

AFRICA AND THE WORD: IMPLICATIONS FROM THE POST-SYNODAL APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION, *VERBUM DOMINI*

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Introduction

A cursory glance at the historical evolution of the Church, right from the time when she was born, at least in typological terms in the Old Testament to its glorious institution in the New, the Word of God has always been the wellspring of constant renewal in the Church. God, the first principle and last end of all things (Rom 1:20), who created and conserves all things by His Word (Jn 1:2), manifested and communicated Himself and the eternal decrees of His will through His Word¹. After the fall of our first parents, God buoyed them up through the promise of salvation in His Word (Gen 3:15). He has never ceased to take care of the human race. In His own time, He called Abraham, and made him into a great nation (Gen 12:2). After the era of the patriarchs, He taught this nation through His Word, by Moses and the prophets, to recognize Him as the only living and true God, a Provident Father and just judge. He taught them to look for the Promised Saviour. After God had spoken various times through the prophets, 'in these last days He has spoken to us through His Son' (Heb 1:1-2), who is the Eternal Word, who enlightens all peoples about the inner life of God.²

The Word of God is therefore the heart of the Christian life.³ It is not surprising that the Synod Fathers called Christianity 'the religion of

¹ Vatican II, *Dei Verbum*, 18th November, 1985, No.6

² Vatican II, *Dei Verbum*, 18th November, 1985, No.6

³ Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Word of God, Ibadan, St Paul's, 2011, p.3

the word of God.⁴ The Word permeates and animates every aspect of the Church's life, and the Church has in recent times become more sensitive to this realism. Beginning with the pontificate of Pope Leo XIII,⁵ through that of Benedict XV⁶ to that of Pius XII⁷ we can say that there has been a crescendo of interventions aimed at an increased awareness of the importance of the Word of God.⁸ This culminates in the Second Vatican Council's, following in the steps of the Councils of Trent and Vatican I, promulgation of the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*. The dimensional consequence of this step is amazing. It has had an attendant imprint on the exegetical, theological expressing itself in the Trinitarian and soteriological horizon of revelation, spiritual, pastoral and ecumenical planes of the life of the Church.

That the summons of salvation, already in process, may more effectively reach the very ends of the earth,⁹ Pope Benedict XVI issued the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Verbum Domini* serve as a catalyst to this process. This work would find its niche by concentrating on unveiling the practical application of this document. For the realism of this purpose, significant attention would be given to the third part of the document, *Verbum Mundo*.

The Cosmic Dimension Of The Word As A Witness To The Mystery Of The Incarnation

The cosmic dimension of the Word of God can be understood in its Christological sense. This Christological approach, linked by necessity to the Pneumatological one, leads to the discovery of the Trinitarian openings of revelation.¹⁰ The Word goes forth from the Father, comes to dwell in our midst through the Son, and the effect of the communion between the Word and the world is brought to bear in a concrete historical circumstance through the power of the Holy Spirit. This same Word returns to the Father to bring with Him the whole of creation which

⁴ Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Word of God, Ibadan, St Paul's, 2011, p.11

⁵ Leo XIII, *Providentissimus Deus*, Encyclical Letter, 18th November 1893, 269-292.

⁶ Benedict XV, *Spiritus Paraclitus*, Encyclical Letter, 15th November 1920, 385-422.

⁷ Pius XII, *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, Encyclical Letter, 30th Sept, 297-325.

⁸ Leo XIII, *Providentissimus Deus*, 18 November, 1893, 269-292.

⁹ St Augustine, *De Catechizandis Rudibus*, 4, 8.

¹⁰ *The Twelfth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod, Vatican City, 2008.*

was made through Him, in Him and for Him. At the appreciation of this divine mystery, Saint Augustine said, "In symbolic form, a Trinity now dawns clear to me, the Trinity which is yourself, My God."¹¹ John the evangelist introduces Jesus as the Word: "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (Jn 1:1). Jesus was not just the Word who was passively with God, He was a Word in activity, "Through Him God made all things and not one thing in all creation was made without Him" (Jn 1:3). The Synod Fathers specifically said: "Creation is born of the *logos* and indelibly bears the mark of creative reason which orders and directs it. With joy-filled certainty the Psalms says, 'by the Word of the Lord, the heavens were made, and their entire host by the breath of his mouth' (Ps 33:6); and again 'he spoke and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood forth' (Ps 33:9). All reality expresses this mystery: 'The heavens are telling the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims his handiwork' (Ps 19:1)."¹² St Bonaventure, from this understanding concludes that "every creature is a word of God, since it proclaims God."¹³

Jesus as the Word was spoken by the Father at creation and as the Wisdom of creation He guided the work of creation. The earth was formless and unorganised before the Word was spoken, it was an abyss, dark with unstable flux of spiritual formlessness and it was destined to remain so if the Word were not spoken. But once illuminated by the power of the Word it was transformed into a life so beautiful that it became the heaven overreaching that other heavenly vault to be established later between the upper and lower waters.¹⁴ While God the Father spoke the Word, Jesus was the Word that was spoken. The Holy Spirit was the Spirit poised above the waters, giving life to all that was created.

As the *logos*, the Wisdom of God and the Principle of intelligibility,¹⁵ the Word was present as the artificer of creation. Wisdom itself says, "I was

¹¹ Saint Augustine, *The Confessions*, Book XIII, New City Press, New York, 1997, p.345.

¹² Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Word of God, Ibadan, St Paul's, p.12

¹³ *Intinerarium mentis in Deum*, II, 12

¹⁴ Saint Augustine, *The Confessions*, Book XIII, New City Press, New York, 1997, p.345.

¹⁵ Joseph Omoregbe, *A Simplified History of Ancient Philosophy: Ancient and Medieval Philosophy*. Joja Educational Research and Publishers Ltd, 1991, pp.11-12.

there when he set the sky in place, when he stretched the horizon in across the ocean, when he placed the clouds in the sky, when he opened the springs of the ocean and ordered the waters of the sea to rise no further than he said. I was there when he laid the earth's foundation. I was beside him like an architect, I was his daily source of Joy, always happy in his presence" (Prov 8:27-31). The Word which is the Wisdom of God, now becomes incarnate. The sage says, "Wisdom has made herself a house and made seven columns for it. She has had an animal killed for a feast, mixed spices in the wine and set the table" (Prov 9:1-3). When the sage speaks of wisdom as having made herself a house, it speaks of the incarnation, when "the Word became flesh" in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary and "dwelt among us" (Jn 1:14). Here, the Word finds expression not primarily in discourse, concepts or rules. He was self-evident.¹⁶In the cosmic dimension of the Word, the mystery of the incarnation is revealed. God the invisible Word makes Himself visible; the incorporeal God makes Himself corporeal; the intangible makes Himself tangible; the timeless makes Himself timely; the unlimited makes Himself limited; the unapproachable makes Himself approachable; the inaccessible makes Himself accessible; the incomprehensible makes Himself comprehensible; the ineffable makes Himself effable. In this process, God who is so abstract to us makes Himself applicable to contexts in concrete historical circumstances, creating a path way and a basis for the practical application of the Word of God.

The Dynamics Of The Word Of God And The Church

The Church is born from the Word of God; it is built upon the Word of God and lives by the Word of God.¹⁷St Augustine puts it nicely, "You were created through the Word, but now through the Word you must be recreated."¹⁸ Although the Church springs from the Word, her adherence to the Word affects her historical and eternal destiny. The Church therefore draws life, not from herself but from the Word of God, and from that same Word, she discovers ever anew the direction of her journey.¹⁹

¹⁶ Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Word of God, Ibadan, St Paul's, p.16

¹⁷ Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Word of God, Ibadan, St Paul's, p.3

¹⁸ St Augustine, *Iohannis Evangelium* Tractacus, 1, 12

¹⁹ Benedict XVI, Address to the International Congregation, "Sacred Scripture in the Life of the Church", 16 September, 2005

There is an inseparable link between the Word of God and the Church. This nexus, which finds expression in the responsibility of the Word of God to the Church and the Church to the Word of God, and the risk of the nonexistence of the latter should the former be separated from it, earns the latter the name 'the home of the Word of God'. The Word takes its place in the Church in a unique way in the sacred liturgy. Within this context, the people of God are fed from the table of the Word. In *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the Church teaches that the "sacred scripture is of the greatest importance in the celebration of the liturgy. From it are taken the readings, which are explained in the homily and the Psalms. From scripture the petitions, prayers and liturgical hymns receive their inspiration and substance. From scripture the liturgical actions and signs draw their meanings."²⁰ All this is done in the Church following the rhythm of the liturgical year, in such a manner that at the centre of it is the Paschal Mystery, with the mysteries of Christ and the history of salvation radiating in such a manner that they become sacramentally present. In this process which reveals the mysteries of redemption, the faithful are opened up to the riches of the saving actions and merits of her Lord in such a manner that they are filled with the grace of salvation.²¹ The Church therefore, is the effect of the Word of God and she lives by the same Word.

The Practical Application Of The Word Of God

The Word of God received by the Church commits her into mission. The Divine Word is not like the Greek Key that turns around but never opens any door, neither is it like the wheel of Buddha that turns round but never moves on. The Word of God is active and alive and initiates activity in a concrete historical circumstance. Its effect is seen, heard and felt. It is in this regard that we shall discuss the practical application of the Word of God.

1. **The Word of God and neighbour:** The Word of God emphasizes the need for our engagement in the world and our responsibility before Christ, the Lord of History.²² Those who listen to God's Word should be able to translate that Word into

²⁰ Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 4th December 1963, no. 24

²¹ Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 4th December 1963, no. 24

²² Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Word of God, Ibadan, St Paul's, p.118.

gestures of love, because this is the only way to make the proclamation of the gospel credible. For those who sincerely build their lives on the Word of God, it changes their concept of realism. It shades light on human existence and reminds us that every moment of our life must be lived with the knowledge that everyone will give an account of his or her life. In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus considers everything done to the least of our brethren as done to Him: "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me" (Mt 25:40). The Word of God that we share daily has no other better place to show itself than in our relationship with the neighbour. St Augustine would say, "It is essential to realize that love is the fullness of the law, as it is of all divine scriptures... whoever claims to have understood the scriptures, or any part of them, without striving as a result to grow in this twofold love of God and neighbour, makes it clear that he has not yet understood them."²³

2. **The Word of God and Justice:** Pope Benedict XVI, in his message during the 2009 World Day of Peace said that "The word of God itself unambiguously denounces injustices and promotes solidarity and equality."²⁴ God's Word inspires people to build relationships based on rectitude and justice, and testifies to the great value in God's eyes of every effort to create a more just and more liveable world.²⁵ Ours, as those who have encountered the Word is a mission, to "reach and as it were to overturn with the force of the gospel the standards of judgement, the interests, the thought-patterns, the sources of inspiration and lifestyles of humanity that are in contrast with the word of God and with his plan of salvation."²⁶ This has greater implications for those who take part in political and social life, and does not in any way exclude the Church who has a right to intervene on ethical and moral issues related to the good of individuals and

²³ St Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, 1, 35, 39-36.

²⁴ Pope Benedict XVI, in his message during the 2009 World Day of Peace, 8 December, 792-802.

²⁵ Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Word of God, Ibadan, St Paul's, 2011, p.118.

²⁶ Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 8 December 1975, 18.

peoples, especially on issues bordering on the human rights of every person.²⁷

3. **The Word of God and reconciliation:** The Word of God is also a source of reconciliation. In the Word, God is revealed as reconciling everything to Himself (2 Cor 5:18-20; Eph 1:10; 2:14). Christ, through His death and resurrection, has broken the wall that has kept God and mankind apart. He has united us again with the father. It is in this regard, that we who share these words of reconciliation, are called to commit ourselves to being examples of reconciliation for the building of a just and peaceful society.
4. **The Word of God and suffering:** The Word of God we hear should find its point of relevance during our moments of suffering. Pope Benedict XVI in *Verbum Domini* says, "If human words seem to fall silent before the mystery of evil and suffering, and if our society appears to value life only when it corresponds to certain standards of efficiency and well-being, the Word of God makes us see that even these moments are mysteriously 'embraced' by God's love."²⁸ Pain and suffering is the consequence of sin. And God being the physician of humankind per excellence bends lovingly to us in Christ Jesus, who by His passion and death takes our weaknesses and pain upon Himself and transforms them into glory. Those who suffer should also be helped to understand that their condition in a special way enables them to share in the suffering of Christ.
5. **The Word of God and culture:** Pope Benedict XVI, in considering the relationship between the Word of God and culture, pointed out that God does not reveal Himself in the abstract, but by using languages, imagery and expressions that

²⁷ Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Word of God, Ibadan, St Paul's, 2011, p.119.

²⁸ Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Word of God, Ibadan, St Paul's, 2011, p.124.

are bound to cultures.²⁹ And since people live according to cultures which create bonds that are properly theirs, the consideration of the encounter between culture and the Word of God is very significant. The Word of God must be presented in such a way that it has respect for people's cultures, and in a manner that reassures people that it does not destroy culture, but is a constant stimulus to seek ever more appropriate, meaningful and humane forms of expression.³⁰ When cultures encounter the Word of God, people are led into a reality that is truly universal, that is, the Church. In this process, they are led out of the limitations of individual cultures into a universality that connects all, unites all and makes all brothers and sisters.

6. **The Word of God and interreligious dialogue:** Pope Benedict XVI advocates for the application of the Word of God in interreligious dialogue. From the writings of the prophets, it is evident that God desires that His people be gathered into a single universal family (Is 2:2; 42:6; 66:18-21; Jer 4:2; Ps 47). As such, the Church, in her proclamation of the Word must encourage dialogue and cooperation with people of various religions to come to a better knowledge of one another and to promote the values that society needs for a peaceful and positive coexistence.³¹ This must however be done without forms of syncretism or relativism, but along the lines indicated by the Second Vatican Council's Declaration in *Nostra Aetate*.
7. **The Word of God and violence against women:** A cursory analysis of the evolution of human history, right from the time when *theogonies*³² dominated as the cornerstone of human

²⁹ Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Word of God, Ibadan, St Paul's, 2011, p.127.

³⁰ Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Word of God, Ibadan, St Paul's, 2011, p.127.

³¹ Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Word of God, Ibadan, St Paul's, 2011, p.135.

³² Theogonies refer to the mythologies that dominated Greek thought in 600 BC, through which explanations were drawn for the nature of reality. This system of reflection was overthrown by rational explanations given by the Ionian Philosophers. Joseph Omoregbe, *A Simplified History of Western*

thinking, through the Ancient, Medieval and Modern Epochs to the Contemporary Era, reveals that women have for a very long time been relegated to the background of second class citizens or even insignificance. In the Church, they have been abused by many clergymen and treated without respect. In most Nigerian theatre and drama, they are presented as one-dimensional figures that lack self assertiveness and autonomy.³³ In most families, they have been turned into burden bearers. We are all witnesses to their experience of violence, in the forms of rape, genital mutilation, sexual harassment, trafficking in women and forced prostitution.³⁴ Amnesty International describes violence against women and girls as "today's most pervasive human rights challenge."³⁵ In the midst of all these, what can we say is the effect of the Word of God? What is the Word of God calling men and women to become? It is not just about the unmaking of the fall of mankind. It is also about becoming a new people in Christ, who are reformed by grace. Christ's death and resurrection means that evil has lost its power over those who belong to Christ. The resultant consequence therefore is that every division or barrier has been swept away. No special claims and no special disabilities, for all are one in Christ. Until the Word of God ignites the furtherance of the respect due to women in us, then it has not become flesh.

8. **The Word of God and the environment:** the Word of God should lead us into a better appreciation of our environment. After God created human beings according to His image and likeness (Gen 1:26), He gave them a mandate to subdue and rule the earth (1:28). The commission to rule and subdue the earth empowers human beings to act as God's vice-regents in the world, to maintain order in creation and be partners with Him in

Philosophy: Ancient and Medieval Philosophy, Vol. 1, Lagos: Joja Educational Research and Publishers, Ltd, 2003, p.3.

³³ Joseph Omoregbe, *A Simplified History of Western Philosophy: Ancient and Medieval Philosophy*, Vol. 1, Lagos: Joja Educational Research and Publishers, Ltd, 2003, p.170

³⁴ UNIFEM, *Retreat for Church leaders, Enugu*, November 27th -29th, 2002

³⁵ *Awake*, January 2003, p.3.

the ongoing development of the universe.³⁶ The theme of caring for creation occurs in other parts of the Old Testament. Humans are to care for the land (Lev 25:1-5), to treat domestic animals properly (Deut 24:4) and respect wild life (Deut 22:6). It is in this regard that the scripture forbids slaughtering an animal with its young (Lev 22:28). Any purposeless destruction of fruit trees even in a besieged city is taken to be wastefulness (Deut 20:19-20), and therefore, forbidden. Everything that is created by God, was created by the power of His Word. This implies that there is something of God in all that He has created. This calls for respect in our relationship with the environment.³⁷

Priests And Prophetic Witnessing As Instruments For The Realism Of The Word Of God

The proclamation of the Word of God is at the heart of our priestly calling as prophets. St Paul teaches that faith comes from hearing the Word of God *fides ex auditu* (Rom 10:17). From this understanding, the Word of God becomes another *sub-locus* of the present experience of salvation. Stretching this to an extent that carries an obvious hue of protestant extremism, Martin Luther said, "The ears alone are the organ of a Christian man." Holding the ear as an exclusive Christian organ is to note the prominent place of the Word of God in the making of a Christian and in the reality of the Christian life.³⁸

Through the anointing at baptism all Christians share in the prophetic character of Christ and are touched in the very symbolic rite of *epheta* to not only have ears opened to the Word of God, but also opened lips that will announce the Word of God. However, the *elect* within the elect, who participate in the ordained ministerial priesthood, are specifically dedicated to the proclamation of the Word.³⁹ While having recourse to *Lumen Gentium*, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

³⁶ Philip Igbo, *The Exploitation of Nature and the Risk of environmental Crisis*, in African Journal of Contextual Theology, Vol. 2, June 2010, pp.47-48.

³⁷ Philip Igbo, *The Exploitation of Nature and the Risk of environmental Crisis*, in African Journal of Contextual Theology, Vol. 2, June 2010, pp.48-49.

³⁸ Martin Egbuogu, *The Mystery of the Elect within the Elect*, Owerri, Edu-edu Publications, 2008, p.176.

³⁹ Martin Egbuogu, *The Mystery of the Elect within the Elect*, Owerri, Edu-edu Publications, 2008, p.177.

teaches, "And in virtue of the sacrament of Holy Orders, after the image of Christ, the supreme and eternal priest, they (priests) are consecrated in order to preach the gospel and shepherd the faithful as well as to celebrate divine worship as true priests of the New Testament."⁴⁰

While having recourse to *Presbyterorum Ordinis* and *Optatam Totius*, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* further teaches that, "The spiritual gift they have received at ordination prepares them, not for a limited and restricted mission, but for the fullest... prepared in spirit to preach the gospel everywhere."⁴¹ St Gregory the Great taught in his Pastoral Rule, "For it is a fact that anyone entering the priesthood accepts the office of a herald and must by words prepare the way for the terrible judgement of the one who follows. If, then, the priest neglects his preaching, what sort of a warning cry can a dumb herald give? This is why the Holy Spirit settled on the first religious leaders in the form of tongues: because those whom he fills, he fills with his own eloquence."⁴² As the ministry of the Word is at the heart of the priest's calling as prophet, so should the preparation for the announcing of the Word of God be taken seriously by the priest. The responsibility of preparing for the announcing of the Word of God can be seen from two perspectives: the remote and immediate or proximate preparations.

The remote preparation

The remote preparation speaks of a long term readiness for being a bearer and dispenser of the Word of God. This, in a strict sense, begins when the priest-to-be enters the major seminary to begin formation for the priesthood; this does not in any way end with ordination into the priesthood, it continuous to the extent to which one is continuously open to both sacred and secular learning, secular in terms of historical and current affairs. Being informed is very essential to being a good preacher. You cannot preach without the stuff, for what we read and experience is what is found in our store of knowledge. Your lips cannot keep knowledge, if your head does not first have knowledge. And it is to this store that we will constantly fall back to during our analysis and appreciation of texts, and the application of texts to given contexts and settings. Our eyes and ears must be well open and steadily, because every

⁴⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1564; *Lumen Gentium* no.28

⁴¹ CCC 1564; *Presbyterorum Ordinis* no 10; *Optatam Totius* no.20

⁴² Pastoral Rule of St Gregory the Great, taken from the Office of Reading of the Divine Office, 27th Sunday of Ordinary Time.

single point opens to 360 degrees, meaning that every point bears infinity of angles, and leads to an infinity of directions. Just as you can go everywhere from every point, so are the diversity of angles through which points can be surveyed, reached and made. Meaning that just as we can enrich others we can also be enriched by others as long as knowledge and its dissemination is concerned.⁴³

The proximate preparation

The second form of preparation for the preaching of the Word of God is the immediate or proximate preparation. This refers to the *ad hoc* preparations we make before delivering a homily. This process is an art, to perform it, we must learn our stuff, we have to, in a way, rehearse it. But unfortunately, we give into a lot of distractions that we have little time for 'packaging' the Word of God. No matter how busy we may be, we must not forget that a well ordered priority will always give a special place to the preparation of our homilies. I have met priests who meet the gospel readings for the first time in the sacristy, seminarians have stories of priests who ask them to read for them the gospel reading while they drive to Church for a Sunday Mass. This shows how unprepared we can be for an act that is at the heart of our calling. Many have taken literary the assertion of Jesus about the need not to be preoccupied over 'what to say' and the promise of the infusion of the Holy Spirit when the time comes (Mt 10:19-20).

After we have made preparations humanly possible, we must also understand that we are only messengers and must turn to our Lord and Master for what to do and say. In this case, preaching is more than an art. The 'sent' speaks not with his own authority, but with the authority of the 'Sender.' It is not just about a personal effort, it is also about a humble submission to the divine power, trying to know what God is saying in a particular text in relation to a particular situation. This would involve a great deal of prayer/meditation. A good preaching is born out of good praying. Jesus did not teach His disciples how to preach, but He taught them how to pray, because He knows that if they know how to pray they would know how to preach.⁴⁴ No one can break the yoke of Satan, sin and the flesh on the hearts of people with the energy of the flesh. Eloquence,

⁴³ Martin Egbuogu, *The Mystery of the Elect within the Elect*, Owerri, Edu-edu Publications, 2008, pp.182-183.

⁴⁴ Martin Egbuogu, *The Mystery of the Elect within the Elect*, Owerri, Edu-edu Publications, 2008, pp.184-185.

oratory, powerful delivery of sermons; analytical ability to synthesize words from their rudiments; knowledge of ancient languages – Greek, Hebrew, Latin, Aramaic etc., none is as crucial and indispensable like the endowment of power from on high.

The credibility of the gospel is also affected by the preacher's way of life. Good preaching must be accompanied by good way of life. A mathematics teacher could teach in the classroom without the obligation of living a mathematical life outside of the classroom, but a preacher of the Word of God cannot preach something else and live a different kind of life outside the pulpit without contradicting himself. Although preaching as a verbal proclamation of the gospel message, is always essential, we also know that there are many people who are wearied of talk, who often seem to be tired of listening. We are aware of the views of many psychologists and sociologists who hold that people have outgrown the culture evoked by words, and that they respond now to a new visual culture.⁴⁵ When Pope Paul VI was speaking to the members of the *Concilium de Laicis*, he said, 'The men of our day are more impressed by witness than by teachers, and if they listen to this it because they also bear witness.'⁴⁶It is therefore by our own conduct, by our manner of life that the Church can most effectively evangelize the world.

Conclusion

The high point of any valuation of the Word of God is in its practical application. Until the Word of God becomes applicable to particular situations, its effect is never felt. It was only when the Word became flesh that salvation was realized, until then, it was only in process. If the kingdom of God must be realised not just in eschatological terms but also in the present, we must accept the Word of God, allow it to transform us, then shall we become earthen vessels that hold and disseminate this treasure.

⁴⁵ Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 8th December 1985, no.42

⁴⁶ Paul VI, speaking to the members of the *Concilium de Laicis*, 2nd October, 1974.

