



“THE WORD OF GOD AND COMMITMENT IN THE WORLD”

Sacred Scripture in the Life of the Church

Madrid, 7-9 February 2011

INTRODUCTION:

Your Eminence, My Lord Archbishops and Bishops, Very Rev. Fathers and all of you: my Brothers and Sisters in the one call to the discipleship of Jesus,

I bring you the greetings and the prayerful wishes of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. I trust that your days here, reflecting on the Holy Scriptures as God’s word in the life of the Church, have been very fruitful. Although many versions of the Bible in Spanish already exist,¹ this has been an occasion for presenting the splendid new *Biblia de la Conferencia Episcopal Española*.² It is hoped that the great work that has gone into producing this version, enhancing its fidelity to original texts, will make it more “communicative with modern culture” and, so, help Christians live their commitments in the world.

This morning, we would like to carry the reflection of the past few days further, if not conclude them, with a consideration of God’s Word in Scriptures not only as the source of life and nourishment of the Church, but also as the source and content of the Church’s very mission and activity in the world, indeed, ***the Church’s commitment in the world***.

¹ E.g., *Reina-Valera*, *Biblia Traducción Interconfesional*, *Biblia Pastoral*, *Biblia Católica para Jóvenes*, *Biblia del Peregrino*, *La Biblia de las Américas*, *Biblia de América*, *Biblia Latinoamericana*, etc.

² *Sagrada Biblia. Versión oficial de la Conferencia Episcopal Española*, Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores cristianos, 2010.

PART ONE

THE WORD OF GOD

AS REVELATION OF HIS COMMITMENT IN THE WORLD

So doing, we wish to suggest first of all that God's Word is the source and content of the Church's *commitment in the world*, because it is first and foremost a revelation of God's own commitment in the world; and it is as such that it inspires, guides and sustains the commitment of the Body of Christ in the world. And so, limiting ourselves to broad outlines, we may rapidly survey how God's Word reveals his commitment in the world:

- as the ***word of creation*** in the creation accounts,
- as the ***word of call and covenant*** in the history of Abraham and Israel's vocation of salvation,
- as the ***word of call, presence and salvation*** in the incarnation, ministry, passion and resurrection of Jesus, and
- as the ***word of missionary call to evangelization and ministry*** at Pentecost and in the Church through all time. This last point coincides explicitly with my assigned task this morning: ***the commitment of the Church in the world.***

1. The Word of God and Creation:

The first instance of the revelation of God's word to the world was actually at the creation of the world. The series of "*God said*" (אָמַר אֱלֹהִים) did "tear through the silence of nothingness"³ to produce created reality. God's word ("*and God said: let there be...*") transformed "***chaos***" at the dawn of creation into a "***cosmos***", an ordered world system, capable of supporting human life.

The prologue of the Gospel of John beautifully expresses this first engagement of God's word with the world as "***creation***": "*All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being*" (Jn.1:3; cfr. Is.45:12.ff; Job 38:4; Neh. 9:6 etc.). What has come into being in the Word of God was "*life*". ***Creation*** is born of the word of God which overcomes nothingness and creates *life*.

Creation, however, is not a passing encounter of God's word with the world. ***Creation*** denotes rather a sustained encounter of his word with the world. The world is in existence, because God continues to sustain it with his word. God is forever committed to creation, the work of his hands; and it is the sense of creation as *cosmos* which best illustrates the sustaining power of his word in creation. "***Cosmos***" (κοσμέω --- cfr. *cosmetics*) describes the created world as an "ordered" and an "adorned" system. It connotes *beauty* and *goodness*, because there is order; and it is that into which God's word has transformed ***chaos*** (the *tohu wabohu*) at creation. Thus ***chaos*** in the presence of and with the word of God becomes a ***cosmos***. Conversely, ***cosmos*** deprived of and without the word of God will revert to ***chaos***. The continued existence and evolution of ***cosmos***, therefore, is due to the ever-present

³ Benedict XVI, Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*, §1.

creating and transforming power of God's word in the world. For, as the prophet says: "*He (God) did not create the world a chaos, he formed it to be inhabited!*" (Is.45:18).

God's commitment to the world, as a created system, is revealed not only by the Word's sustenance and maintenance of creation in being; it is also made known by the accomplishment of God's design in the world by means of his word (Is.55:10ff.). In this sense, it is a very critical and a life-threatening experience for the world to be without the word of God, either on account of its sins (Amos 8:11) or due to a lack of prophets and priests (Ps.74:9).

The Creation accounts thus show God active in the world as *life: source of life and lover of life*, who engages in the world to engender life, to establish order and beauty and to dispel confusion (chaos); for the confusion of roles and identities induce chaos. God is a lover of and promoter of life.

2. The Word of Call and Covenant

The second instance of the revelation of God's word in the world, as an expression of God's commitment to what he has created, is the story of the salvation of man which also took the form of a "*call*" (*the word of a call*). It began with the *call* of Abraham, which led to the *call* of Israel as God's people. In Abraham and his seed, the people of Israel, God's word of a *call* translated into a promise and a blessing, through which God subsequently bound himself to Abraham and his seed in a series of covenants, gratuitous initiatives of God offering them his friendship, and inviting them into communion and fellowship.

Thus God called Abraham from Ur of the Chaldeans, promised to make him a great nation, a great name and a blessing for all the families of the earth (Gen.12:1-3). The lives of the patriarchs, Isaac and Jacob, traced out the beginning of the realization of the contents of the promises contained in the first *word of call* addressed to Abraham.

This first *word of call* was to lead to a second *word of call* that would bring the children of Israel out of Egypt. "*Out of Egypt I called my son*" (Hos.11:1; Ex.3:6ff.). Again, following this *call*, God would bind himself to the children of Israel in a covenant on Mt. Sinai (Ex.19-20; 24; Dt.5:2ff; 29; Jer.11 etc.). "*I will be your God, and you shall be my people*", was the key-idea of this covenant; and God would settle Israel in the "land of promise".

The raising up of Judges and Kings, especially, the choice of David (2Sm.7), for the sake of whom God promised "*to keep a lamp before him in Jerusalem*" (1Kg.11:36; 15:4), the anointing of kings and the call of prophets: all of these fall within the ambit of God's commitment to Israel as his people and inheritance.

Through his word, as the *word of call* and as *word of covenant*, God bound himself to the seed of Abraham, the people of Israel, in a series of covenants that introduced Israel into *communion* with God, even if Israel proved unworthy of it. The initiative was always God's.

His love and mercy, and not Israel's merits, sustained his *call* to Israel and his covenant with her.

In this phase of Israel's history, God's commitment takes the form of the revelation of the utter gratuitousness of his condescending initiative to bind himself to humanity in covenants, drawing it into *friendship* and *communion*. In the ensuing relationship, God reveals the love, mercy, compassion and fidelity with which he engages the world and humanity, while he holds before the world the virtues of *peace, justice, security, brotherly concern, honesty and faithfulness*, teaching it to cultivate them. The story of the "covenants" (leading up to the "*new and eternal covenant in the blood of Christ*") is a story of God's indefatigable commitment and engagement with man and his world. Like the proverbial "mother" in Isaiah's prophecy (Is.49:15), God cannot forget "*her nursing child*", the world and man that he has created.

The Babylonian exile concluded this phase of Israel's existence on the "land of promise"; but it was to lead to another *word of call* through which God would restore his people to the "land of promise". For, when God "*aroused Cyrus in righteousness, anointed him and called him by name*" (Is.45:4; 48:15), it was for the sake of Israel, his chosen one: It was "*to set God's exiles free*" (Is.48:13), "*to build God's city and to perform God's purpose on Babylon*" (Is.48:14b).

In the post-exilic period and in pursuance of the full liberation of his people to *serve him alone and in holiness*, God *called his servant* and wakened his ear to hear a message for his people and, now also, for the nations (Is.50:4-5). "*I have called you in righteousness. I have taken you by the hand and kept you. I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations*" (Is.42:6). In the anointing and power of God's Spirit, God's servant was sent not only to bring good-news and to announce the year of God's favour (Is.61:1-2); he also identified with the sins of his people. In solidarity with them, he suffered vicariously for their sins to make them righteous (Is.53:11-12). That was yet another *call*; and it was *the call of the messiah!*

Already in the context of the covenant relationships, God did make certain individuals *signs* of his blessing to the world. Abraham was such a *sign* of blessing to Abimelech; and Joseph was the same to the land of Egypt. Similarly, God made Moses a *corporate representative* of the people, assuming in himself the lot and destiny of the people (Ex.17:10ff; 32:32). So, God could choose certain individuals and people for roles through which he showed his commitment to the world and worked out his purposes in the life of his people, even if such roles were mere intermediaries and representatives.

In the call and mission of the *servant of the Lord* in the prophecy of Isaiah, this latter form of God's engagement with the world, namely, through corporate representative figures becomes prominent. In the figure of the *servant of the Lord*, God prepared and equipped his *servant* who did not only act on behalf of God. He also acted vicariously on behalf of the people of

God to make them righteous (Is.52:13-53:12). “*My servant shall make many righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities*” (Is.53:11).

The activity of the vicarious *servant of the Lord* is still part of God’s commitment and engagement with the world. It showed how an individual could be engaged by God to carry out his purpose in the world and on behalf of it; and it prepared for the coming and the mission of Jesus Christ, the Messiah, as the definitive revelation of God’s commitment in the world.

3. The Word is made Flesh: the Presence of the saving Word of God

At the *fullness of time*, God’s Word, instead of calling from heaven, descended to earth, took flesh and dwelt among human beings /men. As the *word-made-flesh*, God’s word continued to call humanity to life and to the truth that leads to life; and it also became among men the *presence of God*. Thus, in Jesus, *the word incarnate*, the revelation of God’s commitment in the world and to man was expressed as a *presence*: the presence of God that heals, consoles, teaches, touches and is touched; the presence which drives out demons, forgives sins, and redeems or saves; the *presence* that reveals God’s infinite fatherly love. For “*God so loved the world that he sent his Son,*” the word of eternal life (Jn.6:68), so that his children might have life and have it in its fullness (Jn 10:10).

Jesus, the *word-made-flesh*, continued his *call*, initially to be addressed to his disciples, his first followers. These came to *be with Jesus and he sent them to preach in his name*. For their sake, Jesus sanctified himself, so that they may be sanctified (Jn.17:19). He protected them in the name of the Father, and guarded them (Jn.17:12). Indeed Jesus prayed: “*Holy Father, protect them in your name, [the name] that you have given me*” (Jn.17:11). He assured his followers that he would be with them till the end, and prayed that “*those to whom he had revealed the name of the Father*” (Jn.17:6) might be with him where he is, to see his glory (Jn.17:24). In this, the love of the Father for the Son and the Son himself would be in them.

Indeed, “*Jesus always loved those who were his own in the world, and loved them to the end*” (Jn.13:1)⁴; and he showed the depth of his love for his followers when he reclined with them at the *last supper table*. There, Jesus acted out his commitment to his followers in two ways: He showed himself the *servant* of all, washing their feet (“*I am among you as one who serves*”); and through the sacramental signs of *broken bread* and *wine poured out*, he offered himself in *oblation* for his followers, and offered this oblation to them as food (nourishment). But, it does not end there. Jesus gave this act of total oblation an enduring presence through the institution of the Eucharist at the *last supper*. “*The ancient world had dimly perceived that man’s real food – what truly nourishes him as man – is ultimately the **Logos**, eternal wisdom: this same **Logos** now truly becomes food for us – as **love***”.⁵

⁴ Cfr. too, *Eucharistic Prayer IV*.

⁵ *Deus Caritas est*, §13.

With the birth of Jesus Christ, then, the *Word of God* assumed *flesh*, became a *man* and a *presence* in the world. In becoming *man*, Jesus was seen, among other things, as having “*taken the form of a slave*” (Phil.2:7), become “*lamb of God*” (Jn.1:36) and “*a priest and victim of sacrifice*” (Heb.9-10), identified with sinners accepting their baptism (Mt.3:13ff.), borne their sins and dying for the nation (Jn.18:12), and become homeless with the homeless (Mt.8:20; Lk.9:58). God’s commitment in the world assumed – in the “*word of God born a man*” – a characteristically significant form of *solidarity with humanity*. As a *presence in the flesh*, Jesus embraced children in a show of affection. He touched the sick, healing and consoling them, and they reached out and touched him. He visited the sick and the grieving. He showed compassion, addressed physical needs of hunger, lack of knowledge and understanding, as well as spiritual needs of forgiveness of sin, reconciliation and deliverance from evil spirits. In sum, the life and mission of Jesus, the *incarnate word of God*, reveal the commitment of God in the world in the form of multiple gestures, actions and services which are God-centered and directed towards the well-being of man and his world.

Most importantly, Jesus saw to the endurance of his mission, choosing followers (disciples), preparing them and empowering them for mission. With these he celebrated the first Eucharist and entrusted it to them as an effective sign of his abiding and unfailing presence, the ultimate revelation of God’s enduring commitment to the world.

4. The Word of the missionary Call to evangelize

Through the missionary charge which Jesus entrusted to his followers, as apostles, the *Logos*, *God’s word of call*, continued to go out, but now as “*the word of a missionary call*”; and it went out to “*all who through their [apostles’] word would come to believe in him [Jesus]*” (Jn.17:20). These would be “*the other sheep that do not yet belong to this fold; but must be brought and who will listen to his voice, so that there will be one flock and one shepherd*” (Jn.10:16).

At Pentecost, this began to happen. The *Word of God* went forth in Peter’s preaching to gather three thousand people from different backgrounds into the company of the disciples of Jesus, giving birth to the Church. There, through the *Word of God*, prayer, the breaking of bread and fellowship, God’s presence with his people was celebrated and continues to be celebrated to our day. “*For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them*” (Mt.18:20). The presence of the Lord at work among his followers made them *his witnesses*, **extensions of his ministry in the world until the end of time**, and hence, extensions of the revelation in Jesus of the Father’s commitment to the world, his creating, calling, saving word. *The Church’s commitment in the world must be a continuation and a sign of God’s own commitment revealed in Jesus*. It derives from Christ, her head, and is predicable of him. Thus, the *word of God*, in its pre-eminent and inspired form in the Scriptures, and in its derived forms in the Teachings of the Church, constitutes the source of all forms of the Church’s commitment in the world.

The Church's commitment in the world, then, can only be a *type* – indeed a sacrament – of God's commitment revealed in the Word.

PART TWO

THE WORD OF GOD AND COMMITMENT IN THE WORLD

The consideration of our own commitment in the world, inspired by the *word of God*, as Church and Christians can adopt one of several approaches. In Jesus, the *word incarnate*, Paul had seen the “*appearance of the grace of God*”, which “*teaches salvation to all, and trains us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright and godly, while we wait for the blessed hope and manifestation of the glory of our great God and savior, Jesus Christ*” (Titus 2:11-13). Relating this vision of Paul to the function he attributes to Scriptures, namely: “*all Scripture is inspired by God and useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness*” (2Tim.3:16), one would identify the promotion of personal conversion and training in spirituality as our task in the world.

The *Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Verbum Domini*, for its part, devotes nine paragraphs (99-108) to discussing various services and activities which constitute the *social ministry* of the Church, because “*the word of God itself emphasizes the need for our engagement in the world and our responsibility before Christ, the Lord of history.*”⁶ Besides, “*the Synod recalled that a commitment to justice and to changing our world is an essential element of evangelization.*”⁷

As true as all of this is, it is equally true that the same *word of God* (the *word of evangelization*) enjoins on the Church and her children *to build an earthly city through the various forms of their commitment and social ministries that is an anticipation and a prefiguration of the heavenly city of God.*⁸ Indeed, “Christian communities, with their patrimony of values and principles [should contribute] much to making individuals and peoples aware of their identity and their dignity, the establishment of democratic institutions and the recognition of human rights and their corresponding duties.”⁹ The “social ministries” did not wait until the Church was properly established nearly 300 years after Christ; no, the ministries – and their repercussions – began almost immediately (cfr. early chh of Acts) after Pentecost and soon attracted persecution ... as they do to this day. So now, in all the different circumstances and cultures, how may the Church and Christians contribute most appropriately to building up a more just, more reconciled, more peaceful societies, more human-rights-conscious, more dignity-of-people-conscious, and more common-good-conscious?

⁶ *Verbum Domini*, §99.

⁷ *Verbum Domini*, §100.

⁸ Cfr. *Caritas in veritate*, §7.

⁹ Benedict XVI, *Message*, XLIV World Day of Peace 2011, §7

The most complete and authoritative answer available today may be found in *Caritas in veritate*, which gathers many resources of scripture and our Catholic social tradition and brings them to bear upon the basic crucial social questions of our day: the early 21st century. The Encyclical rephrases – and properly situates – our concern about *commitment in the world* as follows: How are we “to shape the earthly city in unity and peace, rendering it to some degree an anticipation and a prefiguration of the undivided city of God”?¹⁰

How then does man, as a citizen of the here-and-now as well as of the heavenly city, by reason of his rebirth through the imperishable seed of the Word of God (1 Peter 1:23) commit and contribute to the building of an earthly city more reflective of the heavenly one? To this great question, Scripture responds: It is by the grace and the power of the Word of God, through which He accomplishes all His designs; and it is through God’s Word becoming our principle of life, as St Paul says: Let the Word dwell and rule in your hearts” (cfr. Col 3:15-16). For the same great question, *Caritas in veritate* provides a summary answer: “The earthly city is promoted not merely by relationships of rights and duties, but to an even greater and more fundamental extent by relationships of gratuitousness, mercy and communion.”¹¹ It is a matter of healing broken relationships of violence and violation and of promoting healthy constructive ones.

In the past, the Church as institution projected itself into structures of the State – *cuius regio, eius religio, los Reyes Católicos*, etc. but now we understand a healthy separation along with real (complex!) relationships between Church and State. But when we talk of “building”, please note that the architects, the builders, the inhabitants are ALL secular – we do NOT build Christian cities of man!¹²

In one brief paragraph of only about 130 words, the Holy Father details the qualities and virtues needed for our building a City of Man which is more worthy of us, His beloved Creatures reborn through His Word, and which reflects and prefigures the Heavenly City.

The complexity and gravity of the present economic situation rightly cause us concern, but we must adopt a realistic attitude as we take up with confidence and hope the new responsibilities to which we are called by the prospect of a world in need of profound cultural renewal, a world that needs to rediscover fundamental values on which to build a better future. The current crisis obliges us to re-plan our journey, to set ourselves new rules and to discover new forms of commitment, to build on positive experiences and to reject negative ones. The crisis thus becomes *an opportunity for discernment, in which to shape a new vision for the future*. In this spirit, with confidence rather than resignation, it is appropriate to address the difficulties of the present time.¹³

The Holy Father does not prescribe any plans or recipes, any policies or solutions. Instead, recommending the Word of God as our tool for discernment, the Holy Father seems to lay out a whole approach which he recommends – indeed urges – for continuing the work of the

¹⁰ *Caritas in veritate*, §7.

¹¹ *Caritas in veritate*, §6.

¹² “Certainly it is not the direct task of the Church to create a more just society” (*Verbum Domini*, §100).

¹³ *Caritas in Veritate*, §21.

Word in the world, in a process or dynamic which itself embodies and reflects in time God's own Word of *commitment*: creative, calling, binding, present and saving, missionary and evangelizing, prolonging the history of salvation "until the end of time" while building-up the city of man with qualities closer to the City of God. The approach can be summed up in five inter-related competences or qualities:

- 1 – Begin with a realistic attitude
- 2 – Ground the work in fundamental values
- 3 – With confidence, take up the new responsibilities
- 4 – Be open to profound cultural renewal
- 5 – Commit to working with coherence and consistency

These are five aspects or dimensions for each Christian and each *social ministry* to assume in order to carry out our commitment in the world. Let us explore each one briefly.

1. The first step is surely to begin with a realistic attitude, to face *the difficulties of the present time*, not with ready-made answers or simplistic ideologies, but with the Word of God as our key to *discernment*.

"When it is evening, you say, 'It will be fair weather; for the sky is red.' And in the morning 'It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times" (Mt 16:2-3). Many prefer to wait passively until events have taken their course, and then they freely complain. Instead, it takes a real effort to keep reading the signs of the times, and it is our Christian responsibility to do so with balance and intelligence.

Then Jesus says, "Which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build, and was not able to finish'" (Luke 14:28-30). Again, it seems easier to be naïve and leaves things to chance, but this is not enough for building a worthy city of man.

"In the light of the Lord's words, let us discern the 'signs of the times' present in history, and not flee from a *commitment* to those who suffer and the victims of forms of selfishness."¹⁴
"The word of God makes us attentive to history and to emerging realities."¹⁵

2. Our next step is to ground the work *in fundamental values, a new vision for the future*, which can only begin with oneself, and so this second competence can rightly be called

¹⁴ *Verbum Domini*, §100.

¹⁵ *Verbum Domini*, §105.

conversion, *metanoia*.¹⁶ To know and accept oneself is the beginning of wisdom. And this attitude must be accompanied by a willingness to change, to work on oneself.

When telling the parable of the sower (Mt 13:3-9), Jesus concludes that some seeds fell “on good soil”, but good soil is not an accident, it takes hard work to prepare – and patience. When the owner of the vineyard lost patience with the fig tree which for three years produced no fruit, the vinedresser pleaded for yet another chance: “Let it alone, sir, this year also, till I dig about it and put on manure” (Lk 13:8). Do we show real willingness to keep working on our soil? Remember, Jesus is the gardener, the sower!

“The word of God sheds light on human existence and stirs our conscience to take a deeper look at our lives, inasmuch as all human history stands under God’s judgment.”¹⁷

3. *With confidence rather than resignation*, let us *take up the new responsibilities* which go with a new vocation and mission. For a Christian the starting point and the goal of all *commitment* is Christ, Alpha and Omega. Our vision is entirely shaped by God’s salvific plan for the world – as set out in Scriptures and definitively expressed in the life and mission of Christ, continued through time in the Church – and at its centre is the human person. This is the foundation of our life and mission.

“The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree (Mt 13:31-32), from which comes the expression, to have trust like a mustard seed. And hearing the parable of the talents, Mt 25:14-30 Lk 19:12-27, do we take what we are given and, out of fear and insecurity, dig in the ground and hide it? Or do we take the risks to invest and develop the talents, even though without knowing what we will gain?

“The word of God itself emphasizes the need for our engagement in the world and our responsibility before Christ, the Lord of history. As we proclaim the Gospel, let us encourage one another to do good and to commit ourselves to justice, reconciliation and peace.”¹⁸

4. For the fourth competence, the fourth “*how*”, the Holy Father encourages us to be open to *profound cultural renewal* and show *confidence and hope*. Yes, it is fashionable to be negative, nihilistic, pessimist – it not only leaves one off the hook, but also comfortably absent from history, both human and divine. Quite counter-culturally, therefore, we Christians firmly believe that a more just and peaceful world is possible, and so “we ourselves must be instruments of reconciliation and peace.”¹⁹

¹⁶ John Paul II speaks of the need to live the Beatitudes and to have the spirituality of missionaries in today’s world. Cfr. *Redemptoris Missio*, §§ 87-91.

¹⁷ *Verbum Domini*, §99.

¹⁸ *Verbum Domini*, §99.

¹⁹ “We should never forget that ‘where human words become powerless because the tragic clash of violence and arms prevails, the prophetic power of God’s word does not waver, reminding us that peace is possible.’” *Verbum Domini*, §102 quoting Benedict XVI, *Homily* (25 January 2009): *Insegnamenti* V, 1 (2009), 141.

When Jesus sent “seventy-two others” ahead of him to places he was planning to visit, He himself said “I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves (Lk 10:1-20), leaving no doubt about the difficult circumstances; and his confidence was well-placed, because “the seventy-two returned with joy”. Perhaps less successfully in Athens, the cultural centre of Mediterranean civilization, Paul took on “the city full of idols”; and eventually, by an astute use of the Roman law (cfr. *Verbum Domini*, §92), he reached the very centre of the empire Rome. How different would the history of Christianity have been, if Paul had been timid and limited his ministry to “his own”.

In the words of Pope Paul VI, we must “*reach and as it were overturn with the force of the Gospel the standards of judgment, the interests, the thought-patterns, the sources of inspiration and life-styles of humanity that are in contrast with the word of God and with his plan of salvation.*”²⁰

5. Finally, gathering the wisdom of the previous four, the fifth competence commits us to *new rules, new forms of commitment*, with coherence and consistency. Appreciating God’s plan and our place in it, “is what gives rise to the duty of believers to unite their efforts with those of all men and women of good will, with the followers of other religions and with non-believers, so that this world of ours may effectively correspond to the divine plan: living as a family under the Creator's watchful eye.”²¹

Jesus dispensed the new forms and rules of *commitment*, mainly in action but also in words. His critique of the old can be summed up in “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath” (Mk 2:27). His teaching of the new is embodied in Jesus washing the feet of the Twelve (Jn 13:3-11), explicitly establishing the new rule of service to others with His own coherence and consistency ... soon after sealed in His sacrificial death on the Cross.

Human dignity is “a distinctive mark imprinted by the Creator on his creatures, taken up and redeemed by Jesus Christ through his incarnation, death and resurrection. The spread of the word of God cannot fail to strengthen the recognition of, and respect for, the human rights of every person.”²²

Underlying cooperation, therefore, and indeed underlying all five manners of carrying out our *commitment*, there is the human person as the *centre of our concern*. This must be our focus, as Pope Benedict XVI tirelessly teaches, if we are indeed to build a city of man worthy of ourselves and our descendants for generations to come. Indeed, the divine-human Word is the centre of our faith, and the human-with-divine-vocation man is the centre of our concern/*commitment*.

CONCLUSION

“Man’s earthly activity, when inspired and sustained by charity, contributes to the building of the universal city of God, which is the goal of the history of the human family...”²³ We began

²⁰ *Verbum Domini*, §100 quoting *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, §18.

²¹ *Caritas in veritate*, §57.

²² *Verbum Domini*, §101.

²³ *Caritas in veritate*, §7.

with the Word of God. We considered the Word creating, calling, committing, present and saving, to sending Disciples. Turning to the apostolic exhortation *Verbum Domini*, we found that whole of Part Three (§§ 90-120) is entitled “*Verbum Mundo*”, the Word for the world – and therefore the Church for the world or, in other words, *Gaudium et Spes*! This now became the context for the second part of our consideration, namely, our commitment in the world of human history (*Verbum Domini*, §§99-108). Here we join with our fellow citizens – many so different in their beliefs and convictions, yet solidly one in our common humanity – in building that city of man which worthily prefigures the City of God. God’s own commitment to the world in the Word is best carried forward by our competent and generous commitment with the poor of every poverty to struggle for reconciliation, justice and peace.

In the dynamic and sweep of salvation history, the Word of God calls *cosmos* out of *chaos*, calls Abraham out of the wilderness and later the people out of Egypt and out of Exile, calls all of us “while we were yet sinners” (Rm 5,8) to “life, life to the full” (Jn 10:10), and now calls us to be His Body in the world “feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, welcoming the stranger, clothing the naked, caring for the sick and visiting the imprisoned” (Mt 25:31-46).

“As we contemplate the vast amount of work to be done, we are sustained by our faith that God is present alongside those who come together in his name to work for justice”, reconciliation and peace.²⁴

“Here we see fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah about the effectiveness of the Lord’s word: as the rain and snow come down from heaven to water and to make the earth fruitful, so too the word of God “shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it.” Jesus Christ is this definitive and effective word which came forth from the Father and returned to him, perfectly accomplishing his will in the world.”²⁵

Peter K. A. Cardinal Turkson

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²⁴ *Caritas in Veritate*, §78.

²⁵ *Verbum Domini*, §90 referring to Is 55,10f.