

# Ġorġ Preca – Apostle of the Word of God and a Precursor of Vatican Council II

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St. Ġorġ Preca<sup>1</sup> (1880-1962) was a Maltese diocesan priest who lived his priestly vocation in total dedication to the ministry of evangelisation, giving a unique preference to the Word of God in a special way in his writings. In 1907, he founded the Society of Christian Doctrine, made up of male and female lay people, who live a celibate life in order to dedicate themselves totally to catechesis. Not only is St. Ġorġ Preca the founder of the Society of Christian Doctrine, but he also nourished and sustained its members through his writings, which were primarily aimed at instructing them, so that they would be able to instruct others.<sup>2</sup>

Ġorġ Preca lived during a period which is dominated by the transition from the modern to the contemporary period. During this era, the teaching of the catechism, as it was then known, was undergoing very rapid, and at the same time radical changes. With respect to catechesis, the modern era can be described as a return to the sources of catechesis, and to the Word of God as the source of all the proclamation of the Church. The modern era had been marked by the Protestant reformation and the Counter-Reformation where we witness to a severe clash

1. Ġorġ is the Maltese translation of the name George.
2. For more information on Ġorġ Preca's life and endeavours, cfr. Alexander BONNICI, *Dun Ġorġ Preca (1880-1962). Apostle for the Spreading of the Word of God and Founder of the Society of Christian Doctrine*, [Blata l-Bajda] (Malta), The Society [of] Christian Doctrine, 1985; Alexander BONNICI, *Dun Ġorġ Preca (1880-1962). Hajja-Xhieda-Dokumenti*. Vol I: *Zmien ta' Prova (1880-1916)*, Blata l-Bajda (Malta), Soċjetà Duttrina Nisranija M.U.S.E.U.M., 1980. [*Dun Ġorġ Preca (1880-1962). Life-Witnesses-Documents*. Vol I: *A Time of Trial (1880-1916)*]; Alexander BONNICI, *Dun Ġorġ Preca (1880-1962). Hajja-Xhieda-Dokumenti*. Vol II: *L-Inkjesta tal-Knisja (1916-1917)*, Blata l-Bajda (Malta), Soċjetà Duttrina Nisranija M.U.S.E.U.M., 1981. [*Dun Ġorġ Preca (1880-1962). Life-Witnesses-Documents*. Vol II: *The Inquiry of the Church (1916-1917)*]. Alexander BONNICI, *Dun Ġorġ Preca (1880-1962). Hajja-Xhieda-Dokumenti*. Vol III: *Il-Bniedem r'Alla (1918-1962)*, Blata l-Bajda (Malta), Soċjetà Duttrina Nisranija M.U.S.E.U.M., 1989. [*Dun Ġorġ Preca (1880-1962). Life-Witnesses-Documents*. Vol III: *A Man of God (1918-1962)*]; Angelo MONTONATI, *Coraggio e profezia. Un pioniere del Vaticano II. Il beato Giorgio Preca (Malta 1880-1962)*, Cinisello Balsamo (Milano), Edizioni San Paolo, 2003.

between the Catholic Church, emphasizing both Sacred Scripture and Tradition, and the Protestants on the other hand emphasizing *sola scriptura*. The reaction of the Church was very strong: the Bible was not to be given to the faithful since they were not prepared to understand it. This clash had severe consequences. One of these consequences was the fact that the Word of God was retrieved from the hands of the faithful, stored in safe places and safe-guarded using a language which most of the people could not understand – Latin. Moreover, translations into the vernacular were prohibited if these were not approved by the Church.<sup>3</sup> In Malta, the situation was more complex since there was no official Maltese translation of the Bible during the life-time of Ġorġ Preca, while other Christian denominations were working hard to disseminate their translations as much as possible.<sup>4</sup>

When one considers Ġorġ Preca's endeavours and his ministry in founding the Society of Christian Doctrine, together with the written works, one can rightly deduce that he was a prophet and a precursor of Vatican Council II with regards to the use of the Bible. If we juxtapose what was promulgated in these conciliar documents with Ġorġ Preca's ministry and written works, in the light of what the normal practice and the use of the Bible was during his time, we find that he was truly prophetic. In the homily delivered by Pope John Paul II during Ġorġ Preca's beatification ceremony, he declared that: "Dun Gorg was a pioneer in the field of catechetics and on promoting the role of the laity in the apostolate, which the Council was to stress in a particular way".<sup>5</sup>

### **The Word of God at the Centre of all Evangelisation**

The very first words of the Dogmatic Constitution of Vatican Council II, *Dei Verbum* clearly define the aim of the constitution: helping the faithful to listen to the Word of God as this is found in Sacred Scripture and Tradition, and to forward it to others by faithfully proclaiming it.<sup>6</sup> This is one of the objectives which Ġorġ Preca had at heart. All his endeavours centred on, and revolved around this particular

3. Cfr. Cesare BISSOLI, Cesare BISSOLI, «*Va' e annuncia*» (Mc 5,19). *Manuale di catechesi biblica*, Editrice Elledici, Leumann (Torino), 2006, 37-50.

4. For more information on Bible translations in Malta, cfr. Carmel SANT, *Bible Translation and Language. Essays into the History of Bible Translation in Maltese*, [Msida] (Malta), Faculty of Theology - University of Malta, Malta 1992.

5. IOANNES PAULUS PP. II, *Homiliae II. Melitae in beatificatione trium servorum Dei*, 9 May 2001, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 93 (2001) 594-595.

6. Cfr. *Dei Verbum*, 1.

mission, which he strove to accomplish through his indefatigable endeavours in the foundation of the Society of Christian Doctrine, and especially through his numerous writings. In this respect, Ġorġ Preca can make his, the words with which St. John introduces his First Letter:

Something which has existed since the beginning, which we have seen with our own eyes, which we have watched and touched with our own hands, the Word of life— this is our theme. That life was made visible; we saw it and are giving our testimony, declaring to you the eternal life, which was present to the Father and has been revealed to us. We are declaring to you what we have seen and heard, so that you too may share our life. Our life is shared with the Father and with the Son Jesus Christ (1 Jn 1, 1-3).<sup>7</sup>

It is not my aim to go through *Dei Verbum* and analyse its contents, but I will be reviewing only the last chapter of *Dei Verbum* in order to see the pertinent changes which this conciliar document brought about in the use of the Bible in the Church and at the same time see how Ġorġ Preca was a precursor and a pioneer of these changes in Malta.

Chapter Six of *Dei Verbum* which deals with Sacred Scripture in the life of the Church is “a spiritual and practical text in which consequences are drawn for the life of the Church from the other more doctrinal chapters”.<sup>8</sup> It is not a simple addendum to render the text more practical.<sup>9</sup> It aims at drawing practical conclusions for the use of the Bible in the Church after having conducted a detailed study of the theology of divine revelation.<sup>10</sup>

7. Taken from *The New Jerusalem Bible* – English Edition.

8. Roger SCHUTZ - Max THURIAN, *Revelation. A Protestant View. The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation. A Commentary*, Westminster (Maryland) - New York - Glen Rock (New Jersey) - Amsterdam - Toronto - Montreal, Newman Press, 1968, 68.

9. Cfr. Walter KASPER, “*Dei Verbum audiens et proclamans*”. *The Constitution on Divine Revelation Dei Verbum*, in *Bulletin Dei Verbum* 76/77 (2005) 3-4, 19.

10. Cfr. Carlo Maria MARTINI, *La Sacra Scrittura nella vita della Chiesa*, in *La costituzione dogmatica sulla divina rivelazione. Storia. Testo latino dello schema preconciliare «De Fontibus Revelationis». Prospetto sinottico delle quattro principali redazioni dello schema «De Divina Revelatione»*. Traduzione italiana del testo promulgato. *Esposizione e commento*, Elle Di Ci, Leumann (Torino), <sup>3</sup>[1967], 417.

*Dei Verbum* paved the way, from a defensive attitude with regards to the Bible, to a more positive stance, by encouraging the reading, the meditation and the study of the Word of God even by the lay faithful.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, it also brought about moments of friction and points of resistance. “The resistance encountered should not surprise us too much. On the doctrinal level, this Constitution, together with the Constitution on the Church, is the most important document of the Council by reason of the seriousness of the problems taken up...”<sup>12</sup>

*Dei Verbum* 21 declares that the Word of God is the nourishment for all the activity of the Church. The Church’s preaching mission, and indeed the entire Christian religion should be guided by the Word of God as it is found in Sacred Scripture because the Word of God guides, directs, governs and rules the faith and its proclamation.

The reason which *Dei Verbum* gives for placing the Word of God as the source and foundation of all preaching, and of the entire Christian faith is that:

Scripture consigned in writing once and for all has a uniquely unchanging character. It is therefore the supreme and immutable rule of the faith of the Church; its inspiration and its immutability are a solid rock on which the Church rests. Furthermore, the text specifies that because of its inspiration and immutability Scripture communicates immutably the very Word of God.<sup>13</sup>

Ġorġ Preca’s ministry and works attest to the fact that he laid the Word of God in Sacred Scripture at the basis of all his earthly endeavours and pastoral ministry. Ġorġ Preca was inspired by the Word of God itself to found the Society of Christian Doctrine: “Pass on to reliable people what you have heard from me through many witnesses so that they in turn will be able to teach others” (2 Tm 2, 2). This was the starting point of all of his activity in Malta, and beyond its shores.

The different works written by Ġorġ Preca continue to affirm that he wanted to found all his apostolic activity on the Word of God. The different models and

11. Cfr. MARTINI, *La Sacra Scrittura*, 421.

12. René LATOURELLE, *Theology of Revelation Including a Commentary on the Constitution “Dei Verbum” of Vatican II*, Alba House, New York, 1966, 484.

13. SCHUTZ - THURIAN, *Revelation*, 72.

methods of the use of the Bible which can be found in his writings show how Ġorġ Preca wanted to give the Bible a prominent position not only in the Society which he founded, but *the central* position. Amongst the different models and methods of the use of the Bible in his written works, we find a didactic use of the Bible.

This way of using the Bible can be clearly found in *Katekiżmu fuq Alla u fuq Ġesù Kristu*,<sup>14</sup> which as its title indicates, is a *Catechism*. However, it does not deal with all possible aspects usually found in a *Catechism* but it focuses only on God and on Jesus Christ. It was published in 1946 and is presented in the traditional form which was prevalent during those times. It is made up of three hundred and ninety one questions and answers. In this work we encounter the fact that Ġorġ Preca was a product of his times. This can be seen in the several instances where he makes use of the Bible in order to answer, or to sustain the answers to different questions. A case in point is the answer to question eighteen:

18. How do we know from faith that there is one God?

r. That which was revealed in the sixth chapter of the Book of Deuteronomy was re-confirmed by Christ when he said: “Listen Israel, the Lord your God is One God”. Mc 12, 29.<sup>15</sup>

Moreover, through his endeavours Preca clearly showed that all the proclamation made by the Society of Christian Doctrine on behalf of the Church in Malta, and abroad, revolves and finds its unique source and its sustenance in the Word of God found in the Bible.<sup>16</sup>

## Biblical Ministry and Biblical Apostolate

There are two ways in which the Bible can be used in the ecclesial ministry:

1. the biblical ministry;
2. the biblical apostolate.

14. Cfr. [Ġorġ PRECA], *Katekiżmu fuq Alla u fuq Ġesù Kristu*, Sliema (Malta), Salesian Press, 1946. [*Catechism on God and on Jesus Christ*].
15. “18. Kif nafu mill-fidi li Alla huwa wiehed?  
r. Dak li ġie rrivelat lilna fis-sitt kap tad-Dewtoronomju reġa’ kkonfirmah Kristu, meta qal: “Isma Iżrael, Is-Sinjur Alla tieghek, huwa Alla wiehed”. Mark XII, 29.18”. ([PRECA], *Katekiżmu fuq Alla*, 7).
16. Cfr. *Dun Ġorġ: Fundatur tat-Teoloġi bil-Boilersuits in L-Orizzont* (27 ta’ Lulju 1987) 9. [*Dun Ġorġ: Founder of Theologians Wearing Boiler Suits*].

The difference between these two ways of using the Bible in the ministry of the Church is neither subtle nor indifferent.

*Biblical ministry* refers to the use of the Bible in different pastoral activities and ecclesial ministries: in the proclamation of the Word of God, within the catechetical ministry, in the liturgical sphere, and in rendering charitable services. In all these different ministries which imply different types of activities, the Bible is not encountered for its own sake, but it is encountered as a stepping stone and as a service to the particular ministry. Nonetheless, it is still the foundation of all the different activities within that particular ministry. For example, biblical texts are usually referred to during the process of catechesis. These texts are used to explain some particular experience drawn from human life or some other pertinent teaching.<sup>17</sup>

On the other hand, in the *biblical apostolate* the Bible is encountered for its own sake, for itself and in itself in a direct way. The biblical apostolate is aimed at helping the individual to get in touch with the biblical text directly, know what it contains and make it a source of one's Christian life.<sup>18</sup> In this sense, the biblical text is considered and welcomed as a direct encounter with God who speaks through his word to the individual and to the community immediately, here and now, in the particular situation in which one is living.<sup>19</sup>

These two forms of ministry are alluded to in *Dei Verbum*. Paragraph 24 of the constitution attributes a privileged position to the Word of God within pastoral ministry through its use in preaching and in the liturgy. These forms of ministry form part of what is referred to as the biblical ministry:

The word of Scripture should in the same way be made to nourish and strengthen the ministry of the Word: preaching, catechism, the whole work of Christian formation in which the liturgical homily is meant to play an important role. It is in Scripture that the ministry of the Word finds nourishment and health, strength and holiness [*salubriter nutritur sancteque virescit*].<sup>20</sup>

17. Cfr. BISSOLI, «*Va' e annuncia*», 266.

18. Cesare Bissoli summarises the biblical apostolate and the biblical ministry in BISSOLI, «*Va' e annuncia*», 255.

19. Cfr. BISSOLI, «*Va' e annuncia*», 266.

20. SCHUTZ - THURIAN, *Revelation*, 77.

Preaching consists of an orderly way of evangelising and presenting the Christian faith in order to illuminate the mind and move the will of the faithful to live a more Christian life in our contemporary social situation. Preaching usually commences from a biblical text and always refers to the doctrinal and moral teaching which can be extracted from that particular biblical text.<sup>21</sup> The homily within the liturgy consists mainly of an explanation of the biblical texts read during the Liturgy of the Word.<sup>22</sup> The homily is always founded on a biblical text which is explained, and applied to the concrete and contemporary situation of the congregation.<sup>23</sup>

Ġorġ Preca was able to touch upon these forms of biblical ministry during his life. With regards to preaching, we see that some of his writings, especially those elaborated in the form of manuals or treatises, actually take the form of preaching, in that he elaborates upon a particular theme in detail, aided by the Word of God in the Bible, in such a way that he makes a systematic study of that particular theme. The difference is that they are written down, and not based only on the spoken word. An example of such a work is *Il-‘Missierna’*<sup>24</sup>. In this work, Ġorġ Preca seeks to explain what one is praying through the ‘Our Father’ in a lot of detail.

There can be no doubt that one of the things which Ġorġ Preca did as a diocesan priest was to deliver homilies during the Eucharistic celebrations which he celebrated. Moreover, Ġorġ Preca left a written work which is made up entirely of homilies. This writing is entitled *Omeliġa ta’ Patri Franco*.<sup>25</sup> In this writing, Preca seeks to develop homilies on different quotations taken from the Word of God, and then apply the teachings which he draws from these quotations to concrete daily life situations.

*Dei Verbum* speaks directly and clearly of the *biblical apostolate* in paragraph 25 when it calls all the faithful, be they ordained ministers or the lay faithful, to dedicate some of their time to read and to get acquainted with Sacred Scripture. While ordained ministers have the duty of preaching the infinite riches found in

21. Cfr. MARTINI, *La Sacra Scrittura*, 452-453.

22. The Dogmatic Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* in paragraphs 51-52 gives a clear and good description of what the homily is, what the scope of the homily is, and how this scope is achieved.

23. Cfr. MARTINI, *La Sacra Scrittura*, 452-453.

24. Cfr. Ġorġ PRECA, *Il-‘Missierna’*, [Blata l-Bajda (Malta)], Societas Doctrinae Christianae M.U.S.E.U.M., 1992. [*The ‘Our Father’*].

25. Cfr. [Ġorġ PRECA], *Omeliġa ta’ Patri Franco*, in *Kalendarju Museumin* 8 (1951) 147-148. (Continued in subsequent issues and concluded in 11 (1966) 235-236). [*Homily of Fr. Franco*].

the Bible, the religious and the lay faithful are exhorted to read the Bible in order to get to know Christ in a more prolific way:

All the ministers of the Church are called to devote themselves to Scripture by careful reading and deep study so that they may listen to the Word of God before preaching and communicating all its infinite riches to the faithful... The Council insistently exhorts all Christians and all religious to read Scripture frequently so that they may learn to know Jesus Christ.<sup>26</sup>

The continuous study of Sacred Scripture which *Dei Verbum* exhorts everyone to accomplish includes reading the sacred text according to the tradition of the Fathers of the Church. The Fathers of the Church did not just read the mere words of Sacred Scripture and understand the words within the texts which they read, but they meditated upon these texts, applying them to their daily life. In *Dei Verbum*, the careful study of the texts recommended is an intense study of the Bible through daily meditation, which ultimately develops in the application of the Word of God to daily life. It is not just a mere arid reading of the Bible.

What is meant [by meditation] is obviously a spiritual and meditative experience that is not strictly exegetical. The idea is to approach the text with a simple explanation, one that captures its fundamental meanings and permanent message and that can challenge the one who reads and meditates and move him to pray on the basis of the text he has before him.<sup>27</sup>

The written works of Ġorġ Preca demonstrate that even in this respect, he was a precursor of *Dei Verbum* and of Vatican Council II. Among the repertoire of Preca's writings, we find a considerable number of works written specifically in the form of meditations. Preca wanted the members of the Society of Christian Doctrine, and indeed all the lay faithful, to meditate upon the Word of God in order to be able to apply it to their daily lives. The use of the Bible in meditations can be clearly evidenced, amongst others, in *Il-Mansjonijiet*<sup>28</sup> which was published for

26. SCHUTZ - THURIAN, *Revelation*, 78.

27. Carlo Maria MARTINI, *The Central Role of the Word of God in the Life of the Church. Biblical Animation of the Entire Pastoral Ministry*, in *Bulletin Dei Verbum* 76/77 (2005) 3-4, 37.

28. Cfr. Ġorġ PRECA, *Il-Mansjonijiet*, in *Il-Mansjonijiet u Praeconia*, 5-46. [*The Mansions, in The Mansions and Praeconia*].

the first time towards the year 1939. The book is made up of a series of meditative exercises on the Sacred Heart of Jesus. In the work, Ġorġ Preca studies different aspects and virtues which emerge from the Sacred Heart of Jesus.<sup>29</sup> The aim of the whole exercise is to meditate on the life of Christ and try to imitate Him because «one who does not imitate the Sacred Heart is not a true follower of our Lord».<sup>30</sup>

The book presents us with seventy three mansions which cover the entire life of Christ in a chronological way. The sub-divisions within each mansion can be demonstrated through the following example:

### **MANSION 37**

Christ asleep in the Boat (Mt 8)

Let us pause to reflect and see Our Lord asleep in the boat which was caught in a great storm. The disciples who were with Him were so afraid that they woke Him up, asking Him to save them. He rebuked them for their lack of faith and He calmed the fury of the waters by His commanding word.

In this Mansion, meditate on the Heart of Jesus as a source of benefits for all who abide with it (*Pause*)...<sup>31</sup>

*Dei Verbum* 25 also expresses the wish that the reading of Sacred Scripture be accompanied by prayer so that there may evolve a true dialogue between God and the human being who listens to God.<sup>32</sup> Some of Preca's works demonstrate that he wanted prayer to be an integral part of some of his writings. This can be verified in works such as *Arloġġ Museum*.<sup>33</sup> This work is a pocket-size prayer book which Ġorġ Preca wrote for the members of the Society of Christian Doctrine. It was aimed at having the members pray the same prayers at approximately the same time of the day.<sup>34</sup> It contains a short prayer for every fifteen minutes, between six o'clock in the morning and noon, and two o'clock in the afternoon and seven o'clock in

29. Cfr. PRECA, *Il-Mansjonijet*, 5-6.

30. PRECA, *The Mansions*, 5. The quotations from this work are taken from the official English translation published by the Society of Christian Doctrine.

31. PRECA, *The Mansions*, 27.

32. Cfr. SCHUTZ - THURIAN, *Revelation*, 78.

33. Cfr. [Ġorġ PRECA], *Arloġġ Museum*, [Malta], [Soċjetà tad-Duttrina Nisranija], 1996. [*The Watch*].

34. Cfr. [PRECA], *Arloġġ*, 4.

the evening. All the members of the Society of Christian Doctrine, both male and female, have to pray all the prayers of *Arlogg Museummin* every day.<sup>35</sup>

The use of the Bible which Preca makes in *Arlogg Museummin* is quite diversified. However, the most sublime use of the Bible which Dun Ġorġ makes in *Arlogg Museummin* can be found in each of the prayers which fall on the half hour, starting from half past seven in the morning. This prayer consists of a meditation on an episode from the Gospels or from the Acts of the Apostles. These episodes cover the entire life of Christ in one week. Each episode is presented by stating the theme of the episode; then three scenes which depict the event being meditated upon are mentioned. Finally, we find some short prayers. The following is an episode taken from the half past four prayer for Monday:

Subject – Christ reads in the Synagogue  
(Lk 4, 14-22).

Scene 1: The attendant handing Christ a scroll to read from.

Scene 2: Christ standing in the synagogue reading.

Scene 3: Christ closing the scroll before handing it back to the attendant.<sup>36</sup>

When one considers all the above-mentioned aspects which emerge both in a general and in a specific way in the ministry and in the works of Ġorġ Preca, one cannot negate that he not only foresaw but also put into practice, what *Dei Verbum* would eventually state on the Word of God with regards to the biblical ministry and the biblical apostolate. Ġorġ Preca was thus a forerunner of *Dei Verbum*, decades before it was promulgated.

### **The Bible Explained to All the Faithful**

The opening words of *Dei Verbum* 22, exhorting the accessibility of Sacred Scripture to the faithful as much as possible, are a corollary to what *Dei Verbum* states in the previous paragraph about the Word of God as the foundation of all the proclamation and of the faith of the Christian religion. In the decades and in the centuries which preceded Vatican Council II, there was a great distance between

35. Cfr. [PRECA], *Arlogg*, 5.

36. George PRECA, *The Watch*, [Ġabbar] (Malta), SDC, 1998, 69. The text of this quotation was taken directly from the official English translation.

the Bible and the faithful. One must state that this distance was not always so wide, because during other eras the Word of God formed an intrinsic part of the life of the Church, with the Bible being the fundamental text for the formation of the laity.<sup>37</sup>

*Dei Verbum* changed all this and gave the Bible back to the faithful as the Word of God.<sup>38</sup> This brought about a change in the way in which the Bible was considered, both by the Church and by the faithful themselves. “The fences that had been erected with respect to the vernacular Bible and to Bible reading by non-theologians ever since the 13<sup>th</sup> century and especially the 15<sup>th</sup> century are here decisively torn down”.<sup>39</sup> *Dei Verbum* therefore marks the end of a period in which the Word of God was jealously defended.<sup>40</sup>

Ġorġ Preca pre-announced this situation not only by making the Bible the centre of all his activity, but also by giving the Bible into the hands of the lay members of the Society of Christian Doctrine which he founded. He did this in a period where no ecclesially-approved biblical translation was available in Maltese. Consequently, he translated parts of the Bible himself, from the Vulgate translation which was available during those times.<sup>41</sup> Ġorġ Preca founded the Society of Christian Doctrine at a time when it was not only unacceptable to give the Bible to the lay faithful, but also when the faithful on their part were afraid to open and read it because they had been brought up with the perception that they were not even worthy of touching the Bible.<sup>42</sup>

Ġorġ Preca’s initiative was neither easy nor simple. Many misunderstood him and considered him as going beyond the limits in this aspect; however history

37. Cfr. Carlo M. MARTINI, *La Sacra Scrittura nutrimento e regola della predicazione e della religione. (Cap. VI della «Dei Verbum»*, in S. LYONNET et al. (Eds.), *La Bibbia nella Chiesa dopo la «Dei Verbum»*. Studi sulla costituzione conciliare, Edizioni Paoline, Roma 1969, 162-169; MARTINI, *La Sacra Scrittura*, 437. With reference to the relation of the Bible to catechesis during the Patristic Period and during the Middle Ages, cfr. Cesare BISSOLI, «Va' e annuncia», 31-37.

38. Cfr. MARTINI, *Alcuni aspetti*, 226.

39. Joseph RATZINGER, *The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation. A Commentary*, in *Bulletin Dei Verbum* 74/75 (2005) 1-2, 4.

40. Cfr. MARTINI, *La Sacra Scrittura*, 437.

41. Cfr. Joseph ABDILLA, *Dun Ġorġ: Żejt Ġdid Għas-Seklu*, in *Dun Ġorġ* 27 (1987) 21. [*Dun Ġorġ: New Oil for the Century*].

42. Cfr. Lawrenz CACHIA, *L-Ispirtu Profetiku f' Dun Ġorġ*, in *Dun Ġorġ* 4 (1973) 3. [*The Prophetic Spirit in Dun Ġorġ*].

ultimately proved that he was on the right track.<sup>43</sup> Ġorġ Preca gave the Bible to the members of the Society so that the Word of God would be their nourishment and inspiration in their daily lives. The fact that Preca introduced the laity to the reading and to the study of the Bible was so *avant-garde* during his epoch that it brought on him the condemnation of some people who considered him as moving towards the Protestant position.<sup>44</sup>

Through his writings, especially those which are based on Sacred Scripture, and those which have Sacred Scripture as their point of departure, and then develop, explain and apply it to daily situations, Ġorġ Preca was a precursor of *Dei Verbum* 22 which:

describes the necessity and the character of a biblical pastoral ministry. To provide “easy access to Sacred Scriptures” – this includes promoting the translation and distribution of the Bible as well as providing people with the resources and the opportunities to enter into a life-relevant dialogue with the Word of God.<sup>45</sup>

The models and the methods of the use of the Bible in the written works of Ġorġ Preca were intended to render the message of Sacred Scripture intelligible and applicable to the daily life of the people. Even in this respect, Ġorġ Preca was a precursor of *Dei Verbum*, because it is futile to have access to the Bible, if this is not explained and applied to the daily life of the faithful.<sup>46</sup> In this respect, to some extent one can compare Preca’s works to what was referred to as the *biblia pauperum* – the Bible in illustrated form. Ġorġ Preca did not produce or publish any illustrations, nor draw episodes from the Bible, but all his writings were aimed at rendering the episodes found in the Bible clearer and intelligible to others.

The Church at Vatican Council II was pre-occupied with the lack of understanding of Sacred Scripture that prevailed during that epoch. Through *Dei Verbum*, the Church wanted to create a biblical movement towards a much more conscious

43. Cfr. Paul N. CALLEJA, *Dun Ġorġ - Katekista*, in *Dun Ġorġ* 9-10 (1975-1976) 31. [*Dun Ġorġ - A Catechist*].

44. Cfr. Emanuel CURMI, *Dun Ġorġ u l-Lajċi*, in *Dun Ġorġ* 34 (1994) 19. [*Dun Ġorġ and the Laity*].

45. Claudio ETTL, *The Rediscovery of the Word of God. The Second Vatican Council and the Dei Verbum*, in *Bulletin Dei Verbum* 72/73 (2004) 3-4, 7.

46. Cfr. Santiago GUIJARRO OPORTO, *L'accesso alla Sacra Scrittura*, in *Firmana. Quaderni di teologia e pastorale* 11 (1996) 31.

understanding of the Word of God. The Church wanted the Bible to become the handbook for the fundamental nourishment of the believer.<sup>47</sup>

The reason Ġorġ Preca wrote most of his works was to teach others to live a truly Christian life based on the Word of God. At times in his writings, Preca himself explicitly declares the aim of the writing by saying that he is explaining the Word of God in order that a maximum benefit can be achieved from reading, meditating and knowing the Word of God, since there is no benefit in simply repeating texts from Sacred Scripture blindly, without understanding what one is saying. It is when one comprehends what one is reading that one appreciates the Word of God to the full, and ultimately puts it into practice.<sup>48</sup>

## Conclusion

The end result expected by *Dei Verbum* in the re-allocation of the Bible to its central position in the Church is, that just as the Eucharistic mystery helps in the growth and in the maturity of the life of the Church, so does a new impulse of the Word of God bring about an increase in spiritual life.<sup>49</sup> Ġorġ Preca, and the Maltese people living during his time, experienced this through Preca's life itself. One can conclude that the saintly life which Ġorġ Preca lived, as proclaimed by the Church through his canonisation on the 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2007, is the end result of a life lived in constant contact, reflection and prayer on the Word of God. It is therefore no exaggeration to call Ġorġ Preca a great apostle of the Word of God and a precursor of the Second Vatican Council.

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47. Cfr. MARTINI, *La Sacra Scrittura*, 441-442.

48. Cfr. [Ġorġ PRECA], *Lucerna ta l-Ispirtu Santu*, [Valletta (Malta)], [Chretien & Co.], [1920's], 4. [*The Lamp of the Holy Spirit*]; [Ġorġ PRECA], *Il-Ktieb tal-Lanterni*, in *Kalendarju Museum in 4* (1950) 65-66. [*The Book of Lanterns*].

49. Cfr. *Dei Verbum*, 26.

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