

Item #56 (On the Uses of Scripture)

When I arrived at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome in the autumn of 1960 I knew I was facing a considerably time-consuming amount of class and study. But I made a determined effort to keep some time open for pastoral work, especially pastoral work involving Holy Scripture. This attitude had results especially in Holy Week and Easter, when I resolved to get to know Italy as well as I could so that I could say I was as fully integrated into the local culture as possible. As I understood it, this was the will of St. Ignatius for Jesuits working in a country not their own. As a result, in my fifty years of being stationed in Rome at the Biblical Institute I worked in fifty different dioceses in all parts of the country. All provinces of the country are represented in the following list of dioceses where I worked, including Sardinia and Sicily. And the result was something I had not anticipated, as I discuss below, following the list.

1961. Sabina and Poggio Mirteto

1962. Civitavecchia

1963. Grosseto

1964. Spoleto

1965. Terracina, Priverno and Sezze

1966. Bologna

1967. Cortona

1968. Chiusi and Pienza

1969. Perugia

1970. Volterra

1971. Fiesole

1972. Cremona

1973. Brescia

1974. Rossano

1975. Messina

1976. Cagliari

- 1977. Torino
- 1978. Genova
- 1979. Vicenza
- 1980, Potenza and Marsico Nuovo
- 1981. Udine
- 1982. Lecce
- 1983. Trento
- 1984. Salerno
- 1985. Roma
- 1986. Tivoli
- 1987. Macerata
- 1988. Aosta
- 1989. Rimini
- 1990. Lucera
- 1991. Aquila
- 1992. Campobasso
- 1993. Parma
- 1994, Bergamo
- 1995. Modena
- 1996. Varese
- 1997. Mantova
- 1998. Pescara
- 1999. Nardo Galipoli
- 2000. Ventimiglia

- 2001. Gorizia
- 2002. Cuneo
- 2003. Siracusa
- 2004. Trieste
- 2005. Trapani
- 2006. Alghero-Borsa
- 2007. Benevento
- 2008. Lucca
- 2009. Trebbia
- 2010. Pavia

Anyone who knows Italy can see at a glance of these dioceses that I have labored in all parts of the country, none excepted. I have wonderful memories of Catholics in action. Stories about them that are able to be made public are written down in dozens of letters that I have shared with relatives and friends. Often such stories were an immense surprise to me. For example, how Catholics in northwestern Sardinia a thousand years ago often had to bury the church statutes outside their churches to prevent them from being stolen and/or defaced by Muslims from the west and south. The Muslims claimed that said statues were being adored when, on the contrary, they were being venerated as they are today, in accord with the Second General Council of Nicaea in 787. I got to know how Catholics learned to live with the Mafia and related organizations. How Catholics learned to live with poverty. How Catholic men at times failed to live up to their Catholic responsibilities on a noticeable scale. But more often than not, how Catholics learned to live their everyday lives as they are lived in many other parts of the world, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit through generous bishops, priests, nuns, and parents. In all of this I was learning how the Catholic faith was inculturated in Italian life.

But I was also learning something else that I am not sure all professors of Scripture had learned and were teaching: that Sacred Scripture is not just something to be taught and studied as an historical or literary discipline; it is something to be taught as a

religious discipline.

To illustrate this point I quote from an article in the American journal *First Things* in the June-July 1997 print edition. The article consists of an interview of Fr. Albert Vanhoye, S.J. (now a Cardinal) who was chairman of the Pontifical Biblical Commission. at the time. The interviewer is Peter Williamson, at the time a student of Scripture. Here is an extensive quotation from the article that illustrates the point I am making and puts in relief my learning from my extensive pastoral Holy Week ministry in Italy for the fifty years 1961-2010.

WILLIAMSON: *There is a widespread perception that contemporary Scripture scholarship has become an exclusively historical or literary discipline, with little concern for the meaning of the Bible for believers today. Is this a real problem or only a mistaken perception?*

VANHOYE: It is a real problem, not a mistaken perception. In the legitimate desire to be scientific there is a tendency among scholars to study the Bible without paying attention to its religious message, seeking only to clarify, for instance, the historical context or the stages of the formation of a text. But the Bible is a collection of religious writings. If one does not explain the religious meaning of a biblical writing, one has not explained the text adequately.

WILLIAMSON: *One of the themes of the document (the Pontifical Biblical Commission's "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church") that provoked intense interest by some commentators was the section on Actualization, which is a new term in Church documents on Scripture. What is the significance of the term?*

VANHOYE: To actualize Scripture means to bring the word of God into the present.

(Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, June 29, 2020)

