

**ANSWER GUIDE**

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# THE WORD OF GOD AT VATICAN II



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## A Brief History of Dei Verbum

1. While there are no “correct” responses, many people may indicate that they are more comfortable finding their way around the various parts of the Bible, or understand how to read and interpret it in a more personal way, or are more aware of the historical or cultural background, while others may indicate that they use the Bible more in their personal prayer life.
2. Depending on the various ages represented in the group, some may note that the preaching in recent decades is more focused on Scripture than in earlier generations, or that there is better attention given to training lectors so that the Scriptures proclaimed at Mass are understood more easily, or that the parish encourages personal reading, prayer, and study of the Bible.
3. Some group members may be too young to recall the council in any personal way and may know it only from passing comments about it, while others may recall days prior to the council when the Mass was always offered in Latin, there was little awareness of the church’s social teaching, or people generally had been discouraged from personal reading of the Bible. Some may realize that the council had worldwide representation or that it took place over several years, and so forth.
4. The term can be understood to refer to an interdenominational meeting or relationship, but its primary meaning is a worldwide gathering of authorities, which was the case at Vatican II.
5. The central importance of the word of God (both in written form and the incarnate Word found in the gospels) was visually reinforced by enthroning the Book of the Gospels and by issuing a dogmatic constitution, which is held to be the highest level of teaching authority in the church.
6. In 1962 Pope John XXIII intervened after early disputes over a first draft and created a commission intended to force opposing positions to be brought together. In 1965 the final constitution was promulgated by Pope Paul VI. The actual writing of the document was worked out by various bishops and expert advisors (*periti*) over a period of four years.

7. The first draft or schema was produced by a commission representing various offices of the Curia and has been described as negative and defensive in tone, while the final draft was produced by a mixed commission and tended to be more pastoral in tone.
8. The final version of the document stresses one source of revelation with two aspects (rather than two sources), includes an introductory prologue with a personal approach (rather than an immediate discussion of technical issues), discusses inerrancy in a rather nuanced way (rather than overemphasizing a literal understanding of this), and includes a very pastoral approach. Note: each of these differences will be further explored when studying the document itself.
9. Trent established the canon of Scripture for Catholics and so today we have forty-six books in the Old Testament and twenty-seven books in the New Testament.
10. There could be a variety of responses, but clearly the Second Vatican Council was the only one of the three that issued an independent document about Scripture and did not include condemnations as previous councils had.
11. Advances in science (such as archaeology), linguistics (such as familiarity with ancient biblical languages), and literature (such as literary forms) were approached with caution but certainly encouraged for Catholic scholars.
12. In his 1943 encyclical, *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, Pope Pius XII encouraged Catholic scholars to use modern developments in other fields and apply them to the study and understanding of Scripture.
13. Exegesis literally means “to draw out or explain” and is used in biblical studies to indicate the process of interpreting what is in a given text of Scripture. Eisegesis has the opposite meaning, to read into the biblical text a meaning that is not there.
14. Familiarity with the historical setting or the meaning of certain terms or the context of a given biblical passage can help to ground one’s understanding, as well as taking note of the type of literature that is being used by the biblical writer. For example, a letter written by Paul or someone else in the early church would be read with a different sensitivity and awareness than a psalm or a parable.

15. a) The first level is the actual experience of the oral teaching of Jesus. The second step is the later preaching of the apostles about the experience of Jesus. The third step is the written testimony of the evangelists who collected, organized, edited, and synthesized the oral and written testimony.
  - b) This may be a confusing concept to some members of the group. The church is helping us realize that while the gospels are historically grounded in the life and ministry of Jesus, they also act as tools to evangelize and reflect some developing Christian beliefs or issues.
16. By returning to earlier periods they were examining the longer view of tradition. If the church had simply responded out of a medieval mindset, for example, it could have failed to notice that every generation is influenced by the current culture and previous teachings. We might have missed the valuable insights and energy of biblical writers and early church fathers and diminished contemporary insights as well.
17. Discussion. Remember that by studying the text itself in the next chapter of the commentary some lingering questions may be clarified.

## SESSION 2

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# Dei Verbum, Paragraphs 1–13

1. Allow time for some discussion to tie up loose ends from the previous lesson.
2. The prologue shows openness to the world and a desire to share the gift of salvation and the virtues of faith, hope, and love with the entire world. God's revelation is not a possession to be guarded but a gift to be shared.
3. Although the document will deal with revelation from the viewpoint of teachings and doctrines (a propositional understanding of revelation), the prologue gives emphasis to the relational aspect of God's revelation to human beings (a personalistic angle).
4. The biblical references given offer a sampling of how Jesus taught with authority and acted with compassion and strength in ways