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Hermeneutics of "Revealed Morality" in the Document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, "The Bible and Morality: Biblical Roots of Christian Conduct"

Hermeneutyka "Moralności objawionej" w dokumencie Papieskiej Komisji Biblijnej "Biblia a moralność. Biblijne korzenie postępowania moralnego"

Sacrae Scripturae studio, quae universae theologiae veluti anima esse debet, peculiari diligentia alumni instituantur; congrua introductione praemissa, in exegeseos methodum accurate initientur, maxima divinae Revelationis themata perspiciant et in Sacris Libris quotidie legendis et meditandis incitamentum et nutrimentum recipiant […] *Specialis cura impendatur Theologiae morali perficiendae*, cuius scientifica expositio, *doctrina S. Scripturae magis nutrita*, celsitudinem vocationis fidelium in Christo illustret eorumque obligationem in caritate pro mundi vita fructum ferendi.

(*Optatam totius*, n. 16)

Abstract. The purpose of this paper is the critical analysis of the document of Pontifical Biblical Commission (PBC): *Bible and Morality. Biblical Roots of Christian conduct* (2008) and specifically the hermeneutical reflection on the "revealed morality". The nature of consideration on the dokument is especially hermeneutical, beginning with the key concept, namely "revealed morality". The article is divided into two parts and preceded by a brief contextualization. In Part I is present the analysis of the document, highlighting the most important points for the biblical and moral reflection. In Part II we shall focus on the hermeneutics of the document and the developments that these indications can offer us today, in order to clarify the roles of the two disciplines and thereby contribute to a fruitful interdisciplinary dialogue.

Streszczenie. Celem niniejszego artykułu jest krytyczna analiza dokumentu Papieskiej Komisji Biblijnej: „Biblia a moralność. Biblijne korzenie postepowania moralnego" i w szczególności hermeneutyczna refleksja nad „moralnością objawioną". Natura

rozważań nad dokumentem jest przede wszytskim heremeneutyczna, poczynając od kluczowego konceptu, nazwanego „moralnością objawieniową". Artkuł jest podzielony na dwie części, poprzedzony krótką kontekstualizacją. W części pierwszej jest zaprezentowana anliaza dokumentu, a w sposób szczególny najważaniejsze punkty nad biblijną i moralną refleksją. Cześć druga konecntruje się na hermeneutyce dokumentu i rozwoju tezy, że przesłanie dokumentu może ofiarować wkład w dialog między biblistyką i teologią moralną.

Keywords: revealed morality; hermeneutic; moral theology.

Słowa klucze: moralnośc objawiona; hermeneutyka; teologia moralna.

Preliminaries

The purpose of this paper is the critical analysis of the document of Pontifical Biblical Commission (PBC): *Bible and Morality. Biblical Roots of Christian conduct* (2008) and specifically the hermeneutical reflection on the "revealed morality". I believe and hope that this document will contribute to the work that exegetes and moral theologians do in everyday life.

We shall not go into the merits of philosophical questions or complex problems of exegesis of the Bible, that are involved in the document's reflection. These form part of the research of the individual disciplines and their specific study.[1]

The nature of our considerations on the document will be especially hermeneutical, beginning with the key concept, namely: "revealed morality". Our proposal is set properly on the level of "fundamental morality" and biblical hermeneutics. We cannot exhaust the full analysis of the document. We shall merely point out the novelty of this text and indicate some developments and perspectives for theological research. Our work is divided into two parts and preceded by a brief contextualization. In Part I we shall present the analysis of the document, highlighting the most important points for the biblical and moral reflection. In Part II we shall focus on the hermeneutics of the docu-

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[1]   Cf. my doctoral research: G. De Virgilio, *Bibbia e teologia morale*. For the examination of the theme, cf. idem, *Etica del Nuovo Testamento: lo stato della ricerca*, pp. 141–155; idem, *La "proposta ermeneutica" nel documento della Pontificia Commissione Biblica: Bibbia e morale*, pp. 237–250; idem, *La sacra Scrittura alla base di un'«etica applicata»: problemi e prospettive*, in: V. Viva, G. Witaszek (edd.), *Etica teologica nelle correnti della storia*, pp. 38–45.

ment and the developments that these indications can offer us today, in order to clarify the roles of the two disciplines and thereby contribute to a fruitful interdisciplinary dialogue.

Context

In presenting the work of the Biblical Commission, Cardinal W. Levada explains how the theme "Bible and Morality" was drawn up based on the indications of the then Cardinal J. Ratzinger in 2002[2] who, as prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, inspired three documents reflecting the common theme regarding the specific hermeneutical question about the Bible. These documents include: *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (15.04.1993), *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible* (27.05.2001) and the *Bible and Morality. Biblical Roots of Christian Conduct* (11.05.2008).[3]

After a long gestation period of six years, which saw the ascension to the papacy of Benedict XVI in April 2005, the Commission published this document marked by gradual hermeneutical interventions that have characterized the course of theological research since the Second Vatican Council.[4]

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[2]   The *Preface* reads: «Already in 2002 the Pontifical Biblical Commission, at the behest of the then President Card. Joseph Ratzinger, set about to examine the problem of the relationship between the bible and morality by posing itself the question: what is the value and the significance of the inspired text for today's morality, regarding which the above mentioned difficulties cannot be neglected?» (PBC, *BM*, *Preface*).

[3]   Already the 1993 document on the *Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (1993) refers to the problems related to moral and biblical hermeneutical and gives some general guidelines. Subsequently, the PBC worked on the reflection about the role of the Jewish people and their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible, which culminates with the publication of the document *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible* in 2001. Even the latter document is important because of the interpretative criteria which support the relationship between the Hebrew Bible and Christian interpretation and which are retrieved and expanded in the reflection on the relationship between "the Bible and morality"; cf. K. Stock, *Cento anni della Pontificia Commissione Biblica*, pp. 209–220; idem, *Bibbia e Morale: il recente documento della Pontificia Commissione Biblica*, in *Parola di Dio e morale*, pp. 61–71.

[4]   In the post-conciliar period the interventions of the Pontifical Biblical Commission have focused on the following themes: „The role of women in society and in religious activity according to Sacred Scripture" (1975–76); „The use of Scripture in the writings concerning the theology of liberation" (1977); „Acculturation in the same Holy Scripture." From 1980 to 1983 the Commission has been studying the „problem of interpretation and Christology," and it elaborates a joint text, then published along with nine reports of individual

Our proposal fits into the debate about the post-conciliar renewal of Christian morality advocated by the Council Fathers.[5]

We do not intend to elaborate the reasons for the "moral crisis" and the crisis of moral theology today, but there is no denying the fact that the relationship between the Bible and morality is involved in this debate and is connected with the problems concerning the identity and specificity of Christian morality.[6] The document of the Biblical Commission does not enter into this debate neither does it give any history of reports and opinions about the relationship between the Bible and morality. The Biblical Commission prefers to start from the primacy of Scripture and its moral implications, which challenges the exegetes on the reflection on morality and on the ability to respond to today's problems.

> In the present document the reader will not find either a complete biblical moral theology or recipes for ready answers to moral problems, whether old or new, currently discussed in all forums, including the mass-media. Our undertaking makes no claim to replace the work of philosophers and moral theologians. An adequate discussion of moral problems posed by moralists would need a methodical investigation and a study of the human sciences which are completely outside our field of competence.[7]

The conclusion of this document states that the work of the PBC is a "modest seed for reflection" in order to continue the work and the meeting between the two disciplines.[8] Considering the framework of magisterial pronouncements from the Second Vatican Council until today, I feel that this broad dis-

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members (cf. Commission Pontificale Biblique, *Bible et Christologie*). The next issue, investigated from 1985 to 1988 is "Relations between the local Churches and the universality of the one People of God". The result of this work is the publication of a joint text, along with 20 personal study, entitled Commission Pontificale Biblique, *Unité et diversité dans l'Eglise*. Recently, the Biblical Commission has reflected and finally published a further paper on the topic: *Inspiration and truth in the Holy Scriptures* (22.02.2014).

[5]   Cf. V. Gòmez Mier, *La rifondazione della morale cattolica*. Per la riflessione biblica, cf. G. Segalla, *Introduzione all'etica biblica del Nuovo Testamento*; C.E. Curran, R.A. McCormick, R.A. (edd.), *The use of Scripture in Moral Theology*, J. S. Siker, *Scripture and Ethics: Twentieth Century Portraits*.

[6]   The clarification of the relationship between the Bible and moral theology has developed particularly in the post-conciliar manuals. For a general overview: cf. R. Gula, *Foundations of Catholic Morality* (soprattutto il Cap. XII: *Scripture in Moral Theology*); A. Bonandi, *Il difficile rinnovamento*; J. Kacprzak, *Il ruolo della Sacra Scrittura nella morale fondamentale secondo i teologi italiani dopo il Concilio Vaticano II*.

[7]   PBC, *BM*, n. 3.

[8]   Ibidem, n. 156.

cussion on the Bible and Morality is the broadest and inspiring contribution, with authoritative character, devoted to this specific theme.[9]

I. The document: *Bible and morality*

We shall go into the specific proposal of the document and analyze its structure. In the *Introduction*, the objective of the proposal is enunciated in two points:

1. The first objective consists in "situating Christian morality within the larger sphere of anthropology and biblical theologies". In this way, one can clearly highlight the specificity and originality of Christian morality in relation to both ethics and natural morality founded on human experience and reason, and moral proposals from other religions.

2. The second objective is "more practical". It consists in showing how to use the Bible properly "when seeking enlightenment in order to deepen one's moral reflection or when seeking answers to problems or delicate moral situations."[10] For this reason, the work is divided into two parts: the first part examines the main contents of the biblical-theological message from the Old to the New Testament, the horizon of "revealed morality, which is a divine gift and human response." The second part indicates some biblical criteria for understanding the theological message and for encoding it into moral reflection. Furthermore the preferred Biblical method is indicated. Beyond the approach of historical-critical exegesis, the "canonical approach" to the Bible is preferred, because it is the one that ensures an interpretation of the biblical message in as unified and synchronic way as possible.[11]

Ultimately the text is meant to convey a working method for both exegetes, and moral theologians.[12] The overall purpose of the contribution of the Biblical Commission is to propose a practical reflection on how one can create a meeting between the "reality" of the biblical world, represented by the fruits of the

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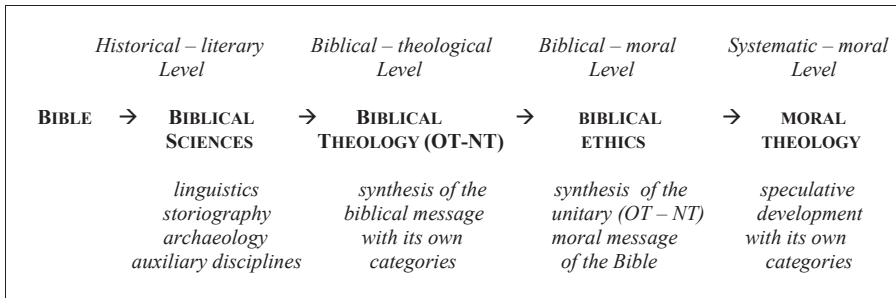[9] Cf. G. De Virgilio, *Bibbia e teologia morale*, pp. 25–29.

[10] Ibidem, n. 3.

[11] Cf. PBC, *L'interpretazione della Bibbia nella Chiesa,* I, C, 1.

[12] The three perspectives that emerge at the end of the document include: a) the „dialogue"; b) the identification of ‚the stategic means of communication of the Church's moral teaching; c) The effort to authentically translate the moral message into the concrete existence of believers (cf. PBC, *BM*, nn. 160–162).

research of "biblical sciences", and the need to establish and formulate a "moral theology" where "its specificity and originality emerges more clearly".[13]

The interest in this premise consists in its language. In fact, the document uses significant terms to express the relationship between the Bible and morality, which refer to the exegetical research. It speaks of "revealed morality", "biblical theology", "biblical morality", using later the expression: "biblical ethics".[14] It also presupposes a unified reading of the Old and New Testament. It is good to point out formally the process which links the "biblical sciences" to the moral reflection, given the epistemological difference of the two disciplines. The process can be schematically represented as:

Historical – literary Level		*Biblical – theological Level*		*Biblical – moral Level*		*Systematic – moral Level*
BIBLE →	**BIBLICAL SCIENCES**	→	**BIBLICAL THEOLOGY (OT-NT)**	→	**BIBLICAL ETHICS**	→	**MORAL THEOLOGY**
	linguistics storiography archaeology auxiliary disciplines		*synthesis of the biblical message with its own categories*		*synthesis of the unitary (OT – NT) moral message of the Bible*		*speculative development with its own categories*

The Bible requires a thorough reading through the use of "biblical sciences" (linguistics, history, archaeology, the additional auxiliary disciplines). The development of this hermeneutical process that collects the theological message of individual texts, involves the development of a unitary "biblical theology" (the Old and New Testament). It is necessary to formulate a coherent system that is able to offer a synthesis of the biblical message with its own categories.[15] Within the unitary biblical theology, with the same methods of exegetical analysis and their respective hermeneutical assumptions, the "biblical ethics" is elaborated (or the biblical morality of the OT and NT). It is here that the work of the exegete and the biblical theologian is situated. The results of the

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[13] The reading of the document reveals the urgent need of the Chruch to make more and more communicable and plausible the morale datum on the pastoral and pedagogical level: cf. PBC, *BM*, n. 161.

[14] Cf. "Revealed morality"(Nos. 2; 4; 19; 20; 31; 80; 121; 156, 161),"biblical theologies"(no. 3), "biblical morality" (Nos. 7; 23; 29; 95; 121; 133; 160), later using the expression „biblical ethics" (nos. 39; 51; 131).

[15] About the debate on the identity and role of biblical theology: cf. G. De Virgilio, *Teologia Biblica del Nuovo Testamento*, pp. 125–130.

biblical-theological research directly interrogates the moral reflection and its philosophical and theological elaboration.[16]

Therefore the relationship between the Bible and morality presupposes the use and necessary mediation of 'biblical studies' in order to reach a "biblical theology" and in particular to reach a "biblical ethics", and be able to communicate its useful conclusions for systematic reflection in the field of morality.[17] For this reason we declare from the start that the document does not claim to offer a "comprehensive biblical theology in matters of morality" (ie: it does not intend to develop an organic "biblical ethics") nor give "recipes or answers made for moral problems, old or new, which are discussed in our days on all forums, including the mass media".[18] The document is not a substitute to the work of philosophers and moralists. The Biblical Commission does not enter into this merit, which are outside of its competence.[19]

1. The key concept of "revealed morality"

The *Introduction* presents the central principle guiding the reflection, namely: the key-concept of "revealed morality" as a "gift of God". The key concept pair: the revealed morality/God's gift is considered essential to set the biblical argument.[20] The use of this concept must purify the memory from a deep previous understanding of biblical reflection. Since God revealed Himself through the inspired Word, it is not possible to narrow down the self-communication of God to man within the limits of a mere individual and collective code of conduct, or a set of virtues to be practiced or the "natural law." The concept of revelation must be understood according to a dialogue relationship linking the Trinitarian mystery of God with the whole reality of man placed in history. To confirm this position, we want to connect the "revealed morality" to what

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[16] Cf. G. De Virgilio, *Bibbia e teologia morale*, pp. 76–87. For a review of the debate on the ethics of the New Testament: cf. G. Segalla, *Introduzione all'etica biblica del Nuovo Testamento.*

[17] Cf. Segalla, *Introduzione all'etica biblica del Nuovo* Testamento, pp. 110–114.

[18] PBC, *BM*, n. 3.

[19] I personally understand that during the period of preparation of this document (2002–2007) certain moral theologians had been invited to work in the sessions of the PBC to provide ideas and contributions on the theme. But at the end of the day the document was written only by the exgetes. Thus, the result is not the fruit of a shared work.

[20] The theme of the „gift" and its use in theological reflection is broad and profound: cf. A. Gnada, *Le principe don en éthique sociale et théologie morale* (with an extensive bibliography).

the Second Vatican Council said in the Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*[21]:

> The term "revealed morality" is perhaps neither classical nor current. Nevertheless it finds its place within the orbit traced by the Second Vatican Council in the dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation. The God of the Bible reveals not primarily a code of conduct but "Himself" in his mystery and "the mystery of his will". "This pattern of revelation unfolds through deeds and words which are intimately interconnected: the works performed by God in the history of salvation illustrate and confirm the doctrine and realities signified by the words; the words, for their part, proclaim the works, and bring to light the mystery they contain." (*Dei Verbum*, I.2). Accordingly, all the deeds through which God manifests himself possess a moral dimension in so far as they invite human beings to conform their thought and their actions to the divine model: "You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy." (Lev 19.2); "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect". Mt 5.48).[22]

Therefore, the vocational (appellant) connotation of God's Word takes on a hermeneutic value both in the reading of biblical texts and in the moral reflection.[23] The "revealed morality", without further specification or references to authors and doctrinal positions[24] is proposed as a horizon of meaning to indicate the underlying "religious, spiritual and legislation vision" in view of the moral discernment of the believer. This concept is the common thread of the entire document, and involves both a theological understanding of the Bible as the "word of God" with normative value for the existence of believers. In the definition of "revealed morality" two basic ideas come into play:

1) the free initiative of God who reveals himself. God acts first, giving himself. The moral response is a consequence that comes after this gift. In other words, the moral response comes second. For this reason morality

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[21] Cf. *Dei Verbum*, n. 2.

[22] PBC, *BM*, n. 4.

[23] The vocational (appellant) function of the Sacred Scripture has been treated in the Synod of Bishops on „The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church" (2008); cf. Benedetto XVI, *Verbum Domini*. Esortazione Apostolica Post-Sinodale (30.09.2010), nn. 6–28; cf. *Commento teologico all'Esortazione Apostolica post-sinodale «Verbum Domini» di Benedetto XVI*, a cura di M. Tábet, G. De Virgilio, pp. 49–62.

[24] On the idea of „revealed morality" and its use of Christian ethics, cf. J. Gustafson, *The Idea od Christian Ethics*, in *Companion Encyclopedia of Theology*, P. Byrne and L. Houlden (eds.), pp. 705–713; Idem *The Changing Use of the Bible in Christian Ethics*, in: C. Curran, R. McCormick (eds.), *Reading in Moral Theology*.

comes second in the Bible. It comes after the experience of free gifts of God.

2) The second idea, resulting in the process of divine revelation, consists in interpreting the law and his duties which implies faithfulness to the covenant, as a gift of God that accompanies the journey of believers.

Christian morality is placed in the "proper spiritual horizon" and defined in relation to the anticipatory revelation of God, as "second, without being secondary," because what is first and fundamental is the initiative of God.[25] Taking this perspective means that

> the revelation can be employed to define and discern the moral character of today's urgent moral problems. Morality therefore flows out of an experience of God and his loving attitude toward us. It is concerned less with making sense of worldly experience than with learning the way of salvation, the *imitatio Dei* taught by God.[26]

This model "gift-response" that guides all *First Part* of the document, best expresses the divine idea of the initiative and priority of the gift than the moral commitment of the believer.[27] In the conclusion of the document the theme of "revealed morality" is taken up again showing how taking this idea is useful and beneficial. In fact, thinking about the act of a believer as the result of anticipatory gift of the Lord, invites us to consider morality, "not from the point of view of human beings but from that of God."[28] It is an element of originality compared to a vision of morality based primarily on reason. It reiterates a double benefit derived from the idea of "revealed morality":

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[25] Cf. A. Fumagalli, *Il dinamismo graduale della morale biblica*, pp. 17–22; T. Kennedy, *La Sacra Scrittura e i problemi etici della nostra epoca*, pp. 23–27 (english version: *The Bible and Morality: Contemporary Moral Issues in the Pontifical Biblical Commission's Document* The Bible and Morality. Biblical Roots of Christian Conduct, *May 11, 2008*: http://compassreview.org/winter09/6.pdf).

[26] T. Kennedy, *The Bible and Morality*, p. 23.

[27] According to Fumagalli (cf. A. Fumagalli, *Il dinamismo graduale della morale biblica*, 7) the gift-response scheme is even more expressive of the call-answer combination, used in the recent moral manuals: cf. B. Häring, *La legge di cristo. Trattato di teologia morale* (il vol. I – *Morale generale, Struttura fondamentale dell'esistenza cristiana* – It is divided into two sections entitled: *L'Appello di Cristo* e *La risposta dell'uomo*); A. Günthor, *Chiamata e risposta. Una nuova teologia morale*; H. Weber, *Teologia morale generale L'appello di Dio e la risposta dell'uomo*.

[28] PBC, *BM*, n. 156.

a) on the *theoretical side,* morality is inscribed in a proper *spiritual horizon,* capable of dialogue and openness towards others, especially to those who are in need and are marginalized in the existential peripheries of life;

b) on the *practical side,* the "revealed morality" allows one, first of all, to define the three, often subtle but mistaken, approaches that have menaced and still menace several pedagogies both on the level of human values and on that of faith, namely: casuistry, legalism and a strict moralism.[29] In addition, it helps to bring each type of precept within the broad horizon of God's gift and gives them importance and a force of new expression.

2. A unitary vision of the two oriented Wills in Christological sense

Another element not less important is represented by the theological principle according to which the unity of the two Testaments is founded Christologically, in the sense that all revelation converges in Christ. This principle is important for both the biblical and theological reflection, and its impact in the field of moral theology.[30] Its application will not contrast the Old and New Testament with regard to morality, as in any other field. Supporting this position is the analysis offered by the previous document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible*, where the relationship between the two Testaments in terms of "continuity, discontinuity and progression was elaborated"[31] There are two main aspects that affect the moral reflection: the gradual nature of biblical morality and Christological centrality.[32] The gradual process expresses a dynamism that runs through the Old and New Testament, each closely related to the other.

This progressive revelation from the Old to the New Testament is seen as a "way" symbolized by the story of the exodus, considered as the primordial event of the formation of the chosen people, together with the covenant gift which is connected to the giving of the *Torah*. However this "exodus" journey culminates in the New Covenant that was fulfilled in Jesus who is the way, truth and life (Jn 14,6). In Christ "all God's liberating dynamism is condensed and, in a certain way, also the whole of morality, theologically understood as God's gift, as the way spontaneously offered to men and women to attain eternal life,

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[29]   Ibidem.

[30]   The theme is highlighted in PCB, *BM*, n. 5. For the development of the theological reflection: cf. G. De Virgilio, *Bibbia e teologia morale,* 82–87.

[31]   PBC, *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible*, nn. 40–42.

[32]   Cf. A. Fumagalli, *Il dinamismo graduale della morale biblica*, 18–20.

total intimacy with him."[33] Taking Christ as a dynamic centre of attraction and the summit of morality is proved to be consistent with the theological tradition that has its roots since the patristic period. The new element is represented by the application of canonical approach, which allows one to interpret the Old and New Testament books according to a unified and progressive vision in Christological sense.[34]

3. The development of the First Part (Nos. 7–91)

Part I of the document entitled *A revealed morality: divine gift and human response* (Nos. 7–91) describes the gifts of God that always involve the tasks for humans. In the light of "revealed morality" as a gift of God to man, the document reads the main stages of the biblical accounts. It appears the concern is to emphasize the theological nature of the revealed morality, which highlights, in the God-man relationship, the two fundamental factors for the biblical morality:

> It is not characterized by a rigorous moralism. Pardon granted to fallen humanity forms part of God's gift; and, as the New Testament makes very clear, earthly endeavour develops in the inspiring perspective of eternal life, the completion of God's gifts.[35]

With this later premise, we want to clarify that an authentic interpretation of the moral message of the Bible cannot lead to a moralistic and rigoristic view of the behaviour required of believers, because the action of God is to forgive those who have fallen and forgiveness is part of these gifts.

The second factor is characterized by the eschatological perspective, which inspires the earthly act of the believer and represents the fulfilment of the gifts. After this premise follows the analysis of the gifts, which can be summarized in five key levels that guide the moral answer:

– the initial and fundamental gift of creation, mostly narrated in *Genesis* and in some *Psalms*;

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[33]   PCB, *BM*, n. 5.

[34]   Fumagalli comments: «Senza il riferimento unitario a lui [Cristo], il dinamismo morale attestato nella Bibbia si frammenterebbe in una serie eterogenea di concezioni etiche, facilmente conflittuali, così come avviene nell'odierna babele delle etiche postmoderne, che rinunciano alla ricerca di una verità morale, ma poi confliggono nell'accreditare come uniche le proprie verità parziali» (A. Fumagalli, *Il dinamismo graduale della morale biblica*, 18).

[35]   PCB, *BM*, n. 7.

– the gift of the covenant with the people of Israel and its fundamental experience in the giving of the Law at Sinai;

– the gift of the new covenant in Christ, which is completed and the paschal mystery;

– the gift of the mercy of God in Christ forgives the sin of the world;

– the eschatological gift of eternal life, which began in the present and is open to the future fulfilment.

From each of these gifts that mark the saving action of God from the Old to the New Covenant, the moral implications arise for human being.

Summing up the analysis of the first part we can focus on the three elements of the revealed morality that emerge from the reading of the document. The first element consists in the strictly religious and spiritual horizon of the dialectics of gift-response between God and man, which defines "second, but not secondary" morality. The second element is the gradual moral dynamism, culminating in the Christological revelation. To the gradualness of the revealed morality corresponds the progressive refinement of the moral conscience.[36] The third element is the claim of the universality of the revealed morality that goes beyond the historical boundaries of the chosen people and of the Christian community to get to the heart of each man and each woman.

4. Part Two: Biblical criteria for moral reflection (Nos. 92–154)

The theological elaboration of "revealed morality" in the first part of the document is connected to its practical application which is developed in the second part, where some "biblical" criteria for moral discernment are explained and elaborated. In no. 92 of the document there is the question of the role of Scripture in dealing with today's moral problems.

> Faced by these complex problems, the temptation arose in these latest decades to put aside the Scriptures, either wholly or in part. What is to be done when the Bible provides no satisfying answers? How can we integrate biblical data into a moral discourse on problems that need the light of theological reflection, reason and the sciences for their solution? This is our present project.[37]

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[36] The theme is highlighted in A. Fumagalli, *Il dinamismo graduale della morale biblica*, pp. 21–22.

[37] PCB, *BM*, n. 92.

The hermeneutical question concerns the "how" to use the Bible, which is characterized by its diversity and complexity, for moral reflection.[38] It is not easy to build a fruitful relationship between moral theology, which must give solutions to contemporary issues and "revealed morality", which is based on a collection of inspired books and authors from very different eras.

For this reason the Commission proposes a hermeneutical paradigm by defining "methodological criteria that will allow us to refer to Sacred Scripture in moral matters. At the same time we must take into account the theological contents of these writings, the complexity of their literary composition and finally their canonical dimension."[39] It adds a further principle, which concerns the relationship between two wills:

> In this regard we must pay particular attention to the re-reading of the Old Testament in the New, and apply to it with maximum possible rigour the categories of continuity, discontinuity, and progression which mark the relationship between the two Testaments.[40]

• The criteria and the interdisciplinary dialogue

No. 93 presents the list of criteria for reflection and moral discernment of the texts of Sacred Scripture. The text reads:

> To clarify as much as possible difficult moral decisions from the point of view of Scripture, in our exposition we shall use two fundamental criteria: conformity with the biblical view of the human being and conformity with Jesus' example; as well as six other more specific ones: convergence, contrast, advance, social dimension, finality and discernment.[41]

The two central themes that guide the document's hermeneutic choice are the biblical anthropology and Christology. The Biblical Commission argues that in the judgement "of difficult moral decisions,"[42] theologians and exegetes

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[38] For an assessment of some hermeneutical models related to the relationship between the Bible and morality: cf. G. De Virgilio, *Bibbia e teologia morale*, pp. 217–297.

[39] PBC, *BM*, n. 92.

[40] Ibidem. The reference of the three criteria "continuity, discontinuity and progression" is the above-mentioned document: cf. PCB, *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible*, nos. 64–65.

[41] PCB, *BM*, n. 93.

[42] From the context of paragraphs. 92–93 one can infer that the framers intend to allude to the expression "...illuminate as far as you can, difficult moral choices..." (n. 93), the

must, "together", base their evaluation principally on the two convergent hermeneutical perspectives, namely: the *anthropological* and *Christological* perspectives.

The anthropological criterion (biblical vision of the human being) and the Christological criterion (conformity to the example of Jesus of Nazareth) connect the message of the Bible with the moral life of believers. In this way one can achieve "a just moral discernment" in today's context. These two criteria, "play a double essential role. First of all they form a bridge between the first part (fundamental structures) and the second (methodological guidelines), thereby securing the coherence of the argumentation as a whole."[43] These two fundamental criteria "introduce and incorporate somehow the six specific criteria. The document explains that the six specific criteria can be deduced from the whole of Scripture and help to achieve 'adoption of solid moral position, leaning on the biblical revelation'. The document spells out the value with the following description:

> 1. an openness to diverse cultures, hence a certain ethical universalism (convergence); 2. a firm stand in the face of incompatible values (contrast); 3. a refining process of the moral conscience observable in each of the two Testaments, but especially from the one to the other (advance); 4. a rectification of many tendencies to be found in contemporary cultures to relegate moral decisions exclusively to individual subjective choices (community dimension); 5. an openness to a definite future of the world and of history, capable of imprinting a profound mark on the objectives and motivations of moral behaviour (finality); 6. lastly, a careful distinction, in every case, between the relative or absolute value of biblical principles and moral precepts (discrimination).[44]

Without pretending to address and solve all the problematic moral issues, the criteriology proposed in the document wants to be a real help in the "delicate process of correct moral discernment." This criteriological synthesis is consistent with the biblical hermeneutics and biblical theology which we know from the history of the debate on Christian morality. The Commission is proposing a real "hermeneutic paradigm" which is not only the biblical context,
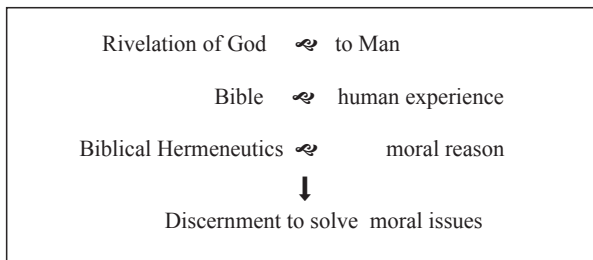
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moral problems that Scripture does not anticipate or that are not directly solvable through the use of "revealed morality" in the Bible.

[43]   PCB, *BM*, n. 93.

[44]   Ibidem.

but which relates the biblical macrocosm with the rationality and methodology that is proper to moral theology.[45]

We note the positive intention that guides the proposal of the document: the effort to create a "bridge of communication" between the datum of biblical revelation and the theological necessity of moral reason, using expressive linguistic categories that is shared by two different disciplines.[46] The progressive dialectic mirror can be summarized as follows:

Rivelation of God	✍	to Man
Bible	✍	human experience
Biblical Hermeneutics ✍		moral reason
	↓	
Discernment to solve moral issues		

• Fundamental criteria (Nos. 94-103)

To illustrate the two fundamental criteria, two key texts of biblical morality are examined: the Decalogue (Ex 20: 1–17) and the Beatitudes (Mt. 5: 3–12). Concerning the fundamental criterion of an anthropological nature, the moral evaluation of the biblical message has as a primary reference the judgement of "conformity with the biblical view of the human being". The Commission contrasts the position of those who believe that Scripture does not have an "original moral revelation" in that its content derives from other cultures. For this reason the solution to the moral problems should be entrusted not just to the biblical revelation, but to the endeavour of reason.[47] To answer this objec-

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[45] Cf. R. Fabris, *Analisi del documento Bibbia e morale. Radici bibliche dell'agire cristiano*, pp. 15–16.

[46] The commission makes clear that the proposal contained in the document has the value of a "model" and does not pretend to be "exhaustive" of all the moral issues: «A full examination or treatment of all problematic moral questions cannot be expected. We have chosen only a certain number of points, certainly far from exhaustive, that can illustrate the most fruitful way or ways to be followed in shedding light from the Scriptures on our moral reflections. Our purpose is to bring out the points offered by biblical revelation to help us today in the delicate process of making a balanced moral judgement» (PCB, *BM*, n. 93).

[47] Without entering into the debate, the reference is to the question of obligatory validity of the ethical guidelines of the Bible: cf. J.M. Gustafson, *The Place of Scripture in Christian Ethics*, pp. 430–455; D.H. Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology*; G. Segalla,

tion, the authors take up the thesis of J. Ratzinger on the originality of Sacred Scripture in morality[48]: the novelty consists in assimilating the human contribution, transforming it into the divine light of Revelation, which culminates in Christ.[49] Even if we do not find in the inspired text of the Sacred Scripture the solution to all the problems of moral theology, the Bible offers a precious horizon to "clarify all moral questions, even those that do not find in it a direct and complete answer." Concretely, the methodological approach that the moral theologian must follow in relation to the biblical reflection is indicated:

> More specifically, before forming a moral judgement, two questions must be asked in the first instance. Is a definite moral stance 1. In conformity with the theology of creation, i.e. with the vision of the full dignity of human nature, as 'God's own image' (Gen 1,26) in Christ, who is himself in an infinitely stronger sense, 'the image of the invisible God' (Col 1,15)? And 2. In conformity with covenantal theology, i.e. the vision of a humanity called, collectively and individually, to an intimate communion with God and to an effective collaboration in building up a new humanity that finds its completion in Christ?[50]

It shows how two foundational aspects are present in any moral evaluation: the human dimension and the construction of a "new humanity" (trans-

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Introduzione all'etica biblica del Nuovo Testamento, pp. 30–62; G. De Virgilio, *Bibbia e teologia morale*, pp. 127–165.

[48]   In this context, the contribution of H. Schürmann has been instrumental to the interpretation of the obligatory value action of the believer. The study from the original title: *Die Frage nach der Verbindlichkeit der neutestamentlicher Wertungen und Weisungen*, was published in Italian with the title: *La questione del valore obbligante delle valutazioni e degli insegnamenti neotestamentari. Un abbozzo*, in: J. Ratzinger, H. Schürmann, H.U. von Balthasar, *Prospettive di morale cristiana sul problema del contenuto e del fondamento dell'ethos cristiano*, pp. 9–35. The text of Schürmann was presented at the plenary session of the International Theological Commission held in Rome 16 to 21 December 1974. It was approved by the same committee "in generic form *ut textus CTI.*" On that occasion, J. Ratzinger intervened with a contribution entitled "Magisterium – Faith – Morals" and H. U. von Balthasar, with a contribution entitled "Nine thesis of Christian ethic." It was the first time that the International Theological Commission, whose secretary was once Ph. Delhaye, who was also chairman of the sub-committee of moral, published documents without the signature of the authors. According Delhaye the texts were so dense and organic that touching them hands would spoil them. Therefore, the sub-committee approved them "in generic form" – that is, in bulk, but not in the individual statements – and posted them as they were (cf. *Enchiridion Vaticanum*, V (1974–1976), p. 613); cf. interventions Ph. Delhaye on the CTI works, in *La Rivista del Clero Italiano* (1975), pp. 721–722; 890–893.

[49]   PBC, *BM*, n. 95.

[50]   Ibidem, n. 95.

cendent), the completion of which is Christ. To explain specifically how the document enunciates the first criterion in nos. 96–99 we present two examples: the sanctity of life ("you shall not kill" Es 20:13; Dt 5:17) and marital fidelity (cf. Ex 20:14; Dt 5:18). Looking back from the Old to the New Testament on the theme of life and marital fidelity, the document shows how the biblical journey of the two themes culminate in the Christological revelation. The biblical vision of progressive development throughout history culminates in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Following this perspective we take up the explanation of the second criterion:

> The other fundamental criterion focuses even more sharply on the heart of Christian morality, the imitation of Jesus, the incomparable model of conformity between word and deed, and of conformity with the will of God. There is no need to repeat or sum up what has already been said in the first part about the imitation and the following of Christ, both important themes for our purpose As Jesus is for Christians the model par excellence of perfect conduct, the principal question for moral discernment is whether Jesus' conduct is to be considered as a norm, a more or less unattainable ideal, a source of inspiration or as a simple point of reference?[51]

To answer that question one takes as an example the Gospel passage of the Beatitudes (Mt. 5:1–12), a text already elaborated in relation to the preaching of Jesus and its moral value.[52] Starting from his message and more generally the entire Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:13 to 7:29), it is reiterated as the example of Jesus urging believers to adopt a course of action that reflects right from now the future reality of the Kingdom. With the beatitudes, the evangelical morality is placed in a radical horizon, but at the same time it is made practicable by each believer.

The ideal of the "poor in spirit" (Mt 5:3) is embodied by Christ himself "poor, humble, meek, persecuted for justice." Jesus not only reveals the superior justice, but he is also its model, as he does not abrogate but fulfills the Law and the Prophets. The teaching and witness of Christ are not inaccessible to Christians, but rather they constitute practical ways to attain evangelical perfection. In terms of moral-theological reflection it is stated that:

The orientations given by Jesus have the value of true moral imperatives. They provide a basic outlook to lead the disciple to seek and find similar ways of regulating actions and values towards the final vision of the gospel, to lead a better life in the world, in anticipation of the coming kingdom. Jesus' moral

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[51] Ibidem, n. 100.

sayings and his example establish the theological and Christological founda-tions of moral living and encourage the disciple to live by the values of the kingdom of God revealed by Jesus.[52]

> In summary, the Christological interpretation of biblical morality is the key to the theological reflection of the document. The peculiarity of the biblical and moral reflection is contained in the mystery of Christ and his Gospel, whose ethical stan-dards are binding on believers.

• The specific criteria (Nos. 104–154)

After presenting the *two fundamental criteria*, we move to the explication of the *six specific criteria,* aimed at completing "a methodology for dealing with mor-al issues."[53] They are: 1. *Convergence* (Nos. 105–110); 2. *Contrast* (111–119); 3. *Advance* (Nos. 120–125); 4. *Community dimension*: (Nos. 126–135); 5. *Final-ity* (Nos. 136–149); 6. *Discernment* (Nos. 150–154).

The document takes up again some themes and reflections of the First Part in order to demonstrate within the Bible how the criteria operate. It is impor-tant to note how a remarkable effort of communication between biblical lan-guage and theological-moral language is highlighted even for the six specific criteria. We shall not go into the merits of the individual criterion. We shall only point out the links between the criteria and the virtues of reference.

The criterion of *Convergence* is connected to the theme of "wisdom", which represents an opening to different cultures, in the perspective of an ethical uni-versalism. The criterion of *Contrast* is connected to the theme of "faith". Faith in God enables us to discern the incompatible values of cultures of the world alongside the guidelines underlying the biblical vision of man.

The criterion of *Advance* is connected to the theme of "justice", which consists in a process of refinement of the moral conscience present in the sa-cred Scriptures, especially in the progression from the Old to the New Testa-ment.[54] The the criterion of *Community dimension* is connected to the theme of '' brotherly love ', which exceeds the limit of personalism and avoids relegat-ing the moral judgement to the subjective sphere. The criterion of *Finality* is re-lated the theme for "hope", which implies an opening to the future, beyond his-tory and the present world and is able to mark profoundly the motivation and the moral justification of the action. The criterion of *Discernment* is connected

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[52] Ibidem, n. 102.

[53] Ibidem, n. 104.

[54] Cf. A. Fumagalli, *Il dinamismo graduale della morale biblica*, pp. 21–22.

to the virtue of prudence, which involves a careful determination, according to the cases, the relative or absolute value of the principles and moral precepts derived from Scripture.[55] We can view the discussion in the following mirror:

1. *Convergence* (wisdom)

6. *Discernment* (prudence)   2. *Contrast* (faith)

5. *Finality* (hope)   3. *Advance* (justice)

4. *Community dimension* (brotherly love)

For each criterion an essential selection of specific themes is proposed[56], according to an established scheme (Biblical text and / evolution issue OT–NT / final synthesis), which interprets the biblical text in the development of the canon from the Old to the New Testament, culminating in the "Implications for

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[55] Cf. R. Fabris, *Analisi del documento Bibbia e morale. Radici bibliche dell'agire cristiano*, p. 15; PCB, *Bibbia e Morale*, n. 104.

[56] For the criterion of the *Convergence* the themes touched upon are: sin, evil, the law, the wisdom, the comparison between Paul and the philosophers of his time (cf. Nos. 106––110). For the criterion of the *Contrast,* the themes addressed are: monotheism and idolatry, the law, the anti-idolatrous preaching of the prophets, the Maccabean revolt against the pagan cult, the Pauline opposition to idolatry, and the anti-demonic conflict of 'Revelation (cf. Nos. 112–116). For the criterion of *Advance,* the themes touched upon are: the dynamic and progressive revelation of God from the time of Moses (law) to Jesus (the Beatitudes), the question of conflict and love of neighbor, the conjugal morality, the development of cultic theology from the temple sacrifice of the Old Testament, the new Christhian worship (cf. Nos. 121–124). For the criterion of *Community Dimension,* the themes touched upon are: the socio-communitarian form of Israel from tribal context to its evolving state and national levels, the ecclesial dimension of the first Christian community, the value of interpersonal relationships in the Church and outside the Church, the role of the marginalized and the claim of universal ethical communication (cfr. Nos. 127–134). For the criterion of *Finality,* the themes touched are: the theological reason for the time and the future hope traced in the Jewish conception and development of Christian theology, the attitude and the eschatological teaching of Jesus, following the example of the martyrs, the Pauline eschatological perspective (resurrection, judgment, Second Coming), the re-reading of eschatology in the Apocalypse (the centrality of Christ in the Church, the presence / Second Coming of Christ in history, eschatological fulfillment) (cfr. Nos. 137–146). For the criterion of *Discrimination,* the themes touched are: the historical moments in which Israel forms a judgment and issues a regulatory system in response to an event (the covenant, the land, exile and reconstruction), the dynamic of discernment in some New Testament contexts of ecclesial and personal nature (cfr. Nos. 151–153).

today's world". The development of the reflection highlights how it is possible to delve into the texts of the Bible with a correct hermeneutics. The commission is very keen to provide input for the interdisciplinary dialogue and encounter the moral theologians. And 'this is the purpose of the paragraph entitled "Implications for today's world."[57]

5. The elements of originality

In the *Conclusion* we shall summarize some of the original elements that illuminate the moral dimension of the biblical message and its relation to moral theology.

– First, the usefulness of the concept of "revealed morality" with its dual benefit is highlighted: on the *theoretical level*, revealed morality is inscribed in the properly spiritual horizon of the primacy of God, his Word and his gifts to man[58]; on the *practical level*, the revealed morality helps to better define the misleading topics that threaten the educational instance of morality, ie "a kind of casuistry, legalism and a strict moralism." Ultimately the use of the Bible helps one to situate the precepts within the underlying theological horizon of "gift of God."

– The re-reading of the founding texts of biblical morality (the Decalogue, the Beatitudes) opens the moral action of the Christian reflection to a new dynamism, not only prohibitive and prescriptive, but paradoxically more attractive, in conformity with the ethical and moral sensibilities of the majority of our contemporaries.[59]

– The eight criteria derived from the Bible and proposed in the document represented a "hermeneutic grid" that should help the believer to grasp the moral reflection in the spirit that makes the difference, and reminiscent of the breath of new life that comes from the mystical reality and inspired by the sacred text.

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[57] Cf. PCB, *BM,* nn. 110; 117; 125; 135; 147; 154.

[58] The fundamental role of the Word of God, expressed through the Sacred Scripture, is framed in a broad „salvific" vision that incorporates anthropology and Christology: cf. Benedetto XVI, *Verbum Domini*, n. 9.

[59] «In his Sermon on the Mount, also a basic foundational document, Jesus clearly opens the way in this direction. The advantage is quite evident: the development of *morality as a stimulus* rather than a burden, that respects and favours an itinerary, launches towards the kingdom, and educates the conscience rather than giving the impression of imposing a leaden burden on our shoulder (cf. Mt 11.29–30)» (PBC, *BM*, n. 157).

II. Hermeneutical aspects for interdisciplinary dialogue

The quick glance at the document of the Biblical Commission has made it possible to focus on the reality of this proposal, which is still open to discussion and improvement.[60] Employing the idea of "revealed morality", reinterpreted according to a dual path (theological and practical application) seems particularly interesting for the development of hermeneutics.[61] Starting with the outcome of the document one can further explore the proposed hermeneutics and how the dialogue between exegetes and theological moralists plays out. I think I can indicate two directions: the mediation of biblical language and, the methodology for the formation of "biblical moral identity" of believers.[62]

1. The mediation of biblical language

There is a problem in the linguistic relationship between the contents of the "biblical science" and the systematic work of moral theology. This problem, also raised by the same document, is one of the reasons that has not always allowed adequate communication between biblical scholars and moral theologians.[63] The evolution of the two disciplines and the complexity of the research confirm the relevance of this issue. The communication effort between the two disciplines cannot be more urgent. The mediation of the biblical language can help moral theology to grasp the peculiarities of the revealed morality and to

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[60] It is recognized that certain issues remain open, as the concept of "natural law" (cf. ibidem, 159).

[61] Cf. R. Fabris, *Analisi del documento Bibbia e morale. Radici bibliche dell'agire morale*, p. 16.

[62] The educational and pedagogical aspect seem to be urgent in the process of Christian evangelization (cf. the insistence on the theme of education to the faith in the teachings of the bishops in recent decades). The crisis of moral theology is contextualized within the broader framework of the postmodern transformation of the system of life and Western thought. The work of the XIII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops held in 2012 was specifically dedicated to these problems, cf. *Lineamenta*: *The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith* (02.02.2011) and the subsequent apostolic exhortation Francesco, *Evangelii Gaudium* (24/11/2013).

[63] Cf. P. Bordeyne, *Les promesses d'une collaboration renouvelée entre biblistes et moralistes*, in: Idem (ed.), *Bible et Morale*, pp. 179–199; idem, *Le renouveau biblique de la théologie morale: une fausse simplicité*, pp. 31–50.

translate it into the current environment of man and his historical condition. It is a major challenge for the development of theological reflection.[64]

In the "circular dialectic" between the Bible and the lives of believers, moral discernment is even better developed through the help of the narrative and rhetorical approach to the Bible.[65] Several recent studies confirm attention to these two areas of interpretation, which connect the Bible to the revealed morality. [66] In this way the relationship between the Bible and moral theology can result in a fruitful link between the two dimensions of communication: the normative dimension of the biblical ethics and the formative-affective and motivational dimension. Both dimensions are directed to the individual and the entire community of believers in order to internalize, update and apply the Word to life. Within the limits of this paper we explore the "two ways" of linguistic mediation.

• The narrative way

Bible and life meet each other in the 'story'. History is made of personal and community stories. The importance of the narrative method involves both the exegesis and moral theology.

Concerning the application of the narrative approach to biblical texts, the document of the PCB, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* distinguishes two aspects of the narrative analysis: a) methodological aspect; b) theological reflection. Regarding the methodology applied, the Commission emphasizes the novelty of historical-critical exegesis through the narrative approach, which produces a new way of assessing the significance of the texts. To the literary elements which are studied with the historical-critical method as documents of the past, shall be added the identification process that the reader gets through the response that he is called to give (as "implicit reader") entering into the "the world of the story".[67]

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[64] Cf. PCB, *BM*, n. 32. The task of "finding the language" is a necessary mediation not only in view of communication for the people of today, but also the end of a fruitful interdisciplinary cooperation.

[65] Cf. T. Goffi, *Etica cristiana narrativa. Verso un metodo nuovo della teologia morale?*, pp. 345–351. Corcening the rhetorical reflection: cf. F. Rigotti, *La verità retorica. Etica, conoscenza e persuasione.*

[66] Cf. G. De Virgilio, *Bibbia e teologia morale*, pp. 304–313.

[67] «A text will continue to have an influence in the degree to which real readers (e.g., ourselves in the late 20th century) can identify with the implied reader. One of the major tasks of exegesis is to facilitate this process of identification» (PCB, *L'interpretazione della Bibbia nella Chiesa*, I, B, 2.)

The document highlights the peculiarities of the historical-critical method with respect to:

> While the historical-critical method considers the text as a "window" giving access to one or other period (not only to the situation which the story relates but also to that of the community for whom the story is told), narrative analysis insists that the text also functions as a "mirror" in the sense that it projects a certain image—a "narrative world"—which exercises an influence upon readers' perceptions in such a way as to bring them to adopt certain values rather than others.[68]

The narrative approach has consequences not only for the understanding of the biblical texts, but also for theological reflection. The nature of the story makes the reader to enter into the dynamism of the characters and the inspired message of the Bible. From this process comes a practical and pastoral hermeneutic. The strength of the biblical story allows the reader to find out the effectiveness of the Word of God which has not only an informative function ("narration of salvation"), but also a "performative" function ("narration in view of salvation").

The role of *narrative theology* shows all its interest for ethical reflection as is outlined as a possible communication route between the two disciplines. In fact, the narrative paradigm does not consist in an extrinsic application of literary and theoretical systems used in the analysis of biblical texts, but in an existential process, which involves faith and moral action, in as much as it is based on the fact that "a history liberates the histories of the listeners." [69]

Ultimately the programme of narrative theology has far more radical implication than the simple apology of the methodological use of narrative forms in moral theology. According to the theological orientation that is based on the hermeneutics of narration, the proper narrative moment comes before the normative moment.

The role of the narration properly reveals the "moral sense" of the action. In contrast, the normative evaluation of a biblical text only specifies the 'moral attitude.[70]

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68   Ibidem.

69   Cf. P. Cattorini, *Un buon racconto. Etica, teologia, narrazione*, pp. 57–60; C. Segre, *Narratologia*, in: G.L. Beccaria (ed.), *Dizionario di linguistica e di filologia, metrica e retorica*, p. 501.

70   «La norma, nel riferirsi a certe situazioni determinate, opera un'astrazione rispetto a questo riferimento paradigmatico, ma non può dismettere totalmente l'originaria valenza narrativa. la norma comanda o vieta gesti concreti, ma cade nella ripetizione moralistica e nella mimesi esteriore se non allude, in tali comandi o divieti, al *significato* di tali gesti, il

The narrative and the normative levels are interpreted in a new world, based on the analysis of the biblical text and its essential rhetorical and narrative nature.

This is not the context to deepen the internal dynamics of narration, but simply to indicate how reading the Bible brings into play a cooperative process in which the reader, entering the biblical story, "transforms it and transforms himself, builds it and at same time contributes to the realization of his own competence and planning."[71] Ultimately entering into dialogue with the characters and situations of the biblical stories involves letting oneself be challenged by them and being open to a transformation. The construction of '' narrative identity 'occurs when the believer opens himself to the revealed morality and discovers himself in front of the Bible. [72] In the act of reading, the subject is seen to suggest the power to be caught up by the new and unexpected possibilities which the encounter with the text reveals.[73] The biblical narrative reveals all its transforming power with regard to the moral identity of the believer.[74]

• The rhetorical way

Alongside the narrative method, the rhetorical analysis is part of the 'pragmatic' approaches that concern the research of the effects of the text on the reader.[75] As is known, the rhetoric is the art of composing speeches that persuade

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quale può venire espresso e percepito solo entro un contesto narrativo che ne illumina le componenti, l'intenzione, lo svolgimento» (P. Cattorini, *Un buon racconto. Etica, teologia, narrazione*, pp. 57–58)

[71]   G. De Virgilio, *Bibbia e teologia morale*, p. 317.

[72]   The philosophical model that inspires the „affective poetic ‚followed in biblical moral inquiry is inspired by the hermeneutic proposal of P. Ricoeur; cf. the presentation of the authors who are inspired by the „affective poetic" in De Virgilio, *Bibbia e teologia morale*, pp. 268–294; A. Macintyre, *Dopo la virtù. Saggio di teoria morale*, Feltrinelli, Milano 1988, pp. 225–269.

[73]   «I racconti con le loro variazioni immaginative che rifigurano la nostra visione del mondo, aiutano a costruire il nostro immaginario morale ispirano la nostra visione etica e contribuiscono a formare le nostre convinzioni e i nostri sentimenti. L'immaginazione narrativa ha la forza per nutrire la nostra immaginazione etica e di suscitare quel desiderio di "essere come" ciò che nel racconto si è svelato come "buono" e "realizzante in sé"» (A. Barbi, *L'analisi narrativa e la forza trasformante del racconto*, pp. 35–52 (ivi, 47).

[74]   For the deepening of the relationship between poetry, rhetoric and hermeneutics: cf. P. Ricoeur, *Retorica, poetica, ermeneutica*, in Idem, *Filosofia e linguaggio*, pp. 201–218.

[75]   The document on the *Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* emphasizes that this hermeneutic address is placed in the channel of classical rhetoric and the new application of the rhetorical approach to texts from Scripture can be distinguished according to three

people. Now a good part of the biblical texts are to some extent the "persuasive" texts, hence, the rhetorical approach should be considered an important hermeneutical key, especially for the interpretation of the discursive and argumentative sections of the Bible. Together with the narrative approach, this method expresses a close connection with ethics and – in our opinion – is an effective factor in the dialogue between the Bible and moral theology.[76]

In the ancient time there were classified three types of speeches, defined on the basis of the subject, the public and, the function.[77] The first type concerned the speaker's ability to persuade a jury about the guilt or innocence of a defendant (*judicial genre*). The second type was to convince an assembly of citizens to take one political decision rather than the other (*deliberative genre*). The third type concerned the speech as part of an official ceremony, before an audience gathered to participate in an act of worship, a public praise in regards to a character or teaching concerning the exaltation of the virtues (*epideictic genre*).[78] The latter typically is most close to the ethics purposes, for the fact that, in it, virtues are praised whilst vices are condemned. In this way, as bad examples are reproached, good examples are recommended to be imitated.[79]

The connection to the literary world of the Bible and its ethical value emerges particularly in relation to the epideictic genre.[80] It is placed in a "process of formation" of consciousness of the individual and community, called to adhere with greater intensity to a thesis already commonly accepted (*res certa*) and the framework of values that ensues. The *epideictic genre* is a communicative model not tied to a particular context and its informative dimension, but aimed at persuasion and as such "repeatable" indefinitely.

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approaches: the first is based on the greek-latin classical rhetoric; the second is attentive to the process of semitic composition; the third covers the latest applications in the research called the "new rhetoric" (cf. PCB, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, I, B).

[76] As various biblical studies on the rhetorical and argumentative approaches emerged, it is hoped that there would also be a further exploration in moral theology on the hermeneutical level: cf. H.D. Betz, *Rhetoric and Theology*, in: A. Vanhoye (éd.), *L' apôtre Paul: personnalité, style et conception du ministère* (BETL 73), pp. 16–48.

[77] Presenting the „rhetorical genre" Ellero noted three types: a) legal type; b) type deliberative; c) type epideictic (cf. M.P. Ellero, *Introduzione alla retorica*, pp. 33–34).

[78] Membership of genres was decisive for the choice of arguments and the most appropriate ornaments. It should be noted that in the course of historical epochs the same structure of the genre and their coding underwent considerable changes and adaptations, also producing mixed genres (cf. ibidem, 32).

[79] Cf. F. Rigotti, *La verità retorica. Etica, conoscenza e persuasione*, p. 126.

[80] Cf. C. Perelman, L. Olbrechts Tyteka, *Trattato dell'argomentazione. La nuova retorica*, pp. 24–55.

The rhetorical approach used in biblical hermeneutics sheds new light on the role that text plays on the listeners. Thus, the purely aesthetic and passive conception of the epideictic speech is challenged whilst the "aretalogic and pragmatic importance" of biblical texts is emphasized.[81] Listeners of epideictic speech are not mere "spectators" but they become real "protagonists" of a dialogue. They are challenged by the persuasive function of speech and driven to move from "aesthetic" level to the "ethical" and engaging level.

In this sense, the *epideictic genre* unveils its transformative role which is expressed through the process of formation of the moral conscience of the subject. The rhetorical procedure that is activated in the epideictic genre present in biblical literature must be grasped in all its "formative" value.

This element induces a further consideration which relates to the role of the speaker. He assumes the function of an "educator". The end result of rhetorics leads to the belief that the ethical sphere and the educational sphere are the hinges of epideictic rhetorics.[82] This fact has hermeneutical consequences in the context of exegetical and theological-moral research. The Bible has not only an illuminative role, but also an ethical role and the teaching of moral values. This element helps to qualify the exhortative function of texts of Sacred Scripture and their ethical value.[83]

2. From revealed morality to the formation of "biblical moral identity"

In the previous analysis we highlighted how the *Bible and Morality* document proposes to consider the "progressive nature" of revealed morality taking into

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[81]   It recorded that in this genre a kind of convergence between ethical value of the content (proposal of virtuos model, pedagogical use of blame and invective, etc.) and persuasive capacity expressed by the rhetorical form of epideictic speech. Already Quintilian emphasized the ethical function of oratory, both from the laudatory and punitive aspects: cf. M.T. Quintiliano, *Institutio oratoria*, 3.4.16

[82]   Writes F. Rigotti: «La retorica intesa come momento di invenzione di una teoria originale e come arte dello sconvolgimento di concetti, la retorica con il suo richiamo alle passioni e all'immaginazione e con il suo appello al non detto e al non dicibile, rimane legata in vari modi al campo dell'etica» (F. Rigotti, *La verità retorica. Etica, conoscenza e persuasione*, p. 122).

[83]   As an example of the functional role of epideictic rhetoric one may indicate the parabolic method of Jesus and the use of metaphorical language (cf. G. De Virgilio, *Bibbia e teologia morale*, pp. 317–320). Even more relevant is the theme in the Pauline epistles: cf. H.-D. Betz, *The Problem of Rhetoric and Theology According to the Apostle Paul*, in: A. Vanhoye (ed.), *L'Apôtre Paul. Personnalité, Style et Conception du Ministère* (BETL 73), pp. 16–48; B. Standaert, *La Rhétorique ancienne dans Saint Paul*, in: ibidem, pp. 78–92.

account the major connections of the biblical canon and its development from the Old to the New Testament. When one reads the Bible the "moral conscience" of the believer is involved in the dialectics between the divine gift and the human correspondence following the steps outlined in the previous analysis. From each of these passages that mark the progressive self-giving of God, the moral implications arise for the believer and the formation of his conscience. Indeed the progressive refinement of the "moral conscience"corresponds to the gradual dynamism of the revealed morality in the Bible.[84]

• The human person in the dialectic between "biblical text," and everyday life

We have considered two different approaches that play a transforming role in the reading of the Bible: the narrative and the rhetoric. Through the narrative approach, the "illuminative and creative role" in the relationship between the reader and the text is highlighted while in the epideictic rhetoric approach, the "persuasive" role, centred on the power of communication and argumentation is expressed. We should not forget that every literary work, being an indirect communication event – through writing – is looking for readers who will bring it back to life. It should also be pointed out that the biblical text, given its rhetorical and narrative value, emits a singular ability to engage readers since the "narrative" dimension of life is a fundamental category of human beings.

At the heart of the relationship between the Bible and Moral theology lies the concrete reality of the individual person and the community of believers in the daily struggle. They are the ones who listen to the reading and open their hearts to the gift of the Word. After having welcomed it, they are increasingly being called to embody in their lives the perennial newness of the Gospel. Therefore the biblical moral identity formation occurs through an encounter and a fruitful engagement between the "revealed morality" of the Bible and the practical life of believers. One can talk about three levels of involvement.

– First it is the involvement in the interweaving of the story of life. The biblical stories are presented as an exploration of human complexity with its greatness, misery and contradictions. In the Bible we find figures, situations and events that challenge not only the past but also the present and the future of the reader. They pose questions and provide teachings. Every reader can learn

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[84] The criterion of „advance" promises to be the „most original criterion and less used in the elaboration of moral theology". According to Fumagalli this criterion allows one to grasp how the refining of consciousness constitutes the progressive form with which the man and woman of every culture and epoch grow in perception and in moral disposition, cf. A. Fumagalli, *Il dinamismo graduale della morale biblica*, n. 21.

from them what is truly human. Thus a first level of the reader's involvement in the biblical stories is established, and it is vehicled through the correlation between these stories and the experience of the reader. The texts of Scripture can give access to a multitude of experiences. Similarly, the human experiences of the reader make up an area of interest and acceptance of the biblical message.

– A second level is the involvement in the plot of "narrated text." In front of the pages of Scripture the subject discovers how his experience in reinterpreted biblical characters is configured from a new perspective.[85] The subject is involved in the plot of the biblical tales, and urged to make a comparison with the characters and their behaviour, invited to take the narrator's point of view. In this way the "narrative world" of the Bible opens up to the world of the subject with all the transforming power of the values and opportunities that reading brings in itself. This world becomes familar. In this way, the subject is able to issue ethical judgements about his actions, to imagine new ways to live their lives and find a new identity. At this level it finds the quality of the pastoral plan of the community and the effectiveness of its educational process, aimed at the formation of "new ethical conscience." It captures in this process the performative character of the biblical narrative.[86]

– A third level touches the subject's relation with God and the community of believers. The theological nature of biblical texts, accepted as an expression of "revealed morality," leads the reader to discover God as "a protagonist who is before and behind" each story of the Bible. The reader who with faith opens himself to the biblical account understands how the adequate mediation between salvation and history consists in an open memory to the liberation accomplished by God. The subject accepts the sacred Scriptures and the unpredictable traces of divine action in favour of man, it is the testimony of the community that recalls the experience of salvation. The consequence of this 'formative and transformative' process is represented by the plot of interpersonal relations that the player weaves in the community. The act of reading reveals its maximum effectiveness in the ecclesial context and under the action of the Holy Spirit.[87]

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[85]   The proceedings of the parables of Jesus represent a clear example of this rhetorical phenomenon: cf. V. Fusco, *Oltre la parabola.* Introduzione alle parabole di Gesù, pp. 126–127.

[86]   Cf. A. Barbi, *L'analisi narrativa e la forza trasformante del racconto*, pp. 48–49.

[87]   Cf. PCB, *L'interpretazione della Bibbia nella Chiesa*, II, A, 2); Benedetto XVI, *Verbum Domini*, nn. 29–30.

• The revival of the method of *lectio divina*

From the ancient tradition of the Church comes the method of the prayerful reading of the Bible called *lectio divina*.[88] Particularly, in the recent decades there is a growing need to unify the personal and community formation of believers by proposing to them this prayer form for their contact with the Word of God. It is prayer form in which the main aspects of the relationship with God and the commitment in the world are summarized.[89] We believe that this practice that is being proposed, when properly revived, and further clarified, is one of the most effective methods for the formation of the biblical moral identity of believers. It was punctuated in the document: *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*[90] and recently revived in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini* by Benedict XVI.[91]

In numbers 86–87 the Exhortation *Verbum Domini* talks about the relationship between the Word of God and the liturgy, the condition of "inner silence" and the listening skills of the believer. To hear God speaking one must be silent in the heart.[92] The spiritual life of the believers implies the prayerful approach to the Bible.[93] The reference to the liturgy as "privileged place" leads one to underline how the dynamic life of the Word acts similarly to the Eucharistic dynamism, through which the word is "actualized" in the com-

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[88] There is an extensive bibliography on the subject. We refer to our approach to the reflections of D. D'Alessio, *Il racconto come vita. Lectio biblica come avventura della mente e del cuore*, pp. 103–144.

[89] Insistence on „*lectio divina*", whose origin is placed at the beginnings of Christianity, gradually developed especially starting from the indications of *Dei Verbum* n. 25 which reaffirms the urgent need to promote Bible reading among believers. In these post-conciliar years there appeared in numerous publications and qualified studies dedicated to *lectio divina*. These studies have helped raise awareness of the method and its applications in the Church's life, proposing to groups, to associations and movements (cf. *Catechismo della Chiesa Cattolica,* Vatican City 1993, nn. 1177; 2708).

[90] Cf. PCB, *L'interpretazione della Bibbia nella Chiesa*, IV, C, 2.

[91] Cf. M. Tábet, G. De Virgilio (edd.), *Sinfonia della Parola,* Commento all'Esortazione Apostolica post-sinodale *Verbum Domini* di Benedetto XVI, pp. 11–23.

[92] The liturgy and the Word of God: cf. Benedetto XVI, *Verbum Domini*, n. 52; the Word as "sacrament"; cf. ibidem, n. 56; cf. M. Tábet, G. De Virgilio (edd.), *Sinfonia della Parola*, pp. 87–103.

[93] Cf. Benedetto XVI, *Verbum Domini*, n. 86.

munity. In a sense the prayerful reading of the sacred text should be lived and understood in relation to the Eucharistic celebration.[94]

Essentially, the five stages of *lectio divina* are indicated in the *Verbum Domini,* namely: the thorough reading of the inspired text (*Lectio*), personal meditation on the read text which responds to the question: "what does the biblical text say to us?" (*Meditatio*). What follows is prayer time as "response to the Lord and his Word" (*Oratio*), which culminates in the quiet reception of the divine gift of conversion and contemplation of its greatness (*Contemplatio*). In this inner process the dynamics of the Word operates in the heart of the believer a "wise vision of reality" and is presented as a "criterion of discernment" that penetrates heart of the person (cf. Heb 4:12).

In *lectio divina* a double relationship is activated: from the written text to the meeting with the mystery of God's will and, from the encounter with God to the witness to the Word Incarnate which is actualized in history. So, the journey of *lectio divina* concludes with a final step which consists in living charity as ethical determination (*actio*) and historical response to the Word accepted and internalized. It is quite clear that this method tends to effect the unity between faith and life, between life and prayer, between the human and the spiritual, between interiority and exteriority.

Lectio divina helps to integrate the study, critical analysis of the text in a wise and prayerful process. Thus, it is a faith approach. The four steps can be summarized in two fundamental movements: the first (*lectio* and *meditatio*) is more objective, all aimed at bringing out what the text says; the second (*oratio* and *contemplatio*) is rather more subjective because it makes the most out of the existential and experiential dimension of the reader. The *lectio divina* process culminates in discernment and concrete translation of moral action of the believer (*actio*).[95]

A closer look at the practice of *lectio divina* reveals that the three components that affect the biblical moral formation of the subject are intertwined:
  – the "hermeneutical component" that uses a direct, personal encounter and "ecclesial" with the Bible. It helps to know the lyrics, allows a vital contact with the world of the characters and the events narrated;

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[94] Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 11; *Catechismo della Chiesa Cattolica*, n. 1324. As regards the reference to the Eucharist, as well as precious nn. 54–55 of *Verbum Domini*, cf. Benedetto XVI, *Sacramentum caritatis.* Esortazione apostolica post-sinodale (22.02.2007), nn. 155–156.

[95] «We do well also to remember that the process of *lectio divina* is not concluded until it arrives at action (*actio*), which moves the believer to make his or her life a gift for others in charity» (Benedetto XVI, *Verbum Domini*, n. 87).

– the "pedagogical" component attested in the Bible with all its richness of expression. The believer acquires wisdom and begins to teach others.
– the "ethical and moral" component that summarizes the entire hermeneutical path and represents the culmination of that wise synthesis that occurs in the encounter between the "biblical text," and "life". The path proposed in *lectio divina* can be summed up in four stages which correspond to the four key aspects of the relationship between the Bible and Moral Theology:

1 – *attention* to the text	[literary aspect]
2 – *attraction* of the text	[aesthetics aspect]
3 – *actualization* of the text	[existential aspect]
4 – *realization* of the text	[ethical aspect]

The literary importance of analysis (the narrative approach, the rhetorical approach) concern points 1 and 2. While steps 3 and 4, i.e. the existential and the ethical aspects in *lectio divina* correspond to the stage of "*actio*."[96]

• *Actio*: actualization and application

In *lectio divina* the final moment of the *actio* is the stage of decision and of moral commitment. The sacred Scripture read in the Spirit, meditated, prayed and contemplated, is translated into the concrete experience of life through actualization and application. "Actualization" and "application" of the biblical message call to mind the relationship between the Bible and morality. The two functions are the most delicate and sensitive stage of the hermeneutical process – and ultimately the relationship between the Bible and moral theology – which allows one to connect the world of the text to the reader. The *actualization* is the hermeneutical process by which the word of the Bible resonates with the contemporary word for today's reader. The *application* is the consequential step for actualization where the reader decides and puts into practice what he has freely accepted in his heart. Experience confirms how fruitful practice of *lectio divina* is for the formation of the biblical moral identity of the believer.

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[96]   Concerning the role of *actio* (*operatio*), cf. M. Masini, *La lectio divina. Teologia, spiritualità, metodo*, pp. 439–443.

• The interplay of the affective and normative dimensions

We understand that the path of the two disciplines, the Bible and moral theology is marked by the difference of their respective research fields. The proposal contained in the document of the PBC, the *Bible and Morality* connects, in a "viable circularity", the 'affective' dimension to the 'normative' dimension of the biblical text. Such circularity characterizes the revealed morality, as is elaborated in the reflection of the document. In the light of the above consideration, the opposition between those who support the illuminative and motivational role and those who affirm the normative and binding role of the Bible and its moral message seems not to have reasons to exist. We believe it is not possible to separate the affective-illuminative aspect from the normative, as both participate in the hermeneutical process that must be considered in its dialectical unity and in its perspective for future development.

A conscience trained to interpret, implement and apply the message of the Bible cannot infer from the chosen text some moral norms, without having first followed the theological-spiritual path described above. A similar thing occurs in the elaboration of a moral reflection: a system of fundamental moral theology implies serious research, biblically founded on the basis of a rigorous hermeneutical verification. The two dimensions produce a "creative" role in the dialogue between exegetes and moralists, as they are closely related in terms of form and content, aesthetics and ethics in the composition of a literary work, a story or a speech.

In summary, we want to point out to the moral conscience of the believer the elements of the affective dimension of the Bible, which includes: a) recognizing the role of the spiritual reading of the Bible; b) enabling the hermeneutic circularity between believers, communities and the Word; c) having experience of interpretation, actualization and application of the Word.

Furthermore, we want to point out to the moral conscience of the believer the aspects of "normative dimension" of the Bible, which includes: a) contextualizing and defining the moral process witnessed in the Bible along the course of history; b) identifying the concrete history of the effects of a text in the community; c)ensuring the continuity between religious experience and moral experience in a process of ongoing improvement and inculturation of the biblical message. The exclusion of a dimension in favour of the other would produce a "short hermeneutical circuit" with harmful consequences both for the interpretation of the biblical message and the structure of moral theology and its credibility.

Conclusion

[The proposed hermeneutics of the document PBC, *Bible and Morality* shows its positivity. For the authority of the document and the historical context in which it is offered, we can say that it is a useful tool, which enables the interdisciplinary dialogue and suggests paths for further deepening of the relationship between the Bible and Moral Theology. The use of 'idea of "revealed morality" is positive, both with regard to the moral and theological research, and the strictly practical and pastoral daily life.

– As regards the theological field, the utilization of the concept of "revealed morality implies a theological mediation, which refers to the very nature of the divine Revelation. The document states that the interlocutor of revealed morality" is the human being, recipient of divine revelation and its moral implications. The revealed morality connects what is authentically human to the mystery of the triune God who reveals himself in history through his gifts. These gifts culminate in the new covenant in Jesus Christ, crucified and risen. It is interesting to note that the idea of revealed morality illuminates the relationship between anthropology and Christology and these two poles become criteria for moral discernment. The "anthropological criterion" involves the ability to reflect and to identify the ethical content starting from moment of reflection on the human condition illuminated by the biblical testimony. Closely related to the first criterion is the Christological criterion which touches the heart of the truly Christian morality: the imitation of Jesus, true God and true man, unequalled model of perfect conformity of words and life and conformity to God's will.

– The main effort of the document is hermeneutical. We believe this framework constitutes a critical and decisive interdisciplinary mediation. Because of the nature of "revealed morality" offered to man, the theological message of the Bible engages one in the required hermeneutical reflection. The eight criteria proposed in the document are a great help to know how to authentically interpret the moral message of the Bible. The revealed morality demands that it be interpreted in accordance with the otherness of the text and its theological message. The synthesis of the Biblical Commission is a very good one. It demonstrates a sensitivity to moral research and its hermeneutical needs. We consider it an important indication of the two ways, "narrative and rhetoric" to further develop the moral message of the Bible. The hermeneutic consistency of the 'narrative and rhetoric way "has much to offer to the exegetes as well as to the Moral theologians".

– The proposal of the eight 'criteria' is also aimed at the formation of the biblical moral conscience of believers.

This is an urgent task of the Church and of teaching in our academic centres.

At the same time we retain the practice of *lectio divina* as very effective in terms of the formation of the biblical moral identity of the believer. It is a tool for knowledge and for spiritual and moral maturity of the individual and the community.

The need for a permanent educational attention must accompany not only the intelligent research, but the preoccupation of every believer, called to become himself "the formed and the formator" within the limits of their powers and responsibilities.[97] This element is not only the 'test' of the relationship between the Bible and Morality, but also the process of renewal of moral theology, the *magis nutrita* of the Holy Scripture.[98]

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97   Cf. De Virgilio, *Bibbia e teologia morale*, pp. 342–346.

98   Cf. *Optatam totius*, n. 16.

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