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**“Proclaimed, Accepted, Celebrated, and Meditated Upon”:
Benedict XVI on the Word of God**

On September 30, 2010, the memorial of Saint Jerome, Pope Benedict XVI issued the post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Verbum Domini* (*The Word of the Lord*). It was released on November 11, 2010, the memorial of Saint Martin of Tours. The Twelfth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops had met in Rome October 5–26, 2008, with the theme, “The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church.” The exhortation draws on the synodal documents, the texts of the interventions, the small group reports, the final message of the synod, and the “specific proposals (*Propositiones*) which the Fathers considered especially significant” (no. 1). The printed document runs 194 pages, followed by an “index” that outlines the text. This column will offer an overview of the document and present some of its key themes.

The aim of the exhortation is to “point out certain fundamental approaches to a discovery of God’s word in the life of the Church as well as a well-spring of constant renewal (no. 1). Thus, Benedict hopes: “. . . may we allow ourselves to be led by the Holy Spirit to an ever greater love of the word of God” (no. 5; emphasis in original). It is also important to note how Benedict

takes the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (*Dei Verbum*) and its appropriation in the life of the church as point of departure for the synod as well as his exhortation.

The pope invokes the prologue of the Gospel of John as a guide for the exhortation, seeking that “the Bible may not be simply a word from the past, but a living and timely word” (no. 5). The prologue of John’s gospel, the pope says, “offers a synthesis of the entire Christian faith” (no. 5).

Verbum in Ecclesia

The exhortation is divided into three parts: *Verbum Dei* (The Word of God), *Verbum in Ecclesia* (The Word in the Church), and *Verbum Mundo* (The Word to the World). In part one, the pope presents a theology of divine revelation. “God makes himself known to us as a mystery of infinite love in which the Father eternally utters his Word in the Holy Spirit” (6). He presents a “glimpse at all reality as the handiwork of the Blessed Trinity through the divine Word . . .” (11). He then turns to a “Christology of the Word”: “Jesus is revealed as the word of the new and everlasting covenant” (12). His trinitarian vision is completed with atten-

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tion to the "mission of the Holy Spirit in relation to the divine word" (15). Further themes of part one include the relation of tradition and scripture and inspiration and truth. After this theological vision, he sets out the human "response to the God who speaks" and the capacity of the word of God "to enter into dialogue with the everyday problems that people face" (23). He remarks that the Blessed Virgin Mary is a stellar witness to the "interplay between the word of God and faith" whose "obedient faith shapes her life at every moment before God's plan" (27). Thus he says, the relationship between Mariology and the theology of the word should be more carefully studied by scholars (27). (A marian motif will appear in each of the three sections.) The final section treats the interpretation of Scripture in the church, taking up issues in biblical hermeneutics, interreligious dialogue, and the role of Scripture in the pastoral activity of the church.

Verbum in Ecclesia

Part two, *Verbum in Ecclesia*, probes the relationship "between Christ, the Word of the Father, and the Church." Benedict explains that "the Church thus emerges as the milieu in which, by grace, we can experience what John tells us in the Prologue of his Gospel: 'to all who received him he gave power to become children of God'" (51). He names liturgy as the "privileged setting in which God speaks to us in the midst of our lives . . ." (52). The liturgy is by its nature "steeped in sacred Scripture" (94); not only the readings but also the psalms, songs, liturgical signs, petitions, and prayers. Benedict explains how the synod stressed the relationship of scripture and the sacraments and the "performative character of the word itself" (53). He gives special attention to the Eucharist and the relationship of the proclamation of the word and breaking of the bread through appeal to the Emmaus narrative (54). A section on the sacramentality

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should be accompanied by our commitment "to justice, reconciliation and peace" (99). The pope, following the synod fathers, highlights the need for proclamation to young people, migrants, the suffering, and the poor.

The motif of the prologue of the Gospel of John—where God's word and human words are inseparably bound—opens the pope's treatment of the word of God and culture, the arts, and "new media." The importance of inculturation is noted, for "the word of God is inherently capable of speaking to all human persons in the context of their own culture" (181). He explains how people of today still "hunger and thirst for the word of God" and calls for the continued translation of the Bible into local languages as many local churches still lack a complete vernacular translation (115). The value of interreligious dialogue is affirmed as the section closes.

The conclusion of the letter returns to the prologue of John, now to highlight that "the proclamation of the word creates *communio* and brings about joy. This is a profound joy which has its origin in the very heart of the trinitarian life which is communicated to us in the Son. . . . a fruit of the Holy Spirit" (123). The pope appeals that "every day of our lives thus be shaped by a renewed encounter with Christ, the Word of the Father made flesh" (124).

On the whole, Benedict XVI's apostolic exhortation is a significant contribution to ongoing theological reflection on revelation; the study of sacred Scripture; and a deeper sense of the sacramentality of the Word and its role in the life of church liturgically and spiritually. Further, it connects proclamation and witness, with its focus on mission as the church faces new opportunities and challenges in diverse contexts throughout the world.

Verbum Mundo

Part three elaborates on the church's mission "to proclaim the word of God to the world." We are to be not only hearers but also heralds of the word (91). He explains, "We need, then, to discover ever anew the urgency and the beauty of the proclamation of the word for the coming of the Kingdom of God which Christ himself preached" (93). This preaching of the reign of God should "illumine every area of human life: the family, schools, culture, work, leisure, and other aspects of the social life" with a word of consolation and disruption (93). By *disruption* the pope means one that calls to conversion. All the baptized have this responsibility to communicate God's word (94), which is intrinsically connected to Christian witness (97). Our proclamation