



# The Holy See

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**MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI  
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE PLENARY MEETING  
OF THE PONTIFICAL BIBLICAL COMMISSION**

*To my Venerable Brother  
Cardinal William Joseph Levada  
President of the Pontifical Biblical Commission*

I am pleased to send to you, to the Secretary and to all the Members of the Pontifical Biblical Commission my cordial greeting on the occasion of the annual Plenary Assembly. This Commission has met for the third time, to discuss the theme entrusted to it: “Inspiration and Truth of the Bible”.

This theme is one of the principal points of my Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*, which is addressed in the first part (cf. n. 19). “A key concept”, I wrote in this Document, “for understanding the sacred text as the word of God in human words is certainly that of inspiration” (ibid.). Inspiration itself as an activity of God ensures that the word of God is expressed in human words. Consequently the theme of inspiration is “clearly decisive for an adequate approach to the Scriptures and their correct interpretation” (ibid.). Indeed an interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures which ignores or forgets their inspiration does not take into account their most important and precious characteristic, the fact that they come from God.

Such an interpretation does not accede or give access to the word of God in human words and hence loses the priceless treasure that Sacred Scripture contains for us. This kind of approach is concerned with merely human words, although they can be, in a different way in accordance with the different writings, words of extraordinary depth and beauty. In the discussion on inspiration it is a question of the intimate nature and of the decisive and distinctive meaning of Sacred Scripture, namely, of its very quality as the word of God.

In the same Apostolic Exhortation, I also mentioned that “the Synod Fathers also stressed the link

between the theme of inspiration and that of the truth of the Scriptures. A deeper study of the process of inspiration will doubtless lead to a greater understanding of the truth contained in the sacred books” (ibid.). According to the conciliar Constitution *Dei Verbum*, God addresses his word to us in order “to make known the mystery of his will (cf. Eph 1:9)” (n. 2). Through his word, God wants to communicate to us the whole truth about himself and about his project of salvation for humanity. The task of discovering ever better the truth of the sacred books is therefore equivalent to seeking to know God and the mystery of his salvific will ever better.

“Theological reflection has always considered inspiration and truth as two key concepts for an ecclesial hermeneutic of the sacred Scriptures. Nonetheless, one must acknowledge the need today for a fuller and more adequate study of these realities, in order better to respond to the need to interpret the sacred texts in accordance with their nature” (*Verbum Domini*, n. 19). In addressing the theme “Inspiration and Truth of the Bible”, the Pontifical Biblical Commission is called to make its specific and qualified contribution to this necessary deepening. It is in fact essential and fundamental for the life and mission of the Church that the sacred texts be interpreted in accordance with their nature: Inspiration and Truth are constitutive characteristics of this nature. Therefore your commitment will be truly useful for the life and mission of the Church.

Lastly, I would only like to mention the fact that in a good hermeneutic it is not possible to apply mechanically the criterion of inspiration, or indeed of absolute truth by extrapolating a single sentence or expression. The plan in which it is possible to perceive Sacred Scripture as a Word of God is that of the unity of God, in a totality in which the individual elements are illuminated reciprocally and are opened to understanding.

In wishing each one of you that the continuation of your work will be fruitful, I would like, lastly, to express to you my warm appreciation of the activity carried out by the Biblical Commission to further the knowledge, study and acceptance of the word of God in the world. With these sentiments I entrust each one of you to the motherly protection of the Virgin Mary, whom we invoke, together with the whole Church, as *Sedes Sapientiae* and I cordially impart to you, Venerable Brother and to all the Members of the Pontifical Biblical Commission a special Apostolic Blessing.

*From the Vatican, 2 May 2011*

**BENEDICTUS PP. XVI**