

The Symposium Concluding the Celebration of the Centenary from the Foundation of the Pontifical Biblical Institute

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In the period from May 2009 to May 2010 the Pontifical Biblical Institute celebrated a significant centenary of its foundation in 1909. The year of jubilee abounded with numerous international conferences and publications by the professors of the Institute. The crowning of the celebration was a symposium held from 3rd to 8th May 2010. The symposium attracted the attention of numerous professors, students as well as graduates from the Institute from across all the continents. Among them there were also representatives from Polish academic centers, including the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin (CUL), the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw (CSWU) and the University of Silesia in Katowice (US).

The week ending the celebration of the centenary from the foundation of the Pontifical Biblical Institute was divided into three parts. The first one, titled “*Verbum Dei, Verbum In Ecclesia, Verbum Mundo*” has been devoted to a reflection on the recently completed 12th Synod of Bishops on the Bible. In this part, organized under the auspices of the Pontifical Biblical Institute Alumni/Alumnae Association, on the first day the participants of the symposium attended a conference held by Monsignor Gianfranco Ravasi, the president of the Pontifical Council for Culture. Monsignor Ravasi discussed the essential issues to be included in the Apostolic exhortation crowning the works of 12th Synod of Bishops. His reflection covered, among other things: the historical and theological dimensions of Scripture, the complementarity of empirical and philosophico-theological knowledge in the process of arriving at the revealed truth, and the Bible as a foundation of the European ethos and culture.

In the lectures during the afternoon session, Monsignor Pasinya of Kinshasa referred to the Word of God as a historical foundation and a soul of theology, which ensures its vitality and compliance with the “hermeneutics of faith” (as opposed to the positivistic hermeneutics claiming that God does

not reveal Himself in human history). On the other hand, Michael Waldstein (Ave Maria University, USA) reflected on challenges posed for theological methodology by empirical sciences. He underscored the exaggerated ambitions of empirical sciences that usurp the exclusiveness for describing the entire human reality and argued that the hermeneutics of faith has rational and, therefore, scientific nature, as it relies on the common scientific category of “reliable testimony”.

The second day under a working title “*Verbum in Ecclesia*” started with a “round table session” during which the representatives of Churches from Europe, both Americas and Asia discussed reactions related to the Synod. A speech of particular interest was given by Bruna Costacurta (the Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome), in which, referring to the words Pope Benedict XVI said during the Synod, the Italian scholar pointed out the two strictly related methodological levels of exegesis: the historical-critical and theological one. Following the words of the Pope, if these two levels are not observed, one cannot speak of biblical exegesis, of the exegesis fitting the Bible. *Propositiones 26 and 27* of the Synod invite biblical scholars to overcome the dualism between exegesis and theology and to render their exegetical works more accessible in response to the expectations of the believers. Afterwards we had an opportunity to listen to a conference by Ludger Feldkämper, SVD., titled: “Pastoral Communications in the Bible”, dedicated to the problem of “bridging the gap” between biblical scholarship and the Bible in the pastoral ministry. The author presented the contributions the Biblical Institute has made to the biblical-pastoral ministry world-wide and exposed the challenges and development of the ministry since Vatican II.

On that day the afternoon session was divided into two parallel blocks covering eight simultaneous presentations. In the first part the participants attended different language and cultural groups, including: Spanish, Polish, German and Italian one, where scholars presented the specific character of biblical studies in the context of everyday life and work of local churches. The Spanish group focused on the subject of the “Bible in Interdisciplinary Perspective: the Origins of Christianity”: the role and use of social sciences and psychology in the contemporary exegesis. The German group drew the audience’s attention to the “Bible As a Textbook of Education”: Bible in pedagogy, education, and formation. Finally, the Italian group devoted their presentation to the issue of “*Evangelium et Cultura*”. The presentation prepared by a group of Polish scholars was headed by Henryk Drawnel SDB. Its subject was: “Bible at University and in the Pastoral Activity of the Church in Poland”. Among the lecturers there were: Waldemar Chrostowski (CSWU Warsaw), Henryk Witczyk (CUL Lublin) and Artur Malina (US Katowice).

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They gave the following presentations: 1) W. Chrostowski – the development of biblical studies in Poland during three periods (the years 1945-1962, 1962-1978 and 1978-2009); 2) H. Witczyk – biblical initiatives of the Polish church related to preaching, catechesis, and spiritual formation including, among other things, the creation of the Biblical Pastoral Association (Stowarzyszenie Dzieło Biblijne), “Lectio Divina” series, and the Biblical Week (Tydzień Biblijny); 3) A. Malina – the place and role of biblical exegesis at public universities: theological method and differences in the approach of theology and other sciences to the Bible. The presentations were followed by a brief discussion with the participation of the students of PBI and other attendees of the symposium. The second round of sessions held in the afternoon was devoted to the role of the Sacred Scripture in the theological and spiritual formation and liturgy. This part comprised three simultaneous presentations under the following titles: “Teaching and Faith”, “To Discover the Attraction of God’s Word”, “Bible and Liturgy. Bible in Liturgical Celebration: Adjacency, Presence and Function”.

The third day of the symposium started with a participation in a morning audience with the Holy Father. The afternoon agenda provided for a conference titled: “Verbum Mundo. Christianity in Dialogue with Other Cultures and Religions”. During this session the questions of biblical exegesis in relationship with Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism as well as in the context of Chinese culture and the theology of the Orthodox Church were discussed.

The next, that is, fourth day must have satisfied the participants who eagerly expected discussions involving issues connected with contemporary biblical exegesis. The goal of so called “exegetical day” was to take up and concisely present methodological and theological problems encountered in exegetical studies. In the section devoted to the Old Testament Jean Louis Ska, SJ, José Luis Sicre, SJ, and Luca Mazzinghi discussed the status and directions of contemporary studies on the Pentateuch, the Book of Joshua and sapiential literature. During the session dedicated to the New Testament, Reinhard Neudecker, SJ, presented the issue of relationships between rabbinical studies and the New Testament, Dean Béchard, SJ, introduced the topic of contemporary studies on the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles, while Jean-Noël Aletti, SJ, discussed problems connected with the *Corpus Paulinum*¹. That day surely gratified all attendees who expected specialist

¹ For detailed information, please visit http://www.biblico.it/Centenario/settimana_conclusiva.html, where you can find the texts of all lectures or see *Biblical Exegesis in Progress* [Analecta Biblica 176] published by the Professors of the Pontifical Biblical Institute to celebrate its centenary.

knowledge and accurate presentation of trends and directions prevailing in contemporary biblical studies.

The first part of the fifth day of the symposium was held under the auspices of the Faculty of Oriental studies. The representatives of universities conducting studies in Egyptology and Semitic studies, headed by Augustinus Gianto, SJ, discussed their implications for biblical studies. The afternoon session was dedicated to an ecumenical meeting titled “Different Faces of Moses”, presided over by Jean Louis Ska, SJ. It comprised four lectures given by the representatives of different creeds and religions from various academic centers: “Moses, the founder of Israel” (Daniele Garrone, Valdensian Theological Faculty, Rome), “Moses, the Lawgiver of Israel” (Innocenzo Cardellini, the Pontifical Lateran University, Rome), “Moses in the Hebrew Tradition” (Giovanni Rizzi, the Pontifical Urbaniana University, Rome) and “Moses in the Koran” (imam Yahya Pallavicini, the President of CO.RE.IS.). The symposium, rich in academic and associated cultural events, ended with a festive Eucharistic celebration in the church of St. Ignatius of Loyola in Rome, and then a traditional dinner was held at the inner courtyard of the Pontifical Biblical Institute.

Summing up, the week concluding the celebrations of the centenary of PBI gave a great opportunity to see how important is the place this academic institution holds in the life of the Church. Contribution of the generations of Institute’s professors in promoting biblical research both on the scientific and pastoral level is hard to underestimate. The *Biblicum* played a significant role in the development of catholic exegesis over the decades and continues to be a renowned and reputable academic center promoting biblical research and teaching students from all over the world. May the Pontifical Biblical Institute faithfully continue its mission so that “the chosen vine of the Sacred Scripture could bring an abundant fruit” (Pius X, *Vinea Electa*), for the good of the Church and *ad maiorem Dei gloriam*. All the texts from the Symposium are available at http://www.biblico.it/Centenario/maggio_2010.html.