

Jerzy Chmiel

Education for Tolerance Through the Bible

In order to illuminate one way to understand the education for tolerance through the Bible¹ I want to stress three steps:

- 1) a reading the Bible as a God's communication;
- 2) an interpretation of the Bible in a multi-religious context and within the context of ecumenical collaboration;
- 3) the biblical apostolate in a secularized world as a conversation.

Indeed, without attention to each I do not believe that clarification of the category "the coherence of education for tolerance" can be fully understood.

In order to institute an analysis of the relational challenges of the future to the education for tolerance I shall employ a quotation from the British philosopher Michael Oakeshott:

"As civilized beings, we are the inheritors neither of an inquiry about ourselves and the world, nor of an accumulating body of information, but of a conversation, begun in the primeval forests and extended and made more articulate in the course of centuries. It is a conversation which goes on both in public and within each of ourselves. Education, properly speaking, is an initiation into the skill and partnership of this conversation in which we learn to recognize the voices, to distinguish the proper occasions of utterance, and in which we acquire the intellectual and moral habits appropriate to conversation"².

¹ The paper was read at the International Conference "The Protection of Religious Minorities: Religious Freedom and Human Rights in Post-Communist Europe" held on March 16–18, 1998 in Cracow, and sponsored by Columbia University (New York) and Jagiellonian University. The Cracow Conference has include scholars and activists from Poland, the United States and 15 other countries.

² Quoted by David Tracy, *The Catholic University and the Relational Challenges of the Future. Healing the Modern Separation*, held at the 19th

1. The Bible as a God's communication – conversation

Significantly, the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum* of the Second Vatican Council (Nov. 18, 1965) on divine revelation begins with the opening verses of the First Epistle of John, where the theme is the communication of life – *koinônia*, which is also conversation (1 Jn 1:1–4). For the Second Vatican Council, the revelation basically is a divine self-communication. The author of the epistle insists that his message of life is not some abstract treatment of the topic, but God communicates to us his life through the Word³. It is a beatifully personal theology of revelation that the Council has thus chosen, In the fulness of time, God communicated his very self to humankind and “the Word became flesh” (Jn 1:14).

From that moment communication among human beings found its highest ideal and supreme exemple in God. It is true that putting God's words into writing, through the charism of scriptural inspiration, was the first step towards the incarnation of the Word of God. “Joined to the inspired writings of the first covenant, the inspired writings of the new covenant are a verifiable means of communication and communion between the believing people and God”⁴.

The biblical Word is at work speaking universally, in time and space, to all humanity. If the words of God “are like human language”⁵, it is so that they may be understood by all. The Bible exercises its influence down the centuries. This is a constant process of actualization to the contemporary mentality and language. The Bible has spread to every continent and every nation. In our day, a great effort is necessary so that the universal significance of the biblical message may be widely acknowledged and its efficacy may be seen everywhere.

General Assembly of the International Federation of Catholic Universities (21– 25 October 1997) in Santiago de Chile. See further G. VICO, *Scienze pedagogiche e orizzonti educativi*, Edizioni LED, Milano 1997.

³ See J. CHMIEL, *Lumière et charité, d'après la première épître de saint Jean*, Rome 1971; R.C. HILL, *Breaking the Bread of the Word: Principles of Teaching Scripture* (Subsidia biblica, 15), Rome 1991, pp. 12–14.

⁴ JOHN PAUL II, Address on the Interpretation of the Bible in the Church, given the 23rd of April 1993.

⁵ See *Dei Verbum*, n. 13.

2. An interpretation of the Bible as a conversation

In November 1993, the Pontifical Biblical Commission released a lengthy instruction entitled *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*⁶. It was published on the occasion of the centenary of the encyclical of Pope Leon XIII on biblical studies *Providentissimus Deus* (1893) and of the fiftieth anniversary of the encyclical of Pope Pius XII *Divino afflante Spiritu* (1943).

The document argued that “the historical-critical method is the indispensable method for the scientific study of the meaning of ancient texts” (I A). But the exegetes’ task does not end with historical studies; rather they “arrive at the true goal of their work only when they have explained the meaning of the biblical text as God’s word for today” (see III C 1)⁷.

The Biblical Commission takes up the approach derived from Jewish traditions of interpretations. The Jewish canonical meaning of Scripture has significance for Christian readers of the Bible. Judaism of the four or five centuries preceding the Christian era provided the matrix for the origin of the New Testament and the infant Church. Jewish modes of interpretation have also stimulated writers of the New Testament. Early Christian interpreters learned from the Jewish interpreters. Thus Origen and Jerome consulted Jewish interpreters. Medieval Christian interpreters learned to use Jewish commentaries. Many modern exegetes follow this example.

Jewish biblical scholarship in all its richness, from its origins in antiquity down to the present day, is of the highest value for the exegesis of both the First and the Second Testaments.

The special phenomenon is the ecumenical movement. The goal of this movement is the unity of God’s people. Most of the issues, with which the ecumenical movement has to deal, are related in some way to the Bible and its interpretation. In this regard, the ecumenical translations of the Bible in various languages have to be noted. We have now the first ecumenical translation in Polish as a good prognostic. The ecumenical translations are a testimony to the common mode of translating and interpreting the Bible.

⁶ The English text of the document was published by the Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Rome, Vatican City.

⁷ See J.A. FITZMYER, *The Biblical Commission’s Document “The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church”*. Text and Commentary (Subsidia biblica 18), Ed. PIB, Rome 1995.

Since the Bible is the common basis of the rule of faith, the ecumenical imperative urgently summons all Christian to a rereading of the inspired text in docility to the Holy Spirit, in tolerance and charity, in sincerity and humanity.

3. The biblical apostolate – tolerance and charity

“The biblical apostolate has as its objective to make known the Bible as the Word of God and source of life”⁸. It promotes the translation of the Bible into every language, the formation of groups for the study of it, conferences, publications, books and the use of mass-media.

In July 1996, the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the Catholic Biblical Federation met in Hong Kong. More than 170 delegates from 70 countries participated in the discussions and deliberations of this encounter which was devoted to the theme “Word of God, Source of Life”⁹. The Federation made the commitments in its mission of sharing God’s Word of Life:

- forming closer relationship with other groups in whose ministry the Bible plays or could play a central role, for example, liturgical institutes, pastoral formation centres, commissions for justice, peace and the integrity of creation;

- working actively for the cancellation of international debts by the year 2000, in order to make it a real year of Jubilee, a lifting of burdens from the oppressed;

- not be confined to classroom situations, but prepare people through experience for the “dialogue of life”, with other cultures, with other faith traditions, with the poor and marginalized. Dialogue with the fragile cultures of indigenous peoples is of distinctive importance¹⁰.

In bringing my observations to a conclusion, let me emphasize that an ability to enter the conversation with our own classics and, as contemporary multiculturalists justly teach, the classics of all cultures is, in fact, the heart of the very process of becoming educated.

⁸ The Biblical Commission’s Document, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, IV C 3.

⁹ See *Catholic Biblical Federation, Word of God – Source of Life*. V Plenary Assembly in Hong Kong, 2–12 July 1996, Stuttgart 1997.

¹⁰ The Final Statement of the Hong Kong Assembly (see n. 9 above).

The coherence of education is, at bottom, the coherence of genuine conversation.

The life of the mind cannot live alone. As Aristotle insisted, only gods and beasts can do that. Rather, to think is to converse with the classics, to join the community of inquiry of the living and the dead. It is to acknowledge that we too can and must become part of that conversation. "In truth, we are that conversation" (D. Tracy).

The healing power of God's Word comes to us because others have passed it on. We know Christ Jesus because the communities and generations have allowed us to hear this judging and healing Word.

The future for the Bible is *adventus – maranata* that which is to come, the new, the unexpected, gift and promise from God and God's disclosure in history. It is the heart of an education of inquiry and the community of faith. It is not simple ideal, but an education for *shalom*, that means for tolerance¹¹. Both coherence and relationship await upon it for any genuine education in the next global and multicultural century.

¹¹ See Ph. A. CUNNINGHAM, *Education for Shalom. Religion Textbooks and the Enhancement of the Catholic and Jewish Relationship*, The American Interfaith Institute, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 1995.

WYCHOWANIE DO TOLERANCJI POPRZEZ BIBLIĘ

Streszczenie

Autor pragnie skoncentrować się na trzech aspektach:

- 1) czytanie Biblii jako komunikacji Boga (transkomunikacji);
- 2) interpretacja Biblii w kontekście wieloreligijnym i ekumenicznym;
- 3) apostołat biblijny w zsekularyzowanym świecie jako konwersacja.

Jako punkt wyjścia autor przyjmuje stwierdzenie brytyjskiego filozofa M. Oakeshotta, że edukacja jest nie tyle nagromadzeniem informacji, lecz wprowadzeniem do konwersacji, a nawet samą konwersacją-obcowaniem.

Według konstytucji II Soboru Watykańskiego *Dei Verbum* (1965), objawienie jest samokomunikacją Boga. Interpretacja tekstów Pisma świętego – jak stwierdza Dokument Papieskiej Komisji Biblijnej o interpretacji Biblii w Kościele (1993) – korzysta z bogatych tradycji tak judaistycznych, jak i wczesnochrześcijańskich. Ruch ekumeniczny skłania wszystkich chrześcijan do relektury tekstów biblijnych w duchu posłuszeństwa dla Ducha Świętego, tolerancji i miłości, szczerości i pokory. Apostołat biblijny – co potwierdził V Kongres Katolickiej Federacji Biblijnej w Hong Kongu (1996) – kładzie nacisk na współpracę międzyludzką, zarówno na polu wyjaśniania tekstu Biblii, jak i realizacji wskazań wynikających z Biblii w ramach „dialogu życia”.

Wychowanie do tolerancji jest częścią konwersacji-obcowania, do której powołana jest każda osoba ludzka.