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AN INTRODUCTION TO THE CONSTITUTION ON DIVINE REVELATION

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The formation and discussion of the dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation extended through all four years of the Second Vatican Council. Its main themes, Revelation—Scripture—Tradition, are foundation realities of the Church and the Church's life in the world. The revelation event in Christ created the Church as the community of faith in which it would remain present as reality and truth through Scripture and Tradition. But the Council debates made it clear that reflection on these basic realities of the Church's life and on their relation to one another had not attained the maturity required for easy formulation. Differences of opinion on these matters were sharp and ran deep. But after four drafts, a final text emerged which represents a significant development of Catholic teaching and opens up ecumenical perspectives for which the first draft proposed to the Council gave little hope.

PART I: THE PREPARATION OF THE TEXT

Session I: 1962. The original schema presented for discussion at the first session in the fall of 1962 was entitled "On the Sources of Revelation." It had been prepared by the Theological Commission under the presidency of Cardinal Ottaviani. Unfortunately, this

commission had refused the help offered by the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, which had been studying the relations between Revelation, Scripture and Tradition in a broader perspective than that of the Theological Commission.[1] Written in the style of Trent and Vatican I, and orientated toward the refutation of errors, the schema met strong opposition from some of the most prominent Cardinals at the Council. The adversaries of the draft objected to three points in particular.[2]

The first objection concerned theological formulation. The schema tended to conceive revelation primarily as the communication of conceptual truths rather than as the luminous action and presence of God in events of history at the interior of which the word provides the necessary commentary and explication. Furthermore, the critics of the schema objected to the terminology "two sources of revelation," affirming that there is only one source of revelation and that this revelation is transmitted in the church through the mutually related channels of Scripture and Tradition. Scripture as the crystallization of the primitive oral tradition under the influence of the Holy Spirit is *par excellence* "canon" of the faith and norm for the formulations of the magisterium. The Council should formulate this correlation in such a way that Protestants might be able to understand that the magisterium of the Church, whose importance should not be minimized, is not above Scripture, but rather serves the function of interpreting Scripture authentically, in function of the totality of the tradition.

The second objection centered on the tendency of the schema to definitively settle points still controverted among theologians and thus to deepen the differences between Catholics and Protestants. For example, the schema asserted (in a formulation that went beyond Trent): "Tradition, indeed, and this alone, is the way by which the

[1]Johannes Feiner, "La contribution du Secrétariat pour l'Unité des Chrétiens á la constitution dogmatique sur la révélation divine," in *La Révélation Divine* I, ed. Bernard D. Dupuy (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1968), 119-124.

[2]Robert Rouquette, "Bilan du Concil," *Études* 316 (1963), 94-111.

Church can clearly know a number of revealed truths...."[3] Since many Catholics denied that there are some revealed truths ascertainable by Tradition alone, apart from Scripture, the critics of the schema insisted that in line with the practice of previous Councils, such controverted questions should not be settled by the Council.

On many other delicate points, the schema presented massive affirmations, devoid of nuances, which canonized the position of a particular theological school within the Church concerning the nature of inspiration, the inerrancy of Scripture in profane matters, the precise nature of the historicity of the Gospels, the identity of the authors of the Gospels, and the genuinity of the words attributed to Christ in the Gospels. Biblical scholars described the schema as a step backward of fifty years and a silent burial of Pius XII's encyclical on Scripture (*Divino Afflante Spiritu*).[4] If this schema were approved by the Council, the work of exegetes and theologians would be severely hampered and collaboration with other Christian scholars would be made difficult, if not impossible.

The third objection of the opponents of the schema concerned its lack of conformity with the ecumenical spirit which animated John XXIII and which according to his desire should inspire the entire Council. In an important intervention on November 19, Bishop De Smedt of Bruges, who spoke on behalf of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, recalled that ecumenical dialogue involves not only concern for truth, but also concern for presenting the truth in a way that may make it comprehensible to others. Both sides must explain their faith clearly, objectively, and in a way that is psychologically acceptable and without engaging in controversy. The Holy Father wished this method to be applied to the Council documents. But in the judgment of the Secretariat, the proposed schema possessed "grave faults from an ecumenical point of view; it would not encourage a dialogue with

[3]Schema I, caput 1, *Documenta Concilii Vaticani* II: *De Divina Revelatione*, 3 (hereafter cited as *Documenta*), all translations from this source are the author's own.

[4]Pierre Grelot, "La Constitution sur la Révélation," *Études* 324 (1966), 101 (all translations from this source are the author's own).

non-Catholics; it would not represent progress, but a retreat." "If the schema prepared by the Theological Commission is not modified," he emphasized, "we shall be responsible for causing Vatican Council II to destroy a great, and immense hope ... for ... the unity of those for whom Christ Our Lord offered this prayer: *ut unum sint.*"[5]

This judgement is reflected in the initial reactions of Protestant observers to the schema. A. Outler later commented: "I can still recall the thud of my heart when I first read the first text of that schema, originally drafted by the theological commission—and the anguish of Lukas Vischer when he wrote of it as 'worse than Trent'."[6]

On November 20, a vote was taken to determine whether the existing schema should be discussed chapter by chapter or withdrawn for total redrafting. One thousand three hundred sixty eight voted to reject the schema; eight hundred twenty-two voted to continue the discussion chapter by chapter. Since this meant that the required two-thirds majority had not been attained, the minority would have imposed continued discussion on the majority. But on November 21, Pope John XXIII intervened, ratified the opinion of the majority, and sent the schema to a newly-formed mixed commission, as suggested by a number of bishops, for complete redrafting. He indicated that the new draft should be pastoral in tone, ecumenical in spirit and free from binding declarations on matters still under discussion among Catholics.

Oscar Cullmann observed that this date decided the orientation of the whole Council.[7] At a conference in Rome in 1963, Yves Congar declared: "The date of Nov. 20, 1962 will be remembered in the

[5]For a report on this speech, cf. Xavier Rynne, *Letters from Vatican City* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Co., 1963), 161-163.

[6]Albert Outler, "Scripture, Tradition and Ecumenism," in *Scripture and Ecumenism*, ed. Leonard Swidler (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1965), 18-19.

[7]Oscar Cullmann, "Entre deux sessions du Concile; Experiences et espérances d'un observateur protestant," *La Documentation Catholique* 60 (1963), col. 483.

history of the Church as marking the definitive closure of the Counter-Reform, since by a majority vote, the Fathers of the Council on that day rejected a document on the sources of revelation which was not sufficiently ecumenical and too greatly inspired by an anti-Protestant Catholicism."[8] The great majority of the universal episcopate clearly manifested that it refused to take a position of pure defense against error, that it judged that there was no heresy facing the Church, that it wished to allow exegetes a healthy liberty of research, that it wished to speak a pastoral language intelligible to men of today, and that it wished to engage in a true dialogue with non-Catholics.

Session II: 1963. The new commission was placed under the joint presidency of Cardinal Ottaviani of the Theological Commission and Cardinal Bea of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity. Avery Dulles notes that the inclusion of Cardinal Bea and his Secretariat in the drafting of the new schema on Revelation indicates the great ecumenical importance which Pope John XXIII attached to the Constitution.[9]

However, the new mixed commission could not produce the results that were desired. It did not include among its members any exegete with a world-wide reputation. Father Yves Congar, who had just finished a comprehensive historical and theological study of Tradition,[10] was not called to participate in the first phase of the work, though he was admitted to the commission later on. René Laurentin reports that under these conditions the commission could only arrive at a dull compromise. The commission did not rework the entire draft and give it a new theological approach. Its work consisted in deleting apparent deficiencies from the first draft. "Neither of the two

[8] *La Documentation Catholique* 61 (1964), col. 1393, note 2 (all translations from this source are the author's own).

[9] Avery Dulles, "The Constitution on Divine Revelation in Ecumenical Perspective," *American Ecclesiastical Review* 154 (1966), 219.

[10] Yves Congar, *La Tradition et les Traditions: Essai Historique* (Paris: Fayard, 1960); idem, *La Tradition et Les Traditions: Essai Théologique* (Paris: Fayard, 1963).

tendencies was satisfied, at least on the first Chapter: the one which posed the famous question of the 'two sources', and of the relation between Scripture and Tradition."[11]

This second draft was entitled "On Divine Revelation" instead of "The Sources of Revelation." Like the first draft it had five chapters, but an entirely new prologue was added. "Although the quotation at the beginning from the First Epistle of John (1:2-3) suggests that revelation is the communion creating self-disclosure of God, the further explanation shows that the old restrictive concept of revelation, namely, revelation as doctrine, is still presupposed."[12]

Chapter 1 was entitled "The Revealed Word of God" instead of "The Twofold Source of Revelation." Following Trent, the Gospel was affirmed to be the "one source of all salutary truth and discipline of life." No expression or formula was used which favored the "two source theory" (the existence of constitutive Tradition was neither affirmed nor denied). But as Congar pointed out, the text was only "negatively good." A text was needed which would be "positively good." It lacked a description of tradition which would make clear what is original and proper to this mode of the transmission of the truth of revelation, even when it hands on the same realities to which Scripture witnesses in its own manner. However, the text did emphasize the close relationship and inner connection between Scripture and Tradition.

Chapter 2 was entitled "The Divine Inspiration and Interpretation of Sacred Scripture." It briefly affirmed the fact of the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture. God is the principal author who makes use of men as living instruments to transmit in writing all that He wills and only what He wills. Since God is the principal author, the inspired Scripture is "free from all error whatever" (*ab omni prorsus errore immunis*).

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[11]René Laurentin, *Bilan de la Troisième Session* (Paris: Editions du Sevil, 1965), 90 (author's own translation).

[12]Gregory Baum, "Vatican II's Constitution on Revelation, History and Interpretation," *Theological Studies* 28 (1967), 56.

There was no longer any explicit affirmation that divine inspiration "excludes any error in what ever matter, whether religious or profane," as in the first schema.

Chapter 3 of the second draft, like Chapter 3 of the first draft, was entitled "The Old Testament." Here for the first time was to be found that deepened conception of revelation which would be developed in the later drafts in a special first chapter. Revelation was no longer approached from the viewpoint of teaching. Corresponding with the concrete history of salvation in the Old Testament, God was said to have revealed himself through words and deeds in such a way that Israel experienced the divine ways with men, and through the prophetic Word of God grew in their understanding of this experience. Gregory Baum noted that this shift from a concept of revelation as teaching to the conception of revelation as personal self-communication in history "represents the important turning point in the development of the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation."[13]

Chapter 4 also retained the same title as in the first schema: "The New Testament." The question of the historicity of the Gospels was approached differently; their general historicity was affirmed. The Gospels transmit what Jesus did and taught for the salvation of men, even though their standards of historical composition were not the same as those of our day, and even though they were often reported in a kerygmatic form. But the condemnation of errors concerning the historical nature of the Gospels, which had made up a large portion of the chapter in the first draft, was eliminated.

Chapter 5, "The Use of the Bible in the Church," was a positive statement which, especially in the first paragraph, betrayed the influence of the schema "On the Word of God" prepared by the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity. In Scripture, God encounters His children and speaks with them. God is active in His Word in the Church, strengthening the Church and the faith of Christians. Scripture is the Word of God and does not only contain it as does Tradition.

[13]Baum, "Vatican II's Constitution on Revelation, History and Interpretation," 57.

This revised schema was distributed to the Fathers of the Council, but was not submitted for debate at the second session. The draft did not appear to capture the enthusiasm of the Bishops; some hoped that the schema would be given a silent burial, while some French and Italian Bishops sought to win support for the project of incorporating the main themes of the draft into the Constitution on the Church. Furthermore, the long debates on Collegiality did not leave time for a serious discussion of the schema on Revelation in the last days of the session. But in his discourse closing the second session on December 4, 1963, Paul VI indicated that the question of Revelation would be taken up at the third session. In the meantime, the Fathers were requested to submit their observations on the second draft in writing.

Session III: 1964. By April 1964, almost two hundred eighty observations were received from the Fathers of the Council. In general, they approved the substance of the second draft, but most demanded that the chapter on Tradition be redone, and many asked that the schema begin with a special chapter on Revelation. It seemed that such revision should be carried out in a much broader perspective.

The Theological Commission set to work to rewrite the schema on the basis of the new proposals. On March 7, a special subcommission was constituted with Bishop Charue of Namur as President.[14]

[14]This subcommission of seven Fathers and nineteen experts was itself divided into two sections. The first section, comprising Bishop Florit as President and Bishop J. Heuschen and Abbot Butler, examined the chapters concerning Revelation and Tradition. The experts assisting them were: H. Schauf, A. Prignon, C. Moeller, K. Rahner, P. Smulders, Y. Congar, U. Betti, S. Tromp, A. Ramirez, and J. van den Bynde. The second section, comprising Bishop Charue and Bishop Dodewaard, examined the chapters treating of Scripture. The experts assisting them were: L. Cerfaux, S. Garafalo, J. Turrado, B. Rigaux, R. Gagnebert, O. Semmelroth, and A. Grillmeier.

The mixed commission left the revision of the schema to the Theological Commission, but the revision was to be made according to the principles fixed in 1963. The result of the revision was to be submitted to Cardinal Bea. (Bernard D. Dupuy, "Historique de la Constitution," in Dupuy, *La Révélation Divine* I, 93.)

The work this time was serious, open, scientific, and constructive. The opinions of the theological tendencies were transcended. The essential was disengaged and dialogue opened the way for a real adjustment between the two tendencies. After the necessary preparatory work by the *periti*, the subcommission met between April 20 to 25 and worked out a new text which represented an entirely new approach to the subject. The Theological Commission studied this schema from July 1 to 5 and agreement was easily reached on all but one point. A minority of seven maintained that an addition should be made explicitly stating that Tradition is wider (*latius patet*) than Scripture, that some truths of faith are not known with certitude except through Tradition. The majority of seventeen vetoed this proposal, but they agreed that in presenting the schema to the Council a minority report on this controverted point should be given. However, the final text of the Constitution on Revelation would not be very much different from this third draft approved by the Theological Commission.

Max Thurian, sub-prior of the Protestant community of Taizé and guest of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, declared: "The present schema represents the best possible accord between the different theological schools concerning the problems of Revelation, Scripture and Tradition.... Such as it is today, the conciliar text offers a solid basis for the ecumenical dialogue. It nourishes our profound optimism concerning the fruits of the Council for the visible unity of Christians."[15]

This rejuvenated schema on divine revelation was introduced to the Council for debate on September 30, 1964. Archbishop Florit explained this third draft of the schema to the Council on behalf of the Theological Commission, and Bishop Franic exposed the reserves of the minority. This third draft consisted of a Prologue and six Chapters, one more than the previous drafts. The Prologue of the second draft was revised and developed as Chapter 1 of the third draft, treating of Revelation in itself. The five Chapters of the second draft followed this

[15] *La Documentation Catholique* 61 (1964), col. 1393-1394, note 3.

in order. Chapter 2 (Chapter 1 in the previous drafts) was given the significantly new title of "The Transmission of Divine Revelation."

The new draft was discussed chapter by chapter until October 6. In general, the new text was favorably received. A minority attempted to reopen the debate concerning the question of the "two sources" and their relative material extent; with Bishop Franic they desired an explicit statement that Tradition contains more truths of faith than Scripture, but conceded that this omission would not be an error but only a "notable defect" in the schema. This attempt, however, was without success. The majority of the Fathers agreed with Archbishop Florit, the spokesman for the majority on the Commission, that this difficult question should be left open for theological investigation.

The debate also brought to light two further "sore points" in the schema. The first concerned the "inerrancy" of Sacred Scripture as explained in Chapter 3. The affirmation that Scripture teaches the truth "without any error" seemed to affirm too much, for it is evident that the sacred books contain certain errors in the modern sense of the term, in matters of physical science, chronology, and conceptions of time. Many Fathers demanded that the inerrancy proper to Scripture be explicitly related to the order of saving truth.

The second neuralgic point concerned the explanation of the historicity of the Gospels as proposed in Chapter 5. Various proposals were made for the improvement of the text.

After the debate, the Theological Commission (i.e., the corresponding sub-commissions) immediately began the work of retouching the text in conformity with the proposals of the Fathers. The corrections were relatively few and homogeneous with the whole tenor of the schema. The fourth modified draft of the schema was redistributed on November 20 in the course of the last general congregation, too late to be voted upon in the third session.

Session IV: 1965. When the fourth session began in September of 1965, one of the first items on the agenda was the fourth revision of the schema on Revelation. From September 20 to 23, it was voted upon paragraph by paragraph, all of which were eventually approved

in general by a two-thirds majority. The schema was then sent back to the Commission for another revision according to the corrections and amendments expressed in the votes *juxta modum.*

In the sessions of the Theological Commission concerning the question of tradition (Ch. 2), the question of inerrancy (Ch. 3), and the question of the historicity of the Gospels (Ch. 5), there was strong resistance from the so-called *Coetus internationalis Patrum*, which numbered between one to two hundred supporters. Due to the document's doctrinal nature, the Pope followed the work of the Commission closely as it was putting the definitive text in final form. He too became particularly uneasy concerning the three points mentioned above: the relation between Scripture and Tradition, the extent of inerrancy and the historicity of the Gospels. When he saw that others were demanding precisions concerning the same points, he sent a letter dated October 18 to the Commission through the Cardinal Secretary of State, proposing three precisions concerning the points enumerated. The Pope did not restrict the liberty of the Commission, but asked that his amendments be examined freely yet with benevolence.[16] The Commission did precisely that. As we shall see, in all three questions the Commission chose formulations which satisfied the basic intention of the Pope, but which did not close any of the doors so many had fought for four long years to hold open.

The fifth and final draft of the schema was submitted to the vote of the Council on October 29. At the last minute the *Coetus internationalis Patrum* tried once again to rally opposition to the constitution, accusing it of modernism. However, they could only muster twenty-seven negative votes. The schema was adopted in its totality by two thousand eighty-one affirmative votes. In the course of the public session of November 18, the final vote which took place just before the promulgation of the constitution was two thousand three hundred fifty in favor and six against.

Naturally, the final text is marked by its long history and bears

[16]R. Rouquette, "La quatrième session du concile," *Études* 323 (1965), 681.

the traces of many compromises. But, as J. Ratzinger notes, the fundamental compromise which underlies it is more than a compromise; it is a synthesis of great significance. "The text unites faithfulness to ecclesial tradition with the affirmation of critical science, and thus opens up for faith the path into the present."[17]

PART II: A COMMENTARY

PROLOGUE

The first two words (*Dei Verbum*) give an exact summary of the object of the Constitution: the Word of God. Right from the beginning, the Council emphasizes that the Church's role in relation to the Word of God is that of obedient listening. All her life, proclamation and activity flow from her openness to this Word. The quotation from the first epistle of John indicates that this Word of God in the concrete is the Incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, our life. This living Word has been seen and heard and is now present to us in the Church's proclamation in order to establish fellowship and communion between men and between men and God the Father. The whole first chapter on Revelation will be dominated by the themes orchestrated here: Word, life and communion.

The emphasis on the doctrine of the Word of God and the dominance of the Word over the Church makes the ecumenical importance of this constitution evident. The Catholic Church here is attempting to overcome an earlier over-emphasis on institution and sacrament. The affirmation of the prologue that the present Council understands itself to be "*inhaerens vestigiis*" of Trent and of Vatican I in no way nullifies this ecumenical and corrective thrust of the constitution. These words intend to emphasize the continuity of this

[17]Joseph Ratzinger, "Dogmatische Konstitution über die göttliche Offenbarung," in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche: Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil*, Band II (Freiburg: Herder, 1967), 503 (all translations from this source are the author's own).

Council with the previous Councils, but the entire Constitution makes it clear that this continuity is achieved within a reinterpretation which overcomes former insufficiencies. We can agree with K. Barth that in the context of the entire constitution and the directives of John XXIII these two words should be translated as "going forward from the footsteps of those councils," i.e., placing the left foot in the track of those councils and marching forward in the direction indicated by them.[18]

Chapter 1: Revelation Itself

Chapter 1 contains the most complete statement concerning revelation ever given in a document of the magisterium, yet it makes no claim to be a complete treatment of the subject. The chapter aims to present a concrete biblical and salvation-history view of revelation. This limited but important objective is successfully and attractively achieved.

The divine self-revelation is first explained in its nature and meaning (article two). It is then presented as a historical reality which passes from the creation, through the special revelation history of the Old Testament (article three), to Jesus Christ who perfects revelation by fulfilling it (article four). Man receives this revelation in faith (article five). Finally, into this total view of revelation as personal encounter is integrated revelation's role as a communication of truth (article six).

Article 2: Nature and Object of Revelation. Revelation is viewed here dynamically as process or act, not statically as final result or doctrine (as in draft one and draft two). Three points should receive special emphasis:

a) Revelation is God's gratuitous manifestation of Himself and

[18]Karl Barth, "Conciliorum Tridentini et Vaticani I inhaerens vestigiis?" in Dupuy, *La Révélation Divine* II, 514.

the mystery of His will for the purpose of inviting man to personal fellowship with Himself through Christ in the Spirit. The structure of revelation is therefore Trinitarian. Its goal is personal encounter and communion with men. Revelation thus involves more than a communication of truth, although a communication of saving truth is necessarily involved as well.

b) Revelation is historical and sacramental. According to the explanation of Archbishop Florit given to the Council at the third session, "the constitutive elements of revelation are both the deeds wrought by God in salvation history and the words by which God himself wills his work to be explained." Therefore, the revelation is historical "because it consists primarily in all the interventions of God...." It is "sacramental, moreover, because the total significance of the deeds is not known to us except by words, that is, by the 'speech of God' which is itself a historical event."[19] This is the first time that a document of the magisterium has described the concrete structure of the revelation-encounter of God with man. The intimate union of deed and word receives special emphasis. God's salvific actions in history bear a meaning, but frequently the historical event is ambiguous and does not fully manifest its revelatory significance except in the light of a divinely communicated interpretation. Revelation is therefore accomplished through history together with the interpretation of the word. Revelation is not a system of abstract propositions but it does communicate doctrine in the form of events which themselves bear a meaning in relation to God and his saving design which the words illuminate and proclaim. History and doctrine, event and interpretation are complementary and refer to one another. Together they introduce man to Mystery, the reality of God whom the human spirit can never fully grasp, for which human language is never adequate, and who even in his revelation remains veiled in obscurity, always transcending what we can think and say of him.

[19] *Documenta*, 90.

c) The mediator and fullness of this saving revelation through word and deed is Jesus Christ. This will be developed in article four. Christocentric structure and Trinitarian structure complement each other. The Father can only introduce us to the Trinitarian life through His Son in the Spirit. Only then is the goal of revelation achieved: the communication of the saving truth about God and the salvation of man through the self-communication of God in Christ.

Article 3: Revelation and Preparation for Christ. The revelation of God does not only occur in history. It is a history moving toward a goal. Through it, history becomes salvation history. In the Council's conception of history, God, not man, is placed in the center and at the source. Man's answering history-creating-action is carried along by the far more important saving action of God.[20]

The first stage of revelation history began with the self-witness of God through creation and in created realities, and it is present to men of all times. But as the *relatio* of Archbishop Florit to the corrected third draft explains, this revelation in the created order is distinguished from the "supernatural revelation" which God intended from the beginning, and which consisted "in the manifestation God made of Himself to the first parents in order to open up for them the way of salvation."[21] The manner and the clarity of this revelation is left undetermined. In order to emphasize that God's salvific will is universal, the Council adds two affirmations concerning the period after the Fall: God aroused in man the hope of being saved and ceaselessly kept the human race in his care in order to save those who perseveringly do good (cf. Rom. 2:6-11). But the Council determined nothing in detail concerning the objective and subjective conditions of salvation.

The second stage is inaugurated by the new initiative of God to form a people of his own through the call of Abraham. The last

[20]Hans Waldenfels, *Offenbarung* (Munich: Hueber Verlag, 1969), 186-188.

[21]*Documenta*, 135.

sentence of the article indicates that the whole time before Christ, even outside of Israel, was a preparation for the Gospel. But in the sentence before that the Council teaches that Israel's history was a special and privileged form of preparation for the redeemer and of exercise in faith in the one God. We find here an expression of the unity of the entire pre-Christian history and the privileged preparatory nature of the revelation given to Israel.[22]

Article 4: Jesus Christ, the Personal Plenitude of Revelation. The final stage of God's personal revelation in history is the Person of Jesus Christ, the eternal Word made man. He is the summit of revelation. By his whole personal reality He is the "epiphany" of God on earth. "By his presence and manifestation, by his words and deeds, by his signs and miracles, but especially by his death and glorious resurrection from the dead, finally by sending the Spirit of Truth, Jesus Christ perfected the revelation by fulfilling it." Jesus Christ is the fullness of revelation because here what is expressed (God and his design for man), the mode of expression (the human reality of Christ), and the recipient of revelation (Jesus as hypostatically united with the Word), have become one.[23] In Jesus, a man with all his human activity and expression has become a Word that God not only speaks but is. In Jesus, the self-communication of God to man and its expression in the dimension of perceptible and social reality has reached its highpoint. We now know that God is with us in a definitive, irreversible manner "to free us from sin and death and to raise us to life eternal." We know that the world is definitively open to the concealed presence of the divine fullness. It is for this reason that the paragraph ends by saying that no new public revelation is to be expected before the final revelation of Christ in glory, for revelation is the history of God who draws near to man, and this history culminates in the definitive presence

[22]Ratzinger, "Dogmatische Konstitution über die göttliche Offenbarung," 510.

[23]Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler, *Kleines Theologisches Wörterbuch* (Freiburg: Herder, 1961), 268.

of God to the world in the God-man.[24] In Jesus, both God's gracious self-communication to man and its explicitation in the tangible, bodily, social dimension have reached their climax.

But this does not mean that we have to live only from the remembrance and application of objects and contents once and for all revealed in the past, and do not experience the event of the self-communication itself. The completion and fulfillment of the revelation in Christ includes the "final sending of the spirit" through whom the once-and-for-all "God is with us" of Christ remains an ever-present reality for the Church as a whole and for the individual believer in faith. To the once-and-for-all original revelation in Christ corresponds the ever-actual event of the dependent self-revelation of God in Christ through the Spirit in the history of the Church as a whole and in the personal faith of every believer. This is not expressly stated by the Council, but it is implied in all that the constitution says about Faith, Tradition and Scripture in the life of the Church in their connection with the once-and-for-all revelatory event of Christ.[25] The Spirit adds no "new" revelation to the definitive revelation of the Son. His role is to lead the Church and the individual believer into an understanding and actualizing interpretation of the fullness that has been communicated in the Son in all the periods and cultures of history in which the Church lives. He enables the Church, in the light of the illuminating Mystery of Christ, to discern the ambiguous signs of the times that indicate where and how God is calling the Church to concretely live and apply the definitive revelation in Christ.[26]

Article 5: Reception of the Revelation in Faith. Corresponding

[24]Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations* I (Baltimore: Helicos Press, 1961), 49.

[25]Cf. articles 5, 8, 21 and commentary.

[26]Cf. article 8: "Thus God, who spoke of old, uninterruptedly converses with the Bride of his beloved Son; and the Holy Spirit, through whom the living voice of the gospel resounds in the Church, and through her in the world, leads into all truth those who believe and makes the word of Christ dwell abundantly in them."

to its treatment of revelation, the Council deliberately accented the "biblical and personalist" aspect of faith.[27] Faith is an obedience not to revelation (as in the second schema) but to the revealing God, an obedience "by which man entrusts his whole self freely to God." But the Council refused to suppress all reference to faith as an assent given to revealed truth, as some had petitioned, since "faith essentially includes assent given to doctrine, and on the other hand this assent is itself a personal commitment (*deditio*)."[28] Thus, the first sentence of article five which describes faith is a concrete example of how the Council in this constitution surpassed the one-sided problematic of the Counter-Reform by eliminating the all too frequent over-emphasis of the gnoseological side of faith and revelation, which portrayed them primarily as the mediation and acceptance of new knowledge and which made faith appear as primarily faith in "something" rather than in "someone." The Council clearly indicates that the fundamental form of faith is the integrally human surrender and adhesion to the Person of God disclosing Himself in Christ. This is the response in which revelation achieves its goal and completion, without which the dialogue initiated by God would become a monologue, without which there would be no personal encounter. But this total affirmation of the revealing Person of God in Christ, which is the core of faith, must necessarily articulate itself into the assent to what God says, promises and commands, in the "full submission of intellect and will to the revealing God." The Council "has indicated to the theology of tomorrow the path to a synthesis which the more recent centuries have not succeeded in elaborating fully."[29]

The last two sentences of this article explain the role of grace and the Spirit in the response of faith. These affirmations imply that the revelation and the revealer do not remain in a distant past,

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[27]Cf. *relatio* of Pieter Smulders in *Documenta*, 109.

[28]Cf. *relatio* of Smulders in *Documenta*, 109.

[29]Henri de Lubac, "Commentaire du Chapitre I sur la Révélation," in Dupuy, *La Révélation Divine* I, 248 (author's own translation).

but through God's self-communication in the Spirit and grace the revelation event is actualized for every believer in immediate personal encounter. Revelation is a reality with a double dimension. To the external dimension given in Christ once-and-for-all and present to history in the life of the Church corresponds the interior illumination and attraction of the Spirit who gives man the new eyes and the new heart which alone enable him to recognize and receive the Word of God as *God's* Word addressed to him and calling for a personal response. Finally, once the revelation of God has been accepted in faith, the same Spirit makes possible an ever deepening existential understanding of the mysterious reality that has been communicated. This affirmation prepares for what Chapter 2 will say concerning Tradition in the life of the Church.

Article 6: The Revealed Truth. Some have called this paragraph "an undeveloped and almost alien element" in the totality of the first chapter.[30] However, as an appendix to the chapter, recalling "the object of revelation in all its breadth,"[31] the article serves the important purpose of dissipating any misunderstanding of the personalistic view of revelation proposed in the first chapter. The truth-mediating function of revelation and assent to the saving truth mediated are elements integral to, not contrary with, the personal encounter.[32]

Though the article basically repeats the teaching of Vatican I, it reverses the order in which it proposes the contents of revelation in line with its theocentric view of revelation. Mention is first made of God's revelation and communication of the proper object of revelation, Himself and the eternal decisions of His will regarding the salvation of men, realities which transcend the human mind's capacity

[30]Peter van Leeuwen, "The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation," *Concilium* 21 (1967), 12; repeated by Leo Bakker, "What is Man's Place in Divine Revelation?" *Concilium* 21 (1967), 28.

[31]*Relatio* of Archbishop Florit in *Documenta*, 91.

[32]Otto Semmelroth in Otto Semmelroth and Maximilian Zerwick, *Vatikanum II über das Wort Gottes* (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1966), 19.

of understanding. Revelation is, then, both a manifestation and self-giving of God, a real self-communication of himself in Christ and in the Spirit. Secondly, against the background of modern atheism the Council reaffirms that this revelation in Christ also enables man to know "with ease, with solid certitude and with no trace of error" those religious truths which are not in principle inaccessible to human reason but which man experiences great difficulty attaining in his present fallen condition.

Conclusion to Chapter 1. This chapter may be viewed as an official approbation of the development of the theology of revelation that has taken place in Catholic theology within the last thirty years. Influenced by both the biblical renewal and by twentieth century Protestant theology, the Catholic theology of revelation has assumed the biblical, personalistic and historical form apparent in this chapter. Since this presentation of revelation "harmonizes well with much modern Protestant biblical theology, (it) should facilitate interconfessional dialogue." This approach to revelation also "serves to accentuate the great central truths of revelation on which Christians commonly agree rather than the later and more refined developments of doctrine."[33]

In the light of the Council's avowed purpose of speaking to the contemporary situation, one defect should be mentioned. The chapter does not place right from the start its statement concerning the final revelation in Jesus Christ within the framework of a universal history of salvation and revelation. Karl Rahner finds that in this respect, Chapter 1 of *Dei Verbum* is "kerygmatically obsolete."[34]

Chapter 2: The Transmission of Divine Revelation

The revelation event in Jesus Christ created the organism of

[33]Dulles, "The Constitution on Divine Revelation in Ecumenical Perspective," 221.

[34]Karl Rahner, "The Content of the Christian Message," *The Catholic Mind* 68 (1970), 26. Cf. the schema on Revelation proposed by Rahner in Dupuy, *La Révélation Divine* II, 577-587.

the Church possessing Scripture and Tradition as instruments of revelation's transmission and representation. Chapter 2 clarifies the role and relation of these realities.

Article 7: Transmission of the Revelation in the Primitive Church. This article, as formulated, is dependent on Trent, but Trent's formulation is modified in the light of the deeper understanding of revelation given in Chapter 1. Trent's legalistic sounding phrase concerning Christ's promulgation of the Gospel promised by the Prophets is softened by adding that he "fulfilled" the promised Gospel. This addition points to the role of deeds mentioned in the first chapter. To Trent's characterization of the apostles preaching as the source of all saving truth and moral teaching is added the assertion that this preaching is also a communication of divine gifts. This addition points to God's active and dynamic presence in the word of preaching, communicating grace and salvation, and to tradition as a "real-communication" and not merely a "verbal communication."

The following sentence continues Vatican II's "re-reading" of Trent. The apostles did not only receive the content of their tradition from the lips of Christ, but also from the intimate experience of his life and actions. This experience of Christ was then complemented not by the "dictation" of the Spirit, but by his "prompting" which explicitated the implications of their deep, rich experience. The apostles in turn communicated this experience to others not only by verbal preaching, but by the example of their lives, by the celebration of the Eucharist and through the prescriptions and institutions they established in the Church. A final form in which this experience of Christ was communicated was Scripture, which forms an essential part of the transmission of revelation. It is this Church of the Apostles, in what it believed, in what it celebrated, this Church in its sacraments, in its concrete life, in its experience, in its objectification of itself in Scripture, which is transmitted and handed down as the normative reality for all future ages. Thus, the "mystery of Christ" communicated to the apostles and explicitated and preserved in the life, structure and writing of the apostolic Church under the guidance of the Spirit, is the

"deposit" and heritage handed over by the apostolic Church to the post-apostolic Church to be preserved, adapted and actualized.[35]

In the footsteps of Irenaeus, the paragraph affirms that between the apostolic and post-apostolic Church there is continuity in the living organs of transmission. The apostles left behind bishops as their successors, handing over to them their magisterial function. This does not mean that the bishops are the sole bearers of the tradition, but it means that the criterion of the authentic apostolic deposit and the instrument of its living presence is not Scripture alone, but conjointly the guarantee of these who have received the mission of watching over it and of proclaiming it, and who have been given the special assistance of the Spirit to fulfill this role. The same Spirit who inspired Scripture continues to assist them in their interpretation and application of Scripture to changing historical circumstances.

The final sentence of this article reminds us that revelation and its transmission through Tradition and Scripture introduce us to a true, personal encounter with God who really communicates himself in a veiled and provisional fashion by these means.

The *relatio* of Archbishop Florit notes that this article leaves open the question whether the non-written tradition of the apostles contains more objective content than the written tradition of the apostles.[36] But as many commentators have pointed out, the Council's view of revelation as the personal self-disclosure of God in His Word makes this a secondary issue. God personally addresses Himself to man in both Scripture and non-written Tradition in the Church. "The whole question what truths are or are not contained in Scripture is probably unanswerable, since Scripture says different things to different people, depending on the dispositions and previous knowledge which a given interpreter brings to it. According to the Catholic view, the Bible

[35]Karl Rahner, "Écriture et Tradition," in Henri de Lubac, *L'homme devant Dieu: Mélanges Henri de Lubac* III (Paris: Aubier, 1964), 212.

[36]*Documenta*, 92.

does not yield its full meaning unless it is read in the context of the life and experience of the Christian community—or, in other words, in the Church."[37]

Article 8: What is Tradition? This article describes in more detail what is meant by Tradition, but does not give a concise definition. The Council has clearly transcended the idea of Tradition as the oral handing on of doctrine. In the present constitution, Tradition is the living transmission of the realities of salvation, the manifold presence of the total Christ-mystery in the Church. To the genuine content of Tradition belongs "everything that contributes toward the holiness of life and increase in faith of the people of God." In this Tradition, "the Church in its doctrine, life and worship perpetuates and transmits to all generations all that she herself is, all that she believes." In the mind of the Council, therefore, Tradition is the life of the whole Church under the breath of the Spirit. In this life is transmitted more than is expressed or expressible in doctrine.

The *relatio* at this point makes it clear that in stating that the Church hands on "all that she herself is, all that she believes" (and in dropping the previous draft's phrase "all that she has"), the constitution indicates that from the apostolic tradition proceeds "all that and only that which belongs to the substantials of the Church."[38] "The present text, therefore, distinguishes between apostolic tradition in the Church and the traditional life of the Church, even if no clear criterion is given by which that which belongs to the substance (*substantialia*) can be recognized."[39]

In the second section of this article, the Council develops the dynamic aspect of tradition as growth and development. The tradition from the apostles in the Church is a living tradition because

[37]Dulles, "The Constitution on Divine Revelation in Ecumenical Perspective," 222.

[38]*Documenta*, 115.

[39]Baum, "Vatican II's Constitution on Revelation, History and Interpretation," 66.

it explicitates and develops its implicit and hidden facets under the influence of the Spirit in interaction with the realities of history: peoples, ideas, cultures, problems. The subject of this living tradition is the whole Church as the communion of all the faithful animated by the Spirit. All, according to their function in the Body of Christ, contribute to the growth in understanding of the realities and truth handed on in the life of the Church. The Church is the Mary of world history preserving and contemplating all these things in her heart. Three factors of this growth and development are mentioned: the reflection and study of the faithful; insight which results from the experience of the Christ-mystery; the preaching of the magisterium. In all these ways, the Church brings to explicit consciousness facets of the Christ-mystery latent in its faith and practice. Tradition, therefore, is not a mechanical transmission of an inert deposit. It is the abiding, ever-actual, Spirit-inspired hearing of the reality of revelation as it remains present in the Church.

The final section of the article is a more detailed emphasis of the living and vivifying nature of tradition "which permeates everything the Church is and has."[40] The writings of the Fathers of the Church are expressions of the ever new interpretation and application of the Christ-mystery in the Church's living Tradition. The practice and life of the believing and praying Church is the expression of the Tradition's vital richness. It is through this living Tradition that "the entire canon of the sacred books is made known in the Church." Tradition is the "atmosphere" in which the letter of Scripture comes to life and is understood more profoundly in the Church. Thus, God holds dialogue with the Church through Scripture immersed in the living tradition. Through the action of the Holy Spirit, the definitive revelatory Christ-event is not restricted to the past, but re-presented and actualized. The dependent self-revelation of God continues to take place in the Church on the basis of the original and definitive revelatory event of Christ.

[40]*Relatio* of Archbishop Florit in *Documenta*, 93.

Through the Spirit, the Church is led more deeply into the fullness of the mystery of Christ.

Article 9: The Mutual Relation between Scripture and Tradition. The relation between Scripture and Tradition described in the previous article is here developed further. Scripture and Tradition form an organic unity and possess "a certain identity."[41] This is true because *a*) they both have the same divine origin, though Scripture possesses this through the charism of inspiration, which is proper to it alone, and *b*) they merge into a unity to a certain extent. The ultimate reason for this is the fact that they both make the Word of God present in the Church; *c*) consequently, they both help men attain the same supernatural end. In connection with this emphasis of the unity of Scripture and Tradition, a kind of definition of these two realities is attempted. Only of Scripture is it affirmed that it *is* the speech (*locutio*) of God, consigned to writing. "Tradition, on the contrary, is only described functionally, by what it does: it mediates the word (*verbum*) of God, but 'is' not the word of God."[42] The next sentence distinguishes clearly the role of the bishops from the role of the apostles with regard to Tradition. Tradition was constituted by the apostles, but through their successors Tradition is only faithfully preserved, explained and made known.[43] Their function is one of conservation and service.

The next sentence is the one chosen by the Commission out of the seven proposed by the Pope during the final session of the Council. "Consequently it is not from Sacred Scripture alone that the Church draws her certainty about everything which has been revealed." There is question here of "certitude," not simply of "knowledge." When Scripture is not sufficiently clear and explicit, the Church can find in Tradition illumination that gives certitude. In his explanation of this addition to the general assembly, Archbishop Florit stated that the

[41] *Relatio* of Archbishop Florit in *Documenta*, 93.

[42] Ratzinger, "Dogmatische Konstitution über die göttliche Offenbarung," 525.

[43] *Relatio* of Archbishop Florit in *Documenta*, 136.

text does not imply that Tradition represents a quantitative addition to Scripture. The question of the "material sufficiency of Scripture" was deliberately left open by the Council. Ecumenically, the addition should not cause insurmountable problems. It is widely recognized by Protestant theology today that the certitude of faith is not derived from "scripture alone" and that Luther's *Sola Scriptura* cannot isolate Scripture from the history of the faith of the Church and the action of the Spirit in the Church.[44]

The following sentence could be more troublesome from the ecumenical point of view. It repeats Trent's formula that Scripture and Tradition "are to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of devotion and reverence."[45] However, this does not intend to be a complete description of the relation between Scripture and Tradition. In its context, "it is simply a confession of fidelity to the inviolability of dogma, the ecclesial form of faith."[46]

Article 10: Scripture, Tradition and Magisterium. The first paragraph explains the relation of Tradition and Scripture to the entire Church. The "one sacred deposit of the Word of God" formed by Scripture and Tradition has been entrusted to the whole Church. All the people of God in a unique union of faithful and pastors form the total subject which holds, professes and thus hands on the faith contained in the deposit of the Word of God. This represents an advance over previous documents, especially Vatican I and the encyclical *Humani Generis*, which only spoke of the relations of the Word of God to the

[44]Semmelroth in Semmelroth and Zerwick, *Vatikanum II über das Wort Gottes*, 26. Cf. Barth, "Conciliorum Tridentini et Vaticani I inhaerens vestigiis?", 518, and Baum, "Vatican II's Constitution on Revelation, History and Interpretation," 68.

[45]Cf. Barth's comments on this in Barth, "Conciliorum Tridentini et Vaticani I inhaerens vestigiis?", 518-519.

[46]Ratzinger, "Dogmatische Konstitution über die göttliche Offenbarung," 526. Cf. the historical background of the statement in Trent and in Saint Basil, explained by Ratzinger, "Dogmatische Konstitution über die göttliche Offenbarung," 526.

magisterium. It corrects a misunderstanding which would isolate the magisterium from the entire people of God in the role of conserving, professing and handing on the revealed deposit.

The second paragraph explains the special relation of the magisterium to the deposit of the Word of God. The magisterium alone has the function of authentically interpreting the Word of God in Scripture and Tradition. But to forestall a frequent misunderstanding of this interpretative function, the Council adds that this teaching office is not—as is often maintained—placed over the Word of God. The Word of God is a reality prior to the teaching office of the Church and stands over this office. The magisterial function of the Church is ministerial and its first service is to listen to the Word of God. The authority of the magisterium is not authority over the Word of God, to which it is bound, but authority in relation to the faithful, to whom the members of the magisterial college also belong. Furthermore, "the function of the *magisterium* is not to decide what the faithful are to believe, but rather to formulate accurately beliefs which already exist in the Church thanks to the apostolic witness, originally embodied in Scripture, and ever freshly understood through the living presence of the Spirit of Truth which Christ promised and bestowed upon his Church."[47]

Therefore, the three realities which have so often been separated from one another and opposed to one another really form a living unity. Between Scripture, Tradition and the teaching office of the Church there is no competition, but co-operation and coordination under the influence of the Holy Spirit who is their transcendent principle of operation. "One cannot stand without the others, and all together and each in its own way ... contribute effectively to the salvation of souls."

Conclusion to Chapter 2. From the ecumenical point of view, Chapter 2 has been called the most important chapter in *Dei Verbum.*

[47]Dulles, "The Constitution on Divine Revelation in Ecumenical Perspective," 224. Cf. the *relatio* of Archbishop Florit in *Documenta*, 94.

"Without attempting the impossible task of bridging the gap between Protestants and Catholics on the norms and channels of revelation, it succeeds in offering a very irenic and moderate statement of the Catholic position."[48] Most remarkable from this perspective is the convergence to be discovered between this chapter of *Dei Verbum* and the Report of the Fourth Meeting of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches held at Montreal in 1963. In substance, both conceive the relation between Scripture and Tradition as one of inseparability: Scripture not without Tradition, Tradition not without Scripture. Both Catholics and Protestants have progressed in understanding since the Reformation and Trent.[49] Catholics now see that Scripture and Tradition are two forms, different by nature, for the communication of revelation which together make present the Word of God. Protestant theologians admit that Scripture by itself, by the mere fact of its existence, cannot constitute the criterion of the true Tradition. But on both sides there is need of further reflection and dialogue concerning the criterion of the apostolic tradition in the Church and the role of the magisterium in relation to this criteriological problem.[50]

Chapter 3: The Inspiration and Interpretation of Scripture

After its treatment of Tradition and the relation between Scripture and Tradition, the Council proceeds to consecrate the next four Chapters (3-6) to Scripture. Chapter 3 briefly presents the teaching of the Church concerning the inspiration of Scripture, the truth of

[48]Dulles, "The Constitution on Divine Revelation in Ecumenical Perspective," 224-225.

[49]Jean-Louis Leuba, "La Tradition à Montréal et à Vatican II," in Dupuy, *La Révélation Divine* II, 473-485.

[50]Cf. Barth, "Conciliorum Tridentini et Vaticani I inhaerens vestigiis?", 517-519; Leuba, "La Tradition à Montréal et à Vatican II," 486-497; van Leeuwen, "The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation," 16-18.

Scripture and the principles of Catholic interpretation of Scripture. In other words, the theological character of Scripture is explained. Because of its inspired nature, the Bible is the especially qualified mediator of the truth of revelation. The title had originally contained the word "inerrancy" but the word was dropped in order to emphasize the positive values of the Bible, rather than the negative one of immunity from error.

Article 11: The Inspiration and Truth of Scripture. The first sentence connects this chapter with Chapter 1 on Revelation. The inspiring action of the Holy Spirit effected the preservation and written presentation in the world of what has been divinely revealed once and for all. Right from the beginning, therefore, we are told what to seek in the Bible: "all that which pertains to the object of revelation and that alone."[51]

The second sentence reproduces the traditional teaching concerning the inspiration of Scripture, the extension of inspiration to all the books and all their parts, and the canonical and sacred nature of these books because they have God as author[52] through inspiration and have been handed down as such to the Church.

The third sentence explains the activity of the human author under inspiration in a way that should dispel the widespread impression that inspiration is identified with mechanical inspiration and that the Church is committed to this obsolete mechanical view. In the text, "the transcendent activity of God is exactly coordinated to a human activity which it arouses, directs and envelops totally."[53] The men whom God chose and employed in composing the sacred books made use of their own powers and abilities. The result was that with God

[51]Pierre Grelot, "Commentaire du Chapitre III," in Dupuy, *La Révélation Divine* II, 360 (all translations from this source are the author's own).

[52]The word used in the Latin text is *auctor*, the general expression used since the patristic era. Perhaps a more exact translation would be: originator.

[53]Grelot, "Commentaire du Chapitre III," 363.

acting in and through them, but yet as authors in the proper sense, i.e., literary authors, they wrote everything God intended them to write. This description permits the Bible to be a book "which grew out of a particular religious and cultural context through divinely assisted human effort."[54]

The Council has reaffirmed the inspiration of Scripture on the dogmatic level, abstracting from all philosophical and psychological explanations of the fact. It does not make use of the terms "instrument" or "divine motion" as did the encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* in 1943, nor does it speak of God as "illuminating the mind" or "moving" the will as did Benedict XV in 1920. It neither denies nor affirms these further precisions, but reduces the doctrine to what is dogmatically essential. In non-technical language, the third statement does imply the idea of instrumental causality: men are "employed" by God and God "acts in them and through them." Therefore, the composition of the book has its first source in God and these books contain "all that he wanted and everything he wanted." However, contrary to the preparatory schema, "the text avoids formally attributing to God the quality of writer"[55] or literary author. The accent is placed on the full human activity in the composition of Scripture, and "everything which pertains to the literary author in the strict technical sense, is to be sought on the side of the human author."[56] This emphasis provides the basis for the later affirmation of the necessity of critical interpretation of Scripture. The Council's formulation invites and allows great freedom for renewed theological reflection on the goal, nature and manner of divine influence and human activity in the composition of Scripture. Perhaps there is need in the Catholic theology of inspiration to leave

[54]Dulles, "The Constitution on Divine Revelation in Ecumenical Perspective," 225-226.

[55]Grelot, "Commentaire du Chapitre III," 362.

[56]Aloys Grillmeier, "Dogmatische Konstitution über die göttliche Offenbarung: Kommentar zum III. Kapitel," in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche: Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil*, Band II, 545 (all translations from this source are the author's own).

more room for human limitations in a way that does not deny the true divine causality and yet does not make God responsible for human deficiencies either in the form or the content.

The second paragraph speaks of the truth of Scripture. Since on the basis of inspiration, "everything asserted by the inspired authors must be held to be asserted by the Holy Spirit," and is therefore the Word of God, "it follows that the books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching solidly, faithfully and without error that Truth which God wanted put into the sacred writings for the sake of our salvation."

From the development of the text it is clear that the Council intended to formulate here the traditional problem of the inerrancy of Scripture in a more positive and open manner. Rejecting the formulation of the first schema that inspiration "excludes any error in whatever manner, whether religious or profane" as well as that of the second draft which stated that Scripture is "free from all error whatever," the text affirms that "the books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching solidly, faithfully and without error that Truth which God wanted put into the sacred writings for the sake of our salvation."

The first observation to be made concerning this sentence is that biblical truth is related here to the Bible as a whole, not to the individual biblical authors. In the following article, the Constitution explicitates this idea: "Serious attention must be given to the content and unity of the whole of Scripture if the meaning of the sacred texts is to be worked out." In other words, "no one chapter, book, or author is to be read as if it alone were the Bible."[57] This does not mean that the Council denies inerrancy to the individual biblical authors. It abstains from expressing itself concerning this point. It takes a minimal position and leaves the rest to further theological discussion.[58]

[57]Dulles, "The Constitution on Divine Revelation in Ecumenical Perspective," 226.

[58]Norbert Lohfink, "Die Wahrheit der Bibel und die Geschichtlichkeit der Evangelien," *Orientierung* 29 (1965), 254.

The second observation on this sentence is that the Theological Commission explicitly stated that the word "teach" is to be understood in the sense of "affirm" or "assert." The Council again has adopted a minimal position and does not officially adopt a theory of inspiration in which the word "teach" is a key concept.[59]

The third and most important comment on this sentence refers to the final phrase: "the truth which God wanted put into the sacred writings for the sake of our salvation." The schema of Spring 1963 had spoken of the truth which the books of Scripture teach "without any error." At the third session on October 2, 1964, Cardinal König of Vienna protested against this formulation and quoted a list of historical errors to be found in the Bible. Both Cardinal König and Cardinal Meyer of Chicago forcefully maintained that the Bible taught the "truth of salvation" without error. The Theological Commission then reformulated the phrase to read: "All the books of Scripture with all their parts teach ... the truth of salvation faithfully, firmly, entirely and without error." Agreeing with the reservations of many Fathers of the Council, the Pope in his letter to the Commission expressed uneasiness at what might prove to be a premature and too decisive solution to the complicated problem of the extent of inerrancy. Many bishops feared that if they only spoke of the "truth of salvation," occasion might be given for the misinterpretation that the truth of the Bible was restricted to matters of faith and morals.[60] The Theological Commission had prepared a document assuring the bishops that "by the word *salutaris* (of salvation) it is in no way indicated that Sacred Scripture is not inspired in its entirety and is the Word of God.... This expression does not imply any material limitation of the truth of Scripture, but indicates its formal specification, which has to be

[59]E.g., Pierre Benoit, *La Prophétie* (Paris, 1947), 340-353; idem, "Note Complémentaire sur l'inspiration," *Revue Biblique* 63 (1956), 416-422.

[60]Certain theologians of the nineteenth century proposed the restriction of inerrancy and inspiration to matters of faith and morals. This theory was rejected by Leo XIII in the encyclical *Providentissimus Deus.*

taken account of in judging in what sense not only the truths of faith and morals and the facts connected with the history of salvation are true, but also all that is affirmed in Scripture."[61] However, to avoid all misinterpretation, the Commission agreed to omit the word "*salutaris*" and put in its place the relative clause: "which God wanted put into the sacred writings for the sake of our salvation."

This addition is not a mere play on words. It affirms what was intended by the previous draft but does it in a way that is not open to the misinterpretation that the Council was affirming two clearly distinguishable areas in Scripture: salvific statements which are free from error and other non-saving statements which could contain error because they are indifferent for salvation. Rather, the text indicates that like revelation, the fixation of revelation in Scripture is totally determined by the viewpoint of our salvation, no matter what the material content may be. Revelation and Scripture cannot communicate God's plan of salvation without touching upon many areas studied also in human sciences: anthropology, paleontology, and especially history. But it does this not from the point of view of the secular sciences, but from the point of view of our salvation.[62]

The Council here is primarily interested in reaffirming the fundamental truth, which had been lost sight of in much discussion concerning the inerrancy of Scripture, that the divine purpose in the inspiration of Scripture is the integral and accurate fixation of the truth God communicated in Christ for salvation. The affirmation of the Council makes it unnecessary to defend the exaggerated view that the biblical writers made no mistakes on any matter—even astronomy, biology, or secular history. "This larger and more flexible concept of inerrancy will permit Catholic exegetes to feel free to interpret the individual texts with complete honesty."[63]

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[61]Giovanni Caprile, "Trois Amendments au schéma sur la Révélation," in Dupuy, *La Révélation Divine* II, 678-679 (author's own translation).

[62]Grelot, "Commentaire du Chapitre III," 368.

[63]Dulles, "The Constitution on Divine Revelation in Ecumenical Perspective," 226.

The Council has not positively affirmed, but by its formulation has left the question open, whether Scripture contains affirmations which are not errors from the viewpoint of our salvation, but which are errors from the viewpoint of secular science.[64] The contrary encyclical teaching has been referred to in a footnote, but this teaching has not been made the object of a conciliar statement. This does not mean that theology can totally disregard the previous encyclical teaching, but the way is opened for placing this teaching in its proper context as the result of further instruction from exegetical investigation of Scripture. Perhaps the most likely theological starting point for an answer to this complicated question opened by the Council is that of P. Grelot as summarized by A. Grillmeier:

> In the fragile vessel of human language and human writings, God's Word communicates itself to us without falsification. God's intention is directed to the effective communication of his word of salvation in all its fullness. He guarantees this with his full authority. In this lies the proper meaning of inspiration, of the assistance of the Holy Spirit. In relation to the truth communicated without error 'for the sake of our salvation' all else has only a ministerial function. It is the medium or framework of the properly intended affirmation, and therefore only has a share in the inerrancy in so far as the service of the word of salvation demands.[65]

In conformity with the biblical notion of truth, the Council affirms that God communicates the truth of revelation "firmly" and "faithfully" in Scripture. As the guarantee of the permanency of the saving truth among us, Scripture is a witness to the covenant faithfulness of God to his people. In Scripture, we encounter the saving truth without error because of the covenant faithfulness of God. The truth and trustworthiness of God belong inseparably together.[66]

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[64]Zerwick in Semmelroth and Zerwick, *Vatikanum II über das Wort Gottes*, 33. Cf. Lohfink, "Die Wahrheit der Bibel und die Geschichtlichkeit der Evangelien," 255.

[65]Grillmeier, "Dogmatische Konstitution über die göttliche Offenbarung," 550. Cf. Pierre Grelot, *La Bible, Parole de Dieu* (Paris: Desclée, 1965).

[66]Grillmeier, "Dogmatische Konstitution über die göttliche Offenbarung," 548.

Article 12: Principles for the Interpretation of Scripture. Article eleven's emphasis on the full participation of true human authors in the composition of Scripture and on the truth which God wishes to communicate for our salvation leads to the question concerning the interpretation of Scripture. The Council reaffirms and develops the hermeneutical principles of *Divino Afflante Spiritu.* To discover what God wanted to communicate to us, "the interpreter should carefully investigate what meaning the sacred writers really intended, and what God wanted to manifest by means of their words." The first clause of the quotation will be developed in the second paragraph of the article which treats of the critical methods of biblical interpretation; the second clause prepares for the third paragraph which indicates theological rules for the interpretation of Scripture.

The theological goal of exegesis is to discover the truth which God has communicated for the sake of our salvation. But this truth is intimately connected with the meaning that the human authors intended to express.[67] Therefore, the first task of exegesis will be to use all the critical methods available for discovering the intention and meaning of the human authors. *a)* One way, "among others," is to study the "literary forms" used by the writers. "For truth is proposed and expressed in a variety of ways, depending on whether a text is history of one kind or another, or whether its form is that of prophecy, poetry, or some other type of speech." Recognition is given here to the fact that various historical forms are to be found in Scripture. Consequently, the relation of the presentation of the author to historical factuality will vary with the literary form. *b)* Investigation must be made of the situation and circumstances of the author's time and culture which conditioned his experience and apprehension of the realities he seeks to communicate and influenced the literary forms and the manner of presentation. Furthermore, the temporal and cultural milieu influenced the author's intention and meaning

[67]Grillmeier, "Dogmatische Konstitution über die göttliche Offenbarung," 552. For a different interpretation, see Lohfink, "Die Wahrheit der Bibel und die Geschichtlichkeit der Evangelien," 255.

through the medium of the customary ways of perceiving, speaking and narrating and of the forms of human intercourse at the time of the writer. Since every writer writes for his contemporaries, it is in function of his historical and cultural framework that his work is to be interpreted. In principle, the Constitution approves all legitimate methods employed by historical-critical exegesis for discovering the historically conditioned intention and meaning of the biblical authors. This is the necessary starting point toward discovering the truth God has communicated for our salvation and is itself a theological task.

A strong conciliar statement on this point was necessary in the face of opposition from a small but powerful group of theologians to all efforts to open up the Bible to scientific critical study. Despite the important encyclical of Pius XII (*Divino Afflante Spiritu*) commending the critical study of the Bible, a conservative opposition continued to attack Catholic biblical scholars. This Conciliar statement which defends the freedom of exegetes to work responsibly with all the tools of modern research is therefore of the greatest importance.

However, the conscientious application of the rules of scientific critical method does not suffice for an understanding of the Word of God. Therefore, the third paragraph treats of the theological rules for the interpretation of Scripture. Three points are emphasized: *a*) the general principle of theological interpretation; *b*) the role of exegetes in the Church; *c*) the role of the magisterium in matters of exegesis.

a) The general principle: "But, since Holy Scripture must be read and interpreted according to the same Spirit by whom it was written, the correct interpretation of the sacred text demands that the interpreter give no less diligent attention to the content and unity of the whole of Scripture, taking into account the living tradition of the whole Church and analogy of faith." The Council has here affirmed a hermeneutical principle that derives from the completely theological character of Scripture and its position in the Church and her tradition.

1. **The content and unity of the whole of Scripture:** This appeal to the content and unity of all of Scripture does not deny the proper character and unique contribution of each

book and the necessity of using all the means of biblical criticism. But standing in a tradition whose culminating point is Christ, each book under the inspiration of the Spirit takes its place in a greater organic whole. Therefore, there is need of complementing the historical analytic method of interpretation with the coordinating and synthesizing method which illuminates everything from the keystone which is Christ.

2. **The living tradition of the Church:** The newer hermeneutic has adopted a more positive attitude toward the significance of tradition for the interpretation of texts.[68] This is especially true of the "Sacred Scriptures" which are the expression of the "Word of God" which under the influence of the Spirit is lived and reactualized in the Church's life. By placing himself at the interior of this tradition, the exegete is in a position to understand the Word of God in Scripture from "within."
3. **The analogy of faith:** The unity of the revelation and the unity of Scripture which witnesses to it has a further consequence: there is a proportion and harmony between all the elements of revelation, and one element, when seen in relation to another, illuminates it. "Thus the originating individual statements of Scripture, for example, concerning Father, Son and Spirit, concerning the person and mission of Jesus, are to be viewed in relation to one another and placed in relation to the trinitarian and christological dogmas."[69]

The Theological Commission deliberately left open the question concerning the "fuller sense"[70] of Scripture. But the three theological

[68]Hans G. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, 2nd ed. (Tübingen: Mohr, 1960), 275ff.

[69]Grillmeier, "Dogmatische Konstitution über die göttliche Offenbarung," 556.

[70]The literal sense of a text in the modern sense is determined by the explicit intention of the inspired writer. But the design of God, who makes use of the

principles for the interpretation of Scripture just mentioned are closely connected with the problem and perhaps open the way for a more organic connection between the results of critical exegesis and the use of Scripture in theology.[71]

b) The role of exegetes in the Church: After having given exegetes the charter to use all the tools of modern research for the investigation of Scripture, the Council here points out that they exercise a specialized and necessary function in the Church's growing understanding and appropriation of the revealed reality. Though they cannot take the place of the "judgement of the Church" in its organic and hierarchized totality, they play an indispensable role in the process by which this judgement reaches its maturity. This is a correction of the one-sided stress of some theologians on the submission of scripture scholars to the teaching of the magisterium.

c) The role of the magisterium in matters of exegesis: The magisterium has the function of "guarding and interpreting the Word of God" authentically, yet exegetical research is not the specialty of the magisterium but of the exegete, and in this area the magisterium must listen that its judgement and comprehension may mature. Its mandate does permit it to intervene in exegetical matters, but not blindly or arbitrarily. "The relation between scientific exegesis and the teaching authority must be one of mutual listening."[72]

Article 13: The Condescension of God. In this concluding article, the Council returns to the basic idea that Scripture is the Word of God expressed in the words of man. Like its analogue, the

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human author, can transcend the explicit consciousness that the human author has of it. His text therefore can carry a more profound meaning which appears when one confronts it with the totality of the record of revelation—a fuller sense. Cf. Pierre Grelot, *Sens chrétien de l'Ancien Testament* (Tournai: Desclée, 1962), 449ff.

[71]Grillmeier, "Dogmatische Konstitution über die göttliche Offenbarung," 555.

[72]Dulles, "The Constitution on Divine Revelation in Ecumenical Perspective," 227.

Incarnation, this mystery of Scripture manifests the condescension of God which has its root in his love for men.

Conclusion to Chapter 3. Formerly, the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture were doctrines common to Protestants and Catholics. Today many Protestants deny the inerrancy of the Bible and either reject its divine inspiration or limit the extent of this inspiration. But perhaps "the doctrine of the final text opens up new possibilities of fruitful encounter with non-Fundamentalistic Protestants."[73]

The idea of inspiration is now formulated in a way to clearly exclude a narrow mechanical understanding of inspiration as comparable to dictation to a secretary. The formulation of biblical inerrancy is broad and flexible and does not oblige Catholics to maintain that the biblical writers made no mistakes on any matter. The chapter's defense of scientific, biblical scholarship will guarantee the continuation of the exchanges between Protestant and Catholic exegetes which have played a major role in the ecumenical movement. In all these ways, the Council has called attention to the human aspect of the divine-human mystery of the Word of God in the words of man. Perhaps some Protestants, who have long recognized this human element, might profitably reconsider the divine aspect which the Council has reaffirmed.

Chapter 4: The Old Testament

In this Chapter, the Constitution definitely separates itself from a modern tendency to neglect the Old Testament as a stage left far behind now that we possess the glory of Christ. As "Word of God" the Old Testament possesses a permanent significance. The Old Testament must be taken seriously by the Christian, because without the Old Testament, Jesus Christ and the New Testament are unintelligible. Ideas have no beginning and end, but the revelation of God in history is a reality only in the totality of what has taken place.

Article 14: The History of Salvation in the Old Testament.

[73]Dulles, "The Constitution on Divine Revelation in Ecumenical Perspective," 225.

Article fourteen speaks of the Old Testament first as an economy of salvation, then as the books in which the history is consigned as Word of God. In the first section, the main steps of the Old Testament economy of salvation are indicated. This economy is rooted in the love of God, has as its goal the salvation of the whole human race, and the means to this goal is the election of a particular people as the bearer of his revelation of promise. This act of election concretized itself in the preparatory covenant with Abraham and the solemn covenant with the people of Israel at Sinai through which God promised to be with his people in history and demanded their obedience. Through word and deed he revealed himself as the one true living God and caused them to experience his ways with men. The living Word of God through the prophets deepened and clarified this experience.

Finally, this unified series of revelatory and saving experiences announced, narrated and explained by God's living word found its written fixation as true Word of God in the books of the Old Testament. The permanent value of these books stems from the fact that they are the inspired Word of God.

Article 15: The Importance of the Old Testament for Christians. This article takes up again the distinction between the old economy of salvation and the books in which it is recorded and treats them primarily from a christological viewpoint. As economy of salvation, the Old Testament served the purpose of preparing for and announcing the coming of the universal redeemer and his messianic Kingdom and of indicating their meaning through a plethora of symbols, images, words and events which possess the function of types and figures of what is to come. The Scripture quotations indicate that the orientation of the Old Testament toward Christ was clearly understood by the early Church. But again the Council expressly refused to enter into the question of the "fuller sense."

The rest of the article treats of the permanent significance of the books of the Old Testament for Christians. These books still manifest today to all men who come in contact with them a knowledge of God and man and of God's ways with man. The Council cautions that some of the doctrines and precepts in the Old Testament are incomplete

and provisional. Though these things are useful for manifesting the pedagogy God used in educating his people, they cannot be directly used for our guidance. But the Council immediately lists five areas in which the Old Testament remains permanently valuable for Christians. The list is not a synthesis of Old Testament theology or spirituality, nor is it complete. It speaks neither of man's relations with his neighbors, nor of the cosmic activity of God, nor of the action of man in the world and on the world.[74] But the text does provide suggestions and a stimulus for further private study of the Old Testament.

Article 16: The Unity of the Two Testaments. This article treats of the relationship of the Old and New Testaments as a relationship of unity and mutual illumination. To express this, the Council adopts the formulation of Augustine: "The New Testament is hidden in the Old; the Old Testament is made manifest in the New." The Old Testament only finds its full meaning in the New Testament while at the same time the Old Testament illuminates the New Testament. The Protestant Old Testament exegete, G. von Rad, expressed the same idea: "The coming of Jesus Christ as a historical reality leaves the exegete no choice at all; he must interpret the Old Testament as pointing to Christ, whom he must understand in its light."

Conclusion to Chapter 4. This brief statement concerning the Old Testament does not raise any serious problems for ecumenical relations. "Protestants and Catholics are generally agreed that the Old Testament is an essential part of the Christian Bible and that it receives its full religious significance in the light of the New Testament fulfillment."[75]

Chapter 5: The New Testament

This chapter contains four articles. The first is concerned with all the writings of the New Testament (article seventeen). The two

[74]Luis Alonso-Schoekel, "Commentaire du Chapitre IV," in Dupuy, *La Révélation Divine* II, 395.

[75]Dulles, "The Constitution on Divine Revelation in Ecumenical Perspective," 227.

following treat of the apostolic origin and of the historicity of the Gospels (articles eighteen and nineteen). The final article is concerned with the other writings of the New Testament (article twenty).

Article 17: The Excellence of the New Testament. The first sentence affirms the efficacious presence through the writings of the New Testament of "the Word of God which is the power of God for the salvation of all who believe" (cf. Rom. 1:16). This had been expressed more clearly in the earlier draft which spoke of the Word of God being "efficaciously present" through the New Testament writings. But it is clear that the ambiguous "is set forth" (*presentatur*) of the final text is to be interpreted in the light of the phraseology of the previous draft because the Commission itself declared that the change was merely formal: "we explain the efficacy of the New Testament writings in simpler words."[76]

The basis of this efficacy of the writings is the incarnate reality and action of this Word in the Person of Jesus Christ. The text gives a brief outline of this event modeled on that given in Chapter 1, article four. No doubt the exegete will deplore the accommodated sense in which the Council applies Eph. 3:5-6 to the Person of Christ and his work.

The last sentence returns again to the active and permanent witness given to the reality of the Incarnate Word in the inspired writings of the New Testament. The excellence of the New Testament writings consists in the revealed content of this witness: the person and mystery of Jesus Christ.

Article 18: The Apostolic Origin of the Gospels. The article affirms the pre-eminence of the Gospels as the principal testimony to the life and doctrine of the Incarnate Word. The response of the Commission to a proposed amendment makes it clear that "life" here means the existence of Jesus in its totality, including the paschal mystery of his death and resurrection.[77]

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[76]*Documenta*, 127.

[77]Xavier Léon-Dufour, "Commentaire du Chapitre V," in Dupuy, *La Révélation Divine* II, 408 (all translations from this source are the author's own).

The important question of the apostolic origin of the Gospels is treated with care. Without entering into the problems of literary criticism and of the dates of the redaction of the Gospels, the Council affirms the broad apostolic origin of the Gospels on the basis of the firm and universal tradition in the Church that goes back to the second century. "The council does not determine more exactly in what way the Apostles stand at the origin of the Gospels. The Gospels contain the apostolic preaching, but the measure of the apostolic influence in the redaction of the Gospels is not indicated."[78] Against the background of this broad affirmation of the Council, exegetes are free to determine in what precise manner the individual Gospels are related to the apostles and who actually redacted them. "The real relation of a text to a man in the framework of a tradition is not to be confused with the literary composition in the strict modern sense."[79]

Article 19: The Relation of the Gospels to History. Next to the section concerning the relation between Scripture and Tradition, this article was the most debated and the most delicately phrased of the Constitution, for the question concerning the historicity of the Gospels is a key question and at the same time a very complicated and explosive one.[80] In the first schema, a condemnation had been pronounced against all who doubt the genuine and historical truth of the words and deeds of the Lord as they are narrated in the Gospels. N. Lohfink commented that if this text had not died, Catholic exegesis would have died.[81]

The first text of the mixed commission, drafted in the winter of

[78]Béda Rigaux, "Dogmatische Konstitution über die göttliche Offenbarung: Kommentar zum V. Kapitel," in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche: Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil*, Band II, 566 (author's own translation).

[79]Grelot, "La Constitution sur la Révélation," 243, note 1.

[80]Grelot, "La Constitution sur la Révélation," 100 and note 1, 110 and note 2. Also cf. Joseph Fitzmyer, "A Recent Roman Scriptural Controversy," *Theological Studies* 22 (1961), 426-444.

[81]Lohfink, "Die Wahrheit der Bibel und die Geschichtlichkeit der Evangelien," 256.

1962-1963, was less extreme. The section on the Gospels began: "Holy Mother Church has always firmly held ... that the four gospels hand on truthfully what Jesus really did and taught." This is practically the definitive text without the word "historicity." But a few lines later we find the ambiguous sentence: "The Gospels hand on to us true and faithful history."

The text of Spring 1964 was reformulated to state: "They hand on to us what is true and honest concerning Jesus." Furthermore, in dependence on the new instruction of the biblical commission which had recently appeared, a brief outline of the three stages of the formation of the Gospels was included. In the third redaction of the schema which resulted from the debate in the fall session of 1964, the section concerning the Gospels was practically unchanged. Only a brief and rather extraneous polemic against the Form Critical school of the 1920's was eliminated. This development brought the text into closer correspondence with the present state of exegesis.

However, a number of Council Fathers were not content with the clause stating that the Gospels "hand on to us what is true and honest concerning Jesus." One hundred fifty-eight Fathers wanted to strengthen the reference to history by amending the clause to: "what is true and honest concerning the history (*historia*) of Jesus" or "hand on to us truly historical (*historicam*) narration." Eighty-five petitioned the addition: "in such a way that, concerning the historicity of the facts, they always hand on objective truth."

The Commission reaffirmed that it wanted to avoid the words "history" and "historical" because of the ambiguity of these words in modern usage. Furthermore, it felt that the phrase "true and honest" sufficed for the purpose because "true" (*vera*) is applied to those things "whose affirmation agrees with the reality of the fact (*cum realitate facti*): for truth is *adaequatio rei et intellectus.*" "Honest" (*sincera*), however, complements "true" as the subjective element complementing the objective element.[82]

[82] *Documenta*, 172.

At this point the Pope made his third recommendation to the Theological Commission. He also did not think that the text as it stood sufficiently assured the historicity of the Gospels. He therefore asked, this time rather insistently, that *et sincera* be replaced by *seu historica fide digna.* The text would then affirm that the Gospels "hand on what is true, i.e., worthy of historical faith (historically credible)."

The Commission again refused to make the desired change because the word "historical" lent itself to equivocation. The one word can be translated by two different German words that have become technical expressions in critical circles: *historisch* and *geschichtlich.* The *historisch* reality is characterized by its facticity (i.e., its having happened in the past at a time and place that can be located) and its being open to verification by objective research. The *geschichtlich* reality is one that is present, having existential significance here and now for us, and for which there can be no verification apart from faithful participation.[83] Thus, the expression *fides historica* could be misunderstood in a Bultmannian sense which would in no way guarantee the actual occurrence of Gospel events.[84]

Therefore, the Commission decided to leave intact the clause affirming that the Gospels "hand on what is true and honest concerning Jesus." But the Commission met the recommendation of the Pope by making an addition to the first sentence of article nineteen after the word "Gospels:" "whose historicity the Church unhesitatingly affirms." The abstract concept "historicity" was to be preferred because it was not such a debated term in theological-exegetical literature as "history" and "historical." Actually, the new clause adds little to what the sentence already said: "Holy Mother Church has firmly and with absolute confidence held, and continues to hold, that the four Gospels

[83]Norman J. Young, *History and Existential Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969), 25.

[84]Giovanni Caprile, "Tre emendamenti allo schema sulla rivelazione," *La Civilta Cattolica* 117 (1966), 229.

... faithfully hand on what Jesus ... really (*reapse*) did and taught for their salvation...."

The question then arises: What is the precise nature of this historicity of the Gospels which the Council affirms in the first sentence of article twelve? In the context of the text's formation and of the rest of the article, "historicity" takes on the broad sense of having a genuine relation with Jesus of Nazareth, the Jesus of past history. But the precise relation of the Gospel narratives and sayings to Jesus of Nazareth must be determined more in detail by exegetical investigation of the history of the tradition and of the literary forms used.[85] Article twelve already gave recognition to the fact that various historical literary forms are used in Scripture and that the relation of a narrative to factual reality will vary with the literary form. The explanations given in the rest of this article concerning the three stages of the Gospel tradition and concerning the kerygmatic Gospel form make it evident that the Gospel method of recording history does not correspond to the methods of modern history writing. But what the Council is insisting upon here is that "the history of salvation related by the Gospels is rooted in facts which are accessible to us in different ways through the sources used by the evangelists,"[86] that the Gospel witness does bring us into contact with the person, words and deeds of Jesus, that the connection between the Gospel's and Jesus' actual doctrine and conduct must not be minimized.

The precise nature of this connection must be determined by exegetical study of the formation of the Gospel tradition. Following the 1964 Instruction of the Biblical Commission (which is therefore the best commentary to this section) but in a more compressed manner, the Council implicitly distinguishes three stages: 1) Jesus' teaching and actions "until the day he was taken up into heaven."; 2) The transmission of what Jesus said and did by his apostles after the

[85]Lohfink, "Die Wahrheit der Bibel und die Geschichtlichkeit der Evangelien," 256.

[86]Leon-Dufour, "Commentaire du Chapitre V," 430.

Ascension, a transmission made in the light of a clearer understanding of these words and deeds derived from the Resurrection appearances and the influence of the Holy Spirit; 3) The composition of the Gospels by the Evangelists. This work of the Evangelists is characterized by four types of activity: *a*) selection of what interested them from the oral and written material available to them; *b*) synthesis of the material as, for example, in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew; *c*) adaptation and application of the traditional material to the problems and circumstances of their local congregations; *d*) composition in the form of kerygma, i.e., proclamation of the Good News. This enumeration is concluded with the clause discussed previously which affirms that in all this activity the Evangelists "hand on to us what is true and honest concerning Jesus." Despite all transformations, adaptations, interpretations, and developments, there was no deformation but faithful explicitation. The intention of the Evangelists was that indicated by Luke in his prologue: to teach "the truth" and to give the reader full security "concerning those matters about which we have been instructed" (cf. Lk. 1:2-4). The word "truth" is placed in quotation marks in the text in order to refer to the Greek word *asphaleia* used by Luke, which means at the same time certainty and truth, or as the Theological Commission commented: "security in objective truth."[87]

Article 20: The Other Writings of the New Testament. This article brings the fifth chapter to a close by giving a brief description of the contributions of the remaining books of the New Testament. They confirm the Christ event; they explicitate and develop his true teaching; they proclaim the redemptive value of his action; they recount the origins of the Church; they announce the glorious consummation. All this was done under the influence of the presence of the Risen Lord and the guidance of His Spirit whose function is to lead the Church into the fullness of the truth revealed in the Christ event.

Conclusion to Chapter 5. In this chapter, the Council has given its approval to the use of the method of form criticism and the method

[87] *Documenta*, 172.

of tradition criticism in the study of the Gospels. This merely sanctions a practice that has been profitably used by Catholic exegetes for many years. But this official approval of exegetical work to determine the historical significance of the texts is of importance, both for the protection of Catholic exegetes who have been unjustly accused of dangerous innovations in the recent past,[88] and for the ecumenical dialogue. Abbot Butler of Downside Abbey, a New Testament scholar who is also a member of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, commented: "We do not want the childish comfort of averting our gaze from the truth, but a truly critical scholarship which will enable us to enter into dialogue with non-Catholic scholars."[89]

Chapter 6: Sacred Scripture in the Life of the Church

Lukas Vischer told the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches in January 1965 that this last chapter is perhaps the most important part of the Constitution.[90] Its purpose is more pastoral than doctrinal, though it does contain important theological affirmations concerning the relation between Scripture and the Church. The formulation of the chapter has been strongly influenced by a schema prepared by the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity under the title "On the Word of God."

Article 21: The Importance of Holy Scripture for the Church. Article twenty-one proposes three reasons for the Church's veneration of Scripture. *a*) The Church receives the bread of life, Jesus Christ, from the table of the Word as well as from the table of the Eucharist. "'Flesh' and 'Word' are the two ways in which the ... incarnate Word

[88]Cf. Fitzmyer, "A Recent Roman Scriptural Controversy."

[89]*La Documentation Catholique* 61 (1964), col. 1422.

[90]Antoine Wenger, *Vatican II: Chronique de la troisième session* (Paris: Éditions du Centurion, 1965), 156.

comes to us and becomes our 'bread'."[91] This unity of Word and Sacrament is manifested in a unique way in the liturgy. Since the time of Trent, Catholic theological reflection has tended to separate Word and Sacrament from one another and has underestimated the role of the Word in the Church. But the reality of revelation as a unity of word and deed possesses the same structure in its representation in the history of the Church through Word and Sacrament. The Council here contributes toward a correction of an all too sacramental concept of the Church. *b*) Scripture, together with Tradition, is the supreme norm of faith. Originally, Scripture was called "canon" because it was the normative measuring stick, the *norma normans* for the faith of the Church. Although the later official preaching of the Church is also a norm for the faith of the members of the Church, it is at the same time a *norma normata*, measured by Scripture interpreted in the Tradition.[92] The Council's statement points to the fact that Scripture is the objective rule of faith in a special way for two reasons: 1) because of the charism of inspiration, Scripture is formally the written Word of God, though it is not as immediately the Word of God as the actually resounding revelatory Word of God or as the substantial Word of God, the Incarnate Logos. Thus, there is an indirect identity between the Word of Scripture and the Word of God in so far as Scripture mediates, presents and allows us to encounter the actually resounding Word of God through the action of the Spirit. 2) Because it has been consigned to writing once and for all, it possesses the immutability and stability needed in a true norm. Therefore, Scripture can and must be the norm and nourishment for the preaching of the Church and for the whole Christian life. This is not meant in the sense that Scripture is merely a dead reference book concerning past facts and early Christian beliefs, but in the sense that when read in faith there occurs living encounter, dialogue and address between God and his children. *c*) The third reason for the Church's veneration of Scripture

[91]Joseph Ratzinger, "Dogmatische Konstitution über die göttliche Offenbarung: Kommentar zum VI. Kapitel," in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche: Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil*, Band II, 572 (author's own translation).

[92]Semmelroth in Semmelroth and Zerwick, *Vatikanum II über das Wort Gottes*, 53.

is the life-giving, i.e., grace-giving power of the biblical Word for the Church. "Scripture assures the communication of the Spirit of Christ to us: to the entire community of believers as well as to each one in particular."[93] In her believing, reading of, listening to, and meditation upon Scripture, the whole Church lives from and grows in the strength of the Word which proceeds from the mouth of God (Mt. 4:4).

Article 22: The Church and Bible Translations. If Scripture is so important for the life of the Church, translations must be prepared in all languages in order to make the word of Scripture as accessible as possible for all. Especially in this article does the *inhaerens vestigiis* of the prologue prove to be a "going forward." In reaction to Protestantism, the Counter-Reformation had actually led to the discouragement of translations into the vernacular and of the reading of the Bible. This narrow point of view is officially corrected here.

The following sentences betray an ecumenical inspiration. The Church is said to have always given a place of honor to both Eastern and Latin translations of the Bible. This is a corrective to the isolation and factual absolutizing of the Latin-Western portion of the Church. Both Eastern and Latin translations are elements of the Church's scriptural interpretation and therefore of its Tradition. However, since the original text has more authority and more weight than any translation, old or new, priority is to be given to translation from the original texts. Finally, the ecumenical openness of the Council is given a concrete application. The recommendation is made that this translation by a return to the original sources which bind both Catholic and non-Catholic Christians be made in common, for a common translation will make possible a common reading and a common understanding of the Word of God which is the source of a common faith.

Article 23: The Apostolic Task of Catholic Biblical Scholars. The next three articles form a unit. They treat of three areas of the Church's use of Scripture: exegetical interpretation of Scripture for

[93]Grillmeier, "Dogmatische Konstitution über die göttliche Offenbarung," 544-545.

pastoral use (article twenty-three), the role of Scripture in the study of theology (article twenty-four), and the religious reading of Scripture by all Christians (article twenty-five).

The article first emphasizes that the entire Church in all its members, as the Bride of the Incarnate Word, and therefore as possessing an inner relationship with Scripture, is involved in the continual effort to grow in the understanding of Scripture. This is also accomplished by a study of the Fathers and the ancient liturgies where the Scriptural understanding of the Church of the past is recorded.

However, in this effort to understand Scripture, the professional exegetes exercise a special function, intimately related to the pastoral concern of the Church to nourish faith and love of God through the service of the Word. The Council gives special emphasis to the present-day need of cooperative efforts between exegetes and systematic theologians to synthesize the results of scientific specialization in a way that will enable pastors to communicate the Scripture effectively as truth of salvation. The goal of scientific exegetical and theological labor is the service of the servants of the Word and the life of the Church. This pastoral emphasis should not be an occasion for the surrender of high scientific standards, but a reminder of the specific orientation of theological science.

The article concludes with a word of encouragement and praise for the exegetes and their work. It is to be read against the background of the accusations made against Catholic biblical scholars during the last ten years and during the Council itself.[94]

Article 24: The Importance of Scripture for Theology. Three images express the central role of Scripture in theology. *a*) Scripture is the permanent foundation on which theology rests. The contents of Scripture are the permanent starting point and support for all theological reflection. All theological labor must begin there and constantly return there.

[94]Cf. Fitzmyer, "A Recent Roman Scriptural Controversy."

Once again, the phrase "together with tradition" has been added. But as J. Leuba notes, this "together with" of Vatican II corresponds to the Protestant affirmation of "together with" at Montreal.[95] "That also for the Churches of the Reformation the *Sola Scriptura* in fact does not exclude but includes the unlocking of Scripture and the determination of its hermeneutical center through the confessional writings, should be a clear indication that ultimately Scripture only exists in some kind of 'together with' Tradition."[96]

b) A more organic image is added to the static image of foundation by calling Scripture the rejuvenating force of living theology. Unless dogmas and traditional statements are continually completed and rethought in the light of the totality of the biblical word, theological sclerosis and dimming of vision is the fate of all theology.

c) A third image that goes back to Leo XIII designates the study of Scripture as the soul of sacred theology. This certainly does not mean that theology should concentrate on Scripture alone and ignore the development that has taken place in the history of the Church. But it emphasizes the preeminence and determinative character of Scripture for all of theology since because of its inspiration it is the Word of God. This means that the biblical message should be studied, reflected upon and questioned in itself, that the themes be unfolded from the perspective of the Bible, that questions be raised in a fresh manner from the Bible, that Scripture have a determining role in the setting of themes and on the emphasis given to each theme in the systematic presentation. The unfolding of the tradition and dogmatic and speculative analysis can only follow from this.

The reference to Scripture as the Word of God in no way denies the fact that Scripture is only Word of God as and in the word of man nor that it includes an element of mediation. It is not equated here with

[95]Leuba, "La Tradition à Montréal et à Vatican II," 483.

[96]Ratzinger, "Dogmatische Konstitution über die göttliche Offenbarung," 576, with reference to Erich Dinkler, "Theologische Aufgaben der ökumenischen Arbeit Heute," *Ökumenische Rundschau* 14 (1965), 123ff.

the unmediated directness of the divine.[97] The Council's intention is to emphasize the unique importance of Scripture as the inspired record of revelation and thus as the basic form of "Tradition" for theology.

Finally, the article looks beyond theology in the strict sense and speaks of the ministry of the word, of catechesis and of all forms of instruction given within or outside the liturgy. The study of Scripture should be the soul of all of these.

Article 25: The Recommendation of the Reading of Scripture. This article draws the practical consequences of all that the Council has said concerning the unique function of Scripture in the Church and makes a pressing admonition that all members of the Church read and study Scripture in a prayerful way. Never before has the Church as clearly placed the Bible at the center of Christian existence as a fundamental form of Christian intercourse with God.

Understandably the admonition is first directed to priests and all other servants of the word in the Church. They must allow themselves to be formed by the Word of God through diligent meditative reading and study lest any of them become, in the words of Augustine, "an empty preacher of the word of God outwardly, who is not a listener to it inwardly."

But the admonition is then extended to all the faithful, especially but not exclusively to the members of religious communities, to learn by frequent reading of Scripture "the excelling knowledge of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 3:8). "For ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ." Perhaps the Council's recommendation of the meditative reading of Scripture is a pointer toward a solution to the pressing problem of daily meditation among religious.[98]

This contact with Scripture through which Christ becomes effective in us can occur in the liturgy which provides a living commentary on Scripture, in personal Scripture reading or in the framework and with

[97]Ratzinger, "Dogmatische Konstitution über die göttliche Offenbarung," 578.

[98]Semmelroth in Semmelroth and Zerwick, *Vatikanum II über das Wort Gottes*, 58.

the various aids of the Bible movement. But everywhere the goal is never mere intellectual enrichment, but personal dialogue in prayer with the Lord who encounters us through the text.

But since Scripture is the book of the Church and must be read in the spirit of the Church within the life of the Church, pastoral concern should lead the bishops to provide suitable aids for the proper understanding of this treasure.

The final section of the article calls for the preparation and distribution of editions of the Bible for non-Christians. In imitation of the Protestants, the Church here recognizes the missionary value and power of the Bible. "With this a new element has entered into the previously all too hierarchical-institutional concept of Mission: the trust in the self-active power of the Word, that of course can not and should not make the preaching of the Church superfluous but which as a part of the presence of Jesus Christ can carry it among the nations, far beyond the presence of the hierarchical Church."[99]

Article 26: Epilogue. This article is an epilogue to Chapter 6, but it also recalls the theme of the entire Constitution. It recalls the inseparable unity of both Word of God and Body of Christ, Word and Sacrament, as the media of the incarnate Word's active presence in the Church. But it returns also to the opening theme of the prologue, the Word of God in its fullness as the treasure of revelation which has been communicated to man that he might live. All the theological affirmations of this Constitution have this ultimate pastoral purpose: to be an instrument toward "a new surge of spiritual vitality from intensified veneration for God's word, which 'lasts forever' (Is. 40:8)."

Conclusion to Chapter 6. The ecumenical importance of this final chapter can hardly be overestimated. The strong affirmation of the unique position of Scripture in the life of the Church is a remarkable example of the progress made since Trent in the Catholic Church's

[99]Ratzinger, "Dogmatische Konstitution über die göttliche Offenbarung," 580.

understanding and expression of this reality from which it lives. "This text," commented O. Cullmann, "can affect the future more than any other conciliar text" because it places Scripture at the heart of theology and the Church's life.[100] "The presence of God in Scripture is expressed as strongly as has ever occurred even from the Protestant side."[101] "In this [chapter] there are declarations which bring us completely together in our common attitude toward the Bible."[102] Who can say where the deeper appreciation of this treasure by the Catholic Church and the common reading of Scripture, which the chapter encourages, will lead the Churches? The Word of God is not limited to the past. It is an event which occurs anew on the basis of the event of the past through the inspired Scriptures in the Church. The common hearing of this mysterious and inexhaustible Word of God in new circumstances can lead to a more profound understanding of what has been given once and for all and thus illuminate partial interpretations of the past from more inclusive perspectives. This the Churches can await in hopeful searching of the Scriptures, realizing that it can only come from God through a growth in the knowledge of Christ who calls to a unity of faith and its manifestation in love.

CONCLUSION TO THE COMMENTARY

The foundation and key to the other chapters of the Constitution and to the ecumenical hopes the Constitution inspires is the deepened understanding of revelation as primarily a vital interpersonal communion between God and man, as the living Word that the living God addresses to the living Church composed of living members. The following chapters merely draw the consequences from this foundation

[100]Peter Hebblethwaite, "The Coherence of the Council," *The Month* 35 (1966), 48.

[101]Oscar Cullmann, *Vatican Council II: The New Direction* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 86.

[102]Oscar Cullmann, "The Bible in the Council," in *Dialogue on the Way*, ed. George Lindbeck (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1965), 136.

for the reality of Tradition, for the inspiration, truth and function of Scripture, for the relationship between these two modes of transmission of this interpersonal communion. Furthermore, this understanding of revelation paved the way for a reconsideration by Catholic theologians of the relation between revelation and dogma. This has resulted in a position which is far less inflexible than Catholics or Protestants have presumed, and raises hopes for ecumenical progress along a road which had formerly appeared closed.[103] Finally, a sentence of the Decree on Ecumenism which has been called "the most revolutionary" passage of all the schemas of the Council[104] is a direct consequence of the idea of revelation in the first chapter of *Dei Verbum*, even though the Decree on Ecumenism was promulgated before *Dei Verbum*. There it is said that there is a hierarchy among the truths of Catholic teaching, according to their relation to the fundamentals of the Catholic faith (article eleven). But this is true because the object of revelation is one, the mystery of Christ, and therefore each of the particular truths in which this mystery expresses itself can and ought to be understood in its relation to this unique mystery.[105]

The Constitution on Revelation has not said all that could be said about revelation and its transmission, nor did it intend to do so.[106] It has been suggested that in documents such as the Pastoral

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[103]Avery Dulles, "Dogma as an Ecumenical Problem," *Theological Studies* 29 (1968), 397-416.

[104]Oscar Cullmann, "Comments on the Decree on Ecumenism," *The Ecumenical Review* 17 (1965), 94.

[105]de Lubac, "Commentaire du Chapitre I sur la Révélation," 291. See also Patrick O'Connell, "Hierarchy of Truths," in *Cardinal Bea Studies II: The Dublin Papers on Ecumenism*, ed. Pedro S. Achutegui (Manila: Loyola School of Theology, 1972), 83-115.

[106]"The view of revelation proposed in *Dei Verbum* is almost exclusively biblical. This again is a limitation. The Constitution says nothing about how revelation comes to non-Christians, who have no contact with the biblical religions. Nor does it take up the thorny question whether God continues to reveal himself

Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, there are hints of a more comprehensive view of revelation "with greater stress on the secular and cosmic dimensions."[107] However, it cannot be doubted that *Dei Verbum* makes a very real and magnificent advance in Catholic teaching and that it is one of the best and most unified documents produced by the Second Vatican Council.

through the experience of individuals, or the history of the Church, or the example of the Saints. On this last point the Constitution on the Church in its seventh chapter (art. 50, par. 2) is more explicit" (Avery Dulles, "The Constitution on Divine Revelation in Ecumenical Perspective," *American Ecclesiastical Review* 154 [1966], 230).

[107] Avery Dulles, *Revelation Theology:* A *History* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 157-158.