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## **An Introduction to the Constitution on Divine Revelation**

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# An Introduction to the Constitution on Divine Revelation

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JOSEPH J. SMITH, S.J.

**D** *EI VERBUM* is the second great dogmatic constitution of the second Vatican Council. *Lumen Gentium*, the constitution on the Church, was the first. And already these two constitutions are competing for theological honors from the pens of theologians. While the editors of *Herder Correspondence* affirm that "the high point of the Council, at least doctrinally and dogmatically, has already been reached and left behind with the passing and promulgation of this constitution (on the Church)"<sup>1</sup>; the editors of *Orientierung* declare without reserve: "With the promulgation of the dogmatic constitution concerning the divine Revelation, the Second Vatican Council has reached its theological high point."<sup>2</sup>

Reserving judgment on the truth of these affirmations, we can say that though the constitution on the Church does appear more central to the discussions of the Council, the constitution on Revelation is its foundation. Having interrogated herself concerning herself, the Church turned to explore the dimensions of the Good News which is her treasure, and which she must broadcast to the world. "The Church is conscious of possessing a message which comes to her from God and

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<sup>1</sup> "Constitution on the Church", *Herder Correspondence* 2 (Feb. 1965), p. 40.

<sup>2</sup> *Orientierung* 29 (Nov. 30, 1965), p. 254.

which must lead to God. All her life proceeds from this revelation which culminates in Christ. The meditation on this mystery of revelation will place in relief the very foundations of the mystery of the Church, of the people of God, of the hierarchy, and of the vocation to sanctity. At the same time the Church prepares herself to tell the world that she brings a religious view concerning the destiny of man, the view which God has in relation to humanity."<sup>3</sup>

#### PART I: THE PREPARATION OF THE TEXT

##### *Session I: 1962*

The original Schema 'On the sources of revelation' was presented for discussion at the first session of the council on Nov. 14, 1962. It soon became evident that the "text redacted according to scholastic methods and orientated toward the refutation of errors or of certain doctrines of the schools, was far from rallying the votes of many Fathers."<sup>4</sup> On the contrary it aroused powerful opposition from some of the most notable Cardinals at the council. Three points especially were emphasized by the adversaries of the schema.<sup>5</sup>

The first point pertained to 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 history at the interior of which the word provides the necessary commentary and explication. Further, in place of speaking of two sources of revelation, the adversaries of the schema thought it would be better to speak of the one source, the Word of God, which is transmitted through the closely united channels of Scripture and Tradition in the Church. Scripture as the crystallisation 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 co-

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<sup>3</sup> Mgr. Charue, A. M., "Le schema sur la Révélation", *La Documentation Catholique* 61 (1964), col. 1427.

<sup>4</sup> Wenger, A., *Vatican II: Première Session*. Paris: Éditions du Centurion, 1963, p. 102.

<sup>5</sup> Rouquette, R., "Bilan du Concile", *Études* 316 (1962), pp. 94-111.

relation in such a way that the 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 point concerned the manner in which the schema tended to definitively settle points which are still controverted among theologians. For example, the schema opted for the theory that the revelation is contained in part in Scripture and in part in Tradition. It would follow from this that certain articles of faith taught by the Church would be based on Tradition alone and in no way on Scripture. This is the manner in which the Council of Trent has been interpreted by many theologians. However, recent studies concerning Tradition have led many to different conclusions. The Council of Trent stated that the Good News was transmitted to us in Scripture and Tradition without settling the question whether Tradition carries doctrinal contents not contained in some way in Scripture. Further, the perspective of the Fathers has been rediscovered according to which Tradition is not a source of faith alongside of Scripture and independent of it, but rather a different mode of transmitting the same apostolic teaching that is contained in Scripture, which illuminates and interprets Scripture. For the Fathers and medieval theologians, Scripture read in the Church in the light of the Tradition contains the whole content of faith in one way or another. Today, many theologians insist that revelation is transmitted in substance totally in Scripture and totally in Tradition.<sup>6</sup> The adversaries of the schema insisted, therefore, that in line with the practise of previous councils, controverted questions such as this should not be settled by the council.

Further, on many delicate points the schema presented massive affirmations without nuances which closed the door to all further research. This was true concerning the nature of the inspiration of the sacred writers, the inerrancy of scripture in profane matters, the precise nature of the historicity

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<sup>6</sup> Congar, Y., *La Tradition et les traditions: Essai théologique*. Paris: Artheme Fayard, 1963, p. 168.

of the Gospels, the identity of the authors of the Gospels, the objectivity of the words attributed to Christ in the Gospels. Biblical scholars who were able to catch a glimpse of this first schema described it as a step backward of fifty years and a silent burial of Pius the Twelfth's famous encyclical on Holy Scripture (*Divino afflante Spiritu*).<sup>7</sup>

The third point emphasized by the opponents of the schema was its lack of conformity with the ecumenical spirit which animated John the 23rd. In an important intervention on Nov. 19th, Mgr. De Smedt, in the name of the Secretariate for unity, insisted that the ecumenical dialogue involves being concerned not only with a preoccupation for truth, but also with the way in which it is presented, so that it can be made comprehensible to others. Both sides must explain their faith clearly, objectively, and in a way that is psychologically acceptable and without engaging in controversy. According to the wishes of the Holy Father this method should be applied to the council. But in the judgment of the secretariate, the present schema has "grave faults from an ecumenical point of view: it would not encourage dialogue with catholics, or represent progress, but a retreat."

This judgment is corroborated by the initial reactions of Protestant observers. A. Outler writes: "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'."<sup>8</sup>

However, the schema also found convinced defenders, and the crisis threatened to become eternal, if after the general discussion the schema was taken up chapter by chapter. Therefore, on Nov. 20th an historic vote was taken. 1,368 voted to reject the schema; 822 voted to continue the discussion on the schema chapter by chapter. Since the two-thirds majority had not been attained, the minority would have imposed con-

<sup>7</sup> Grelot, P., "La constitution sur la Révélation", *Études* 324 (Jan. 1966), p. 101.

<sup>8</sup> Outler, A., "Scripture, Tradition and Ecumenism" in *Scripture and Ecumenism*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne Univ. Press, 1965, pp. 18-19.

tinued discussion on the majority. At this point, on Nov. 21, Pope John intervened, ratified the opinion of the majority and sent the schema to a newly formed mixed commission for a new elaboration. Oscar Cullmann observed that this date decided the orientation of the whole council.<sup>9</sup> Yves Congar declared at a conference in Rome, Sept. 30, 1963: "The date of Nov. 20, 1962 will be remembered in the 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 too little ecumenical and too greatly inspired by an anti-protestant catholicism."<sup>10</sup> The great majority of the universal episcopate clearly manifested that it refused to take a position of pure defense against error; that it judged there was no heresy threatening 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; that it wished to engage a true dialogue with non-catholics.

### *Session II: 1963*

The new mixed commission, under the joint leadership of Cardinal Ottaviani and Cardinal Bea, did not at first produce the results that were desired. It did not include among its members any exegete with a world wide reputation. And Father Yves Congar, who had just finished a comprehensive historical and theological study of Tradition<sup>11</sup>, was not called to participate in this first phase of the work, though he was admitted to the commission later. Rene Laurentin reports that under these conditions the commission could only arrive at a dull compromise. "Neither of the two tendencies was satisfied, at least on the first chapter: the one which posed the famous question of the 'two sources', and of the relation bet-

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<sup>9</sup> Cullmann, O., "Between Two Sessions of the Council: Experiences and Hopes of a Protestant Observer", *La Documentation Catholique* 60 (1963), col 483.

<sup>10</sup> Congar, Y., in *La Documentation catholique* 61 (1964), col. 1393.

<sup>11</sup> Congar, Y., *La Tradition et les traditions: Essai Historique*. Paris, 1960. *La Tradition et les traditions: Essai Theologique*. Paris, 1963.

ween Scripture and Tradition.”<sup>12</sup> This revised schema was distributed to the Fathers of the council, but was not submitted for debate. It was rarely mentioned, even in the gossip of Bar-jonah or the Secretariate for Promoting Christian Unity in the Via dei Corridori. Most thought that the schema was to be given a silent burial. But in his discourse closing the second session on Dec. 4, 1963, Paul the 6th demanded that the text in difficulty be reworked again. At the same time the Pope asked the Fathers to submit their observations on the schema in writing.

### *Session III: 1964*

The observations submitted by the Fathers were very important, and in April 1964, a sub-commission set to work to rewrite the text in the direction demanded. Laurentin reports that this time the work was serious, open, scientific and constructive. The opinions of the theological tendencies were transcended; the essential was disengaged and the dialogue opened the way to a real adjustment between the two tendencies. However, agreement was not reached by merely reducing the opinions to their common denominator. Rather, a return was made to the data of revelation, which the two schools had approached from different perspectives, and the narrowness of these perspectives was brought to light.

The change of the title of the schema from ‘The Sources of Revelation’ to ‘The divine Revelation’ is an indication of the transformation of the text. The first schema was above all a critical and apologetic discussion of the problems raised concerning Scripture and Tradition. The new redaction went deeper. Whereas the first chapter of the old schema had abruptly introduced a discussion of the ‘two sources’ of revelation, the new schema treats of the fact of revelation itself in the first chapter, of the consciousness that the primitive Church had that God had revealed Himself in Christ and that His Word was present, living and active in the Church<sup>13</sup>. Thus the

<sup>12</sup> Laurentin, R., *Bilan de la 3<sup>e</sup> session*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1965, p. 90.

<sup>13</sup> *La Documentation Catholique* 61 (1964) col. 1394.

first paragraphs of the original schema have been developed into one of the most important chapters in the Schema, giving a full treatment of the Word of God as the foundation of the primitive Church. Only after the first chapter has laid this foundation, does the second chapter proceed to treat of Scripture and Tradition which flow from the revelation as two channels rather than as 'two sources'. Consequently, the title of the chapter has been changed: no longer 'The Two Sources', but 'The Transmission of the Revelation'. The rest of the plan is unchanged from the first schema. The subsequent chapters treat of 'The Inspiration and Interpretation of Scripture', 'The Old Testament', 'The New Testament', 'Scripture in the Life of the Church'. But the text itself has not only been modified; often it has been completely rewritten,

This schema was approved by the commission on July 3rd, 1964 and sent to the Fathers of the Council a little before the third session. On one point unanimity had not been attained in the commission. A minority of 7 against a majority of 17 maintained that Scripture does not contain all the dogmatic truths even implicitly, and wished this to be stated in the schema. However, nothing is decided concerning this point in the schema one way or another.

Max Thurian, sub-prior of the protestant community of Taizé, and guest of the Secretariate for the Union of Christians declared: "The present schema represents the best possible accord between the different theological schools concerning the problems of revelation, of Scripture and of Tradition . . . Such as it is today, the conciliar text on Revelation offers a solid base for the ecumenical dialogue. It nourishes our profound optimism concerning the fruits of the council for the visible unity of Christians."<sup>14</sup>

This rejuvenated schema on divine revelation was introduced to the council for debate on September 30th, 1964. It was discussed chapter by chapter until October 6. The reception received by the new text was generally favorable. A minority sought to reopen the debate concerning the question

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* col. 1393-1394, note 3.



of the 'two sources' and their material extent. This attempt was without success. The majority of the Fathers agreed with Mgr. Florit of Florence, the spokesman for the majority on the commission, that this difficult question should be left open for theological investigation.

After the debate, there were relatively, few corrections to be made, and those which were made were judicious and homogeneous with the whole tenor of the schema.<sup>15</sup> The amendments were completed by the middle of October. The schema was redistributed on the 20th, 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, 1965, one of the first items on the agenda was the revised schema on Revelation. It was voted upon paragraph by paragraph from the 20th to the 23rd of September. All the paragraphs were approved in general by a majority of two-thirds. The schema was then sent back to the commission for revision according to the corrections and amendments expressed in the votes *juxta modum*.

Because of its doctrinal character, the Pope followed the work of the commission very closely as it was putting the definitive text in its final form. He became particularly uneasy concerning three points: the relation between Tradition and Scripture, the extent of inerrancy and the historicity of the Gospels. When he saw that others were also demanding precisions concerning the same points, he sent a letter to the commission through the Cardinal Secretary of State, dated October 18th, proposing three precisions concerning the points enumerated. The Pope did not impose any liberty of the commission and asked that his amendments be examined with benevolence but freely.<sup>16</sup> The commission did precisely that. As we shall see, it satisfied the fundamental intention of the Pope's suggestion in a way that manifested its freedom of action.

<sup>15</sup> Laurentin, R., *Op. cit.*, p. 113.

<sup>16</sup> Rouquette, R., "La quatrième session due concile", *Études* 323 (Dec. 1965), p. 681.

The final draft of the schema was submitted to the vote of the Fathers on October 29th. At the last minute the *Coetus internationalis Patrum* tried to create opposition to the Constitution, accusing it of Modernism. But they could only stir up 27 negative votes. The Schema was adopted in its totality by 2,081 affirmative votes. The final vote which took place just before the promulgation of the decree, in the course of the public session of November 18th was 2,350 in favor; 6 against.

When the fourth session began in September, 1966, one of the first items on the agenda was the revised schema on revelation. It was voted upon paragraph by paragraph from the 20th to the 23rd of September. All the paragraphs were approved by a majority of two-thirds. The schema was revised again taking account of the desires expressed in the votes *juxta modum*, and was again submitted to the vote of the Fathers on Oct. 29th. At the last minute the *Coetus internationalis Patrum* tried to create opposition to the decree, accusing it of Modernism. But they could only stir up 27 negative votes. The Schema was adopted in its totality by 2,081 affirmative votes. The final vote which took place just before the promulgation of the decree, in the course of the public session of November 18th was—2,350 in favor; 6 against.

#### PART II: A COMMENTARY

At the beginning of the council on October 11, 1962, Pope John the 23rd expressed the immediate goal that the Council was to attain at the interior of Catholicism. "The authentic doctrine of the Church should be exposed...according to the forms of expression used by modern thought. One thing is the substance of the ancient doctrine contained in the deposit of faith, another thing is the form in which it is clothed." He further stated that this formulation must also take account of the pastoral and ecumenical aspects of the church's doctrine.

Oscar Cullmann felt that it was this goal which gave a unique and characteristic stamp to this council in relation to all previous councils.<sup>17</sup> This time the problem of the transposition

<sup>17</sup> Cullmann, O., *Op. cit.*, col. 483.

of ancient christian truth into the forms of modern thought was to be resolved in a positive manner. The reaction to Modernism had been exclusively negative. *Humani Generis* in 1950 had as its goal to warn against excesses and exaggerations in the adaptation of dogma to modern thought. The goal of this council was to resolve this problem first in a positive way. In particular, this is the intention and perspective of the Constitution on divine Revelation: to give an irenic, positive, pastoral expression of revelation and of its transmission and presence in the life of the Church through Scripture and Tradition.

### 1. *Preface*

The introduction to the six chapters of the constitution emphasizes that the council is following in the footsteps of the Councils of Trent and Vatican I. However, it is clear that here the opposition between Reform and Counter-Reform has been surpassed, that the horizon of Vatican I, limited by its opposition to rationalism, has been transcended, and that a more personalistic and christocentric formulation has been attained. The goal is the restatement for modern man of the kerygma of St. John: "We announce to you the life eternal which dwelt with the Father and was made visible to us. What we have seen and heard we announce to you, so that you may have fellowship with us and our common fellowship be with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ." (I John 1, 2-3).

### *Chapter 1: Revelation Itself*

Chapter one, along with Chapter six, has been called the most significant of the chapters of 'Die Verbum'.<sup>18</sup> It is the most complete treatment of Revelation ever given in a magisterial document, though it makes no claim to be a complete treatise on revelation.

### 2. *Nature and Object of Revelation*

Three points receive special emphasis. (a) Revelation is God's personal manifestation of Himself and of the Mystery of His will to bring man into personal communion with Him-

<sup>18</sup> Lohfink, N., "Die Wahrheit der Bibel und die Geschichtlichkeit der Evangelien", *Orientierung* 29 (Nov. 30, 1965), p. 254.

self through Christ in the Spirit. Revelation, therefore, can never be understood as a communication of purely speculative truth. It is essentially salvific and personal. Its purpose is to create personal encounter with God, and it has not attained its goal until this communion has been established. This personal nature of the reality described in the bible imposed the use of the vocabulary of inter-personal relations on the council. This is an important acquisition over Vatican I and the original schema, and an important point for the dialogue with Protestants who have long been accustomed to speak of God's revelation of Himself in inter-personal categories. Revelation is God's initiative to establish dialogue and personal encounter with men, his invitation to personal communion. God does not communicate 'information'. He opens His 'heart' and discloses Himself to His friends. He solicits their response as the commencement of a saving relationship with Him.<sup>19</sup> "When men truly speak to one another, they do not merely communicate their thoughts, they manifest at the same time their personal dispositions. To commence a dialogue is to unveil a profound will, to come to an understanding in mutual respect; it is to already offer oneself for the collaboration of another... Between men, the word is that which permits them to manifest the secrets of their heart, and that which lays the foundation for all their fruitful exchanges. This is all the more true of God... For God to speak and to act are one... When God speaks to His people, He realises His alliance, and the people know that the Word is living and efficacious."<sup>20</sup>

(b) The second important point in this paragraph concerns the way in which this personal and salutary revelation takes place. This is the first time that a document of the magisterium has described the concrete means adopted by God to enter into personal relation with men.<sup>21</sup> The council affirms that this has been done through an intimate union of deeds and words. The deeds refer to all the salvific actions of God in history; to all the works of God which constitute

<sup>19</sup> Laurentin, R., *Op. cit.*, p. 91.

<sup>20</sup> Charue, A. M., *Op. cit.*, col. 1429.

<sup>21</sup> Latourelle, R., "La Révélation et sa transmission selon la constitution 'Die Verbum'", *Gregorianum* 47 (1966), p. 12.

the history of salvation: e.g. the events of the exodus, the establishment of the kingdom of Israel, the exile and captivity, the restoration, the Incarnation, life and actions, death and resurrection of Christ. The words refer to the words of Moses and the prophets interpreting the actions of God in history; the words of Christ interpreting his own actions; the words of the apostles, inspired witnesses and interpreters of the reality of Christ.

This union of deeds and words is a union of mutual dependence and service. God's salvific actions in history bear a meaning. They manifest the salvific plan and action of God. They confirm what is expressed by the words of the prophets. Thus the deliverance from Egypt manifests the intervention of the saving God and His salvation; it confirms the promise God made to Moses to save His people.<sup>22</sup> However, this emphasis on the revelation as the action of God in history does not underestimate the role of words. For the historical event frequently does not fully manifest its revelatory significance except in the light of a divinely communicated interpretation. Thus the event has need of the word to explicitate and proclaim the mystery contained there. Revelation is accomplished through history with the interpretation of the word, and communicates a type of knowledge which is essentially concrete. There is no room here for the abstract, intellectualistic representation of revelation as a collection of truths analogous to the theorems of geometry. Revelation is not a system of abstract propositions concerning God, but the doctrine comes to man first of all under the form of events which themselves bear a meaning in relation to God and his saving design which the words help to illuminate. 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 inadequate, and who even in his revelation remains veiled in obscurity, always transcending what we can think and say of Him.

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<sup>22</sup> Latourelle, R., *Théologie de la Révélation*. Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1963, pp. 363-382.

(c) Finally the council points to the Mediator and to the plenitude of this saving revelation through deed and word: the Person of Jesus Christ. He is the way to the knowledge of God and to the truth concerning the salvation of man. He is in His Person the fullness of the Truth He announces. This will be developed further in paragraph 4.

### 3. *The preparation for the revelation of the Gospel*

The personal revelation of God is a unity composed of progressive and interdependent stages; one design of God carried out in an historical process, leading to a unique term. Paragraph 3 describes the preparatory stages of this process. The first stage includes the revelation made through the uncreated Word in created reality, and present to all men of all times; the existence from the beginning of the intention of initiating the gratuitous personal communion with Himself; the special positive revelation of Himself to the first parents; the promise of redemption after their sin, and the continual concern of God to save all men who seek salvation through good works. The council speaks here in general terms. It was not the intention of the council to decide the literary genre of Genesis, the question of monogenism, nor the significance of Genesis 3, 15ff.<sup>23</sup>

The second stage is inaugurated by the new initiative of God to form a people of His own through the call of Abraham. This stage of special positive revelation coincides with the history of the chosen people. There through His saving deeds and the interpretative word of inspired men, God implanted the faith in Himself as the only living and true God, the guiding Father and the just Judge, and the hope for the promised redeemer.

### 4. *Christ, the personal plenitude of Revelation*

The final stage of God's personal revelation on earth is the Person of Jesus Christ, the eternal Word made man. He is the summit of the 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 mi-

<sup>23</sup> Lohfink, N., *Op. cit.*, p. 256.

racles, but specially by His death and glorious resurrection from the dead, finally by sending the Spirit of Truth, Jesus perfected the revelation by fulfilling it". Christ is the fullness of the revelation because here what is expressed (God), the mode of expression (the human reality of Christ), and the recipient of the revelation (Jesus as seeing God), have become one.<sup>24</sup> Here 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 way "to free us from sin and death and to resurrect us to life eternal"; And 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 of God to the world in the God-man.<sup>25</sup>

##### 5. *Acceptance of the revelation by faith.*

Mgr. Guano, member of the Commission for the apostolate of the laity, of the post-conciliar commission on the liturgy, and of the mixed commission concerning schema 13, pointed out at the third session: "The revealed Word of God is a Word of Truth, of life and of love; faith in the pregnant sense of the word is the full acceptance of the entire Word of God, by which the whole man obeys God, the Word, with love, humbly and joyously accepts the Truth which is announced to him concerning the mystery of God, as well as the precepts, the counsels, the promises, the friendship and finally the life of God."<sup>26</sup> It is to this full conception of faith that the council points by emphasizing that faith is an obedience "by which

<sup>24</sup> Rahner, K.-Vorgrimler, H., *Kleines theologisches Wörterbuch*. Freiburg: Herder, 1961, p. 268.

<sup>25</sup> Rahner, K., *Theological Investigations I*, Baltimore: Helicon, 1961, p. 49.

<sup>26</sup> *La Documentation Catholique* 61 (1964), col. 1401.

man freely commits himself totally to God." The fundamental form of faith is this integrally human surrender to and adhesion to the Person of God disclosing Himself in Christ. This is the action in which revelation reaches its goal and its completion; without which the dialogue initiated by God becomes a monologue; without which there is no personal encounter. This total affirmation of the revealing Person of God in Christ, which is the kernel of faith, articulates and manifests itself necessarily in the free assent to what God says, what He promises and what He commands, in the "full submission of intellect and will to the revealing God."

The final point emphasized in this paragraph is the necessary role of the Spirit and grace of God for faith. The response of man to the revelation of God is not a simple result of the activity of man. It is a gift of God. Revelation is a complex reality composed of the external manifestation in deed and word plus the interior illumination of the Spirit of Christ. Without the latter, the former would be without effect, but the latter is given in and through the former. It is this interior help of the Spirit and grace of Christ penetrating the heart of man that turns man from his satanic egoism toward God, enables him to perceive with the 'eyes of faith' the invitation of God, and implants an attraction in the heart for the new life which Christ holds out to him. Finally, when the revelation of God has been accepted in faith, it is the same Spirit who introduces man to an ever greater penetration in depth of the mysterious reality that has been communicated.

#### 6. *The revealed truths.*

In this paragraph the council reformulates teachings of the first Vatican Council concerning the object of revelation and its finality. The first point is that through revelation "God manifests and communicates Himself and the decrees of his will". Thus revelation is not merely the manifestation but also the communication of life and salvation. For this, continues the council, is the finality of revelation: "to share with man those divine treasure which totally transcend the understanding of the human mind", i.e. to share the divine life. Re-



velation has nothing to do with the satisfaction of man's curiosity.

Finally, against the background of modern atheism, the council reaffirms that God can be known with certainty from created reality by the light of human reason; it is through His revelation in Christ that what in itself is accessible to human reason "can be known by all men with ease, with solid certitude and with no trace of error."

*Chapter 2: The Transmission of the divine revelation.*

The revelation communicated once and for all in Jesus Christ is intended for all men of all ages. To bear Christ and His revelation to all men God planted the organism of the Church possessing Scripture and Tradition as her necessary instruments for this task. Chapter two clarifies the role and relation of these realities.

*7. The Apostles and their successors, Heralds of the Gospel.*

The revelation in Christ was a real communication of Himself in deed and word, a real 'handing over' of Himself in word, action and the Holy Spirit. This 'tradition' of Himself effected an organism for the faithful transmission of this mysterious heritage of reality, word and action to all generations. The Apostles formed the nucleus of this organism and were sent by Christ to transmit this saving reality in word and action. By their preaching of the kerygma, by their sacramental action through Baptism and the Eucharist, by their communication in word and deed of the norms of christian life, the apostles as living organs of the risen Christ handed on faithfully what they received from Christ and his inspiring Spirit.<sup>27</sup> Further, the apostles and other apostolic men, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, committed the message of salvation to writing. Thus the revelation has been transmitted by the Apostles in a double manner: first by Tradition, and subsequently by Scripture which itself is the written record of the Tradition of the Apostles. It is this Church of the

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<sup>27</sup> Dejaifve, G., *Révélation et Église*, *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 85 (1963), pp. 568f.

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 perpetuated 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, structures, and writings of the apostolic Church under the guidance of the Spirit, is the deposit and heritage handed over by the apostolic church to the church after it to be preserved, adapted and actualised.<sup>28</sup>

Finally, in the footsteps of St. Irenaeus, the paragraph explicitates that between the Apostolic and Post-apostolic Church there is a continuity in the living organs of transmission; that the Apostles left behind Bishops as their successors, handing over to them their magisterial function. This implies that the criterion of the authentic apostolic deposit and the instrument of its living presence is not scripture alone, but conjointly the guarantee of those who have received the mission of watching over it and of proclaiming it, and the assistance of the Spirit to fulfill this role. For the same Spirit which inspired the Scriptures continues to assist them.

The council concludes from all that has been said that both the Sacred Tradition which comes from the Apostles and is preserved in the Church through the successions of the Bishops and the Sacred Scriptures of both Testaments together form the mirror in which the pilgrim Church sees God.

#### 8. *The Holy Tradition*

Paragraph 8 develops more in detail, the nature and content of the Tradition. The noun 'Tradition' is used by the council in the active sense of transmission of the revelation. After evoking the scriptural basis for the necessity of preserving the heritage of the apostles until the end of time, the council indicates the content and extent of the Tradition. "What was handed on by the Apostles includes everything which contributes toward the holiness of life and increase in faith of the

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<sup>28</sup> Rahner, K., "Écriture et Tradition", *Mélanges Henri de Lubac* III, Paris: Aubier, 1964, p. 212.

people of God." In fact this means that the Church through Tradition "hands on to all generations all that she herself is, all that she believes." The Church transmits all this "in her teaching, life and worship". This makes it clear that the council is not merely speaking of a verbal or oral tradition, but of a real tradition through life and action and institutions of which the liturgy is a privileged expression. In the liturgy the Church proclaims the Word of God, relives the saving actions of Christ, conforms itself to her Lord present through His Spirit. In the sacrament is transmitted more than we can express or comprehend, the very reality of the christian mystery.

The Council then turns to the dynamic aspect of the Tradition. The Tradition from the Apostles in the Church is a living Tradition because it develops its implicit and hidden facets under the influence of the Spirit in contact with the realities of history: peoples, ideas, cultures, problems. The whole Church as the communion of all the faithful animated by the Spirit is the subject of this living Tradition and all according to their role in the Body of Christ contribute to the growth in understanding of the realities and the truths handed on in the life of the Church. The Church is the Mary of the history of the world preserving and contemplating all these things in her heart. She is the faithful Spouse of Christ possessing and experiencing the christian mystery in her faithful life and action. She possesses the preaching of those who, with the episcopate, have received the charisms of truth from the Spirit for this task. In all these ways the Church brings to explicit consciousness, elements which until then have been retained in the depths of faith and practise, rather than expressed, related and reflected upon. Thus Tradition is not a purely mechanical transmission of an inert deposit. It is the abiding, always actual, grace-inspired hearing of the reality of revelation as it speaks to the men of all times. It is clear that the ideas of Blondel find an echo here.

The final point emphasized in paragraph 8 is that "the wealth of this living tradition is poured into the practise and life of the believing and praying Church". For the Mystery

of Christ has been communicated not merely in doctrinal statements and in written texts but in the realities of the New Alliance experienced in believing life and action, in the living image impressed on the members of Christ. Because the Christian mystery was first of all a lived reality, of its very nature it cannot be captured in its fullness in a written text. There is infinitely more in the reality of the Eucharist celebrated and lived in the Church than in the testimonies to it contained in the New Testament; and the faithful learn more concerning the Eucharist in living it and living from it, than from texts and explanations. It is in the cultic experience of the presence of the Risen Lord in the gatherings of the primitive community that the whole dogmatic tree of the Church plunges its roots. Tradition as spoken of here by the council, i.e. as coextensive with the Christian life communicated since the Apostles in the Church, is the educative milieu in which Christians are formed, less by propositions and ideas, than by action and example, by participation in a way of doing and viewing things, which develops the Christian sense.<sup>29</sup>

It is through this living Tradition that "the entire canon of the sacred Books is made known to the Church", "not as a proper act of the Church fixing its own rule, but as a becoming conscious of that which in it attests directly to the apostolic Tradition."<sup>30</sup> Further, it is in the milieu of this Tradition that Scripture is fully understood and brought to life. For Scripture is not the Word of God in the fullest sense, until the Spirit vivifies the written word and speaks through it, unveiling its meaning in the Church. It is in the Church that God brings His written Word to life. As the council expresses it: "God continually speaks to the Spouse of His Son". In the mouth of the believing and praying Church, in the faithful life and action of the Spouse, the written Gospel becomes a living message through the vivifying presence of the Spirit. The living contact with the realities of the christian mystery,

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<sup>29</sup> Congar, Y., *La Tradition et la vie de l'Église*. Paris: Artheme Fayard, 1963, pp. 19-31.

<sup>30</sup> Grelot, P., "La Constitution sur la Révélation", *Études* 324 (Feb. 1966), p. 238.

constant conversion to Christ of the whole Church in the fidelity of Christian action, and the presence of the Spirit in the organic and hierarchized body of the Church, are the elements which make of Tradition the necessary norm for the understanding of Scripture.

*9. The mutual relation between Tradition and Scripture.*

In the present paragraph, the council explicates what was implied in what has just been said: the unity of Tradition and Scripture. Against a tendency that developed under the influence of the reformation and counter-reformation, the council stresses that there is no opposition between them; no separation or mutual independence. They are closely knit together and constantly enrich each other. They are interdependent elements which form an organic whole. This is true because: (a) They spring from the same source: the revelation in Christ; (b) they merge into a unity to a certain extent: for both express the same unique Mystery under a different form in such a way that Tradition gives the key to Scripture and Scripture nourishes and guards the purity of Tradition which conserves it; (c) they tend toward the same goal: the preservation of the Word of God in the Church for the salvation of men. The ultimate reason for the intimate unity of Scripture and Tradition is the fact that they both make the Word of God present in the Church. Scripture assures the purity of that Word; Tradition assures its plenitude. For "Sacred Scripture is the speech (*locutio*) of God, in as much as it is consigned to writing under the inspiration of the divine Spirit, while sacred Tradition takes the word (*verbum*) of God, entrusted by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit to the Apostles, and hands it on to their successors in its full purity, so that led by the light of the Spirit, they may in proclaiming it preserve this word of God faithfully, explain it, and make it more widely known."

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." The text had implied this already, but it was useful to say it explicitly to avoid a too material and too literal conception of the fundamental value of Scripture for faith. Thus when Scripture does not seem sufficiently clear and explicit, the Church can find in Tradition which preserves the word of God in its fullness (integre) illumination and certitude. "Thus Scripture and Tradition complement one another, less by quantitative addition than by mutual illumination."<sup>31</sup> Msgr. Florit of Florence when explaining the addition to the General Assembly made it clear that the text does not imply that Tradition represents a quantitative addition to Scripture,<sup>32</sup> Therefore since Tradition and Scripture preserve the revelation of Christ under two different forms and tend toward the same goal, the salvation of men, they are "to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of loyalty and reverence."

#### 10. *The relation of Tradition and Scripture with the Magisterium and the Church.*

This paragraph first treats of the relation of Tradition and Scripture to the entire Church, and then of their relation to the Magisterium of the Church. The "one sacred deposit of the word of God" formed by Tradition and Scripture has been entrusted to the entire Church. The whole People of God in a unique union of faithful and pastors is the subject which holds, practices, professes and thus hands on the faith contained in the deposit of the word of God. This affirmation of the role of the entire church in the preservation of the deposit of the Word of God represents an advance over previous documents, especially Vatican I and the encyclical *Humani Generis* which only spoke of the relations of Scripture and Tradition to the Magisterium of the Church.

The council proceeds to explain that it is the exclusive function of the living magisterium of the Church to authentically interpret the Word of God in Scripture and Tradition.

<sup>31</sup> Latourelle, R., "La Révélation et sa transmission selon la constitution 'Dei Verbum'", *Gregorianum* 47 (1966), p. 32.

<sup>32</sup> *Herder Correspondence* 3 (Feb. 1966), p. 43.

But to forestall a false interpretation of this doctrine, which is frequently made in Protestant circles, the council affirms clearly that "this teaching office is not above the word of God, but serves it, teaching only what has been handed on, listening to it devoutly, guarding it scrupulously and explaining it faithfully in accord with a divine commission and with the help of the Holy Spirit." Thus the Church considers herself the servant of the Word of God, not its mistress. This is the first time an official text has made such an affirmation, though it has always been implied in church teaching concerning the role of the magisterium. Individual theologians, however, have not always been as clear minded concerning this role.

The final sentence of this paragraph shows that God has effected a living synthesis between the three means he instituted for the nourishment and preservation of the faith of the Church. Between Scripture, Tradition and the Magisterium there is no competition, but co-operation and co-ordination under the influence of the Holy Spirit who is their transcendent principle of operation. The three are so closely linked that they are inseparable: "one cannot stand without the others, and all together and each one in its own way...contribute effectively to the salvation of souls."

This paragraph corrects a misplaced emphasis that some theologians had placed on the magisterium of the Church. It is not the normative norm—that is the Word of God. It is not its own source: it is submitted to the Word of God of the Apostolic Age. This does not eliminate all difference with Protestant theology. But it offers a base for ecumenical discussion at a time when Protestants are re-discovering the role of Tradition in the Church.<sup>33</sup> But as Fr. Congar notes: "In the opposition that remains between Protestants and us the most decisive and the most fundamental does not hinge on the conception of Scripture, but on that of the Church."<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> cf. Rodger, P. C. & Vischer, L. (ed.), *The Fourth World Council of Faith and Order*. London: S. C. M. Press, 1964, pp. 23-25; 50-61.

<sup>34</sup> Congar, Y., *La Tradition et la Vie de l'Église*. Paris: Artheme Fayard, 1963, p. 84.

*Chapter 3: The Inspiration and Interpretation of Scripture.*

*11. The Inspiration and Truth of Scripture*

This paragraph first reaffirms the clear doctrine of Trent and Vatican I concerning the fact of the inspiration of all of Scripture with all its parts. The council reaffirms the inspiration of Scripture on the dogmatic level, abstracting from all philosophical or psychological explanations of the fact. It leaves these to the investigation of theologians. 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 the XVth in 1920. It neither denies or affirms these further precisions, but reduces the doctrine to what is dogmatically essential: that God is the author; that God made use of men who used all their faculties freely; that he condescends to their weaknesses; that, as true human authors, they wrote all what He wished and only what he wished. Thus, both the human and the divine nature of the writings is brought to light, and the base is given for the necessity of a critical study of the Bible. As Dom Butler said at the third session: "What we need is not an infantile tranquility that is found by turning one's eyes from the truth, but an authentically critical exegesis which allows us to enter into 'dialogue' with non catholic exegetes."<sup>35</sup>

From this base, the council proceeded to speak of the truth of Scripture. (Note that the negative term 'inerrancy of Scripture' is not used.) "Therefore since 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." The first observation to be made concerning this sentence is that biblical truth is related here to the biblical books, not to the biblical authors. This does not mean that the council denies

<sup>35</sup> *La Documentation catholique* 61 (1964), col. 1422.



inerrancy to the biblical authors. But since the inerrancy of the individual authors is today a disputed problem, the council abstains from expressing itself concerning this point. It takes a minimal position and leaves the rest to further theological discussion.<sup>36</sup> Secondly, at the council it was explicitly stated that the word "teach" is to be understood in the sense of "affirm" or "assert". Thus the Council again has adopted a minimal position, and does not adopt a theory of inspiration proposed today in which the word "teach" is a key concept.

The third point to note in relation to this sentence is 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 Cardinal König of Vienna gave a famous intervention on October 2, 1964 in which he protested against this formulation and gave a list of historical errors to be found in the bible. Both Cardinal König and Cardinal Meyer of Chicago strongly insisted on saying that the bible taught "the truth of salvation" without error.<sup>37</sup> The 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." But the pope in his letter expressed his uneasiness at what might be a premature and too decisive solution of the complicated problem of the extent of inerrancy.<sup>38</sup> A relatively high number of Bishops agreed with him. As Grelot points out: "If they did speak of the 'truth of salvation' it was to be feared that some might restrict the teachings of the bible to matters only of faith and morals."<sup>39</sup> But the historical reality of God's design of salvation where our salvation has been accomplished enters only indirectly into this frame-

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<sup>36</sup> Lohfink, N., *Op. cit.*, p. 254.

<sup>37</sup> Laurentin, R., *Op. cit.*, pp. 105-106.

<sup>38</sup> Rouquette, R., "La quatrième session du concile", *Études* 323 (Dec. 1965), pp. 682-683.

<sup>39</sup> Certain theologians of the 19th Century proposed restricting inerrancy and inspiration to matters of faith and morals. This theory was explicitly rejected by Leo XIII in the encyclical *Providentissimus*.

work.”<sup>40</sup> To avoid all misinterpretation, the word ‘salutaris’ was omitted. In its place the relative clause: “which God wanted put into the Sacred writings for the sake of our salvation” was inserted to mark the point of view under which the Bible always places itself whenever it gives any teaching. “The bible doesn’t teach anything which is not determined by this specific point of view of our salvation. This point has great importance with regard to historical teaching. Human facts and events could well be the object of inspired teaching, but under the exclusive angle of their relation to the plan of salvation. This would significantly change the judgment one makes concerning ‘the historical genre of the bible’.”<sup>41</sup>

## 12. *How to interpret Scripture*

By emphasizing in paragraph 11 that the divine authorship of Scripture did not hinder but implied the free activity of the human writer’s faculties and capabilities, and therefore also of his limitations, the question is posed concerning the interpretation of scripture. To answer this question the council repeats in condensed form the teaching of the encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu*: “To see clearly what God wanted to communicate to us, the interpreter of sacred Scripture should carefully investigate what meaning the sacred writers really intended . . . by means of their words.” But to discover the sacred writers’ intentions, “attention should be given, among other things, to “literary forms”. For truth is set forth and expressed differently in texts which are variously historical, prophetic, poetic . . .” Note here the recognition of various types of history, and therefore various types of historical truth. The meaning of the sacred writer must be determined according to the conditions of the writers’ time and culture and according to the literary genres used at that time; according to the ways of thinking, of speaking, of narrating; the ways men had of dealing with one another at the time of the writer.

Yet the task of the interpreter cannot stop there. In order that a text be seen in its true import, this basic literal sense

<sup>40</sup> Grelot, P., “La Constitution sur la Révélation”, *Études* 324 (Feb. 1966), p. 239.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 240.

must be held up to the light which the totality of Scripture sheds upon it, keeping in mind the living tradition of the whole church and the analogy of faith, i.e. the proportion and harmony which exists between all the parts of God's revelation. Grelot notes that the theological commission deliberately refused to settle the question of the 'fuller sense'<sup>42</sup> of scripture, such as it has been posed in the last twenty years. "But the way is clearly open for a more profound study, which would permit an organic connection between the results of critical exegesis and the use of Scripture in theology."<sup>43</sup> Finally the council reaffirms that the interpretation of scripture is ultimately subject to the judgment of the Church, whose function it is to preserve and interpret the Word of God.

### 13. *The condescendence of God*

This last paragraph praises the condescendence of God manifested in Scripture. For to communicate with us in a way we could understand, He has expressed the divine words in human language, making them like human speech in all things; just as the eternal Word took on the weakness of human nature, becoming like us in all things.

### *Chapter 4: The Old Testament*

The constitution definitely breaks with a modern tendency to neglect the Old Testament as an imperfect attestation of certain truths more perfectly known in the New Testament; as a stage left far behind now that we possess the glory of Christ. 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 be-

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<sup>42</sup> 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, whose instrument the human author is, can transcend the explicit consciousness that the human writer has of it. Thus his text can carry a more profound meaning which appears when one confronts it with the totality of the revelation—a fuller sense. Cf. Grelot, P., *Sens chrétien de l'Ancien Testament*. Tournai: Desclée, 1962, pp. 449ff.

<sup>43</sup> Grelot, P., "La Constitution sur la Révélation", *Études* 324 (Feb. 1966) pp. 240-241.

ginning and end. But the revelation of God in history is a reality only in the totality of what has taken place.

#### 14. *The History of Salvation in the Old Testament*

What we must be familiar with above all is the history of salvation recorded in the Old Testament. It is an integral part of the economy of salvation consummated in Christ. "God has the initiative, God chooses a people, God speaks to the people through Moses and the prophets; God makes this people experience the ways by which He leads the world. God makes all of this become His own Word in the inspired books which make Him known to us. . . . This is the witness of the Old Testament."<sup>44</sup>

#### 15. *Importance of the Old Testament for Christians*

The economy of the Old Testament has a permanent value for those who believe in Christ because it was the preparation for Christ and for His messianic reign, announced through the prophets, and signified in many types and figures. Though the Old Testament "contains many things which are imperfect and temporary", it manifests the ways of the just and merciful God with men, the divine pedagogy leading men to Christ; it expresses a living sense of God, profound teaching concerning God, a wisdom concerning life, and a treasury of prayer as man's response to God, in which is hidden the mystery of salvation.

#### 16. *The Unity of the Two Testaments.*

This christological reading of the Old Testament is based on the fundamental principle of the unity of the Two Testaments, and has been the constant and unanimous tradition of the Church. It has a divine origin in Jesus who communicated to the Apostles, the understanding of Scripture. Christ founded a New Covenant, not by eliminating the Old, but by fulfilling it. Thus, all the books of the Old Testament "taken up into the proclamation of the Gospel, acquire and show forth their true meaning in the New Testament, and in turn they shed light on it and explain it." A protestant theologian expressed

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 241.

it this way: "The time of Advent has reached its fruition in Christmas. But Advent and Christmas belong together.... To eliminate the time of Advent, because we are in the time of Christ, is a sign that we have not understood what the time of Christ is."<sup>45</sup>

### *Chapter 5: The New Testament*

In this chapter on the New Testament, most of the points raise no difficulty, and need no explanation. The paragraph on the Historical character of the Gospels is the only one that will be treated at length.

#### *17. Excellence of the New Testament.*

The New Testament, as the inspired witness to the event and reception of the unique revelation in Jesus Christ possesses a unique significance for the Church. It is the very manifestation of the Mystery of Christ, hidden from former generations, "now revealed to the Holy Apostles and prophets in the Holy Spirit." (Eph. 3, 4-6).

#### *18. The Apostolic origin of the Gospels*

The principle testimony to the life and doctrine of the Incarnate Word are the Gospels. 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 2nd Century. On the basis of the apostolic preaching which fulfilled the commission of Christ, the apostles "themselves and apostolic men, under the inspiration of the divine Spirit, handed on to us in writing: the foundation of faith, namely, the fourfold Gospel." Against the background of this broad affirmation, exegetes are free to determine in what precise manner the individual Gospels are related to the Apostles. "The real relation of a text to a man in the framework of a

<sup>45</sup> Brunner, E., "Die Bedeutung des Alten Testaments für unseren Glauben", *Zwischen den Zeiten* 8 (1930), p. 48.

tradition, is not to be confused with the literary composition understood in the strict sense of the modern day."<sup>46</sup>

### 19. *The Historical Character of the Gospels*

Together with the section concerning the relations between Scripture and Tradition, this paragraph was the most debated and the most delicately phrased part 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.<sup>47</sup> 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 (*prouti narrantur*). N. Lohfink comments that if this text had not died, catholic exegesis would have died.<sup>48</sup>

The first text of the mixed commission drafted in the winter of 1962-63 was less extreme, but still betrayed the influence of its predecessor. The section on the Gospels began: "Holy Mother Church has always held firmly . . . . 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, this was compensated for by the sentence: "The Gospels hand on to us true and faithful history." In the text of Spring 1964, this was reformulated to state: "They hand on to us what is true and sincere concerning Jesus." Further, in dependence on the new instruction of the biblical commission which had recently appeared, a brief survey 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. Thus a development occurred which brought the

<sup>46</sup> Grelot P., *Op. cit.*, p. 243 note.

<sup>47</sup> Grelot, P., "La Constitution sur la Révélation", *Études* 324 (Jan. 1966), p. 100 and note 1; p. 110, note 2. Also cf. Fitzmyer, J., "A Recent Roman Scriptural Controversy", *Theological Studies* 22 (1961), 426-444.

<sup>48</sup> Lohfink, N., *Op. cit.*, p. 256.

text in closer correspondence with the present state of exegesis.

However, a rather large number of council Fathers expressed the desire to add the word 'historical' to this or that passage. This was also the third recommendation made by the pope to the theological commission. He did not think the text as it stood sufficiently assured the historicity of the Gospels. He therefore asked, this time rather insistently, that the text read: "They have always communicated to us what is true and historical concerning Jesus." However the theological commission refused to make the change in this form because the word 'historical' lent itself to equivocation. It could be translated by two different German words that have become technical expressions in critical circles: *historisch* and *geschichtlich*, and for many theologians the second word means precisely what is not *historisch*. But the commission met the recommendation by adopting an equivalent formulation using the word "historicity". The final text reads: "Holy Mother the Church has firmly and with absolute constancy held and continues to hold, that the four Gospels just named, whose historicity she unhesitatingly affirms, faithfully hand on what Jesus the Son of God actually did and taught during his life among men . . . until the day when he was taken up." This was overwhelmingly accepted in the vote of October 29th, 1965.

The text as it stands, however, does not settle the question to which the modern historian attaches so much importance: How is the Gospel witness historical? What is the precise nature of its historicity? What forms does this historicity take? Lohfink finds that in the context of the text's formation 'historicity' here has the broad sense of "having a genuine relation with the historical Jesus" or "having a relation to history". But the precise relation to history must be determined by exegetical investigation of the history of the tradition and the literary forms used."<sup>49</sup>

A general indication of the type of historicity involved is given by the constitution's use of the phrase: "The Gospels

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

faithfully hand on to us what Jesus actually did and taught." The precise nature of this fidelity must again be determined by the exegetes. The council itself makes it clear that the Apostles communicated to their hearers what Jesus said and did with that fuller understanding of these words and events that they possessed as a result of the easter experience and the illumination of the Spirit. Thus one of the foremost concerns at the stage of oral tradition was to bring out the true significance of the person, words and actions of Jesus for faith.

At the stage of the redaction of the Gospels, "the sacred authors wrote...selecting some things from the many which had been handled on by words of mouth or in writing, reducing some of them to a synthesis, explaining some things in view of the situation of their churches", thus effecting a certain faithful development of the tradition. They preserved "the form of proclamation", an essential element of the Gospel literary form. But they did all of this "in such a fashion that they communicated to us about Jesus what is true and sincere".

This conception of the literary work of the evangelists makes it clear that the Gospels are not scientific biographies or scientific histories concerning Jesus. It opens the way for research either on the level of Form Criticism, or on the level of the history of the redaction of the Gospels. For the sincerity and the truth of their witness leaves intact the question of the literary conventions and the procedures of composition to which they had recourse. To understand what they said, we must clearly see from what point of view they said it, and thus discover the intention of the author.<sup>50</sup>

This intention the constitution indicates in a general way by quoting the prologue of St. Luke's Gospel. "For their intention in writing was that either from their own memory and recollections, or from the witness of those who 'themselves from the beginning were eye-witnesses and ministers of the Word', we might know 'the truth' concerning those matters about which we have been instructed." (cf. Luke 1, 2-4).

<sup>50</sup> Grelot, P., "La Constitution sur la Révélation", *Études* 324 (Feb. 1966), p. 244.



Where the Council uses truth in quotation marks, Luke used the word *aspheleia*, which connotes at the same time security and objective truth, as Msgr. Dodewaard explained in introducing this text. At the same time he insisted that this does not mean the endorsement of a positivistic and fundamentalist conception of truth in history, which has at times been used to oppose the investigations of exegetes. "The didactic intention of the evangelists, the way in which they themselves conceive *sacred* history, the conventions that they adopt to construct their evocation of men and of events, necessarily remain the key to their text."<sup>51</sup>

## 20. *The other writings of the New Testament*

Under the influence of the Spirit of Christ, the other apostolic writings confirmed and developed the genuine doctrine of Christ, proclaimed the saving power of His divine work, and narrated the beginnings and growth of the Church.

### *Chapter 6: Sacred Scripture in the life of the Church.*

N. Lohfink considers this sixth Chapter on the role of Sacred Scripture in the concrete life of the Church to be, along with Chapter one, the most important chapter of the constitution.<sup>52</sup> Pastor Lukas Vischer told the central committee of the Ecumenical Council of Churches in January 1965 that this last chapter is perhaps the most important part of the text.<sup>53</sup> Certainly it was one of the least disputed of all, and is in substance, the same as the text prepared by the Secretariate for Unity on this subject. Pastorally it is of the greatest importance.

## 21. *Importance of Holy Scripture for the Church*

The council affirms that the Church has always venerated Scripture. Especially in the liturgy, the Church unceasingly nourishes herself with the bread of life from the table of the Word of God, as well as from the table of the Body of Christ.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*; cf. Laurentin, R., *Op. cit.*, pp. 106-111.

<sup>52</sup> Lohfink, N., *Op. cit.*, p. 254.

<sup>53</sup> Wenger, A., *Vatican II: Chronique de la troisième session*. Paris: Editions du centurion, 1965, p. 156.

The Scripture together with the Sacred Tradition have always been held to be the supreme rule of faith. For "as inspired by God and committed to writing once and for all, they impart the Word of God Himself without change, and make the voice of the Holy Spirit resound in the words of the prophets and Apostles." For the benefit of all pastors, the council draws the conclusion that "all ecclesiastical preaching should be nourished and directed by Sacred Scripture." It is in the Scriptures that the Father in heaven meets his children and speaks to them. The word of God in Scripture exists as the support and strength of the Church, "the food of the soul, the pure and lasting source of spiritual life". These words are directed to the whole Church, but as Dom Butler notes, they should give the pastors first, and then the faithful, a more biblical approach to preaching and the christian life. "If Pastors make the Bible the daily nourishment of their own spiritual life, then they will come to think in terms of the bible, their preaching will be transformed and they will be able to make the homily of the new liturgy an effective instrument."<sup>54</sup> For as the council repeats: "The Word of God is living and active" (Heb. 4, 12).

## 22. *Carefully prepared translations are recommended*

But the council is not thinking only of pastors. The bible is the church's book for all the faithful. Therefore the approach to it must be made as easy as possible for all. In this respect there is no doubt that a real effort must be made to overcome a defect of the past. As Laurentin observes, the Counter-reform, in reaction against Protestantism, had the tendency to discourage the reading of the bible. There hardly was a time when bible-reading was held so little in honor as in the 18th and 19th Centuries. Even the first schema was very reticent concerning the personal reading of the Bible, and appeared to admit it only for priests.<sup>55</sup> The new schema transcends this narrow point of view. In this chapter it recommends today more than ever the preparation of correct translations

<sup>54</sup> Butler, B. C., "The Vatican Council on Divine Revelation", *The Clergy Review* 50 (1965), p. 668.

<sup>55</sup> Laurentin, R., *Op. cit.*, pp. 111-112.

from the original languages. Further, in line with the decree on ecumenism, the wish is expressed that these translations be realised by a common effort with the separated brethren, when opportunity offers.

### 23. *The apostolic function of catholic theologians*

Perhaps the Protestant theologian Max Thurian has given the best interpretation of the intent of this paragraph when he says that here the work of the exegetes is given consideration and appreciated in all its importance; but that it is also placed in relation to the pastoral concern of the Church; the liberty of scientific research which is affirmed, ought not become a scandal for the faith of the people of God.<sup>56</sup> Exegetes must seek to expose the scriptures in such a way that the greatest number may be nourished by them; and they are encouraged to continue with all possible zeal, the work they have begun with such good results. This should be interpreted as an approbation of the critical methods used by catholic scholars. Scholars are urged "to work together in such a way that under the supervision of the magisterium, and with all the proper resources of scholarship, their study and interpretation of Scripture may enable the greatest possible number of the ministers of the word to offer the people of God a truly helpful nourishment in Sacred Scripture, to enlighten the mind, strengthen the will and inflame the hearts of men with the love of God." The editors of *Herder Correspondence* see here a clear allusion to the need for reform in present day preaching which will make it more authentically scriptural.<sup>57</sup>

### 24. *Importance of Scripture for Theology.*

The council reaffirms after Leo XIII that the study of Scripture should be the soul of Sacred Theology. Fortunately the time is past when it was possible to seek in the theologians of the past, the material to be taught, and then seek in Scripture convenient texts in favor of the thesis or conceptions.<sup>58</sup> This is the type of theology that led, for example, to such an

<sup>56</sup> *La Documentation catholique* 61 (1964), col. 1394.

<sup>57</sup> *Herder Correspondence* 3 (Feb. 1966), p. 42.

<sup>58</sup> Butler, B. C., *Op. cit.*, p. 668.

impoverishment of the notion of revelation in catholic theology. It is only by continually searching the scriptures that theology preserves the wholeness of the revelation and its own vitality and force.

The council then affirms that this holds true also for the ministry of the word: i.e. pastoral preaching, catechesis, and all christian instruction, in which the liturgical homily must hold an exalted place. Here again the Chapter contributes to the 'upgrading' of the Word of God, initiated by the liturgical constitution. It is easy to conclude how important this must be for the council and the Holy Spirit.

#### 25. *Recommendations for the reading of Scripture.*

In a most serious and imposing way, the council underlines here the absolute necessity for all clerics "and especially priests to hold fast to Scripture through diligent sacred reading and careful 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".

Further "all the christian faithful, especially Religious, are earnestly and especially urged to learn by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures the 'excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ' (Phil 3, 8)." For as St. Jerome expressed it: "To be ignorant of Scripture is to be ignorant of Christ." But since the word of Scripture is a divine word, it must not be read like an ordinary book. Prayer should always accompany the reading of Scripture. St. Ambrose insists that "we speak to Him when we pray; we listen to Him, when we read the divine oracles."

Laurentin notes that all this does not mean that the bible can be read in any way by anybody. The Bible is the Church's book and the Church must teach the faithful to read it, and initiate them in the understanding of this word written centuries ago, in order that they might find God there *today*. "A whole pedagogy of the Bible is necessary and the discrete directives of the text cannot be taken too seriously in this regard."<sup>59</sup> The Bishops have the obligation of instructing the

<sup>59</sup> Laurentin, R., *Op. cit.*, p. 112.

faithful in the correct use of scripture "especially of the New Testament through translations of the text and through truly sufficient explanations." But it must be remembered that the liturgy is the milieu par excellence for an introduction to the Word of God.

Congar calls the liturgy a living commentary on Scripture, which gives to Scripture its fullness of meaning. Here the texts of Scripture are placed in relation to one another and all are placed in relation to their center, which is Christ, and his paschal mystery.<sup>60</sup>

The constitution also mentions "instructions and other aids" for introducing to an understanding of the Bible. Grelot enumerates among these: Bible circles, the explanation of the bible in Catholic Action groups, etc.<sup>61</sup> One of the Bishops at the council said that it was scandalous that in the Catholic Church there was no equivalent to the 'British and Foreign Bible Society', and he suggested that an international biblical society be founded by the Vatican.<sup>62</sup>

## 26. *Epilogue*

The epilogue concludes with a wish that should be the wish of the whole Church: "In this way, therefore, through the reading and study of the sacred books, may the Word of God fulfill its course and be glorified (2 Thess 3, 1), and may the treasure of revelation entrusted to the Church fill more and more the hearts of men". One Father at the Council expressed the wish that this chapter on the role of Scripture in the Church be complemented by a chapter on the significance of Tradition in the life of the Church. This was legitimate wish and the needed complementation should be kept in mind; but it was not in the plan of the schema to study the importance of Tradition in the life of the Church in a separate Chapter. This had been implicated in previous chapters, especially in Chapter 2 concerning the Transmission of Revelation. And in the epi-

<sup>60</sup> Congar, Y., *La Tradition et les traditions. Essai Theologique*, p. 187.

<sup>61</sup> Grelot, P., *Op., cit.*, p. 246.

<sup>62</sup> *La Documentation catholique* 61 (1964), col. 1418.

logue the council adds that "from the frequent celebration of the mystery of the Eucharist, the life of the Church is strengthened."

*Conclusion:*

Max Thurian, sub-prior of the Protestant Community of Taizé welcomed this constitution as a "marvelous example" of how the Church has left behind the Tridentine theory of "two sources of revelation", in favor of a "more authentically traditional view of the problem of God's revelation to His people." A document "in which ecumenical influences had undoubtedly played a considerable part" had "ended the naive polemics between Protestants and Catholics about the place where the Church must look for revealed truth."

He went on to point out how closely the constitution approximated in fact to the view of tradition put forward at the Faith and Order Conference at Montreal in 1963 which affirmed that "we can speak of Christian tradition of which the content is the divine revelation and the gift which God made of Himself in Christ, his presence in the life of the Church."

He felt that the affirmations of the Council concerning Tradition in its relation to Scripture was a clarification of the ecumenical dialogue which "should now help Christians to deepen their loyalty to Sacred Scripture, the Word of God, understood in the light of Tradition."

But he added that this is only a beginning. "The problem remains of how to know what is this Church which interprets Scripture, what is the correct tradition. The first step has been taken towards a common understanding of the relation between Scripture and Tradition. But others must be taken to arrive at Unity. They are concerned with the concept of the Church, and the authority in the Church."<sup>63</sup>

The important thing is that the Constitution on Revelation has made the first step. "This text" said Professor Cullmann, "can affect the future more than any other conciliar text" because it places Scripture at the heart of theology and worship.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>63</sup> *Herder Correspondence* 3 (Feb. 1966), pp. 43-44.

<sup>64</sup> Hebblethwaite, P., "The Coherence of the Council", *The Month*

Yet it would be a mistake to look upon this constitution or any constitution of the Council, as a definitive end. Rather, it is a successful beginning. For it is an essential characteristic of the Pilgrim Church immersed in history, that she can never rest content with the past, but must always live in the present toward her future. Growth, change, reformation and development must always be in style if she is to be faithful to her Lord, the Lord of History, who leads the world and the Church in the world to a goal, through a process of growth and development. And this is true even of dogmatic statements. God has revealed Himself, but our statements concerning Him can never adequately grasp Him. They will never become false. But what they express must ever be expressed more profoundly, in fuller perspective, from a more adequate point of view. For the created Spirit, knowledge of the truth, and especially of the mysterious personal truth of revelation, is essentially a developing knowledge, a never perfected knowledge, even though the truth of an earlier "level" of perception will never become "false".<sup>65</sup> In particular, concerning the understanding of the reality of revelation and of its transmission and development, there are many points which still remain obscure and in need of further clarification,<sup>66</sup> despite the very real and magnificent advance in official expression as represented by the constitution *Dei Verbum*.

35 (Jan. 1966), p. 48.

<sup>65</sup> Galli, Mario von, "Brief aus Rom", *Orientierung* 29 (Nov. 30, 1965), pp. 250-251. Kung, H., *Konzil und Wiedervereinigung*, Vienna, 1960, pp. 143-145. Rahner, K., *Schriften zur Theologie* I, Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1954, pp. 54-55.

<sup>66</sup> "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 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." (A. Dulles, "The Constitution on Divine Revelation in Ecumenical Perspective", *American Ecclesiastical Review* CLIV (April, 1966), p. 230.)