

Catholic Synod Follow-Up

The 55 propositions emanating from the Synod, which have now been passed to the Holy Father, Benedict XVI, and which will form the basis of his Papal Exhortation on the Synod, will dominate the Catholic Church for the next decade. The UBS needs to position itself appropriately to take advantage of this unique time in the life of the Catholic Church.

The final product of every Synod of Bishops is a list of formal proposals, or “propositions,” submitted to the Pope. The propositions are advisory only, meaning it is up to the Pope to decide what action, if any, to take on the basis of these recommendations. In general, however, the momentum generated by a synod tends to stimulate discussion and action in the church even before popes reach final judgment.

Officially, the propositions are formulated and voted upon in Latin. **On Oct. 25, the Vatican released a “provisional and unofficial” translation of the propositions into Italian.** The following is a rush National Catholic Reporter (Independent US Weekly Newspaper) translation of the 55 final propositions of the Synod of Bishops on the Bible into English.

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The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church
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Final Propositions

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Introduction

Proposition 1: Documents presented to the Supreme Pontiff

The synod wishes to present to the consideration of the Supreme Pontiff – beyond the documents on the Word of God in the life and mission of the church relative to this synod, meaning the *Lineamenta*, the *Instrumentum Laboris*, the *relatio ante* and *post disceptationem*, the texts of the interventions (both those presented in the hall and those in written form), the reports of the *circoli minori* and their discussions – some specific proposals, which the fathers regard as especially important. The synod fathers humbly request that the Holy Father consider offering a document on the Word of God in the life and mission of the church, also in light of the year dedicated to St. Paul, Apostle of the Gentiles, in the 2,000 anniversary of his birth.

Proposition 2: From the Dogmatic Constitution Dei Verbum to the Synod on the Word of God

The synod fathers, more than forty years after the promulgation of the Dogmatic Constitution on divine revelation *Dei Verbum* as part of the work of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, recognize with a grateful spirit the great benefits carried to the life of the church by this document, on the exegetical, spiritual, pastoral and ecumenical levels. Along the path of the history of the *intellectus fidei* and of Christian doctrine, this constitution brought to light the Trinitarian horizon of revelation and its place in salvation history. In these years, the ecclesial consciousness had undeniably grown that Jesus Christ, the Word of God incarnate, “perfected revelation by fulfilling it through his whole work of making Himself present and manifesting Himself: through His words and deeds, His signs and wonders, but especially through His death and glorious resurrection from the dead and final sending of the Spirit of truth. Moreover He confirmed with divine testimony what revelation proclaimed, that God is with us to free us from the darkness of sin and death, and to raise us up to life eternal.” (DV 4).

All this has encouraged a deepening awareness of the infinite value of the Word of God which gives itself to us in the Sacred Scriptures, that inspired witness of revelation, which, along with the living Tradition of the church, constitutes the supreme rule of the faith (see DV 21). It is this same Word which is conserved and interpreted faithfully by the magisterium (see DV 10), which is celebrated in the sacred liturgy and which gives itself to us in the Eucharist as the bread of eternal life. (Jn 6).

Building upon what has emerged in these years, the church feels today the need to further deepen the mystery of the Word of God in its various expressions and pastoral implications. Therefore, this synod formulates the desire that all the faithful will grow in their awareness of the mystery of Christ, the one saviour and mediator between God and humanity (see 1 Tim 2:5; Hebrews 9:15), and that a church renewed by a religious listening to the Word of God can undertake a new missionary season, announcing the Good News to all people.

First Part

The Word of God in the Faith of the Church

Proposition 3: Analogia Verba Dei

The expression “Word of God” is analogical. It refers in the first place to the Word of God in the Person who is the Only-begotten Son of God, born from the Father before all time, Word of the Father made flesh. (Jn 1:14). The divine Word, already present in the creation of the universe and, in a particular way, in the creation of humanity, was revealed in the course of the history of salvation, and is attested to in written form in the Old and the New Testament. This Word of God transcends the Sacred Scriptures, even if Scripture contains the Word in an entirely unique way. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Jn 14:26; 16:12-15), the church is a custodian of the Word and conserves it in its living Tradition (DV 10), and offers it to all humanity through preaching, the sacraments, and its witness of life. Pastors, therefore, must educate the People of God to understand the different meanings of the expression “Word of God.”

Proposition 4: Dialogic dimension of Revelation

“Dialogue,” in reference to revelation, implies the primacy of the Word of God addressed to humanity. In his great love, in fact, God wanted to meet humanity and took the initiative to speak to people, calling them to share his own life. The uniqueness of Christianity is revealed in the event of Jesus Christ, the culmination of revelation, fulfilment of God’s promises and the mediator of the encounter between humanity and God. He “who has revealed God to us” (Jn 1:18) is the unique and definitive Word consigned to humanity. In order to receive the revelation, the human person must open the mind and heart to the action of the Holy Spirit, who creates understanding of the Word of God present in the Holy Scriptures. The human person responds to God in complete freedom with the obedience of faith. (Rm 1:5; 2 Cor 10:5-6; DV 5).

Mary, the Mother of Jesus, personifies this obedience of faith in an exemplary manner. She is also the archetype of the faith of the church, which listens to and welcomes the Word of God.

Proposition 5: The Holy Spirit and the Word of God

The Sacred Scriptures, being a gift presented by the Holy Spirit to the Church as the Spouse of Christ, have in the church their proper exegetical location.

The same Spirit, which is the author of the Holy Scriptures, is also the guide to their correct interpretation in the formation through time of the *fides ecclesiae*, the faith of the church.

The synod recommends to pastors to remind all the baptized of the role of the Holy Spirit in inspiration (DV 11), in the interpretation and the comprehension of the Sacred Scriptures (DV 12). As a consequence, all of us disciples are invited to invoke frequently the Holy Spirit, so that the Spirit may lead to an ever-deeper awareness of the Word of God and the witness of our faith (Jn 15:26-27). May they remind the faithful that the Sacred Scriptures

close evoking the common cry of the Spirit and of the Spouse: "Lord Jesus, Come!" (Rev 22:17-20).

Proposition 6: Patristic reading of Scripture

For the interpretation of the Biblical text, the patristic reading must not be overlooked, which distinguishes two senses: the literal and the spiritual. The literal sense is that signified by the words of Scripture and is ascertained using the scientific instruments of critical exegesis. The spiritual sense also concerns the reality of the events of which Scripture speaks, taking account of the living Tradition of the whole church and the analogy of faith, which implies the intrinsic connection of the truths of the faith among themselves and in their totality in the design of divine revelation.

Proposition 7: Unity between the Word of God and the Eucharist

It's important to consider the profound unity between the Word of God and the Eucharist (DV 12), as expressed in some particular passages, including John 6:35-38 and Luke 24:13-35, in such a way as to overcome the dichotomy between these two realities that is often present in theological and pastoral reflection. In this way, the connection between the preceding synod on the Eucharist becomes more evident.

The Word of God becomes flesh sacramental in the Eucharistic event and carries Sacred Scripture to its fulfilment. The Eucharist is a principal hermeneutical context for Scripture, just as Scripture illuminates and explains the Eucharistic mystery. In this sense, the synod fathers hope that a theological reflection on the sacramentality of the Word of God can be promoted. Without the recognition of the real presence of the Lord in the Eucharist, the intelligibility of the Scriptures remains incomplete.

Proposition 8: Word of reconciliation and conversion

The Word of God is a Word of reconciliation, because in it God reconciles all things to himself (2 Cor 5:18-20; Eph 1:10). The merciful forgiveness of God, incarnate in Jesus, raises up the sinner.

The importance of the Word of God in the sacraments of healing (penance and anointing of the sick) must be underlined. The church must be the community which, reconciled by that Word which is Jesus Christ (Eph 2:14-18; Col 1:22), offers a space of reconciliation, mercy and forgiveness to all.

The healing force of the Word of God is living appeal to a constant personal conversion in the listener him- and herself, and an incentive to a courageous announcement of the reconciliation offered by the Father in Christ (2 Cor 5:20-21).

In these days of conflict of every kind and interreligious tensions, in fidelity to the work of reconciliation accomplished by God in Jesus, may Catholics commit themselves to giving examples of reconciliation, seeking to share the same human, ethical and religious values in their relationship with God and with others. May they thus seek to build a just and peaceful society.

Proposition 9: Encounter with the Word in the reading of Sacred Scripture

This synod firmly invites, once again, all the faithful to an encounter with Jesus, Word of God made flesh, as an event of grace that runs through the reading and the hearing of the Sacred Scriptures. It recalls St. Cyprian, expressing a thought shared by the fathers: "Attend assiduously to prayer and to *Lectio Divina*. When you pray you speak with God, when you read it's God who speaks with you." (*Ad Donatum*, 15)

Therefore, we vividly hope that a new season of great love for the Sacred Scriptures on the part of all the members of the People of God will flow from this assembly, so that a relationship with the person of Jesus will come from their prayerful and faithful reading over time. In this sense, it's hoped, to the extent that it's possible, that every member of the faithful should have a personal copy of the Bible (Dt 17:18-20), and enjoy the benefits of the special indulgence connected to the reading of the Scriptures. (*Indulgentiarium Doctrina*, 30)

Proposition 10: The Old Testament in the Christian Bible

Jesus prayed the Psalms and read the Law and the Prophets, citing them in his preaching and presenting himself as the fulfilment of the Scriptures (Mt 5:17; Luke 4:21, 24:27; Jn 5:46). The New Testament constantly draws from the Old Testament words and expressions that permit it to recount and explain the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. (Mt: 1-2 and the Exodus; Mk 6:3; Luke 24:25-31). At the same time, for the rest, his death and resurrection "give to these same texts a fullness of meaning which was previously inconceivable." (Pontifical Biblical Commission, "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church," III.A.2.) As a consequence, the apostolic faith in Jesus was proclaimed "according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor 15), and it presented Jesus Christ as the "yes" of God to all the promises (2 Cor 1:20). For these reasons, awareness of the Old Testament is indispensable for anyone who believes in the gospel of Jesus Christ, because – according to the words of St. Augustine – the New Testament is hidden in the Old, and the Old is made manifest in the New. (*Quaestiones in Heptateucum*, 2:73)

For this reason, we hope that preaching and catechesis will take into proper account the pages of the Old Testament, explaining them adequately in the context of the history of salvation, and helping the People of God to appreciate them in light of faith in Jesus the Lord.

Proposition 11: Word of God and charity towards the poor

One of the characteristic traits of Sacred Scripture is revelation of the predilection of God for the poor. (Mt 25:31-46) Jesus of Nazareth, the incarnate Word of God, passed through this world doing good. (Acts 10:35) The Word of God, received with an open heart, generates an abundance of charity and justice towards all in the church, and above all towards the poor. As the encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* teaches, the first to have a right to the announcement of the Gospel are precisely the poor, who are needy not only for bread but for words of life. Above all, the poor are not merely the objects of charity, but also agents of evangelization, in that they are open to God and generous in sharing with others. Pastors are called to listen to them, to learn from them, to guide them in their faith and to motivate them to be the artisans of their own history. Deacons charged with the service of charity have a special responsibility in this regard. The synod encourages them in their ministry.

Proposition 12: Inspiration and truth in the Bible

The synod proposes that the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith clarify the concepts of "inspiration" and "truth" in the Bible, along with their reciprocal relationship, in order to better understand the teaching of Dei Verbum 11. In particular, it's necessary to emphasize the specific character of Catholic Biblical hermeneutics in this area.

Proposition 13: Word of God and Natural Law

The synod fathers are well aware of the great challenges presented by the current historical moment. One of these challenges touches the enormous developments in science with

regard to understanding nature. Paradoxically, the more this understanding grows, the less we seem to perceive the ethical message which comes from it. In the history of thought, ancient philosophers generally referred to this principle as the *lex naturalis*, or the natural moral law. As Benedict XVI has observed, this expression seems to have become incomprehensible today “as a result of a concept of nature which is no longer metaphysical but solely empirical. The fact that nature, being itself, no longer seems transparent in terms of its moral message creates a sense of disorientation that renders the everyday choices of life precarious and uncertain.” (Feb. 12, 2007)

In light of the teaching of Sacred Scripture, which is recalled above all by the Apostle Paul in the Letter to the Romans (Rm 2:14-15), it's good to confirm anew that this law is written in the depths of every human heart and that everyone has access to it. It has as its basic principle the necessity to “do good and avoid evil”; that's a truth which imposes itself as self-evident upon all, and from which arise the other principles that regulate ethical judgments about the rights and duties of everyone. It's also good to offer a reminder that the understanding of natural law grows from nourishing oneself with the Word of God, permitting progress in moral awareness. The synod, for this reason, recommends to all pastors to take particular care so that ministers of the Word are sensitive to the rediscovery of natural law and its function in the formation of consciences.

Second Part

The Word of God in the Life of the Church

Proposition 14: Word of God and Liturgy

The assembly convoked and reunited by the Spirit to listen to the proclamation of the Word of God, is transformed by the same action of the Spirit which reveals itself in the celebration. In fact, where the church is, the Spirit of the Lord is there also; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there the church is too. (St. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, 24:1)

The synod fathers confirm that the liturgy constitutes the privileged place in which the Word of God fully expresses itself, both in the celebration of the sacraments and above all the Eucharist, as well as in the Liturgy of the Hours and in the Liturgical Year. The mystery of salvation narrated in Sacred Scripture finds in the liturgy its proper place of proclamation, hearing and realization.

For this reason we suggest, for example:

- The book of Sacred Scripture, even outside the liturgical action, should have a visible place of honour inside the church.
- The use of silence after the first and second reading, and also at the close of the homily, should be encouraged, as is suggested by the General Instruction on the Roman Missal (56).
- Celebrations of the Word of God concentrated on the Sunday readings could be anticipated.
- Readings from Sacred Scripture should be done from liturgically worthy books, meaning the Lectionaries and the Book of the Gospels, and treated with the deepest respect for the Word of God they contain.
- The Book of the Gospels should be honoured with a procession prior to proclamation, especially during liturgical feasts.
- The role of the servants of proclamation should be emphasized: lectors and cantors;
- Lectors, both men and women, should be formed adequately so that they can proclaim the Word of God in a clear and comprehensible manner. They're invited to study and to give witness with their lives to the contents of the Word they read.
- The Word of God should be proclaimed in a clear way, being at home with the dynamics of communication.
- Persons who have difficulty receiving the Word of God in the usual ways, such the blind

and those who cannot hear, should not be forgotten, especially in the Eucharistic liturgy.

- There should be a competent and effective use of acoustic instruments.

Moreover, the synod fathers feel the need to underline the grave responsibility of those who preside at the Eucharist to never substitute other texts for those of Sacred Scripture. No spiritual or literary text can reach the value and the richness contained in Sacred Scripture which is the Word of God.

Proposition 15: Homiletic effectiveness and "Directory on the Homily"

The homily enables the Word which is proclaimed to be realized: "Today, this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing." (Luke 4:21) It leads to the mystery which is celebrated, inviting all to mission sharing the joys and sorrows, the hopes and fears of the faithful – thus disposing the assembly both to the profession of faith (Creed) and to the universal prayer of the Mass.

There should be a homily at every Mass *cum populo*, even during the week. It's necessary that preachers (bishops, priests and deacons) prepare themselves in prayer, so that they preach with conviction and passion. They must ask themselves three questions:

- What are the proclaimed readings saying?
- What are they saying to me personally?
- What must I say to the community, taking account of its concrete situation?

The preacher must above first of all allow himself to be challenged by the Word of God which he announces. The homily must be nourished by doctrine and must transmit the teaching of the church in order to strengthen the faith, calling listeners to conversion in the context of the celebration and preparing them for realization of the paschal Eucharistic mystery.

To help the preacher in the ministry of the Word, and in continuity with the teaching of the Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*, the synod fathers hope that a "Directory on the Homily" can be elaborated, which would present, together with the principles of homiletics and the art of communication, the content of the Biblical themes that are found in the lectionaries used in the liturgy.

Proposition 16: Lectionary

It's recommended that an examination be carried out of the Roman Lectionary to see if the current selection and ordering of the readings is truly adequate to the mission of the church in this historical moment. In particular, the bond between the Old Testament and the pericopes of the gospels should be reconsidered, so that they do not imply an overly restrictive reading of the Old Testament or an exclusion of certain important passages. The revision of the lectionary could be carried out in dialogue with those ecumenical partners who use this common lectionary.

It's hoped that the problem of the lectionary in the liturgies of the Oriental Catholic Churches will be taken authoritatively under examination.

Proposition 17: Ministry of the Word and women

The synod fathers recognize and encourage the service of the laity in the transmission of the faith. Women, in particular, have an indispensable role on this point, above all in the family and in catechesis. In fact, they know how to arouse hearing of the Word and the personal relationship with God, and how to communicate the meaning of forgiveness and evangelical sharing.

It's hoped that ministry of lector can be opened also to women, so that their role as announcers of the Word may be recognized in the Christian community.

Proposition 18: Celebrations of the Word of God

Following the diverse forms received in the liturgical tradition, celebration of the Word of God is recommended. (*Sacrosanctum concilium* 35). Many ecclesial communities, which do not have the possibility of a Sunday Eucharistic celebration, find in the celebration of the Word the food for their faith and their Christian witness.

Celebration of the Word is one of the privileged places for encounter with the Lord, because in this proclamation, Christ is made present and continues to speak to his people. (SC 7). Even in the middle of today's din, which makes effective listening difficult, the faithful are encouraged to cultivate a disposition of interior silence and a way of hearing the Word of God that transforms life.

The synod fathers recommend that ritual directories be formulated, based on the experience of the churches in which well-formed catechists regularly conduct Sunday assemblies around the Word of God. Their aim would be to ensure that these celebrations are not confused with the Eucharistic liturgy.

The reception of the Word, the prayer of praise, the giving of thanks and the intercessions that compose the celebration of the Word of God are manifestations of the Spirit in the heart of the faithful and in the Christian assembly gathered around the Word of God. The Holy Spirit, in fact, enables the Word of God proclaimed and celebrated to bear fruit in the hearts and lives of those who receive it.

Moreover, we retain that pilgrimages, festivals, diverse forms of popular piety, missions, spiritual retreats and special days of penance, reparation and forgiveness are also a concrete opportunity offered to the faithful to celebrate the Word of God and to increase their awareness of it.

Proposition 19: Liturgy of the Hours

The Liturgy of the Hours is a privileged form of hearing the Word of God, because it puts the faithful in contact with the Sacred Scripture and with the living Tradition of the church. Therefore, the synod hopes that the faithful will participate in the Liturgy of the Hours, especially Lauds and Vespers. For this reason, where it doesn't presently exist, it would be useful to prepare a simple form of the Liturgy of the Hours.

Bishops, priests, deacons, religious, and all those to whom it has been assigned by the church should be reminded of their sacred duty to pray the Liturgy of the Hours. Moreover, it's vividly recommended to the lay faithful, so that this liturgy can become in an ever more true sense the prayer of the whole church.

Proposition 20: Word of God, matrimony and family

The Word of God stands at the origins of matrimony (Gen 2:24). Jesus himself inserted matrimony among the institutions of his Reign (Mt 19:4-8), giving it a sacramental status. In the sacramental celebration, with the man and the woman pronouncing a prophetic word of reciprocal donation of self, they become "one flesh," a sign of the mystery of the union of Christ and the church. (Eph 5:32) Through the fidelity and the unity of the life of the family, the spouses are the first announcers of the Word of God to their children. It's necessary to sustain them and to help them develop within the family modes of domestic celebration of the Word, reading the Bible, and other forms of prayer.

Spouses should recall that the Word of God is a precious source of support amid difficulties in conjugal life and in the family.

Proposition 21: Word of God and small communities

The synod recommends the formation of small ecclesial communities where the Word of God is heard, studied and prayed over, also in the form of the Rosary as a Biblical meditation. (John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*) In many countries there are already small communities that may be formed by families, based in parishes, or connected to diverse ecclesial movements and new communities. These small communities meet regularly around the Word of God, in order to share it among themselves, and they draw strength from it.

Some rarely have the possibility of celebrating the Eucharist. They take advantage of the experience of community and meet the Word of God personally. Through the reading of the Bible, they gain an experience of being personally loved by God. The service of the laity who guide these communities must be esteemed and promoted, because they render a missionary service to which all the baptized are called.

Proposition 22: Word of God and prayerful reading

The synod proposes that all the faithful, including the young, be exhorted to come close to Scripture by means of a “prayerful” and assiduous reading (DV 25), in such a way that the dialogue with God becomes a daily reality for the People of God.

For this reason, it’s important that:

- Prayerful reading should be deeply bound to the example of Mary and of the saints in the history of the church, who achieved a reading of the Word according to the Spirit;
- Masters in the material should be consulted;
- Pastors, priests and deacons, and in a particular way future priests, should have an adequate formation so that they in turn can form the People of God in this spiritual dynamic;
- The faithful should be initiated in prayerful reading using the most appropriate method according to the circumstances, categories and culture, in both personal and community settings (Lectio Divina, spiritual exercises in daily life, the “Seven Steps” in Africa and elsewhere, diverse methods of prayer, and in ecclesial base communities, etc.)
- The practice of prayerful reading using the liturgical texts that the church proposes for the Sunday and daily Eucharistic celebrations should be encouraged, in order to better understand the relationship between the Word and the Eucharist;
- Care should be taken so that the prayerful reading of the Scriptures, above all in community, end in a commitment to charity.

Aware of the of widespread use of Lectio Divina and other analogous methods, the synod fathers see in them a sign of hope, and encourage all responsible parties in the church to multiply their efforts in this sense.

Proposition 23: Catechesis and Sacred Scripture

Catechesis must preferably have its roots in Christian revelation. It must take as its model the pedagogy of Jesus on the route to Emmaus.

On the path to Emmaus, Jesus opens the heart of the disciples to the intelligibility of the Scriptures. (Luke 24:27) His way of proceeding shows that catechesis which has roots in Christian revelation presupposes the explanation of the Scriptures. He invites us also to reach the people of today in order to transmit to them the gospel of salvation:

- To the smallest children, with particular attention;
- To those who need a formation which is better rooted in the Scriptures;
- To the catechumens, as it’s important to accompany them in their journey, showing them the plan of God through the reading of Sacred Scripture, preparing them to encounter the Lord in the sacraments of Christian initiation and to commit themselves to the community and to being missionaries.

The pre-baptismal catechumenate should be followed by a post-baptismal mystagogy, a continual formation in which Sacred Scripture and the Catechism of the Catholic Church must occupy the central place.

Proposition 24: Word of God and consecrated life

Consecrated life is born from hearing the Word of God and embracing the Gospel as its norm of life. From the school of the Word, it continually rediscovers its identity and is converted into an “evangelical witness” for the church and the world. Called to be living “exegetes” of the Word of God (Benedict XVI, Feb. 2, 2008), religious life is itself a word with which God continues to speak to the church and to the world.

The synod thanks consecrated persons for their witness to the Gospel and for their readiness to proclaim it on the geographical and cultural frontiers of the missions, through their different services rooted in their charisms. It exhorts them at the same time to preserve personal and community spaces for listening to the Word of God, and to promote schools of Biblical prayer open to the laity, above all to the young. Consecrated persons know how to hear the Word of God with the heart of the poor, and they express their response in their commitment to justice, peace and the integrity of creation.

The synod recognizes the importance of contemplative life and its precious contribution to the tradition of *Lectio Divina*. Monastic communities are schools of spirituality and strengthen the lives of the particular churches. “The monastery, as a spiritual oasis, reminds the world of today what’s most important – that which is, in the end, the only decisive thing: There’s an ultimate reason worth living for, which is God and his inscrutable love.” (Benedict XVI, *Angelus*, Nov. 18, 2007)

In the contemplative life, the Word is welcomed, prayer over and celebrated. Care must be taken, therefore, that these communities receive the Biblical and theological formation appropriate to their life and mission.

Proposition 25: Necessity of two levels in exegetical research

The Biblical hermeneutics proposed in *Dei Verbum* 12 continue to be highly contemporary and greatly effective, presupposing two methodological levels, distinct but related, for adequate exegetical work.

The first level corresponds, in fact, to the so-called historical-critical method, which is often fruitfully utilized in modern research and which entered into the Catholic arena above all with the encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* of the Servant of God Pius XII. This method is rendered necessary by the very nature of the history of salvation, which is not mythology, but a true history with its apex in the incarnation of the Word, divine and eternal, which comes to live in human time (Jn 1:14). The Bible and the history of salvation thus demand to be studied with the methods of serious historical research.

The second methodological level, which is necessary for a proper interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures, corresponds to the divine nature of the human words in the Bible. The Second Vatican Council correctly recalls that the Bible must be interpreted with the help of the same Holy Spirit that guided the process of writing it down.

Biblical hermeneutics must not be considered complete if – along with the historical study of the texts – there is not also adequate research concerning the theological dimension. *Dei Verbum* identified and listed three decisive points of reference for reaching the divine dimension, and therefore, the theological sense of Scripture: the unity of all of Scripture, the living tradition of the entire church, and finally, attention to the analogy of faith.

“Only where the two methodological levels, the historical-critical and the theological, are both observed can one speak of as theological exegesis, an exegesis appropriate to this book.” (Benedict XVI, Oct. 14, 2008)

Proposition 26: Broadening the perspectives of current exegetical study

The positive fruits borne by the use of modern historical-critical research are undeniable; at the same time, however, it's necessary to look at the current state of exegetical studies with an attentive eye also to its difficulties. While current academic exegesis, including Catholic exegesis, operates on a very high level with regard to historical-critical methodology, including its happiest and most recent integrations (Pontifical Biblical Commission, "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church"), one cannot say the same regarding study of the theological dimension of the Biblical texts. Unfortunately, the theological level indicated by the three elements of Dei Verbum 12 very often appears to be absent.

The first consequence of that absence is that the Bible becomes for its readers a book only of the past, by now incapable of speaking to our present. Under these conditions, Biblical exegesis risks becoming no more than historiography and the history of literature.

The second consequence, perhaps even more grave, is the disappearance of the hermeneutics of faith indicated in Dei Verbum. In the place of a believing hermeneutics, a positivistic and secular hermeneutics insinuates itself, denying the possibility of either the presence, or the accessibility, of the divine in the history of humanity.

The synod fathers, while they sincerely thank the many exegetes and theologians who have given, and who are still giving, an essential help in discovering the deep sense of the Scriptures, invite all to an increased commitment so that the theological level of Biblical interpretation can be reached with greater strength and clarity.

In order to truly arrive at the deepened love for the Scriptures hoped for by the Council, the principles that Dei Verbum exhaustively and clearly indicated must be applied with greater care.

Proposition 27: Overcoming the dualism between exegetes and theologians

For the life and mission of the church, and for the future of the faith within contemporary cultures, it's necessary to overcome the dualism between exegesis and theology.

Unfortunately, quite often an unproductive separation exists between exegesis and theology, even at the highest academic levels. A worrying consequence is uncertainty, and a lack of solidity, in the formative intellectual journey of some future candidates to ecclesial ministry. Biblical theology and systematic theology are two dimensions of that lone reality we call "theology."

The synod fathers, therefore, respectfully address an appeal both to theologians and to exegetes, so that – with a clearer and more synthetic collaboration between the two – the force of the Scriptures will not be missing in contemporary theology, and study of the Scriptures will not be reduced to merely revealing the historiographical dimension of the inspired texts. "Where exegesis is not theology, Scripture cannot be the soul of theology and, vice versa, when theology is not essentially the interpretation of the Scripture in the Church, this theology has no foundation anymore." (Benedict XVI, Oct. 14, 2008)

Proposition 28: Dialogue among exegetes, theologians and pastors

The Episcopal Conferences are requested to favour regular meetings among pastors, theologians and exegetes, with the aim of promoting greater communion in the service of the Word of God.

We hope that exegetes and theologians can share, more and more, the fruits of their science in order to spread the faith and edify the People of God, always keeping in mind the characteristic dimensions of Catholic interpretation of the Bible. (Pontifical Biblical Commission, "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church," III.)

Proposition 29: Difficulties in reading the Old Testament

At times difficulties in reading the Old Testament arise because the texts contain elements of violence, injustice, immorality and behaviour on the part of important Biblical personalities which is scarcely exemplary.

Adequate preparation of the faithful for reading these pages is called for, as well as a formation that reads the texts in their historical and literary context in a way that favours a Christian interpretation. It has the Gospel, and the new commandment of Jesus Christ fulfilled in the paschal mystery, as its central hermeneutical key. Nonetheless, it's important not to overlook the Old Testament, which, despite its difficulties, is essential to a complete understanding of salvation history.

Proposition 30: Pastoral work with the Bible

Dei Verbum exhorts making the Word of God not just the soul of theology, but also the soul of all pastoral efforts – of the life and the mission of the church. (DV 24) Bishops must be the first promoters of this dynamic in their dioceses. In order to be a herald, and a credible herald, a bishop must be nourished by the Word of God in order to sustain his Episcopal ministry and to render it ever more fruitful. The synod recommends increasing pastoral work with the Bible not in juxtaposition with other forms of pastoral work, but as the Biblical animation of all pastoral efforts.

Under the guide of the pastors, the faithful participate in the mission of the church. The synod fathers desire to express the most lively esteem and gratitude, as well as encouragement, for the service to evangelization that so many laity, and in particular women, offer with generosity and commitment in communities all around the world – following the example of Mary Magdalene, the first witness to the paschal joy.

Proposition 31: Word of God and presbyters

The Word of God is indispensable for the formation of the heart of a good pastor, minister of the Word. In this regard *Pastores dabo Vobis* recalls: “The priest ought to be the first ‘believer’ in the word, while being fully aware that the words of his ministry are not ‘his’, but those of the One who sent him. He is not the master of the word, but its servant. He is not the sole possessor of the word; in its regard he is in debt to the People of God.” (John Paul II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores dabo Vobis*, 26.) Priests, and in particular pastors of parishes, are called to nourish themselves every day from the Sacred Scriptures and to communicate them with wisdom and generosity to the faithful entrusted to their care.

Proposition 32: Formation of candidates to holy orders

Candidates to the priesthood must learn to love the Word of God. Scripture must therefore be the soul of their theological formation, underlining the indispensable circularity among exegesis, theology, spirituality and mission. The formation of priests must therefore include multiple approaches to Scripture:

- Prayerful reading, in particular *Lectio Divina*, as much personal as communitarian, in the context of a first reading of the Bible. It will be necessary to pursue it during the entire path of formation, taking into account that which the church disposes with regard to the care of retreats and spiritual exercises in the education of seminarians.
- Nourishing oneself assiduously from the Word of God, including through the richness of the Divine Office.
- The discovery of exegesis in its diverse methods. A precise and full study of the hermeneutical rules is necessary in order to overcome the risks of arbitrary interpretation.

The methods of exegesis must be understood in the correct manner, with their possibilities and their limits, permitting a correct and fruitful understanding of the Word of God.

- Awareness of the history of what reading the Bible has produced in the Fathers of the church, the Saints, the Doctors, and the masters of the spiritual life up to our own time.
- Intensifying, during the years of study, of formation for preaching, and vigilance concerning permanent formation during the exercise of ministry, so that the homily can speak effectively to those who hear it. (Acts 2:37)

- Parallel to formation inside the seminary, future priests are also invited to take part in meetings with groups or associations of laity gathering around the Word of God. These meetings, which have developed for a sufficiently long period of time, favour in future ministers the experience and the taste for hearing what the Holy Spirit is arousing in believers gathering as the church, whether these gatherings are large or small.

A serious study of philosophy should not be overlooked, which promotes a clear understanding of the presuppositions and implications contained in the diverse hermeneutical methods applied to the study of the Bible. (*Optatm totius*, 15)

In this regard, it's to be hoped that in faculties of philosophy, a philosophical and cultural mode of thought (including art and music) can be developed and taught which is open to transcendence, so that the disciples can hear and understand better the Word of God which alone can satisfy the desires of the human heart (*Fides at ratio*, 83)

A renewal of academic programs is also hoped for (John Paul II, Apostolic Constitution *Sapientia Christiana*) so that the systematic study of theology is better seen in the light of Sacred Scripture. Moreover, a revision of courses in seminaries and houses of formation must be attentive that the Word of God have its deserved place in the various dimensions of formation.

Proposition 33: Biblical formation of Christians

Love of the Bible is a grace of the Holy Spirit that permeates the entire life of the believer. It's necessary, therefore, to form Christians to appreciate this gift of God: "If you knew the gift of God ..." (Jn 4:10), says the Lord.

It's to be hoped, therefore, that in every cultural region, centres of formation be established for laity and for missionaries of the Word, where one learns to understand, live and proclaim the Word of God. Moreover, according to the various needs, specialized institutes in Biblical studies should be established for exegetes, giving them a solid theological comprehension and a sensibility for the contexts of their mission. This can also be realized by re-examining or reinforcing structures which already exist, meaning seminaries and academic departments. It's also necessary to offer an adequate formation in the Biblical languages, including to people who will be translators of the Bible into diverse modern languages.

Proposition 34: Biblical animation and youth

As Jesus invited the young man to follow him, today the invitation is offered anew to children, adolescents and young adults, so that they may find in the word of the Lord Jesus a response to what they seek. In the Biblical animation of pastoral efforts with young people, account must be taken of the invitation of Benedict XVI: "Dear young people, I exhort you to acquire familiarity with the Bible, to keep it close at hand, so that it may be for you a compass that indicates the path to follow." (Message for the 21st World Youth Day, April 9, 2006). It's to be hoped that Scripture is presented in its vocational implications, thereby helping and orienting many young people in their vocational choices, including total consecration. The younger generations should be welcomed, heard and accompanied with love by the Christian community, in such a way as to be introduced to the consequences of

the Scriptures by educators who are true and passionate witnesses to the Word of God. In this way, also the young will be guided to love and communicate the Gospel, above all to their peers.

Proposition 35: The Bible and the pastoral field of health care

During his life, Jesus cured and healed the sick, and offered in this service a sign of the presence of the Reign of God. (Luke 7:22) Still today, the Scriptures continue to offer to the sick, and to all who suffer, a word of comfort, of encouragement, and also of both spiritual and physical healing. Prayer with the Psalms reaches into the depths, and gives to everyone the very words of God for expressing both their own suffering and also their own hope. The synod fathers therefore exhort all those close to persons afflicted with every sort of illness to carry to them, humbly but boldly, the life-giving Word of the Lord Jesus, both in Scripture and in the Eucharist. Today, too, it's indispensable that the Word of God should inspire the entire pastoral field of health care, helping the sick to discover through faith that their suffering renders them capable of participating in the redemptive suffering of Christ. (2 Cor 4:8-11, 14)

Proposition 36: Sacred Scripture and Christian Unity

The Bible is truly a privileged place of encounter among the diverse churches and ecclesial communities. To listen together to the Scriptures helps us live together in a real communion, even if it's not full. (*Relatio post disceptationem*, 36) "Listening together to the Word of God, practicing together the *Lectio Divina* of the Bible ... constitutes a path to walk for reaching the unity of faith, as a response to hearing the Word." (Discourse of Benedict XVI, Jan. 25, 2007)

Common listening to the Scriptures impels us to the dialogue of charity, and helps the dialogue of truth to grow. The authoritative subject of interpretation in the church (especially the magisterium) remains an open ecumenical problem, and for that reason common Biblical study and research should be intensified. In equal measure, the common commitment to translation and distribution of the Bible should be intensified, as should inter-confessional celebrations of listening to the Word of God.

Proposition 37: The Presence of His Holiness Bartholomew I

The synod fathers give thanks to God for the presence and the interventions of the Fraternal Delegates, representatives of other churches and ecclesial communities, and, in a particular way, for the prayer of Vespers presided over by the Holy Father, Benedict XVI, together with His Holiness Bartholomew I, Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople. The words of the Ecumenical Patriarch addressed to the synod fathers allowed us to experience a profound spiritual joy and to have a living experience of real and profound communion, even if it isn't yet perfect; in these things, we tasted the beauty of the Word of God, read in the light of the Sacred Liturgy and the Fathers – a spiritual reading strongly contextualized in our time. In this way, we have seen that by going to the heart of Sacred Scripture, we really meet the Word in the words; the Word who opens the eyes of the faithful to respond to the challenges of the contemporary world.

Moreover, we have shared the joyous experience of having common Fathers for the both the East and the West. May this encounter become a stimulus for a further witness of communion in hearing the Word of God, and for a fervent prayer to the One Lord so that the prayer of Jesus may soon be realized: *Ut omnes unum sint*.

Third Part

The Word of God in the Mission of the Church

Proposition 38: The missionary duty of all the baptized

The mission to announce the Word of God is the responsibility of all disciples of Jesus Christ, as a consequence of their baptism. This awareness must be deepened in every parish, every community and Catholic organization; initiatives must be proposed that allow the Word of God to reach everyone, especially to those brothers and sisters who are baptized but not sufficiently evangelized. Since the Word of God became flesh in order to communicate itself to all people, a privileged way of coming to know it is through encounter with witnesses who render it present and alive.

In missionary efforts, the Missionary Institutes supply a particular contribution because of their charisms and experience. In addition, the reality of new ecclesial movements is an extraordinary richness of evangelizing strength for the church in this time, so much so that it incites the church to develop new forms of announcing the Gospel. Laity are called to rediscover the responsibility to exercise their prophetic duty, which derives directly from their baptism, of testifying to the Gospel in their daily life; at home, at work, and wherever they find themselves. This witness often leads to persecution of the faithful because of the Gospel. The synod appeals to responsible parties in public life that religious liberty may be guaranteed.

It's necessary, moreover, to open itineraries of Christian formation in which – through listening to the Word, celebration of the Eucharist and fraternal love lived in community – an ever more adult faith can be developed. New questions arising from mobility and the phenomenon of immigration must be considered, which open new perspectives of evangelization – because immigrants don't just need to be evangelized, but they themselves may be agents of evangelization.

Proposition 39: The Word of God and commitment in the world

The Word of God, contained in the Sacred Scriptures and in the living Tradition of the church, helps minds and hearts to understand and to love all human realities and all of creation. It helps us, in fact, to recognize the signs of God in all human efforts to render the world more just and more habitable; it sustains the identification of the “signs of the times” present in history; it impels believers to commit themselves on behalf of those who suffer and who are victims of injustices. The struggle for justice and transformation is constitutive of evangelization (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 19).

The synod fathers address a particular thought to those who, as believers, are involved in political and social life. It's to be hoped that the Word of God may sustain a form of witness to inspire their action in the world, in search of the true good of all, and in respect of the dignity of every person. It's important, therefore, that they be prepared through an adequate education according to the principles of the social doctrine of the church.

Proposition 40: Word of God and liturgical art

The great tradition of the East and the West has always esteemed all artistic expressions, and in particular sacred images, inspired by Sacred Scripture.

We appreciate all the artists who are in love with beauty: poets, men and women of letters, painters, sculptors, musicians, people of theatre and the cinema. They have contributed to the decoration of our churches, to the celebration of our faith, to the enrichment of our liturgy, and, at the same time, many of them have helped to make the invisible world perceptible and to translate the divine message into the language of forms and figures. For all this, the synod expresses profound gratitude.

It's necessary to arouse in every cultural area a new season in which art can rediscover Biblical inspiration and be an instrument able to proclaim, sing, and promote contemplation

of the manifestation of the Word of God.

Bishops, with the necessary help, should take care in the construction of churches that these be places adequate to the proclamation of the Word, to meditation and the Eucharistic celebration. Sacred spaces even apart from the liturgical action should be eloquent, presenting the Christian mystery in relation to the Word of God.

Proposition 41: Word of God and culture

The Word of God is destined for all humanity. It must be recognized that across the centuries, it has inspired the different cultures, generating fundamental moral values, excellent artistic expressions and exemplary styles of life. In the Word of God, in fact, are found diverse resources that can help science in its discovery of ever new conquests, as well as increasing dialogue with those who do not share our faith. The synod fathers, therefore, hope for a dialogue between Bible and culture, above all before the diverse questions about meaning which are present in our time, in such a way as to find in it the definitive reply to their search.

It would be helpful to organize groups for reading the Bible also in secularized environments, or among non-believers, as a way to open the world to God by means of the Word of the Bible.

Proposition 42: Bible and translation

The synod recommends that in neighbouring cultures and in regions with similar languages, the same translation of the Bible be approved and utilized, both for liturgical and private use.

Many churches around the world are still deprived of Bible translated into their local languages. For this reason, the synod retains that, above all, the formation of specialists dedicated to different translations of the Bible is important.

Proposition 43: Bible and distribution

The synod desires to recall how necessary it is that all the faithful have easy access to reading the sacred texts. In this connection, a general mobilization is required so that the sacred text be distributed as widely as possible, and with all the instruments that modern technology offers, above all for those who are differently abled – to whom our attention should go in a special way.

A similar commitment is required to an exceptional form of collaboration among the churches so that those with greater means express greater solidarity in meeting the needs of the churches which are in greater difficulty. The synod fathers recommend supporting the efforts of the Catholic Biblical Federation for greater access to Sacred Scripture (DV 22), so that the number of translations of the Sacred Scripture may be increased and their distribution may be widespread. This should also be done in collaboration with the various Biblical Societies.

Proposition 44: Means of social communication

The synod underlines the importance of the means, and the languages, of communication for the task of evangelization. The announcement of the Good News finds a new breadth in modern communications, characterized by intermediality.

The church is called not only to spread the Word of God through the media, but also, and above all, to integrate the message of salvation in the new culture that modern communications creates and amplifies.

The new communicative context allows us to multiply the means of proclamation and of deepening awareness of Sacred Scripture. This proclamation, with its richness, demands to be able to reach every community, arriving at those who are distant also through these new instruments.

A better knowledge of the means of communication is recommended, in order to accompany their rapid evolution and to invest more in communications through the different instruments which are offered today – television, radio, newspapers, the Internet. They are, in any case, forms of communication that can make easier an obedient hearing of the Word of God. It's necessary to prepare Catholics, convinced and confident, in the field of social communications.

Proposition 45: Word of God and World Congress

In these times, meetings of a global character are multiplying; it is not regarded as opportune, therefore, to institute a Congress specifically on the Word of God. It's important, however, that in these other meetings greater space be dedicated to the study and the celebration of the Word of God. Episcopal Conferences are asked, moreover, to sustain and to promote days geared towards spreading the Bible.

Proposition 46: Believing Reading of the Scriptures: Historicity and Fundamentalism

The believing reading of Sacred Scripture, practiced since antiquity in the Tradition of the church, seeks the truth that saves for the life of the single member of the faithful and for the church. This reading recognizes the historical value of the Biblical tradition. It's precisely because of this value of historical witness that it wishes to rediscover the living meaning of the Sacred Scriptures addressed also to the life of the believers of today.

Such a reading of Scripture is different from "fundamentalist interpretations" that ignore the human mediation of the inspired text and its literary forms. The believer, in order to use *Lectio Divina* fruitfully, must be educated to not "unconsciously confuse the human limits of the Biblical message with the divine substance of that message." (Pontifical Biblical Commission, "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church," I F)

Proposition 47: The Bible and the phenomenon of the sects

We feel deep concern regarding the growth and mutation of the phenomenon of the sects. Sects of diverse origins, in fact, seem to offer an experience of the closeness of God to the life of persons, and promise an illusory happiness through the Bible, often interpreted in fundamentalist fashion. We propose that:

- Through a correct and vital hermeneutics of the Biblical pages, pastoral activity be intensified for providing the food of the Word to the faithful who seek it;
- To learn from the rich experience of the early centuries of the church, which also knew similar phenomena (1 Jn 2:19, 4:2-3);
- To know better the peculiar characteristics, the causes, and those forces which promote the sects, as they present themselves today;
- To help the faithful distinguish well the Word of God from private revelations;
- To encourage groups of sharing and meditation, in order to counteract the attraction of the sects and of fundamentalism.

It's necessary that priests be adequately prepared to confront these new situations, rendering them capable of proposing a Biblically grounded pastoral strategy, adapted to the problems experienced by people today.

We ask the Holy See to study, in collaboration with the Episcopal Conferences and the

competent structures of the Eastern Oriental Churches, the phenomenon of the sects in its global dimension and also in its local expressions.

Proposition 48: Bible and enculturation

Revelation was expressed by taking from the diverse human cultures the authentic values susceptible of expressing the truth that, for our salvation, God has communicated to human persons. (DV, 11) In fact, the Word of God, as revelation, immersed in the cultures the consciousness of truth that otherwise would have remained hidden, and which created progress and cultural development. The mandate which the Lord gives to the church to announce the Gospel to all creatures (Mark 16:15) implies the encounter of the Word of God with all the peoples of the earth and their cultures. This presupposes the same process of enculturation of the Word of God which happened in revelation. For this reason, the Word of God must penetrate into every environment in such a way that the culture produces original expressions of life, or liturgy, of Christian thought. (CT 53) This happens when the Word of God, proposed to a culture, “makes fecund from within the spiritual qualities and the traditions of every people, confirms them, perfects them, and recapitulates them in Christ” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 58), arousing new expressions of Christian life.

For an authentic enculturation of the evangelical message, a formation of missionaries must be assured with adequate means for knowing the environment of life in depth, as well as the social-cultural conditions, in such a way that the missionaries can insert themselves into the environment, the language and the local cultures. It’s the responsibility of the local church to reach an authentic enculturation of the gospel message, naturally paying attention to the risk of syncretism. The quality of enculturation depends upon the degree of maturity of the evangelizing community.

Proposition 49: Missio Ad Gentes

The Word of God is a good intended for all persons, which the church must not conserve for herself, but share with joy and generosity with all people and cultures, so that they too may find in Jesus Christ the way, the truth and the life. (Jn 14:6)

Looking to the example of St. Paul, to the apostles and to so many missionaries throughout the history of the church who have carried the Gospel to the peoples, this synod reaffirms the urgency of the *missio ad gentes* also in our time. It’s an announcement that must be explicit, not only inside our churches, but everywhere, and it must be accompanied by a coherent witness of life which renders the content of the announcement credible and reinforces it.

Bishops, priests, deacons, persons of consecrated life and laity must be close also to those persons who do not participate in the liturgy and who do not attend our communities. The church must reach out to all with the strength of the Spirit (1 Cor 2:5), and continue to prophetically defend the right and the liberty of people to hear the Word of God, seeking the most effective means to proclaim it, even at the risk of persecution.

Proposition 50: The Bible and interreligious dialogue

Dialogue with the non-Christian religions represents a meaningful moment in the life of the church in the dialogue with persons. The monotheistic religions, the traditional religions of Africa and Australia, and the ancient spiritual traditions of Asia contain values of respect and collaboration that can greatly favour comprehension among persons and societies. The guiding lines of this dialogue are given by the declaration of the Second Vatican Council *Nostra Aetate*. The synod equally recalls the necessity that all believers be effectively

guaranteed the liberty to profess their religion in private and in public, as well as the liberty of conscience.

Proposition 51: The Holy Land

Paul VI called the Holy Land “the Fifth Gospel.” The synod recommends pilgrimages, and, if possible, the study of the Sacred Scriptures in the Holy Land and in the footsteps of St. Paul. Pilgrims and students can, by means of this experience, understand better the physical and geographical environment of the Scriptures, and particularly the relationship between the two testaments. The stones where Jesus walked can become for them stones of living memory.

Meanwhile, the Christians in the Holy Land need the communion of all Christians, especially in these days of conflict, poverty and fear.

Proposition 52: Dialogue between Christians and Jews

The dialogue between Christians and Jews belongs to the nature of the church. Faithful to his promises, God does not revoke the Old Covenant. (Rm 9,11) Jesus of Nazareth was a Jew and the Holy Land is the motherland of the church. Christians and Jews share the Scriptures of the Hebrew people, which Christians call the Old Testament. Jews and Christians can be a source of blessing for humanity in their common descent from Abraham. (Gen 17:4-5) The Jewish understanding of the Bible can help the understanding and the study of the Scriptures on the part of Christians.

Christian Biblical interpretation is founded upon the unity of the two Testaments in Jesus, the Word made flesh. In his Person, the full sense of the Scriptures is realized with both continuity and discontinuity with regard to the inspired books of the Hebrew people. It's suggested that the Episcopal Conferences promote encounters and dialogues between Jews and Christians.

Proposition 53: Dialogue between Christians and Muslims

“The church looks with esteem also upon the Muslims who adore the one God.” (NA, 3) They refer to Abraham, and render worship to God above all with prayer, with almsgiving and fasting. Dialogue with them permits a better mutual understanding and collaboration in the promotion of ethical and spiritual values.

In this dialogue, the synod insists upon the importance of respect for life, for the rights of men and women, as well as the distinction between the socio-political order and the religious order in the promotion of justice and peace in the world. An important theme in this dialogue will also be reciprocity and liberty of conscience and religion.

It's suggested to the national Episcopal Conferences, where it seems profitable, to promote circles of dialogue between Christians and Muslims.

Proposition 54: Cosmic dimensions of the Word of God and custody of creation

The Word of God communicates to us the beauty of God through the beauty of creation, and also through sacred images as icons of the incarnate Word. They are modalities with which the invisible mystery of God is made in some way visible and perceptible to our senses. The Fathers of the church, for the rest, always affirmed the cosmic dimensions of the Word of God that makes itself flesh; every creature, in fact, carries in a certain sense a sign of the Word of God. In Jesus Christ, dead and risen, all created things find their definitive recapitulation. (Eph 1:10) All things and all persons, for this reason, are called to be good and beautiful in Christ.

Unfortunately, human beings in our time are out of the habit of contemplating the Word of God in the world in which we live, which was given to us by God. For this reason, the rediscovery of the Word of God, in all its dimensions, impels us to denounce all the actions of the contemporary person which do not respect nature as creation.

Receiving the Word of God attested to in the Sacred Scripture and in the living Tradition of the church generates a new way of seeing things, promoting an authentic ecology, which has its deepest roots in the obedience of faith that receives the Word of God. Therefore we desire that in the pastoral action of the church commitment to the protection of creation be intensified, developing a renewed theological sensibility for the goodness of all things, created in Christ, the incarnate Word of God.

Proposition 55: Mary, Mater Dei and Mater fidei

The synod, which intends above all to renew the faith of the church in the Word of God, looks to Mary, the Virgin Mother of the Incarnate Word, who with her “yes” to the Word of the Covenant and its mission, perfectly fulfils the divine vocation of humanity. The synod fathers suggest encouraging among the faithful the prayer of the Angelus, daily memory of the Incarnate Word, and the Rosary.

The church of the New Testament lives where the incarnate Word is received, loved and served with complete openness to the Holy Spirit. The faith of Mary is developed in the love with which she accompanies the growth and the mission of the Incarnate Word. Under the Cross of her son, her faith and love become the hope with which Mary accepts becoming the mother of the beloved disciple and of redeemed humanity.

Devoted and loving attention to the figure of Mary, as a model and archetype of the faith of the church, is of capital importance for achieving today a concrete shift of paradigm in the relationship of the church with the Word – both in an attitude of prayerful listening, and in generosity of commitment to mission and proclamation.

The synod fathers, united with the Holy Father in the prayer that the synod “may bear fruits of authentic renewal in every Christian community” (Benedict XVI, Angelus at Pompeii, Oct. 19, 2008), invites pastors and the faithful to direct their gaze to Mary, and to ask the Holy Spirit for the grace of a living faith in the Word of God made flesh.