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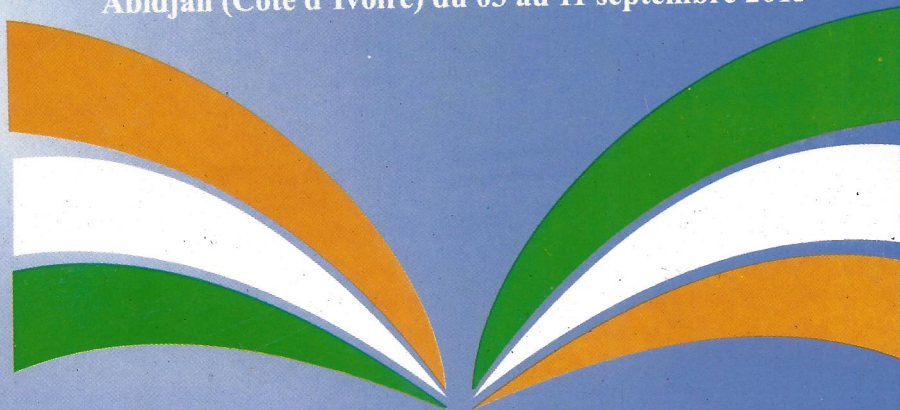
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## **2 Tim 3:16: The Often-Neglected Approaches to Teaching the Bible in Universities**

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### **SUMMARY**

The paper explores the meaning of the biblical assertion that 'all scripture is inspired' (2 Tim 3:16). Having exposed the prevailing methodologies in the teaching of the Bible in the universities, the author draws attention to the dangers of secularized interpretation of Scripture, proposing that Scripture be thought according to its nature as word of God and not simply as a historical document. The essay, therefore, presents and discusses two main approaches: Faith and Contextual, in order to bridge the gap between faith and lived-life, and concludes that the teaching of Scripture more than a profession is a vocation.

### **1. Introduction: Statement of the Problem**

This essay is a research into the very vital but often-overlooked approaches to teaching the Bible (Old and/or New Testament) in an Institution of higher learning. It is a call to pay attention to the method of teaching which accords with the very nature of Scripture as the word of God. As the title of the essay shows, the word 'approach' is used here to designate the way teachers relate with, address, and analyze a text, which determines the methodology to be used. The locus of the teaching, identified here as 'university' concerns a wide range and levels

of secular or Church schools, covering University departments, seminaries or schools of Theology.

The Bible bears witness that scripture is word of God (2 Tim 3:16) given in human language (1 Tess 2:13). This definition makes evident the two natures of the Bible, human and divine. As a human text, many theories have been invented by scholarship, which guide its study. These include complex of exegetical processes which aid the interpretation of ancient texts such as philological analysis, textual, historical, literary criticisms, archaeological research and a host of other critical methods. The benefits of these studies for biblical research cannot be undervalued. These theories are substantially applicable to the study of other classical religious and non religious texts, and biblical studies have experienced progress especially with the application of these historical critical methods. However, these methods have been given so much attention to the neglect of another essential approach to interpretation which relates to the divine nature of the Bible, that is, the faith approach. A second approach which suffers equal neglect is the application of the word of God to the context of the reader. If the Bible is rightly the symbolic locus of the revelation of God and of divine-human encounter, the neglect of these approaches in interpretation is detrimental both to the word of God and to the audience to which it is addressed. The specific problems which inspired this essay are the following:

Firstly, the teaching of the word of God in universities is suffering the negative consequences of 'secularized hermeneutic', to use the words of Benedict XVI, talking of the interpretation of Sacred Scripture in the Church<sup>1</sup>. With this language, the Pope describes some troubling consequences when, at some high academic contexts teachers create a barrier between exegesis and theology. This happens when exegesis concentrates

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<sup>1</sup> Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Word of God (Ibadan, 2010) 44.

only on the level of literary and historical criticism without regard to the spiritual and without engaging the truth claims of the sacred texts. It is a given that some professors of scripture, either willfully or out of ignorance, finish a biblical course or analyze the sacred texts to students without reference to the transcendent reality that the texts mediate. Besides being a treatment of the Bible against its true nature, it leaves students unstable and confused, who had great respect and reverence for the Bible. Another consequence of this treatment of the Bible is that students graduate from school without the ability to make a believing response to the word of God.

Secondly, in the school of Theology where I teach, there is a program that marks the beginning of each academic year, called Theological Sounding, which aims to assist the students in finding links between their experiences during apostolic work and their theological convictions. Through this program, students are encouraged and helped to reflect upon intersections between theirs and the experiences of others and the theological materials being studied in the school. This exercise, important as it is, has no reverberations either in the teaching methodology of the teachers or in the written projects of the students. Teachers and students do not recall these very resourceful shared experiences through the academic year, and teaching and written projects seem as if theology had nothing to contribute to what people experience in their life. This is evidently an example of the break we experience between lived life and theological belief.

Thirdly, as Christianity is facing challenges coming especially from erroneous interpretations of God's word which lead away from true knowledge of God but to religious fanaticism, teachers of the word of God should grow in being more sensitive to the connection between faith and life. Moreover, violence, injustice, material impoverishment and the breakup of culture continue to catalyze our awareness of implications of a connection between faith, life and society. Therefore, like

prophets whose primary concern is the living out of the word of God in the society, teachers of scripture should question themselves about:

- a. The attitude of the modern Christian to suffering, which essentially defines the identity of Christ, and therefore that of the Christian.
- b. How the Bible could be taught as proclamation to a people from within the perspective of their culture and their everyday life experiences, and
- c. How culture has profound consequences in how people understand and practice the Christian faith.

Finally, on the basis of the obvious inability of the modern historical critical method of biblical interpretation to lead students of the Bible to the goal of the word of God, that is, to faith, I wish to draw the attention of all who are actively engaged in the biblical apostolate in different parts of Africa and the globe, to the several calls the Church had made to us, teachers of sacred scripture, about the attention we ought to give to the spiritual dimension of the sacred scriptures. Vatican II gave this clarion call in the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum* by indicating the three elements that are necessary for interpretation (DV, 12). Recently, Pope Benedict XVI has renewed this call by laying fresh emphasis on the need to interpret the sacred texts in accordance with their nature<sup>2</sup>.

The statement of the problem offered in these opening paragraphs is complemented in the next section with a presentation of the problem of methodology in the teaching of the Bible in universities, whose remote cause is the nature of the academic curriculum. After this presentation, the assertion of 2 Tim 3:16 is discussed alongside its implications for teaching the Bible according to its specific nature.

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<sup>2</sup> Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, 28.

## 2. Biblical Courses in Academic Curriculum and the Problem of Methodology

One of my biggest challenges with teaching the Bible in a Higher Institution is teaching under the constraint and restrictions of the academic curriculum, which while necessary is almost totally ineffective. I have experienced different groups of fresh theology students as they come from the Philosophy campuses dotting every sentence they make with quotes from their choice philosophers. I also experience the same students as they leave the theology campus, neither incapable of bragging with biblical quotes what they do with their philosophers nor growing in spiritual life. They join the theology department, quoting Heidegger and Hegel, and they graduate from Theology still quoting the philosophers. As this experience becomes recurrent, students leave one with one of two impressions; it is either philosophy is more interesting than theology or philosophers apply more effective teaching techniques than theologians. Yet, we know that the Bible contains the most interesting and beautiful quotes and stories than any classical book does. The problem, I see, is not only in their methodological approach but also in the nature of the two disciplines.

Biblical courses in academic institutions increasingly fall prey to a form of technologism, which defined the course content only according to questions suggested by the historical-critical method. In this way, the Bible is cut off from its essential link to the Spirit and to life. To this effect, a student may have an excellent result in a biblical course without growing neither in the knowledge of God nor in faith. The text of 2 Tim 3:16 calls attention to the true nature of the Bible and suggests approaches which must not be neglected in teaching and interpretation in order to bridge the gap between faith and lived-life.

### 3. 2 Tim 3:16: All Scripture is Inspired by God

This section of the paper explores the meaning of the assertion that 'all scripture is inspired' as applied to the Bible, and to use the meaning thereby established to justify the methodology to teaching the Bible in schools that this study proposes. Besides being a source for the knowledge of ancient Israel and of the peoples of the Ancient Near East, the Bible is essentially recognized and accepted as the word of God. This affirmation grounds the reason for the survival of the Bible through the centuries to the present time. It also grounds the central importance attributed to the Bible by communities which accept it as source of teaching in righteousness, along with the incessant efforts to preserve its truth through guided interpretation: "All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work (2 Tim 3:16-17).

2 Tim 3:16 is one of the most important passages and most quoted texts of scripture. Its importance is proved by the many studies done on it, by allusions and references to it in many biblical and theological commentaries, introductions to scripture, spiritual books and homilies. Recourse is made to this text whenever the divine origin and goal of the Bible is the subject matter of discussion or as soon as the authority of the Bible is called into question. What is usually being referred to is the first part of the long statement in vv16-17, "All scripture is inspired..." In fact, this text is so important for those engaged in the teaching apostolate as we read from *Verbum Domini*:

The theme of inspiration is clearly decisive for an adequate approach to the Scriptures and their correct interpretation, which for its part is to be done in the same spirit in whom the sacred texts were written. Whenever our awareness



of its inspiration grows weak, we risk reading scripture as an object of historical curiosity and not as the work of the Holy Spirit in which we can hear the Lord himself speak and recognize his presence in history<sup>3</sup>.

The affirmation which this text makes of the Bible, 'all scripture is inspired' (πᾶσα γραφή θεόπνευστος) or literally 'God-breathed' or 'spoken by God' refers essentially to the divine source of the Bible or to the influence of the Spirit of God. In the biblical tradition, the breath of God is a life-giving principle; it is the breath of life (for instance, Gen 2:7; Ezek 37:5-6); therefore, scripture is a life-giving word of God. As a means of communication, the Bible, being the word of God, is the locus of divine self communication; it is the channel of God's gift of self; a locus of salvific encounter with God. The word of God embraces a complex reality much broader than the written scripture. This word of God became incarnate in Jesus Christ. Jesus is the highest expression of God's self communication.

There are multiple theological questions regarding the nature and character of inspiration, which affirm the Bible as normative, authoritative, and infallible. However, the explanation of these questions is outside the interest of the present essay. The essay rather concentrates on the meaning of inspiration as the divine influence at work by virtue of which scripture is a symbolic locus of divine revelation<sup>4</sup>. This meaning reflects the affirmation of 1 Tess 2:13, which says that scripture is God's word given in human language and only those who ac-

<sup>3</sup>Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, 27-28.

<sup>4</sup>I adopt the explanation of Sandra M. Schneiders who recognizes the expression 'word of God' as a metaphor which points beyond the boundaries of human language to be the symbolic locus of divine self communication. Understanding it in this way helps to resist attempts that explain revelation as simple imparting of otherwise unavailable information. Sandra M. Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text. Interpreting the Bible as Sacred Scripture* (Collegeville, PA, 1999) 33-51.

cept its divine origin and character experience its power at work in their lives. I have chosen to study this text to draw from it two essential approaches to teaching the word of God, which is often overlooked by those engaged in the biblical apostolate in academic institutions. The author of the letter advises Timothy about the importance of these vital issues for a successful ministry of the Word. What these approaches are is understood more adequately from the background the Second Letter to Timothy and within the context in which the assertion is found in the letter.

### *3.1 Background and Context of 2 Tim 3:16*

2 Timothy is a representative of the traditions in the New Testament canon, which presents Paul as a protector of sound teaching, the custodian of the Deposit of Faith, establisher of the qualities of good leadership and the exhorter to proper behavior<sup>5</sup>. Together with other Pastoral Epistles (1 Timothy and Titus), 2 Timothy is a genre of hortatory literature whose most outstanding features are contrast and personal example. It is characteristic of this literary genre that the speakers are their own example of what is taught, and the recipients includes a larger audience, alongside the stated audience, who help to shape the pattern of the theological presentation of the letter<sup>6</sup>. These Epistles promote Paul's personal legacy and the authority it brings to bear on his letters and theology. They are, moreover, situated in the struggles of the early Church to define the faith, to preserve the unity of the Church and to establish the authority of both Scripture and the apostolic witness to the gos-

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. J.A. Aageson, *Paul, the Pastoral Epistles and the Early Church* (Peabody, MA, 2008) 8.

<sup>6</sup> Benjamin Fiore, *The Function of Personal Example in the Socratic and Pastoral Epistles* (Analecta Biblica 105; Rome 1986) 6; L.T. Johnson, *First and Second Letters to Timothy* (Anchor Bible 35A; New York 2001) 12.

pel<sup>7</sup>. The historical background of the letter could be discerned from Paul's numerous exhortations to Timothy.

The letter was written in response to an atmosphere of controversy over doctrines, hypocrisy and wickedness leading to persecution. There was much opposition by people who propagate wrong doctrines and thereby upset the faith (2 Tim 2:14-19, 23; 3:1-13). What used to be considered as empty chatters had now turned into clear heresy. Nothing in the text reveals the Jewish identity of the opponents, but Paul exhortations concern adherence to correct belief and rejection of heresy. Rather than give publicity to such doctrines by entering into public debate with the proponents, Timothy should reject them out rightly by maintaining a good distance from them (2 Tim 3:5). This atmosphere of general controversy, wicked passions and persecutions resounds in the entire letter.

After the initial address and greeting, thanksgiving and series of admonitions (1:1-18), the author now exhorts Timothy to join the train of faithful Tradition that had gone before him with the grace that comes from Jesus Christ (2:1-13). Having placed Timothy within the context of salvation history, the author now turns to defining the tasks of a pastor (2:14-19), the vices he should drop and which virtues he ought to cultivate (2:20-26). At 3:1, the author turns from admonition to speak about the signs of the last times, telling Timothy that since he had experienced from him what true discipleship entails, he should recognize the signs for what they were, reject them (3:1-9) and follow Paul's example and teaching (3:10-17). Therefore, in the unit in which 2 Tim 3:16-17 affirms that all scripture is inspired by God, there is a concern for the preservation of faithful Tradition against the stream of other interpretations and heresies. For this reason, Paul draws Timothy's attention to what he had learnt from him, which includes both Tradition and a Gospel way of life (3:10-13). Lastly, as Paul anticipates

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<sup>7</sup>Augeson, *Paul, the Pastoral*, 15.

his execution, he gives Timothy a final charge to proclaim the word as of necessity and with commitment (4:1-8). The letter ends with Paul's sorrow over former associates who abandoned and betrayed him (4:9-18) and with final greetings (4:19-22). This text, therefore, explains a model of teaching God's word within a context where the Tradition of faithful interpretation of scripture is threatened and therefore must be preserved. This model includes both an example of life and attention to the stream of faithful Tradition.

### 3.2 Reading 2 Tim 3:16 in its Context (2 Tim 3:1-17)

The opening verses (vv1-9) describe the activities of false teachers. Some exegetes place the beginning of another session in v10, explaining that the particle  $\delta\epsilon$  in v10 opens it in a disjunctive sense<sup>8</sup>. This is not likely, considering that the model of Paul's apostolate in vv10-12, which the author proposes to Timothy, contrasts the nature of the activities of the false and wicked teachers in vv1-9 and v13. In fact, the fresh reference to the wicked teachers in v13 indicates clearly that vv10-12 cannot be read without the preceding verses which describe them more fully. In vv14-15, Timothy is advised to continue faithfully in what he had learnt, especially about sacred writings which instruct for salvation. Therefore, in vv1-15 the author presents to Timothy two models of discipleship: (a) a model he should avoid (vv1-9,13), described as lawless and selfish teachers who are unqualified in the faith. (b) the model of Paul whose teaching and way of life he has followed closely (v10). The intensive aorist active verb, παρακολουθέω, meaning 'to follow closely' or 'to learn' identifies Timothy as Paul's disciple. (cf. Acts 16:1). From the words which describe the model which Timothy is to follow - teaching, way of life, purpose,

<sup>8</sup> For instance, J.M. Bassler, *1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus* (Abingdon New Testament Commentaries; Nashville, TX, 1996) 162; G.T. Montague, *First and Second Timothy, Titus* (Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture; Grand Rapids, MI, 2008).

faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions and sufferings - one derives two approaches to the word of God - way of life and teaching according to faithful tradition - which are read as different descriptions of the ministry of the word of God that is inspired by faith in Jesus. These two approaches characterize Paul's ministry in contrast to the selfish and faithless way of life of those whom Timothy should avoid.

#### **4. 2 Tim 3:16 and Implied Approaches: Faith and Contextual**

##### **4.1 *The Faith Approach***

The faith approach to teaching of the word of God satisfies an aspect of the injunction of the author of 2 Tim 3:1-17 to Timothy with regard to teaching through witness of Christian life. This approach comprehends all that the author of the text says in vv10-12 and 14-16 about lifestyle, faith and participation in the stream of Tradition that characterize the life of the Church.

Now you have observed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions and suffering the things that happened to me in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra. What persecutions I endured! Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. Indeed, all who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted... But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you

for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus (2 Tim 3:10-12,14-15).

The first part of this text (vv10-12) describes a way of life that is inspired by the Gospel, while the rest of the text (vv14-15) enjoins on perseverance in the life of faith, including the belief that scripture leads to faith.

The biblical tradition defines faith along the general line of openness to the mystery of God. So faith is necessary for any adequate interpretation of the Bible. As word written in human language, the biblical text can be studied and interpreted as a text by a person who does not believe in God or who does not share the Christian faith. However, one requires faith to perceive and experience God's self-disclosure in the text. Faith is the human response to God's self disclosure. Every self-disclosure has the primary aim of communicating knowledge of self. Therefore, the final goal of self revelation is not the cognitive but the personal dimension, encounter and the sharing of life with another. By revealing himself, God invites human beings to share his life. The aim of revelation is not achieved if the other does not reciprocate in positive response to this invitation. From the pages of the Bible, one could read the remote intention of the biblical writers, which is to lead people to faith or to strengthen the faith of believers (cf. Luke 1:1-2; John 20:31; Acts 1:8,22; 2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 10:39, 41; 13:31). In fact, Paul describes the gospel as "the word of faith that we proclaim" (Rom 10:8). There are three ways in which this faith approach could be employed in teaching. The first is the personal dimension.

In respect to this characteristic nature of the biblical text as symbolic locus of encounter with God, therefore, the teacher of the Bible is the primary hearer of the word of God. It is God who speaks through the pages of the Bible and the reader listens. The teacher's first response to God is that he or she should believe in the intrinsic nature of the biblical text as the word of

God. This belief controls his or her attitude to the text and the way he or she communicates the message of the text.

Therefore, the very apostolate of bible teaching calls the teacher to an encounter with the word of God. No one teaches science properly if the person is not a scientist. So also successful surgical operations are done by good surgeons. We also know the ruinous effects of operations done by fake professionals or those without sufficient experience. Does it then not follow that the Bible, the compendium of the word of God, is most profitably taught by a person of the Spirit, the man or woman of God. Openness to the Spirit is a necessary prerequisite for the biblical apostolate. Many biblical texts (for instance, 1 Cor 2:10-11, 12-16) underscore the importance of the Spirit for the knowledge of God and sharing in the life of Christ. According to John 16:12-13<sup>9</sup>. Jesus knew that only the Spirit, and not mere association with him, leads to the full truth. This implies that the teacher of the Bible should be in the Spirit; he or she does not approach the biblical text as other professionals do, and does not do so as a profession, in order to exhibit technical skill but the teacher communicates knowledge of God through a witness of life. Properly speaking, a witness is one who has a firsthand experience or one who has participated in an event which he or she wants to make known or propose to others. This was the case with Moses and the apostles. Witness of life is also the heart of Paul's admonition to Timothy. As the teacher of the Bible matures in the life of the Spirit, he or she grows in his or her capacity to understand the realities of which the Bible speaks<sup>10</sup>.

This personal dimension comprehends as well the mission of the teacher of Scripture. The word of God is an invitation to personal encounter and communion, and facilitating the ability

<sup>9</sup>"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth..."

<sup>10</sup>CE Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (15th April 1993), II, A, 2: *Enchiridion Vaticanum* 13, no. 299].

of the addressee to response constitutes the mission of the teacher. Communication of scientific knowledge is the goal of the academic enterprise. However, in teaching or using the Bible for teaching in academic institutes a true and personal encounter with the saving presence of Christ should form the content of the teacher's project. The teacher's facilitation of this process should also include helping the audience to accepting the word of God for what it really is, God's word (1 Thess 2:13), and not simply a historical document that communicates knowledge of the past. To read and teach the Bible as the word of God and not any kind of human wisdom, 1 Thess 2:13 says, is the basis for it being efficacious in the lives of those who read it. A very efficient way through this assignment is engagement in *Lectio Divina*, which could be organized for willing students outside the academic Timetable. Students need to be guided to be open to the Spirit and to grow in spiritual life in order to appreciate that the Scripture can only be understood if it is lived. Having done this, the teacher could hope that the Holy Spirit completes the work of bringing about the encounter itself.

Another dimension of the faith approach is the ecclesial. An important aspect of the Bible's characteristic which the teacher of the Bible should bear in mind is its ecclesial character. The author of the Second Letter to Timothy strongly enjoined him to "continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it..." (2 Tim 3:14). This is a reference to the Tradition of the Church. This tradition has been clearly distinguished from the model described in vv1-9,13 on the basis of the content of teaching and way of life of the teachers. The injunction of v14 is similar to one of the assertions of the Pontifical Biblical Commission which says that one can have access to the truth of the Bible only through affinity with the message of the text on the basis of sharing in the life of this community of faith<sup>11</sup>. Therefore, the teaching of the

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<sup>11</sup> Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*



sacred text requires that the teacher participate fully in the life and faith of the believing community that produces reads and accepts the text as God's word. Benedict XVI teaches that "the primary setting for scriptural interpretation is the life of the Church"<sup>12</sup>. This ecclesial setting involves a number of other dimensions: the faith traditions that formed the living contexts for the literary activity of the sacred authors, the unity of the Old and New Testaments, and the Magisterial interpretations of the text through history. Significantly in v15, the author refers to Scripture with a rare phrase, *hiera grammata*, meaning literally 'sacred alphabets' (cf. John 5:45). It is used here to fortify the sense of Timothy's coming to familiarity and knowledge of the Scriptures from his childhood.

#### 4.2 The Contextual Approach

In 2 Tim 3, the injunctions to Timothy were given within a historical context where false teachers propagate doctrines and lifestyle which run contrary to the teachings and living Tradition of the Church. This historical context reminds us that interpretation of the word of God does not achieve its goal if it does not address the context of the hearer.

The faith approach, described above, is the enabling element for the contextual approach. The idea that God speaks to us through the Bible means that He is in communication with his people. This communication takes place in the life experience and context of the people. The Bible also is not a historical book about the past but a living word which addresses peoples of different generations. In other words, the word of God should have an ongoing intervention in history. By addressing the context, the teaching of the word of God in the university demonstrates its capacity to present the Bible as a promise of

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(15th April 1993), II, A, 2: *Enchiridion Vaticanum* 13, no. 2988.

<sup>12</sup> *Verbum Domini*, 37.

salvation in every dimension of the life of the human person. There is the growing need to incarnate the word of God within our world and the biblical apostolate should be ready to satisfy that need.

### Conclusion

Certain deductions which are conclusions from our study of 2 Tim 3:16 are recalled here as assertions on which to base the proposals which this section of the work makes as hermeneutic for teaching. A fundamental premise to the definition of this hermeneutic is the entwined nature of the Bible as divine and human. This important premise should also precede the teaching of the content of every biblical course, and should animate the planning and execution of the teaching of the course. The Bible is not only a body of literatures to be subjected to literary analysis or to the historical-critical method. It is more fundamentally the word of God, its goal being to lead people to grow in righteousness. In other words, besides the necessary requirement to teach the Bible as science, there is need for a second level of methodology, which is not defined by the academic curriculum but by the very nature of the biblical text as an inspired book. The Bible is God's word spoken in history, which addresses human beings of every generation in their historical situations. Besides the application of the historical critical method, the two basic approaches discussed in this essay are considered as the often-neglected approaches which the teacher of scripture should adopt in teaching as required by the nature of the Bible as an inspired text.

It is necessary to take account here of Benedict XVI's understanding of the task of theology and biblical interpretation<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> CF. Scott Hahn's presentation and commentary on Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger's books on the theme of Inspiration of the Sacred Scripture and on the Role and Mission of Theology in the Church, *Spirit and Life, Essays on Interpreting the Bible in Ordinary Time* (Steubenville, OH, 2009).

In his book, *Principles of Catholic Theology*, Benedict XVI anchors his arguments on the traditional notion of inspiration of the Sacred Scripture, and from it, he draws out two important conclusions. Firstly, Scripture is the locus where God speaks. It does not just speak of God; it is God's own speech in human words. Secondly, the human authors of the Scriptures are the original 'theologoi', those through whom God enters into history<sup>14</sup>. With this stated, he concludes that the Bible should become the model of all theologies and the human authors the model of all theologians. The human authors of the Bible are model to the theologian in regard to how to do theology, how to represent the subject matter of theology and how the findings of theological inquiry should be expressed. In another book, *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, J. Ratzinger states that every kind of theologizing is preceded by a Word, which God gives us as a gift. This premise having been established, the theological exercise is undertaken as "pondering what God has said and thought before us"<sup>15</sup>. The act of pondering evokes the idea of dialogue to which this word of God invites us. Doing theology, the Church ponders, proclaims and actualizes the word of God.

These two definitions of hermeneutic compel us to spend a word on the identity of the teacher of Sacred Scripture or the theologian. It is important to ask the question of what determines the identity of the theologian. Could the title be given to all who possess the academic certificate? Instead of responding directly to this question, it suffices here to present criteria, drawn from discussion in the foregoing paragraphs, around which those who hold this certificate could assess themselves. Firstly, the theologian is one who allows God to speak through the sacred text. This becomes possible according to the level of

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<sup>14</sup>Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology* (San Francisco, CA, 1987) 320-322.

<sup>15</sup>Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology: Essays to Orient Theology in Today's Debates* (San Francisco, CA, 1995) 103-104.

the faith of the theologian. In fact, Benedict XVI asserts that there can be no theology without conversion and faith<sup>16</sup>. According to Scott Hahn, to take the human authors of the Bible as models for the theologians implies that a theologian must be somebody "who has heard and believed the Word, professed that faith in the Church and made personal assents to the standards and teaching of the Church in its sacramental and moral life"<sup>17</sup>. For this reason, every theologian should engage in prayerful contemplation of the Scriptures and be open to the Spirit of God who alone understands the will of God and who can make it known (1 Cor 2:11-16). The ministry of the word of God, whatever form it takes, is a vocation, not a profession.

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<sup>16</sup> Ratzinger, *Nature and Mission of Theology*, 55-57.

<sup>17</sup> Scott Hahn, *Spirit and Life*, 43.