The Silence of Women in Ecclesial Gatherings,” considers 1 Corinthians 14:33–35. In light of the context of 1 Corinthians 11:5 and 14:31, it is evident that women were given opportunities to prophesy in the community. The prohibition in 1 Corinthians 14:33–35 is thus read as a command for wives to show respect to their husbands in the Church’s assembly (3.2.2; §133, 152).

The third subcategory, “The Role of Women in the Assembly,” handles 1 Timothy 2:11–15. Here the document notes that the prohibition on women’s ecclesial roles addresses only teaching and administrative offices. In regard to the especially problematic way that 1 Timothy justifies its position from Genesis 3, the document recognizes that there are Jewish precedents for this sort of argument in Sirach 25:24 and in the *Life of Adam and Eve*, as well as in the *Apocalypse of Moses*. The argument is therefore regarded as completely

conditioned by Jewish views of men and women and reading strategies used to support such views (3.2.3; §134; 153–54). In general, this section offers socially contextualized readings of these passages.

In the commission's synthesis that begins the conclusion of Part Three of the document, we read:

The course followed in this document shows how a search for the meaning of the texts that goes beyond the preoccupation of determining merely the facts that actually happened leads to a more profound and precise understanding of their sense. (§136; 155)

This is balanced by a following caution not to regard everything in the Bible as invented, but rather to pay attention to the actions and discourse that the Scripture records from past generations (§136; 156). In the same section, the developmental and composite nature of revelation within Scripture is helpfully linked to the reading strategies recommended by the commission as well. After observing how Scripture contains both “the history of God’s revelation” and “the history of revealed moral behavior,” the commission writes:

As the revelation of God, so also the revelation of just human conduct reaches its fullness in Jesus. Just as we cannot find in every single biblical passage the full revelation of God, so too, we cannot find the perfect revelation of morality. Single passages of Scripture, therefore, must not be isolated or absolutized but must be understood and evaluated in their relationship with the fullness of revelation in the person and work of Jesus and in the framework of a canonical reading of Sacred Scripture. A profound understanding of these texts in themselves is very helpful; in this way the history of revelation itself is manifested. (§136; 156)

To conclude the General Conclusion’s section, “Truth in Historical Form,” the document’s framers write:

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. It is by embracing this characteristic of divine revelation that we are actually led to the mystery of

Christ, the full and definitive manifestation of the truth of God in human history. (3.2; §146; 164–65)

The document surprised me by opening up a new topic within its General Conclusion, “The Literary Traditions of Other Religions.” Here, the commission considers how Scripture relates to other religions’ scriptures. Balaam the non-Jewish prophet (Num 22–24) and Paul’s quotation of a pagan poet in Acts 17:28 are cited as examples of Scriptures’ cognizance of other traditions’ canons (§148; 165–66).

Finally, in a way that reminds me of what Origen writes about the difficult or primitive passages in Scripture,¹⁰ the document’s authors show how they perceive this document as going beyond *Dei Verbum* in addressing the difficult texts of Scripture, for they assert that:

It is not enough to assert in a general way that “incomplete and temporary” things are found in the Old Testament (*DV*, n. 15), or to recall that the writers of the New Testament too were influenced by the mentality of their age; if we can restate the principle of incarnation, applying it analogously to the commitment to writing of divine revelation, it is also necessary to indicate how, in this very human weakness, the glory of the divine Word nonetheless shines forth. (§149; 167)

For its focus on what Scripture tells us about God and the salvation that God effects in Christ for humanity, its forthright articulation of the difficulties in the interpretation of Scripture, and the scope of problems surveyed, this document represents discourse on Scripture that is at once breathtaking and very welcome. This will be helpful to all who labor—no matter for how long or short a time—in the vineyard of Sacred Scripture. N·V

¹⁰ Origen applies Paul’s phrase “We hold this treasure in earthen vessels” (2 Cor 4:7) to those sections of Scripture that seem poorly written or primitive (*Philokalia* 1.7).