

DEI VERBUM, DOGMATIC CONSTITUTION ON DIVINE REVELATION

In a society that increasingly communicates through social media, we risk devaluing the importance of words. Words are abbreviated, spellings changed and auto-corrected, creating the possibility that our meaning may be misunderstood. We must choose our words more carefully than ever, particularly when speaking of the Word of God.

The Word in Sacred Scripture

Vatican II's *Dei Verbum* reminds us that Scripture is "truly the Word of God" and that the New Testament is hidden in the Old, while the Old is manifested in the New. This becomes evident when we trace the history of the Word of God throughout Scripture. In biblical times, the Israelites so revered the Word of God that they carried it throughout the desert in an ark. King Solomon designed an elaborate temple to house the Word, including a sanctuary for the Ten Commandments, which only the high priest was permitted to enter once a year. Even Pontius Pilate understood the significance of words. When questioned about his inscription of the phrase "King of the Jews," he famously responded, "What I have written, I have written." One wonders if Pilate would have acted differently if he'd recognized Jesus as the living Word of God.

Jesus Christ is the Incarnate Word of God

Dei Verbum also notes that Christ is both the "mediator and the sum total of Revelation." In other words, Christ is the final Word of God. He has been present and active throughout history. It follows that every instance of the world's existence has led to the Incarnation of the Word in human flesh. When God said, "Let there be light," Christ was that utterance. When God addressed Moses on Mt. Sinai, Christ was those commandments. John 1:1 states this explicitly: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." John later adds, "And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." Thus the Eucharist is housed in a tabernacle similar to the Ark of the Covenant: both are the Word of God, though in

different ways. In the Eucharist, we taste, touch and even smell the body and blood of Christ. During the proclamation of the Word, we see and hear the Word of God. Combined, the Eucharist and the Word offer a complete sensory experience of Christ's living presence.

Responses to the Word

Dei Verbum further affirms that as the direct speech of God, Sacred Scripture is transmitted to us through the Holy Spirit. Therefore, anyone who proclaims the Word of God acts as God's mouthpiece and proclaims Christ. Yet God does not speak just to hear the thunderous sound of His own voice; rather, He speaks directly *to* us. The thread of breath that connects speaker to listener is Christ, the Word of God. What must we do with this Word? *Dei Verbum* reminds us that the Word of God was specially entrusted to the apostles so that they might spread it to all people. The apostles preached the Word of God to pagans, Jews, and Gentiles alike. The most faithful disciples respond immediately and then testify to Jesus. Even the somewhat doubtful royal official in John's Gospel takes Jesus *at his word* and believes that his son will be healed. In turn, he testifies to Jesus by converting his entire household. Today, *Dei Verbum* assures us that the teaching authority and traditions of the early church are faithfully transmitted to us through our bishops and priests. What is required of us is a response.

The Role of the Faithful

So during this Year of Faith, let us not forget that in hearing and consuming the Word, we accept the Word. When we leave the church pews, let us carry the Word of God as the Israelites carried it in the desert - with tremendous care and reverence. Yet we must not be afraid to speak it. For each time we speak the Word of God - in reading the Bible to our children, or in offering forgiveness to one another - we speak Christ to a world that vastly underestimates the power of words.

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For additional reading: <http://catholic-resources.org/>

Moloney, Francis. *Belief in the Word: Reading the Fourth Gospel, John 1-4*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993.

View Vatican II: Inside the Council Episode Four: *Dei Verbum*, Christ is Present in the Word

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March 14, 17, and 19 at 8:30 pm ♦ March 21 at 10 am, 2 pm, and 8 pm ♦ March 24 at 8 pm