

“Si vuol cambiar tutto, si critica tutto”

The Holy Office and Catholic Bible Exegesis after *Divino afflante Spiritu* (1943)

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Abstract Based on two cases of ecclesiastical book censorship from the 1950s, the article deals with the Holy Office’s handling of Catholic biblical exegesis during the late phase of the pontificate of Pius XII (1939-58). On the one hand, the inner-Vatican conflicts between the *Suprema Congregazione* and the Pontifical Biblical Commission in the years 1956-58 are examined. Secondly, the case of the German New Testament scholar Karl Hermann Schelkle shows the specific situation of Catholic biblical scholarship between the centre and the periphery a good decade after the biblical encyclical *Divino afflante Spiritu* (1943).

Keywords Holy Office. Pius XII. Pontifical Biblical Commission. Catholic Bible Exegesis in the 1950s. Book Censorship.

Summary 1 Between Suspicion of Modernism and Encouragement: Catholic Biblical Scholarship in the 1940s and 1950s. – 2 A Roman Controversy: Conflicts between the Holy Office and the Pontifical Biblical Commission (1956-58). – 3 Form Criticism and ‘Demythologisation’ Instead of Tradition? The Schelkle Case (1957-58). – 4 Conclusions.



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Believe, Your Eminences, that we of the previous generation feel lost, confused and discouraged. They want to change everything, they criticise everything. We have become like rags who are not worth looking at; we no longer count for anything. For heaven's sake, but what kind of scientific findings are capable of shaking our old convictions on the basis of proven truth? No, it is not the progress of science or objective criticism that is causing people today to change their attitude, but it is the mind that is weakened and, on the other hand, an overconfidence in one's own thinking.¹

With these clear words, Ernesto Cardinal Ruffini (1888-1967), Archbishop of Palermo, addressed the Holy Office, the supreme authority of the faith, in February 1957. What had happened that the long-serving Secretary of the Congregation for Studies and Professor of Biblical Exegesis at the Pontificio Ateneo del Seminario Maggiore (now Pontificia Università Lateranense) became so enraged? Obviously, the cardinal considered the situation of Catholic biblical scholarship in the 1950s to be extremely serious. According to Ruffini, exegetes acted in a liberal way that challenged previous practices. Did the Holy Office and the Pontifical Biblical Commission which was responsible for exegetical questions no longer intervene in the discourse in the spirit of anti-modernism? How did the supreme guardians of the faith actually deal with questions of bible exegesis in the 1950s?

The sources from the archives of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, in particular on ecclesiastical book censorship (*Fondo Censura librorum*), are of great interest for these and other questions relating to the history of theology. As Ruffini suggests, the Catholic approach to the Bible was highly contested in the first half of the twentieth century, which is why a brief overview of the situation in Rome in the 1940s and 1950s (1) is necessary before subsequently reconstructing the conflict (2) that led to Ruffini's emotional outburst, namely a conflict between the *Suprema Congregazione* and the Pontifical Biblical Commission that began with a case of book censorship in 1956. As a further example that points beyond the inner-Vatican discourse and makes visible the handling of exegetical innovation attempts from the periphery, the proceedings against

1 “Credano, Eminentissimi Signori, che noi della generazione precedente, ci sentiamo smarriti, confusi e etanti di avvillimento. Si vuol cambiar tutto, si critica tutto. Siamo diventati dei cenci, indegni di uno sguardo; noi non valiamo più niente. Viva il Cielo, ma quali sono questi trovati scientifici, che siano in grado di scalfire, in base alla verità provata, le nostre vecchie convinzioni? No, non è il progresso della scienza o della critica oggettiva che fa oggi cambiare atteggiamento, ma è lo spirito che si è affievolito, ed è altresì un'eccessiva fiducia nei propri pensamenti” (Ruffini, Osservazioni sul valore dei Decreti della Pont. Commissione biblica, 9 February 1957, in Archivio del Dicastero per la Dottrina della Fede (ADDF), Sanctum Officium (S.O.), *Censura librorum* (C.L.) 227/1956, ff. 91r-95r, here 94r-95r).

the work *Jüngerschaft und Apostelamt* by the Tübingen New Testament scholar Karl Hermann Schelkle (1908-88) in 1957 and 1958 (3) will be outlined.

1 Between Suspicion of Modernism and Encouragement: Catholic Biblical Scholarship in the 1940s and 1950s

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the starting position for Catholic exegetes was extremely unfavourable. The spectre of ‘modernism’ was identified not only in the history of dogma and church history, but above all in the biblical disciplines.² Central magisterial decisions under Pius X (1903-14) were directed against *modernismo biblico*. In addition to his encyclical *Pascendi* of 1907 and the anti-modernist oath of 1910, the decisions of the Pontifical Biblical Commission of 1905 to 1915 and the founding of the Pontifical Biblical Institute in 1909 were of central importance for the exegetical field.³ The brief yes/no decisions of the Biblical Commission on important research questions ranging from the interpretation of Genesis and the criticism of the Pentateuch to the historicity of the Gospels made it clear that innovation was first and foremost suspect and should not be the task of Catholic exegetes. Accordingly, exegetical publications, especially from France and Germany, were strictly monitored by ecclesiastical censors in the dioceses and religious orders, but above all by the Roman authorities.⁴ Until the 1930s, the Pontifical Biblical Commission played an important role in the Holy Office’s book censorship procedures. The committee was often consulted and played a decisive role in determining the outcome of proceedings. Some denunciations also came from the ranks of the commission. The multitude of doctrinal guidelines and the constant danger of having one’s own publications placed on the famous “Index of Forbidden Books” or perhaps even losing one’s own chair inhibited Catholic biblical scholarship, which Ingo Broer has aptly summarised under

² Cf. Arnold, Losito, *La censure d’Alfred Loisy*; Arnold, Losito, “*Lamentabili sane exitu*”, 3-97; Laplanche, *La crise de l’origine*; Reventlow, “Katholische Exegese des Alten Testaments”.

³ Cf. Pius X, Encyclical *Pascendi* of 8 September 1907, Denzinger, Hünemann, *Enchiridion symbolorum definitionum* (henceforth: DH), 3475-500, here especially 3494-8; Pius X, *Motu proprio Sacrorum antistitum* of 1 September 1910, DH 3537-50, here especially 3544-6. On the Responsa of the Biblical Commission from 1905 to 1915; see Pfister, *Ein Mann der Bibel*, 78-85.

⁴ The Holy Office inculcated this strict approach in those responsible in the periphery. An example of this is: Holy Office, circular letter *Neminem latet* to the superiors of religious orders dated 15 May 1924, in *Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu (ARSI)*, Santa Sede, Congregazioni Romane, 1016, fasc. 6, ff. 7r-9r.

the expression “curbed exegesis”.⁵ As I have already shown in detail elsewhere, from the 1930s onwards, the École Biblique in Jerusalem and the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome, both influential institutions in the Catholic world, increasingly focussed on a positive and constructive form of exegesis, which attempted to follow both the magisterial guidelines and the requirements of modern scholarship.⁶ Popes Pius XI (1922-39) and Pius XII (1939-58) increasingly promoted this line beyond the restrictions of their predecessors. Paradoxically, despite the official refusal of innovation, certain methodological innovations emerged in the backyard of the Vatican, which were ultimately recognised by the highest authorities and had a broad impact. Despite sometimes fierce criticism of the Pontifical Biblical Institute from conservative circles in Italy, the idea that Catholics could also work with the biblical scriptures in a historical-critical way even made it into the encyclical *Divino afflante Spiritu*, which Pius XII published in September 1943, in the middle of the Second World War.⁷ The two leading figures of Roman exegesis and the Pontifical Biblical Commission of those years were behind the papal doctrinal letter: the German Jesuit, Old Testament scholar and long-time rector of the Biblicum, Augustin Bea (1881-1968), and the Dominican graduated at the École Biblique and New Testament scholar at the Roman Dominican College Angelicum, Jacques Marie Vosté (1883-1949). The merit of the encyclical certainly lies in a positive assessment of the research of Catholics in exegesis and ancient Near Eastern studies and the authorisation of certain historical-critical methods, especially form criticism, which was still strictly forbidden around 1900. At the same time, exegetes were encouraged to continue their research on open questions. Many scholars celebrated the Apostolic letter as a liberating strike. However, it by no means represented a complete reconciliation of the Church’s magisterium with historical-critical exegesis. The classical dogmatic guidelines of the doctrine of inspiration and the idea of the inerrancy of Scripture were upheld.⁸ The anti-modernist decisions of the Biblical Commission from the

5 Cf. Broer, “Gebremste Exegese”.

6 Cf. Pfister, *Ein Mann der Bibel*; also cf. Gilbert, *L’Institut Biblique Pontifical*, 113-45; Montagnes, *Marie-Joseph Lagrange*.

7 Cf. Pius XII, Encyclical *Divino afflante Spiritu* of 30 September 1943, DH 3825-31. The timing of its publication shortly after the invasion of Rome by the German Wehrmacht has long puzzled researchers. However, the war had little to do with it; rather, the late and rather inappropriate timing was due to the delay in the proceedings against the Neapolitan priest Dolindo Ruotolo at the Holy Office, who had published a series of dubious Bible commentaries under a pseudonym. On the case and the exact background to the encyclical, see Pfister, *Ein Mann der Bibel*, 465-562. See also the contribution of Alejandro M. Dieguez in this issue of *JoMaCC*.

8 Cf. Unterburger, “Papst Pius XII., Enzyklika *Divino afflante Spiritu*”.

beginning of the century also remained officially in force, although even in Rome they were dealt with ambivalently, as we shall see later. While the Biblicum and the Pontifical Biblical Commission were in favour of a cautious opening,⁹ the Holy Office under its secretary Giuseppe Cardinal Pizzardo (1877-1970) and the long-time assessor and later secretary Alfredo Ottaviani (1890-1979) insisted on a conservative position. This was given renewed impetus by the encyclical *Humani generis* of August 1950.¹⁰ In it, Pius XII criticised overly innovative theological approaches, as well as some of the exegetical research, particularly on the first chapters of Genesis and the Gospels.¹¹ Conservative circles, for example from the Pontificio Ateneo del Seminario Maggiore in Rome, seemingly encouraged by this, began to criticise the work of the Pontifical Biblical Institute and the Biblical Commission from the mid-1950s onwards.¹²

To understand this phase between cautious innovations and the insistence on the previous anti-modernist restrictions, it is worth taking a look at the files of the archives of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, which concern book censorship. The first thing that stands out is that in the 1940s and 1950s, publications on biblical or exegetical topics were no longer denounced as frequently as before.¹³ In contrast to the main phase of anti-modernism, biblical publications accounted for only around 10 per cent of the cases dealt with, i.e. just 85 out of around 850. However, this does not mean that the Holy Office became more lenient. As will be shown later, the proceedings continued to be conducted with great rigour. Only some of the formerly conflictive questions, such as the application of form criticism and concerning the intention of certain passages from the Old Testament, had been clarified by the encyclical *Divino afflante Spiritu* and therefore obviously no longer received much attention. It should also be noted that the Roman censors evidently suspected

9 One example in this context is the letter from the Biblical Commission to the Archbishop of Paris Emanuel Célestin Cardinal Suhard (1874-1949) on the Pentateuch question and the interpretation of Genesis from January 1948 (cf. Pontifical Biblical Commission, letter to Cardinal Suhard of 16 January 1948, DH 3862-4). The Pontifical Biblical Institute dedicated its annual Bible Week (*Settimana Biblica*) in 1947 and 1948 to the new research trends, in particular the interpretation of Genesis. Subsequently, Augustin Bea published a detailed article in which he applied genre criticism to the creation accounts (cf. Bea, *Questioni bibliche*).

10 Cf. Pius XII, Encyclical *Humani generis* of 12 August 1950, DH 3875-99, here 3886-9. See the contribution of E. Fouilloux in this issue of *JoMaCC*.

11 Cf. Pius XII, Encyclical *Humani generis* of 12 August 1950, DH 3898-9.

12 Cf. Gilbert, *L'Institut Biblique Pontifical*, 158-71; Klaus Schatz, "Der 'Fall Schierse'", 248-50.

13 On the situation at the beginning of the century, see Fouilloux, "Affaires françaises, archives romaines"; Hiepel, *Hubert Grimme und Friedrich Schmidtke*, 85-91, 367-473; Schepers, "Dokumentation der römischen Zensurverfahren".

modernist threats in other theological fields, as the figures clearly show: The majority of the proceedings tended to concern works on ecumenism, liturgical renewal, confrontation with communism or, quite significantly, the broad field of sexuality.¹⁴ The last subject in particular comprised almost a third of the publications dealt with in the period from 1939 to 1958.

Certain trends can be discerned concerning the exegetical books for which at least one file was opened in the Holy Office. While in the 1940s only a few exegetical works were dealt with, the encyclical *Humani generis* seems to have favoured a certain revival. As early as the 1940s, several vernacular translations of the entire Bible or the Gospels were placed on the agenda of the Holy Office. The fact that the Bible was the book that was most frequently on the Index or at least the subject of censorship proceedings,¹⁵ was therefore still true in the mid-twentieth century.¹⁶

Exegetical works on Old Testament topics such as the history of Israel or criticism of the Pentateuch were almost no longer an issue.¹⁷ The Old Testament was discussed only in the various publications dealing with the biblical accounts of creation in the light of the findings of the natural sciences. Since the end of the 1940s, these publications have accounted for a not inconsiderable proportion, which is also linked to the progress in biological evolutionary research and physics.¹⁸

New Testament research, on the other hand, was more frequently the focus of the Roman censors. As in the main phase of

14 The works included, for example: Congar, *Chrétiens désunis*; Laros, *Das christliche Gewissen*; Michel, *Ehe*; Dufoyer, *L'Intimité conjugale*; Thomé, *Der mündige Christ*; Rahner, “Die vielen Messen”; Parsch, *Messerklärung*; Chéry, *Le Français - langue liturgique?*; Semaine Sociale de France, *Communistes et Chrétiens*; Bigó, *Marxisme et humanisme*; Stenzel, *Die Taufe*.

15 Cf. Wolf, “Kirchengeschichte als Auslegungsgeschichte”, 224-5.

16 Cf. e.g. Nederlandsch Bijbelgenootschap, Wumkes, *It Nije Testamint*; École Biblique de Jérusalem, *La Sainte Bible*; Lamsa, *The Holy Bible*.

17 Only one French article on the Exodus was the subject of a trial: Steinmann, “L'exode dans l'Ancien Testament”.

18 A selection of the cases dealt with according to the designation in the files: Marsiglia. O.P., Padre Dumeste O.P., viene denunziato come interprete temerario della Sacra Scrittura, specie dei primi capitoli della Genesi, dal canonico Luigi Hemour, curato di S. Ferreol a Marsiglia, in ADDF, S.O., C.L. 97/1949; Gesuiti. Padre Vittorio Marcozzi S.J., autore di articoli, conferenze, ecc. sull'evoluzionismo, in ADDF, S.O., C.L. 296/1951; Evolucionismo in genere (materiale), in ADDF, S.O., C.L. 224/1953; Francia. *Les premiers hommes* dell'abbé Glory, in ADDF, S.O., C.L. 232/1953; Parigi. *Les premiers hommes* di F.M. Berguinoux e A. Glory, in ADDF, S.O., C.L. 206/1954; Francia. *Recherches et débats. Pensée scientifique et foi Chrétienne*, in ADDF, S.O., C.L. 225/1954; *Origines de l'Univers et de l'Homme* di Hauriet, in ADDF, S.O., C.L. 397/1954; Nice (Francia). Odette Fribaut *Evolution ou création* con la collaborazione di A. Dubois, in ADDF S.O., C.L. 351/1957; Articolo del padre Luis Analdich OFM su *El origen del hombre segun la Biblia*, in ADDF, S.O., C.L. 454/1957.

anti-modernism, books on the life of Jesus and exegetical textbooks were targeted with some regularity. Publications dealing with the first decades of Christianity and the development of the New Testament canon were also repeatedly targeted.¹⁹ In this context, the fear that Catholic researchers might adopt Rudolf Bultmann's (1884-1976) theories on the 'demythologisation' of the New Testament became apparent. A dossier, which was compiled in the Holy Office in 1957, assumes a "remarkable influence on Catholics" in Germany and France.²⁰ By turning away from the principles of the strict historical-critical search for the historical Jesus, which paid no attention to the Christ of faith, and by turning to the kerygma of the early Christians' faith, Bultmann did indeed exert a great fascination on Catholic theologians. His reading of the New Testament, influenced by Martin Heidegger's (1889-1976) existential-ontological philosophy, among others, no longer asked about historical objectivity, but about the subjective-existential faith decision of believers both in New Testament times and in the modern present. The biblical writings opened up an encounter with the reality of God and laid the foundations of the Christian faith. However, in order for modern people to advance to a life based on the foundations of faith, i.e. the kerygma of the death and resurrection of Jesus, a 'demythologisation' of the biblical ways of speaking and thinking about God must be undertaken. Only then would the kerygma become understandable and acceptable, both in confessing and in living the faith.²¹ Although Bultmann assumed that God revealed himself in history and in particular in the work and preaching of Jesus of Nazareth, the shift in emphasis towards the post-Easter faith of the first Christians that accompanied the 'demythologisation' was dangerous from a traditional Catholic perspective. Since Pius X, the preoccupation with subjective experiences of faith - whether ancient or contemporary - rather than with doctrinally certified truths of faith had been considered a central error of

19 For example, these are: Daniel-Rops, *Jésus en son Temps*; Tresmontant, *Études de Métaphysique Biblique*; Tresmontant, *Essai sur la pensée hébraïque*; Schaper, *Das Leben Jesu*; Keller, *Bibel hat doch recht*; Robert, Feuillet, *Introduction à la Bible*; Bacht, Fries, Geiselman, *Die mündliche Überlieferung*.

20 Cf. Il pensiero teologico di R. Bultmann, pastore protestante con influo notevole sui cattolici, in ADDF, S.O., C.L. 215/1957, f. 1r. Reference is made here above all to the publications of the French Jesuit and later director of the Centre Sèvres in Paris, René Marlé (1919-94), which were translated into several languages. Specifically mentioned are Marlé, *Bultmann et l'interprétation du Nouveau Testament*; Marlé, "Bultmann'sche Theologie des Paradoxes".

21 Cf. Bultmann, "Neues Testament und Mythologie"; Bultmann, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments*. For an introduction to Bultmann's existentialist theology and the reception in Catholic exegesis and systematic theology see Dahlke, "Katholische Reaktionen", 219-26; Klauck, "Die katholische neutestamentliche Exegese", 64-9; Landmesser, "Theologie des Neuen Testaments"; Landmesser, "Hermeneutik und existentielle Interpretation".

"modernism".²² If Jesus Christ had not identified himself as the Son of God by preaching and performing miracles,²³ what was the value of the New Testament writings? According to Bultmann's logic, could not the Easter event also be disenchanting?²⁴ Questions of New Testament exegesis, then, were therefore still about the core of the faith, which had to be protected.

This brief insight shows that, contrary to Ruffini's pessimistic predictions, the Holy Office's machinery of book censorship continued to operate, albeit with a different focus than at the beginning of the century.

2 A Roman Controversy: Conflicts between the Holy Office and the Pontifical Biblical Commission (1956-58)

However, Ruffini was less concerned with the writings of authors in different countries than with the events surrounding the Roman Curia. The memorandum of February 1957, quoted at the beginning of this article, stems from a very delicate conflict that the Archbishop of Palermo, who still had influence in the Roman Curia, had set in motion.

In May 1956, Ruffini denounced two articles by the German-Roman exegetes Athanasius Miller (1881-1968) and Arduin Kleinhans (1882-1958).²⁵ The delicate point is that the Benedictine Miller was secretary of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, while the Franciscan Kleinhans was his deputy. Ruffini had also been a member of the commission for many years. What was it about? In 1954, the Pontifical Biblical Commission had reissued the *Enchiridion Biblicum*, a collection of magisterial documents on Catholic biblical interpretation.²⁶ Miller and Kleinhans had instrumental in this, publishing

²² Cf. Pius X, Encyclical *Pascendi* of 8 September 1907, DH 3484-6.

²³ It was precisely in prophecies and miracles that classical dogmatics saw the central evidence of the objective reasonableness of faith: "In order that the obedience of our faith may nevertheless be in accord with reason, God willed that external proofs of his revelation should be connected with the inner help of the Holy Spirit, namely divine deeds and above all miracles and prophecies, which, since they clearly and distinctly show God's omnipotence and infinite knowledge, are quite certain signs of divine revelation adapted to the cognitive faculty of all. Therefore both Moses and the prophets, and above all Christ the Lord himself, have performed many and very evident miracles and prophecies" (First Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Filius* of 24 April 1870, DH 3009). See also Niemann, *Jesus als Glaubensgrund*, 51-83.

²⁴ These fears were not unfounded, as the demythologisation debate within Protestant theology showed. Cf. Buri, "Entmythologisierung oder Entkerygmatisierung"; Schaede, "Entmythologisierungsdebatte".

²⁵ Cf. Ruffini to Ottaviani, 30 May 1956, in ADDF, S.O., C.L. 227/1956, f. 3r-v.

²⁶ Cf. Pontifical Biblical Commission, *Enchiridion Biblicum*.

articles in the journals of their orders to introduce the new edition. The conservative Ruffini had come across passages in the articles which, in his view, fundamentally qualified the decisions of the Pontifical Biblical Commission of 1905 to 1915 –²⁷ and this by representatives of the very institution that was supposed to keep a watchful eye on Catholic exegetes! The stumbling block was the following formulation:

Inasmuch as these decrees [of the Pontifical Biblical Commission] represent positions that are neither directly nor indirectly connected with the truths of faith and morals, the researcher can of course continue his investigations in complete freedom and use the results, but always with the reservation of the Church’s doctrinal authority.²⁸

Thus the hardly revolutionary passage in Miller’s German text, which Kleinhans adopted almost word for word in his Latin contribution.²⁹ Obviously, from Ruffini’s point of view, it was enough to cautiously accept the changeability of one or two purely technical guidelines of the Magisterium for biblical research, as long as faith and morals were not affected.

Behind the Cardinal’s criticism was above all a fundamental rejection of the course that the Biblical Commission under its chairman Eugène Cardinal Tisserant (1884-1972) and leading figures such as Miller and Bea had been pursuing since the early 1940s, namely focusing more on the promotion rather than the control of biblical scholarship.³⁰ As early as October 1951, Miller had submitted a proposal to the Commission to issue a decree on the question of the continued validity of the Commission’s decisions of 1905 to 1915 in view of the

27 The file note summarises the accusation as follows: “In questo modo viene praticamente distrutto il valore di molti decreti che S. Pio X aveva sancito con *Motu proprio Praestantia Sacrae Scripturae*, 18 nov. 1907” (Relazione della Cancelleria, October 1956, in ADDE, S.O., C.L. 227/1956, f. 52, [2]).

28 “Insofern indessen in diesen Dekreten [der Bibelkommission] Ansichten vertreten werden, die weder mittelbar noch unmittelbar mit Wahrheiten des Glaubens und der Sitten zusammenhängen, kann der Forscher selbstverständlich in aller Freiheit seine Untersuchungen fortsetzen und die Ergebnisse verwerten, allerdings immer mit Vorbehalt der kirchlichen Lehrautorität” (Miller, “Das neue biblische Handbuch” Das neue biblische Handbuch).

29 “Sub hoc autem respectu ipsa decreta Pontif[iciae] Commissionis de Re Biblica magni sunt momenti. Quatenus vero in iis proponuntur sententiae, quae neque mediate neque immediate cum veritatibus fidei et morum cohaerent, interpres S. Scripturae plena libertate suas investigationes scientificas prosequi earumque fructum percipere potest, salva semper auctoritate magisterii Ecclesiae” (Kleinhans, “De nova Enchiridii Biblici editione”, 64-5).

30 Cf. Fouilloux, *Eugène cardinal Tisserant*, 233-78; Pfister, *Ein Mann der Bibel*, 525-88.

research progress of the previous years.³¹ The scheme drawn up for this purpose was approved by the assembly of the consultors in the spring of 1952 and only slightly amended, but was hotly debated by the cardinals. Since Pizzardo and Ruffini, unlike the other two cardinals, Tisserant and the elderly, long-serving Prefect of the Vatican Library Giovanni Mercati (1866-1957), rejected such a public statement out of hand as “highly inappropriate and dangerous”,³² Pius XII also rejected the decree for the time being.³³ However, in a private audience with

31 In a later Latin report, Miller describes the deliberations of the Consultor Assembly of the Biblical Commission as follows: “Die 21 mensis octobris 1951 Consultor ab Actis Commissionis de Re Biblica sequens proposuit dubium: ... quaesitum est, utrum praescriptum a S. Pio X in Motu proprio ‘Praestantia Scripturae Sacrae’ die 18 novembris 1907 datum se subiucendi sententiis a Pontificali consilio de Re Biblica editis perinde ac Decretis Sacrarum Cogregationum pertinentibus ad doctrinam probatisque a Pontifice, referatur ad omnia quae in illis sententiis decernuntur, an ad ea tantum quae res fidei morumque respiciunt vel cum eis necessarium nexum habent, illis, quae indolis mere historicae, criticae vel philologicae sunt, si forte, occurrerint, relictis ulteriori investigationi? Resp. Praescriptum in supradicto Motu proprio Praestantia Scripturae Sacrae impositum, quod referatur ad res fidei morumque vel cum his necessarium nexum habent, ab omnibus, graviter onerata eorum conscientia, diligenter servandum est; si quae autem in illis sententiis, re serio et diligenter secundum solida criteria theologica perpensa, indolis mere historicae, criticae, philologicae esse videantur, in iis ulterius investigandis et diiudicandis aequa libertas est, salvo semper Ecclesiae iudicio de eorum nexu cum rebus fidei et morum. Hoc schema Decreti Consultores omnes in sessione generali die 20 ianuarii 1952 habita approbarunt praeter duos, quorum prior putabat: libertatem indagandi ulterius in quaestiones, de quibus Pontificia Commissionis de Re Biblica iam decisionem dedit, existere et semper existisse, supposito debito respectu auctoritatis ecclesiasticae, et non opus esse novis Decretis. Alter dubius haesit, bene prospiciens ex una parte opportunitatem Decreti, ex altera vero parte timens pro auctoritate Pontificiae Commissioni eo quod, admissis iis quae in schemate Decreti asseruntur, potius Decretorum reformatio postularetur” (Miller, *De Modo procedendi in Applicatione Motus proprii “Praestantia Scripturae Sacrae”*. Relatio Generalis totius Quaestionis tractatae in Gremio Commissionis, 10 December 1957, in ADDF, S.O., C.L. 270/1958, f. 10, [3-4]).

32 “quanto mai inopportuna e pericolosa” (quoted from: Bea, *Votum on Ruffini’s Osservazioni*, 21 February 1957, ADDF, S.O., C.L. 227/1956, ff. 73r-78r, here 73r). In a later report, Miller describes the concerns of the two cardinals more detailed: “Hac de re fusior facta est deinde relatio quae die 4 februarii 1952 submisae proposita est iudicio Em.orum Patrum e die 6 martii eiusdem anni in sessione plenaria discussa. [...] Sententiam Decreto contrariam proposuerunt Em.i Principes Em.us Cardinalis Pizzardo, qui putat tale decretum edi non posse sine magno detrimento immo despectu magisterii ecclesiastici. Decretum favere rationalismo, agnosticismo atque confirmare inobedientes in sua pervicacia, immo eos inducturum esse, ut Responsa Commissionis Biblicae plane negligant. Ipsi Em.o Principi plane assentit Em.us Cardinalis Ruffini, eo magis quod hodie etiam contemptus traditionis catholicae maiore cum vi intumescit. Tali Decreto insuper iniuriam inferri memoriae S. PP. Pii X. Principia in decreto exposita esse quidem vera, sed in Responsis commissionis Biblicae de facta non inveniri res, quae saltem implicite et indirecte cum rebus fidei et morum non cohaereant. Quam sententiam Em.us Princeps postea documento speciali iterum et fusius defendit, postulando quod tale documentum reponatur inter acta Archivi Commissionis” (Miller, *Relatio*, 10 December 1957, in ADDF, S.O., C.L. 270/1958, f. 10, [4-5]).

33 “In Audientia privata Consultori ab Actis die 6 maii 1952 benigne concessa ipse exhibuit Suae Sanctitati relationem ab Em.is Patribus in sessione plenaria 6 martii 1952 discussam, necnon specialem relationem de exitu huius discussionis in praefata

Miller, who had explained the draft decree and the course of the discussion to the Pope in his capacity as Secretary of the Commission, the Pope expressed his understanding of the situation:

To the Secretary’s insistent, modest enquiry as to how one should behave or what one should answer in general to the written and loudly voiced questions about the current value of the motu proprio *Praestantia Scripturae Sacrae*? On the one hand, many Catholic authors of the best reputation, good will and most solid scholarly qualifications say that they are hindered, their consciences being heavily burdened, that they are all the less able to defend their position on so many issues; on the other hand, however, other brazen authors basically care very little about these decrees. To this the Holy Father replied that he wished to consider this question, which is certainly grave, carefully from within.³⁴

In fact, however, Pius XII took no decision.

It was not until four years later that the conflict flared up again with Ruffini’s denunciation. He now accused Miller and Kleinhans of making a new attempt, with their comments on the new edition of the *Enchiridion Biblicum*, in order to help the failed draft decree of 1951 achieve a breakthrough or to cast doubt on the authority of the older decisions of the Commission, as he wrote in the statement quoted at the beginning.

I do not think I am making a reckless judgement if I think that Rev. Fr. Miller and Fr. Kleinhans tried with the note - incriminated by me, in the articles in question - to pass, albeit privately, but with their own authority, what had not passed in the legitimate forum of the Biblical Commission. This is the real key to interpreting the Mens of the two authoritative Fathers.³⁵

plenaria habitae. Summus Pontifex primum notavit dissentionem Em.orum Patrum circa schema Decreti propositi; hac de causa voluit quaestionem interim iniudicatum relinquere” (Miller, *Relatio*, 10 December 1957, in ADDF, S.O., C.L. 270/1958, f. 10, [6]).

34 “Ad instantiam vero a consultore ab Actis modeste factam: quomodo se gerere debeat aut quid respondeat ad interrogationes scriptis et viva voce factas de valore hodierno Motu proprii Praestantia Scripturae Sacrae et Decretorum Pontificiae Commissionis in genere? Ex una enim parte plures auctores catholicos optimi nominis et bonae voluntatis et solidissimae scientiae impediri, onerata graviter eorum conscientia, quominus in tot quaestionibus mentem suam manifestent; ex altera autem parte alios auctores audaciores plerumque minime curare de istis Decretis. Ad haec Summus Pontifex respondit se velle hanc quaestionem certe gravem penitus perpendere” (Miller, *Relatio*, 10 December 1957, in ADDF, S.O., C.L. 270/1958, f. 10, [6]).

35 “Non credo di fare un giudizio temerario se penso che i Rev.mi P. Miller e P. Kleinhans hanno cercato con la nota - da me incriminata, negli articoli di cui si tratta - di

The Holy Office obviously realised the serious situation immediately; four experts were called in: Augustin Bea, who was a consultor to both the *Suprema Congregazione* and the Pontifical Biblical Commission; Salvatore Garofalo (1911-98), a biblical scholar and rector of the Pontificia Università Urbaniana; the Capuchin Teófilo Garcia de Orbiso (1895-1975), New Testament scholar at the Antonianum college, and the Dominican and Old Testament scholar Piet Geert Duncker, who was also a consultor to the Biblical Commission. With the exception of Garofalo, who had studied under Ruffini and expressed understanding for his teacher’s fears,³⁶ the consultors agreed in their statements that neither Kleinhans nor Miller had declared the *Responsa* of the Biblical Commission of the years 1905 to 1915 to be fundamentally outdated.³⁷ Garcia and Duncker even considered the commentaries to be extremely helpful for all Catholic exegetes.³⁸ Bea

fare passare, sia pure privatamente, ma con l’autorità loro propria, quanto non era passato nella sede legittima della Commissione biblica. Questa è la vera chiave per interpretare la Mens dei due autorevoli Padri” (Ruffini, Osservazioni, 9 February 1957, in ADDF, S.O., C.L. 227/1956, f. 93r).

36 “Queste citazioni sono fatte unicamente a titolo di richiamo per sottolineare quello che noi crediamo un reale pericolo al quale è necessario far fronte. In altri termini, non credo si possa lasciare al giudizio di privati la decisione in merito al rapporto mediato o immediato con la fede di alcune questioni di autenticità. Mi si perdoni la sincerità, forse spietata; difficilmente si saprebbe immaginare che un organo come la Commissione Biblica imponga sub gravi di attenersi a posizioni meramente critiche che non hanno alcun rapporto con la fede e i costumi. Che senso avrebbe imporre una opinione in questioni liberamente disputate? E se una opinione viene imposta semplicemente come tutior, perché è tale se non in ragione di un rapporto almeno mediato con verità ben altrimenti importanti?” (Garofalo, Voto, 6 July 1956, in ADDF, S.O., C.L. 227/1956, f. 52, [17-24], here 21).

37 Cf. Bea, Voto, 8 July 1956, in ADDF, S.O., C.L. 227/1956, f. 52, 3-8; Garcia de Orbiso, Voto, 8 July 1956, in ADDF, S.O., C.L. 227/1956, f. 52, 8-16; Duncker, *Votum*, 8 July 1956, in ADDF, S.O., C.L. 227/1956, f. 52, [24-31].

38 “Propongo al giudizio illuminato degli Em.i Porporati di codesta Suprema S. Congregazione del Sant’Offizio, che i due articoli in questione e i loro autori siano scolpati di qualsiasi reato: anzi si sia loro grati di aver portato una chiarificazione opportuna e necessaria, che come tale è stata salutata con gioia da tutti i sinceri cultori delle scienze bibliche” (Garcia de Orbiso, Voto, 8 July 1956, in ADDF, S.O., C.L. 227/1956, f. 52, [8-16], here [16]). Duncker writes: “Illa igitur, verba articuli, meo humilii iudicio, valde bene, recte, apte ac prudenter ponuntur. Ex una enim parte plene salvatur auctoritas Ecclesiae circa omnia et singula quae res fidei et morum respiciunt atque cum istis immediate vel mediat cohaerunt, ex altera autem parte secundum doctrinam ac mentem Ecclesiae in recentioribus documentis pontificiis explicatam atque inculcatam plena datur libertas pro istis sententiis quae in decretis Pontificiae Commissionis de Re Biblica cum rebus fidei et morum neque immediate neque mediate connectuntur. Si, insuper, illa verba articuli in proprio contextu considerantur, videntur inserta ad animum pacandum multorum exegetarum catholicorum, optimae intentionis sinceraeque fidei, qui habent contra plura antiquiora decreta. Omnibus fere consentientibus ista decreta nostris diebus haud essent edita, saltem non in illa forma quam habent. Quare illa verba articuli valde bene, recte, apta et prudenter formulata mihi videntur. Expressis autem verbis volo dicere meum humile iudicium plene subicere ulteriori iudicio Ecclesiae” (Duncker, *Votum*, 8 July 1956, in ADDF, S.O., C.L. 227/1956, f. 52, [31]).

voted in a similar way, but at the same time criticised Ruffini’s denunciation. It was painful when a high dignitary like the Archbishop of Palermo made such unfounded accusations. After all, both articles were completely in line with the previous line of the Magisterium.³⁹ The long-serving rector of the *Biblicum* added that

apart from strictly theological questions, the decrees of the Biblical Commission contain a whole series of questions of a purely scientific or mixed nature, which today must be answered on the basis of the results of the scientific investigations that have since taken place. With what justification could Catholic authors simply be obliged ‘sub gravi’ to follow the scientifically based opinions of half a century ago on these questions? It thus becomes apparent that the judgement of the value of the decrees of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, which must be made today after so much research, is not quite as simple as the complainant seems to believe. The way in which the decrees themselves proceed shows that their authors made a clear distinction between the truths of faith or truths connected with faith and other elements that belong to the scientific discussion and can be modified with the progress of critical, philosophical and historical science.⁴⁰

Even though the consultors agreed on the two articles at their meeting on 6 November 1956,⁴¹ the cardinals did not want to leave it at

39 “In nessuno dei due articoli si parla neanche con una sola parola di autenticità o genuinità dei SS. Libri, né esplicitamente né implicitamente, e la conclusione che in fine si fa: ‘In questo modo viene praticamente distrutto il valore di molti Decreti’, è priva di ogni fondamento. È doloroso constatare che tali accuse si fanno senza alcuna oggettività contro due autori che appartengono, come il denunziante stesso nota, ‘ai primi gradi della Pontificia Commissione Biblica’” (Bea, Voto, 8 July 1956, in *ADDF, S.O., C.L. 227/1956*, f. 52, [4]).

40 “Da tutto ciò si vede che nei Decreti della Commissione Biblica oltre le questioni di stretta competenza teologica, si trovano non poche altre di natura puramente scientifica o di natura mista, alle quali oggi si deve rispondere in base ai risultati delle indagini scientifiche frattanto fatte. Con che autorità gli autori cattolici si potrebbero semplicemente obbligare ‘sub gravi’ a seguire in queste questioni le opinioni basate sulla scienza di un mezzo secolo fa? Si vede dunque che il giudizio che oggi, dopo tante investigazioni frattanto fatte, si deve dare del valore dei Decreti della Pontificia Commissione Biblica, non è punto così semplice come il denunziante lo sembra credere. Il modo di procedere dei Decreti stessi mostra che i loro estensori hanno ben distinto fra le verità della fede o connesse con la fede, e altri elementi che appartengono alla discussione scientifica e si possono cambiare col progresso della scienza critica, filologica, storica” (Bea, Voto, 8 July 1956, in *ADDF, S.O., C.L. 227/1956*, f. 52, [7]).

41 “Feria II, die 5 novembris 1956. Circa gli articoli dei PP. Atanasio Miller O.S.B. e Arduino Kleinhans, O.F.M. [...] Rev.mi D.i Consultores fuerunt in voto prout sequitur: OMNES (Commissarius, Traglia, Hudal, Brown, Corrà, Hürth, Tromp, Caronti, Bea, Garrigou-Lagrange, Hentrich, Balic, Piolanti, Verardo, Graneris).

1. Quanto agli articoli e loro autori: Reponatur.

a rejection of Ruffini at their meeting on 14 November 1956. On the contrary: Pizzardo, who chaired the meeting and had already prevented the draft decree of the Biblical Commission together with Ruffini in 1951, invited the cardinal to Rome to explain his reproaches.⁴² In doing so, he took up the suggestion of some of the Consultors, including Bea. In a written statement, he had defended the work of the Biblical Commission, but at the same time suggested that Ruffini should specifically name what he considered worthy of criticism in the commission's previous practices.⁴³ Ruffini readily accepted the

2. Interessare la Commissione Pontificia affinché vigili attentamente sulle tendenze dottrinali in questioni bibliche.

Alcuni Consultori (Commissario, Traglia, Hürth, Hudal, Corrà, Garrigou-Langrange, Hentrich, Piolanti) suggeriscono di invitare il Card. Ruffini a esporre in modo più concreto le sue preoccupazioni.

P. Bea addit proprias animadversiones.”

(Memorandum, 6 November 1956, in ADDF, S.O., C.L. 227/1956, f. 59r).

42 “Feria IV, the 14-XI-1956.

Em.i ac Rev.mi Patres Decreverunt:

1. Si faccia vedere la posizione, sub secreto S. Officii, dell'Em.o Card. Ruffini.
2. Si avvertano i due autori che, data la loro posizione, gli articoli furono molto importanti.
3. Si faccia pubblicare un articolo che [ripone] il male fatto.

N.B. [Stima] si eseguisce quanto è stato disposto nel numero 1°, per il resto si vedrà in seguito.

Sabato, die 17 novembris 1956.

In audientia concessa Exc.mo ac Rev.mo Domino domenico Tardini, Pro-Secretario Status, SS.mus decisionem E.morum statum adprobare dignatus est.

N.B.: Sua Santità desidera che, dopo aver sentito il parere dell'Em.mo Cardinale Ruffini, questa posizione venga di nuovo riferita in udienza” (memorandum, 14 November 1956, ADDF, S.O., C.L. 227/1956, f. 68r-v).

43 “Ma essendo l'autore dell'accusa un Em.o Card., e inoltre un Cardinale il quale egli stesso ha insegnato durante circa 30 anni la Sacra Scrittura, è troppo chiaro che egli conosceva e conosce i principi esposti in tutti e quattro i Voti. Che ciò nonostante egli ha creduto dover rivolgersi al Santo Padre, ciò si deve senza dubbio a una seria preoccupazione, ed è facile indovinare quale sia: il fatto che i decreti della Commissione biblica praticamente da molti vengono trascurati, da altri apertamente dichiarati aboliti. Questa preoccupazione certamente non è infondata, e da lungo tempo anche la Commissione se ne rende conto. Ed è proprio per questa ragione che i due Segretari della Commissione hanno voluto dichiarare che i Decreti ancor oggi sono in vigore, salva quella libertà, riconosciuta dai teologi, riguardo a cose puramente profane, che non hanno un nesso necessario con le res fidei et morum. La dichiarazione dei due autori ha dunque anzitutto un senso positivo: i Decreti sono in vigore riguardo a tutto quanto è materia della fede o ha nesso necessario con la verità della fede. La dichiarazione è dunque di grandissimo valore, e dobbiamo essere grati agli autori che l'hanno fatta. Ho detto che la Commissione Biblica si rende conto della situazione. Essa ha in tutte le grandi nazioni dei Consultori che hanno il dovere di riferire ogni anno sulla situazione degli studi biblici nella relativa nazione, sulle pubblicazioni, su eventuali errori, in somma su tutte le cose importanti in proposito [...] Sembra dunque che si possa dire che la commissione fa quello che può ragionevolmente fare. Se tuttavia Sua Em.a il Card. Ruffini, egli stesso Membro della Commissione Cardinalizia, stimasse che si possano e debbano prendere ancor altre misure, il S. Officio lo può invitare a presentare le sue concrete proposte all'Em.mo Card. Presidente della Commissione biblica ovvero al Santo Padre stesso” (Bea, Osservazioni, 5 November 1956, in ADDF, S.O., C.L. 1956, ff. 55r-56r).

cardinals' invitation, visited Ottaviani in the Vatican on 21 December and in February 1957 wrote the memorandum quoted above, in which he complained about the state of Catholic biblical scholarship.⁴⁴ Even if this meant that the work of the Biblical Commission was once again targeted by the Holy Office, Ruffini's tirades at least had no effect on the outcome of the Miller and Kleinhans censorship case. The two exegetes were merely admonished and, for their part, told that their contributions should not be understood as a dismissal of the decisions of the Biblical Commission.⁴⁵ Tisserant, as chairman of the Bible Commission, was commissioned to draw up an internal report on the question of which of the *Responsa* could still claim full validity and which could not – and thus also: which research trends should be stopped more decisively.⁴⁶ Tisserant again entrusted Miller with this task, who completed his detailed report in December 1957.

Even though no censorship proceedings were initiated and the conflict surrounding Miller and Kleinhans did not become public, Ruffini's denunciation had achieved what he had been longing for: the actions of the Pontifical Biblical Commission were now being scrutinised by the Holy Office. Its leaders Pizzardo and Ottaviani were close to Ruffini anyway. Even the harmless formulations of Miller and Kleinhans brought conservatives like Ruffini to the barricades. After all, the fundamental question was: could and was the Magisterium allowed to correct its decisions in the important field of biblical interpretation? The supreme guardians of the faith were extremely sceptical in this regard, and even research advances by Catholic exegetes and the cautious opening of the *Biblicum* and the Pontifical Biblical Commission in Rome could not change this. Miller's clarifying report of December 1957 was able to finally dispel the accusations against him and Kleinhans.⁴⁷ The Holy Office's attempt to tighten its grip on the Biblical Commission through this process was met calmly

44 Cf. Memorandum, [February 1957], ADDF, S.O., C.L. 227/1956, f. 79r; Ruffini, Osservazioni, 9 February 1957, in ADDF, S.O., C.L. 227/1956, ff. 91r-95r.

45 “Feria IV, the 27-II-1957

Em.mi ac Rev.mi Patres decreverunt: La Pontificia Commissione biblica veda se e come fare per rimediare alla situazione creata dai due articoli

Veda se non convenga che essa stessa indichi quali sono i punti dei decreti che possono ritenersi non obbliganti; e se non sia il caso di richiamare i due Padri per aver pubblicato, di loro arbitrario, decisioni o pareri della commissione.

Feria V, the 21-III-1957

SS.mus disporre dignatus est ut scribatur: Vedono gli Em.i Padri della Pontificia Commissione come fare per rimediare alla situazione creata dai due articoli. Siano ammoniti i due Padri per aver pubblicato ecc.” (Memorandum, [21 March 1957], in ADDF, S.O., C.L. 227/1956, f. 96r).

46 [Ottaviani] to Tisserant, 29 March 1957, in ADDF, S.O., C.L. 227/1956, f. 97r.

47 Miller, De Modo procedendi in Applicatione Motus proprii “Praestantia Scripturae Sacrae”. Relatio Generalis totius Quaestionis tractatae in Gremio Commissionis, [10 December 1957], in ADDF, S.O., C.L. 270/1958, f. 10.

by its chairman, Eugène Tisserant. The French cardinal seemed to be in no hurry to justify the Commission's practices before the Holy Office, which is clear from the time that elapsed between the decision of the *Suprema Congregazione*, Tisserant's reactions and the finalisation of Miller's report.⁴⁸ In addition, a joint meeting of the Biblical Commission and the Holy Office, which Pizzardo had called for, did not take place until the end of Pius XII's pontificate.⁴⁹ Whether this was a delaying tactic cannot be completely ruled out. In any case, the fundamental conflict over Catholic biblical exegesis that had now come to light continued to be fought out in the period that followed. This is shown, for example, by the case of the German Jesuit and Frankfurt New Testament scholar Franz Josef Schierse (1915-92) in the years 1960-61.⁵⁰ It was not yet foreseeable that a few years later the Second Vatican Council would bring about a clarification of hermeneutical principles with the constitution *Dei Verbum*, for example with regard to the relationship between Scripture and tradition as well as Scriptural inspiration and historical-critical methodology of exegesis and research into the origin of the New Testament canon.

3 Form Criticism and 'Demythologisation' Instead of Tradition? The Schelkle Case (1957-58)

These internal Vatican conflicts formed the backdrop against which other publications on biblical themes were negotiated by the Holy Office due to the involvement of the same consultors in several proceedings. As already shown, the censors were particularly suspicious

48 He did not reply to Ottaviani's letter of March until May 1957 (Tisserant to Ottaviani, 22 May 1957, in ADDF, S.O., C.L. 227/1956, ff. 98r-99r). In a letter of June, he assured Pizzardo that he would arrange a joint meeting of the Holy Office and the Biblical Commission as soon as Miller submitted his report (Tisserant to Pizzardo, 18 June 1957, in ADDF, S.O., C.L. 227/1956, f. 101r. Only when Miller finally submitted his report in December did Tisserant merely have the report sent to the cardinals of the Biblical Commission and also to Pizzardo. There is no mention of a meeting in the corresponding letter ([Miller], Circular to the Cardinals of the Biblical Commission, 10 December 1957, in ADDF, S.O., C.L. 227/1956, f. 103r) and there are no references to such a meeting in the files.

49 Cf. Pizzardo to Tisserant, 18 June 1957, in ADDF, S.O., C.L. 227/1956, f. 100r. At the end of July 1958, Pizzardo made another attempt and had copies of Miller's report from December of the previous year sent to the Consultors and Cardinals of the Holy Office (Pizzardo to Tisserant, 25 July 1958, in ADDF, S.O., C.L. 270/1958). A file entitled "Relazioni tra la Commissione Biblica e il S[ant'] O[ffizio]" was created specifically for this process (ADDF, S.O., C.L. 270/1958). It is not entirely clear why this is in the *Censura librorum* collection. There may be a connection to the censorship proceedings against the work "Introduction à la Bible", which had been under negotiation since 1957 (ADDF, S.O., C.L. 374/1957) and to which the file repeatedly refers.

50 Cf. Schatz, "Der 'Fall Schierse'", 248-50.

of writings on the New Testament. Again and again, the old fear that Catholic researchers were adopting Protestant positions became apparent; in the 1950s, as already shown, the focus was particularly on Rudolf Bultmann's theories on the 'demythologisation' of the New Testament. The following case is an example of this concern.

In October 1957, the Bishop of Gurk-Klagenfurt in Austria, Joseph Köstner (1906-82), denounced the book *Jüngerschaft und Apostelamt. Eine biblische Auslegung des priesterlichen Dienstes*.⁵¹ The Tübingen New Testament scholar Karl Hermann Schelkle had published it as a commemorative gift for his fellow ordinands on the occasion of their 25th anniversary as priests. In his book, Schelkle attempted to justify the priestly ministry in the work of the apostles. Based primarily on the synoptic gospels and the letters of St Paul, he explored the various facets of the disciples' and apostles' following of Christ and drew several links from the New Testament period to the contemporary tasks of priests in pastoral care, preaching and liturgy. The bone of contention for the Klagenfurt bishop was a footnote on Jesus' different instructions for sending out the disciples as travelling ascetics in Mark 6:7-9 and the parallel passages in Matthew and Luke.⁵² Because Schelkle advocated the priority of Mark and also assumed that the evangelists put certain statements into Jesus' mouth instead of reporting what Christ himself had said, Köstner saw this as jeopardising the church's doctrine of inspiration and inerrancy. Did the professor doubt the credibility of the Gospels?⁵³

The Holy Office recognised the need for action and entrusted two consultants with a statement: the Austrian titular bishop Alois Hudal (1885-1963)⁵⁴ and Augustin Bea.⁵⁵ While Hudal considered the volume to be largely harmless and only recommended an admonition,⁵⁶ Bea went further in his report. The former rector of the *Biblicum*

51 Schelkle, *Jüngerschaft und Apostelamt*, 1957.

52 “Wenn Markus wohl das älteste unserer drei griechischen synoptischen Evangelien ist, dann mögen wir seine Formulierung auch hier als die ursprünglichere betrachten. Dann hat also nicht etwa Markus eine ursprünglichere Strenge, die sich bei Matthäus und Lukas erhalten hätte, gemildert, sondern Markus ist Zeuge echter und schlichter Menschlichkeit. [...] Matthäus und Lukas sprechen dann aus einem sich steigernden und übersteigernden Asketentum der zweiten Generation, das in Gefahr ist, aus dem Geist ein Gesetz zu machen” (Schelkle, *Jüngerschaft und Apostelamt*, 1957, 47-8).

53 Cf. Pontifical Biblical Commission, Answer on the Author and Historical Truth of the Fourth Gospel of 29 May 1907, DH 3398-400; This, Answer on the Author, Date of Composition and Historical Truth of the Gospel of Matthew of 19 June 1911, DH 3561-7; This, Answer on the Author, Date of Composition and Historical Truth of the Gospels of Mark and Luke, DH 3568-78.

54 For a broader impression of Hudal's role within the Holy Office see Burkard, “Alois Hudal als Konsultor”.

55 Cf. Memorandum, [15 February 1958], in ADDF, S.O., C.L. 392/1957, f. 7r.

56 Cf. Hudal, Votum, [18 April 1958], in ADDF, S.O., C.L. 392/1957, f. 22, [2-3].

initially praised Schelkle's work as stimulating spiritual and pastoral reading for priests.⁵⁷ At the same time, however, it became apparent that Schelkle was on a “rather dangerous path” as an exegete:⁵⁸ He predominantly read Protestant authors and their theories, especially form criticism and Bultmann's concept of demythologising the New Testament. This had already been Schelkle's undoing in the 1940s: The *imprimatur* for his dissertation was refused and his habilitation at the University of Würzburg as well as his appointment to the University of Tübingen were delayed.⁵⁹ As an expert on the German exegetical landscape, Bea was well aware of that. He saw the Protestant tendency above all in Schelkle's comments on the origin of the Eucharist and baptism as well as the priesthood of the apostles. The author explained the accounts and teachings of the evangelists and Paul as the result of a gradual development that took place in the first Christian communities.⁶⁰ However, this created the impression that Christ gave the apostles neither the command to baptise nor the instruction to celebrate the Eucharist. The fact that Schelkle repeatedly relativised the effect of Jesus' pre-Easter actions clearly showed Bultmann's influence.⁶¹ But this was contrary to Catholic tradition. Bea commented:

57 “Nello svolgere il suo argomento l'autore mostra una ottima conoscenza dei testi del Nuovo Testamento e li sa abilmente adoperare al suo scopo religioso-ascetico. Un lettore che non abbia una formazione esegetica più profonda e non conosca bene i problemi oggi discussi nell'esegesi del Nuovo Testamento, leggerà questo opuscolo certamente con un buon frutto per la sua vita spirituale e non si accorgerà di certi scogli che appaiono appena a fior d'acqua. Per la grande maggioranza dei sacerdoti i quali leggeranno il libro, esso non sarà un vero pericolo. Essi forse si meraviglieranno di certe espressioni o di alcune idee ivi proposte, ma non potranno rendersi conto dei principi e teorie che stanno a base dell'esposizione” (Bea, Votum, [5 April 1958], in ADDF, S.O., C.L. 392/1957, f. 22, [6]).

58 “Invece l'esegeta che conosce i problemi oggi discussi nell'esegesi neotestamentaria ed è al corrente riguardo alla produzione letteraria dei moderni protestanti in questo campo della scienza biblica, si accorgerà facilmente che l'autore segue una strada assai pericolosa” (Bea, Votum, [5 April 1958], in ADDF, S.O., C.L. 392/1957, f. 22, [6]).

59 Schelkle finally published his dissertation on the Passion of Jesus without church authorisation (Schelkle, *Die Passion Jesu*). On Schelkle's biography and the trench warfare surrounding him at the Faculty of Catholic Theology at the University of Tübingen, see Schmitt, “Schelkle, Karl Hermann”; Thureau, *Der 'Fall Schelkle'*.

60 “Anzitutto si nota la tendenza di spiegare, col metodo della storia delle forme, i racconti e la dottrina degli evangelisti e di S. Paolo come risultato di una evoluzione svoltasi man mano nella comunità cristiana dei primi decenni” (Bea, Votum, [5 April 1958], in ADDF, S.O., C.L. 392/1957, f. 22, [6]).

61 “Gesù ha dunque dato l'ordine di battezzare e di farlo in quella determinata forma che il testo di Matteo presenta, ovvero l'evangelista ha modellato e presentato l'ordine secondo la pratica battesimale allora vigente? L'autore non risponde a questa questione. [...] L'autore afferma che 'Gesù non parla mai espressamente di un compito sacerdotale dei suoi apostoli e discepoli' (111). Sembra dunque che Gesù stesso non abbia dato agli Apostoli l'ordine di offrire il sacrificio eucaristico, compito formalmente sacerdotale [...] L'autore si mostra anche influenzato dalla teoria della smitologizzazione del Bultmann” (Bea, Votum, [5 April 1958], in ADDF, S.O., C.L. 392/1957, f. 22, [6-7]).

Our author [...] seems to know nothing of all this tradition and all the norms and laws given by the Magisterium of the Church [...] This exegesis is essentially not Catholic, but Protestant and is based on the principle of 'sola scriptura'.⁶²

According to Bea, this was due to the one-sided, insufficiently systematic theological formation of his Tübingen colleague and also to the fact that Schelkle quoted almost no Catholic authors.⁶³ Even if Bea's sweeping judgement was exaggerated, it did touch on Schelkle's self-image to a certain extent. After all, he saw himself - admittedly behind closed doors - as a "Bultmannian".⁶⁴

Bea's final judgement was clear: the book should actually be placed on the Index of Forbidden Books. However, Bea - being the shrewd politician that he was - considered this neither opportune nor helpful, as it was merely an edifying little book and not a scientific study or exegetical textbook.⁶⁵ Instead, the author should be ordered to withdraw the book from the market. As far as future publications were concerned, Schelkle was to adhere to the magisterial guidelines and exercise greater restraint when drawing on non-Catholic literature. Finally, the Episcopal Ordinariat in Rottenburg was to monitor the publications of the Tübingen professors more closely in future.⁶⁶

62 "Il nostro autore invece di tutta questa tradizione e di tutte le norme e le leggi date dal Magistero della chiesa sembra non saper nulla; per lui vale soltanto, come già nel suo primo libro sulla 'Passione', la storia delle forme la quale deve spiegare tutto. Questa esegesi in sostanza non è cattolica, ma protestante, basato sul principio del 'sola scriptura'" (Bea, *Votum*, [5 April 1958], in *ADDF*, S.O., C.L. 392/1957, f. 22, [9]).

63 Already in the first part of his report, in which Bea describes Schelkle's academic career, he comes to the conclusion: "Tenendo conto della formazione del prof. Schelkle, della mentalità formatasi nei lunghi anni di studio non scritturistico e della sua dipendenza dalla scienza biblica non cattolica, non si potrà aspettare che l'opuscolo in questione sia scevro di errori e mancanze" (Bea, *Votum*, [5 April 1958], in *ADDF*, S.O., C.L. 392/1957, f. 22, [p. 5]). The lack of orientation towards Catholic biblical scholarship, on the other hand, can already be seen in the literature used: "Si dovrebbe poi notare che il nostro autore non si riferisce mai ai grandi esegeti moderni dei Vangeli e di S. Paolo: non si cita né il P. Lagrange né il Knabenbauer o il Cornely o l'Allo ecc., mentre il *Theologisches Wörterbuch del Kittel* viene continuamente citato" (Bea, *Votum*, [5 April 1958], in *ADDF*, S.O., C.L. 392/1957, f. 22, [9]).

64 Cf. Thureau, *Der 'Fall Schelkle'*, 233-45; Thureau, "Was kann man anderes tun".

65 "Qualora l'autore proponesse teoricamente e formalmente i principi dai quali si fa guidare, senza dubbio si dovrebbe metterne [*sic*] all'Indice. Ma in questo opuscolo i principi sono piuttosto supposti e affiorano soltanto qua e là e in modo che molti lettori appena se ne accorgeranno. Inoltre l'opuscolo non si rivolge a un ceto di lettori più largo: è destinato soltanto ai sacerdoti e di indole piuttosto ascetico-religiosa. Perciò, a mio umile parere, non sembra né necessario né opportuno inserire il libro all'Indice" (Bea, *Votum*, [5 April 1958], in *ADDF*, S.O., C.L. 392/1957, f. 22, [10]).

66 "D'altra parte bisognerà prendere delle misure efficaci per impedire maggior danno. Le misure da prendere mi sembrano essere le seguenti:

a) ritirare il libro dal commercio e vietare ogni ristampa, nuova edizione e traduzione;

Both the Consultors' Assembly on 19 May 1958 and the *Congregatio Plenaria* of the Cardinals of the Holy Office on 28 May 1958 largely agreed with Bea's proposal.⁶⁷ At the end of June, Ottaviani informed the Bishop of Rottenburg, Carl Joseph Leiprecht (1903-81), to have the book removed from sale immediately. Ottaviani also admonished the bishop to keep an eye on the Tübingen faculty.⁶⁸

The case shows that the Roman guardians of the faith were still unwilling to compromise when it came to the exegetical treatment of the New Testament. Despite their contradictions, the Gospels were to be regarded as historical factual accounts. However, in contrast to the main phase of anti-modernism, relatively moderate means were used. Two aspects in particular seemed to have persuaded Bea not to be lenient with Schelkle: on the one hand, Schelkle's academic background and his work at the Faculty of Catholic Theology in Tübingen certainly played a role, as Bea discusses this in detail in the first part of his vote. Publications from Tübingen in particular had often come under the scrutiny of the Holy Office in the past.⁶⁹ On the other hand, it was also Schelkle's proximity to Bultmann's theology. Bea was critical of some parts of Form Criticism, and he rejected the concept of 'demythologisation' out of hand. A few years later, in his essay on the historicity of the Gospels, he also spoke out clearly against what he saw as the extreme variant of Form Criticism.⁷⁰

However, the Congregation's solution also fitted in with the plans to involve Catholic publishers in pre-censorship and use this to influence the book market.⁷¹ In the course of the apostolic visitation in Austria in 1953, the Herder publishing house, among others, was criticised, as it had some overly progressive publications in its portfolio from the point of view of the Holy Office. At FERIA IV on 30 June

b) ammonire seriamente l'autore di attenersi nelle sue pubblicazioni (e nel suo insegnamento) alla tradizione esegetica cattolica, e alle norme e leggi date dalla Santa Sede; di tener in dovuto conto le pubblicazioni degli autori cattolici e di usare libri non cattolici con criterio e prudenza; di non lasciarsi guidare da teorie e correnti esegetiche non cattoliche non fondate; finalmente di attenersi nell'esegesi all'analogia fidei catholicae.

(Mi sembra che non basterebbe dare soltanto un monito generico, ma che sia necessario specificare i punti)

c) Ammonire la Curia di Rottenburgo (la quale ha dato l'Imprimatur) di far esaminare gli scritti dei professori della Facoltà teologica di Tubinga da persone competenti in materia e di dottrina sana e sicura.

(N.B.: Si ricorda che già parecchie volte il Santo Offizio si è dovuto occupare di scritti di professori di quella Facoltà)" (Bea, *Votum*, [5 April 1958], in *ADDF*, S.O., C.L. 392/1957, f. 22, [10]).

⁶⁷ Cf. Memorandum, 28 May 1958, in *ADDF*, S.O., C.L. 392/1957, f. 25r.

⁶⁸ Cf. [Ottaviani] to Leiprecht, 3 June 1958, in *ADDF*, S.O., C.L. 392/1957, f. 29r-v.

⁶⁹ Cf. Wolf, "Der 'Vorhof zum Himmel'?", 37-9.

⁷⁰ Cf. Bea, *La Storicità dei Vangeli*, 41-2.

⁷¹ I owe the following information to Claus Arnold.

1954, a first monitum to the Catholic publishing houses was therefore decided.⁷² In the spring of 1957, immediately before the Schelkle case, a *monitum* was once again on the Congregation's agenda, which the cardinals also passed and Pius XII approved on 21 March.⁷³ However, the letter was withheld for the time being. As Schelkle had published his work with Herder, the suspicion of the supreme religious authority towards the programme of the Freiburg publishing house may have played a role. The fact that Schelkle was then instructed to inform the publisher that *Jüngerschaft und Apostelamt* was to be withdrawn from the market shows that, despite the general decision, those responsible at the Holy Office were ultimately not prepared to be too harsh on Catholic publishers in specific cases.

For Schelkle himself, the case ended lightly. It must certainly have been frustrating to come into conflict with the church superiors again over a publication, but it was an occasional publication and not Schelkle's habilitation on the patristic exegesis of St Paul published in 1956.⁷⁴ The fact that *Jüngerschaft und Apostelamt* was reprinted as early as 1961 and translated into various languages from 1965,⁷⁵ shows that Roman intervention – both against authors and publishers – was increasingly reaching its limits.

4 Conclusions

Does Ruffini's resigned "Si vuol cambiar tutto, si critica tutto" therefore apply to the situation of Catholic biblical scholarship in the late phase of the pontificate of Pius XII? The two cases outlined above show that the situation was not quite so simple when we look at the way in which Roman censorship of books dealt with exegetical works in the 1950s. In my opinion, the following observations can be made:

1. Although the heyday of biblical anti-modernism was over for the time being with the encyclical *Divino afflante Spiritu*, Roman control of New Testament exegesis in particular intensified over the course of the 1950s, particularly in the wake of *Humani generis*. Although the number of censorship proceedings against exegetical works decreased, they were still fiercely contested on the merits.

⁷² "Tale decreto venne emanato specialmente in seguito alle pubblicazioni [...] della Casa Editrice Herder (Friburgo in Brisgovia e Vienna)" (Relazione della Cancelleria, [June 1955], in ADDE, S.O., *Rerum variarum* (R.V.) 1953, fasc. III, f. 109r).

⁷³ Memorandum, [21 March 1957], in ADDE, S.O., R.V. 1953, fasc. III, f. 90r.

⁷⁴ Schelkle, *Paulus, Lehrer der Väter*.

⁷⁵ Schelkle, *Jüngerschaft und Apostelamt* (²1961); Schelkle, *Disciple et apôtre*; Schelkle, *Discipleship and Priesthood*; Schelkle, *Discepoli e apostolato*.

2. The Schelkle case shows that an overly open approach to Protestant exegesis – be it historical-critical or existentialist – was still rejected. Despite all the cautious innovations in Catholic exegesis, which were tolerated at the Pontifical Biblical Institute with regard to the Old Testament, for example, the dogmatic guidelines of the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture were adhered to, especially in the context of the New Testament. However, the penalties in this case were significantly less severe than in previous decades. The Holy Office's strategy of asking authors and Catholic publishers to withdraw books from the market was successful in several cases as late as the 1950s. However, Schelkle was able to keep his professorship and his academic publications were spared the Roman condemnation. This gives an indication of how even in the theological field, the reception of the decisions of ecclesiastical censorship slowly fell into crisis. It would be worthwhile examining other similar cases, such as the works *Introduction à la Bible* or *Die mündliche Überlieferung*, which were dealt with at almost the same time as the Schelkle case.⁷⁶
3. The internal Vatican conflict over the statements of two leading figures of the Pontifical Biblical Commission shows the less than compliant attitude of the Holy Office, which tended to show solidarity with Ruffini's position rather than support the members of the Commission – after all, some of them, such as Bea and Duncker, were also consultants of the *Suprema Congregazione*. The Commission had come under pressure as a result of the incident.
4. This shows the factions that clashed again a few years later at the Second Vatican Council, for example with regard to the scheme *De fontibus revelationis*. The conservative faction around Ottaviani and Ruffini and the moderate reformist group around Bea and Tisserant. The debates that would later stir up emotions at the Council and ultimately lead to the dogmatic constitution *Dei Verbum* were thus already being heralded at the end of the 1950s.

⁷⁶ Cf. Robert, Feuillet, *Introduction à la Bible*; Bacht, Fries, Geiselmann, *Die mündliche Überlieferung*.

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