

VATICAN II'S CONSTITUTION ON REVELATION: HISTORY AND INTERPRETATION

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A CONCILIAL document must be interpreted in the light of its historical development at the Council. The real meaning of a document becomes clear only when we compare it with the preceding drafts and study the conciliar discussion which produced this development. Only if one knows that certain sentences or phrases were accepted into the final text after a long discussion at the Council, can one assess the weight to be given to them. It is equally important to know what sentences or words have been deleted from the drafts after the various conciliar debates. Normally an argument from silence is not worth much. However, if one learns that the silence on an important point came about through the deletion of a significant passage, then the silence acquires a real message. There is hardly a conciliar document whose development at the Council is as important for the understanding of its content as the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation. We can distinguish four drafts and the final text.

HISTORY OF THE DOCUMENT

In the first session of the Council, in the fall of 1962, a draft entitled "On the Sources of Revelation" (*De fontibus revelationis*) was presented to the Council Fathers. The author of this draft was the preconciliar Theological Commission under the presidency of Cardinal Ottaviani. The conciliar debate on the sources of revelation, from November 14 to 20, and the outcome of this significant conflict on November 21 belong to the most important events of the entire Council.

A great number of cardinals and bishops criticized the draft as not in keeping with contemporary thought. They felt that the draft treated the relationship between Scripture and tradition in a one-sided, apologetic, Scholastic, and unecumenical manner. Also it restricted without justification the free research of Scripture scholars. The draft, therefore, did not fulfil the aim of the Council as proposed by Pope John.

On November 20 the first vote was taken. To reject the draft entirely, a two-thirds majority of negative votes would have been necessary. But, of 2,209 Fathers voting, only 1,368 favored the outright rejection of the document. In fact, 1,473 votes would have been necessary to reach the two-thirds majority of negative votes. The voting fell a hundred short. According to the statutes of the Council, therefore, the discussion of the draft should have continued. Then, on the next day, November 21, Pope John intervened. As president of the Council, he clearly saw that a draft which, though not rejected according to the conciliar statutes, was nonetheless basically unacceptable to sixty per cent of the Council Fathers, could not give rise to a fruitful discussion on the Council floor. He ordered that the draft be withdrawn and reworked by a mixed commission made up of bishops of the Theological Commission and of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, as well as a few Cardinals especially appointed for this task. The presidents of this new commission were Cardinals Ottaviani and Bea.

In March, 1963, this new commission produced a second draft entitled "On Divine Revelation" (*De divina revelatione*). This was an abridged and somewhat corrected version of the first schema. It was sent to the bishops of the entire world for their opinions. In the succeeding second session of the Council, in the fall of 1963, the schema did not come up for discussion. Then, at the end of this session, the Council Fathers were again asked to submit their remarks on this schema to the Theological Commission. On the basis of these episcopal observations, the Theological Commission worked out a new text, the third draft, in April, 1964. This draft, as we shall see, represented an entirely new approach to the subject. The final text was not to be substantially different from this third draft.

The third draft came up for discussion in the Council hall at the beginning of the third session, in the fall of 1964. The bishops approved of it in general. The suggestions proposed by the Fathers in the conciliar hall were then examined by the Theological Commission. At the end of this third session an improved text, the fourth draft, was ready for presentation to the Council. This fourth draft was submitted for voting in the fourth session of the Council, in the fall of 1965. This vote still allowed the presentation of *modi*, that is, of amendments

of particular words or sentences. After a careful consideration of these *modi*, a process which did not take place without some serious tensions, the fifth version was composed, submitted to the Council, and, through the vote of the entire assembly, approved as the final text. On November 18, 1965, the Pope, together with the bishops, promulgated the document as the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation.

The First Draft

We must briefly summarize the content of the first draft, in order to prepare for a better and deeper understanding of the final constitution. The draft, called "The Sources of Revelation," consisted of five chapters: (1) The Twofold Source of Revelation; (2) The Inspiration, Inerrancy, and Composition of Scripture; (3) The Old Testament; (4) The New Testament; (5) Holy Scripture in the Church.

Chapter 1 deals with the proclamation of the gospel by Jesus and the apostles chosen by Him. It then speaks of the handing-on of this gospel by the bishops, the successors of the apostles. The concept of revelation is not treated in this connection. Yet it becomes apparent from the context that revelation is here understood primarily and almost exclusively as divine teaching. Revelation is essentially doctrine.

The first chapter presents the traditioning of the gospel in the life of the Church in such a way that the Scriptures hardly seem necessary in this process. The Spirit at work in the Church and, above all, in the successors of the apostles guarantees the authentic traditioning of revelation. It is clearly stated that revelation is contained in two sources (*fons duplex* and *ambae fontes*): tradition and Bible. Scripture needs tradition in order to be clearly and fully understood. Yet there are truths in tradition which are not contained in Scripture. According to this first draft, the Council should establish definitively the existence of a constitutive tradition.

The first draft, therefore, intended to intervene in a Catholic controversy, to solve it on the side of an interpretation which, according to its formulation at least, has appeared rather late in the Catholic Church. We cannot here discuss this well-known controversy. It should be said, however, that the draft rejected not only the position of theologians who argue, with Tavard and Geiselmann, for the material

sufficiency of Holy Scripture, but also, and beyond this, the theological position that emphasizes the mutual dependence and coherence of Scripture and tradition and thus refuses to regard tradition as an independent source of faith.

We also note that the unfortunate manner of speaking about "the two sources of revelation" obscures the transcendence of the divine Word over the witness to this Word and its transmission in the Church. At this point the draft betrays a one-sided concept of revelation: revelation is equated with divine teaching.

Chapter 2 presents a Scholastic concept of biblical inspiration. Scriptural inspiration is to be understood in a univocal sense, as the divine action in the biblical author while he writes. Rejected is any attempt to understand the inspiration of Scripture in an analogous sense, either analogous to other, "natural" kinds of divine inspiration or analogous to the saving action of God in the entire believing community, in oral tradition, and in the authors of the texts used in the final redaction of the biblical books. Since the concept of inspiration is here derived from this miraculous action of God and separated from the total salvational action of God on behalf of the Church, inerrancy is defined as "absolute immunity of the entire sacred Scripture from error." In order to bring this maximal concept of inerrancy into harmony with the biblical reality, the draft argues, for apologetical reasons, that the biblical authors expressed themselves in the concepts and terminology of their time, and that this must be taken into account in interpreting their writings. In this connection the draft does not go as far as Pius XII's Encyclical *Divino afflante Spiritu*. The expression "literary forms" (*genera litteraria*) does not once appear in this draft.

Chapter 3 emphasizes the abiding authority of the Old Testament in the Church. The concern here is basically apologetical: the Old Testament is authoritative as proof for the new covenant instituted by Jesus. In accordance with this outlook, the Old Testament is understood entirely as the preparation for the gospel. What is not treated is the abiding value proper to the biblical books of the old covenant as part of the one Scripture, abiding in the Church of all ages and hence also today.

Chapter 4 insists that the Gospels truly reproduce the historical

events and words of Jesus. Every attempt of biblical scholars to weaken this historicity is condemned. The only concession granted is that the ancients had an understanding of history and historical records which is different from ours. The draft condemned "the errors" which deny or weaken "in whatever manner or for whatever reason" the true historical and objective truth of the events in Jesus' life and the authenticity of His words, at least according to their content. It was the clear intention of this chapter to prohibit the advance of modern biblical scholarship.

Chapter 5 dealt with the Bible in the Church. Again the concern was apologetical and defensive. The Vulgate was once more declared an authentic version of Scripture: it enjoys the authority of tradition (*traditionis auctoritate pollere dicenda*). Since the Church's magisterium is the "proximate norm of belief" (*norma proxima credendi*), the laity should read the Bible only if it is equipped with adequate notes. Catholic exegetes must remain faithful to the Church's teaching office and especially to the norms promulgated by the Holy See. Theology, whose soul is Holy Scripture, has the supreme task of showing how the teaching of the Church and that of Scripture are in harmony with one another.

The Second Draft

For a better understanding of the development of the Constitution, we must briefly present the second draft amended by the Mixed Commission. The entire task of this Commission was to correct the apparent deficiencies of the first draft, deficiencies that were regarded as a hindrance to the renewal of the Church. The Mixed Commission did not have the authority to rework the entire draft and to give it a new theological approach. Its work consisted essentially in deleting texts from the first draft.

The second draft, entitled "On Divine Revelation," consisted of a prologue and five chapters: (1) The Revealed Word of God; (2) The Divine Inspiration and Interpretation of Sacred Scripture; (3) The Old Testament; (4) The New Testament; (5) The Use of Scripture in the Church.

The Prologue is new. 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 explanations show that the old restrictive concept of revelation, namely, revelation as doctrine, is still presupposed. For example, the deeds of Christ are considered only as signs of revelation. They are not themselves revelation; they merely confirm the revealed teaching set forth by Jesus. One important new theme does appear in the Prologue, a theme that was to be amplified in the subsequent drafts and find expression again and again in other conciliar documents. God's revelation communicating salvation did not begin with Abraham: from creation on, "from the very beginning," God has never left men without a sign of Himself nor without His help.

The corrected chapter 1 has been drastically shortened. To give a deeper dimension to the problem of Scripture and tradition, the quotation from Trent is introduced according to which the gospel is the "one source of all salutary truth and discipline of life" (*fons omnis et salutaris veritatis et morum disciplinae*). Since the gospel as source is here regarded as superior to the modes of its transmission, this sentence was avoided in the first draft. In the corrected chapter, moreover, the participation of Scripture in the mediation of revelation is significantly enlarged. The text now states that the apostles carried out their divinely-given mission to spread the gospel in the power of the Spirit through writing and through preaching. The Word of God written and traditioned (*verbum Dei scriptum et traditum*) constitutes the one deposit of faith (*depositum fidei*) from which the Church derives all her truth.

Concerning the relationship of Scripture and tradition, the text now states that they are ordered towards one another. Since both come from a single source, the gospel, and since both, in a certain sense, blend in the life of the Church and have the one aim of bringing men into saving communion with God, Scripture and tradition are accepted by the faithful "with equal love and reverence" (*pari pietatis affectu ac reverentia*). Thus the text tries to give a clearer meaning to this expression of the Council of Trent.

The position of the first draft is thus clearly rejected. The question remains open: the existence of a constitutive tradition is neither affirmed nor denied. Yet it should be noted that the new text describes the close relationship and inner connection of Scripture and tradition

in such a way that the basis for a constitutive tradition becomes very slender. In order to leave the question open, the phrase which says of Scripture and tradition that "the one is not extraneous to the other" (*altera alteri extranea non est*) will be deleted in the subsequent drafts.

The neutrality on this question which the second draft professes remains to the end the position of the Council. Yet one must not forget that this neutrality, achieved at the first session of the Council, actually has a positive meaning, for it declines to make the two-source theory (*partim-partim*) the Church's official teaching. Since this is a shift of the theological perspective in which the problem is seen, the Council is nonetheless able to make some new affirmations concerning this question.

Chapter 2 of the second draft is also drastically shortened. All that is said on biblical inspiration is that the Church confesses Scripture as the inspired Word of God and thus acknowledges God as the author of the Bible. The composers and writers of Scripture, through whom God has worked, remained so free in the disposal of their rational faculties that they must also be regarded as true authors. No further development of this teaching is suggested. On account of this divine inspiration, Scripture is inerrant. The formulation used here is weaker than the original: the Bible is "free from all error" (*ab omni errore immunis*).

The corrected chapter 3, on the Old Testament, is the place where a deeper concept of revelation is first inserted into the conciliar document. This concept will be developed in the later drafts in a special chapter. Chapter 3 distinguishes clearly between God's self-revelation in His action and word in Israel and the Spirit-inspired record of these events in the writings of the Old Testament. This attempt to overcome the concept of revelation as teaching in favor of a concept of revelation as personal self-communication in history represents the important turning point in the development of the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation.

We note, moreover, that the theme, already mentioned above, according to which God, from creation on, cared for the salvation of men is again affirmed in this third chapter.

The corrected chapter 4 is greatly shortened. The sentences in

which all attempts to reject or weaken the historicity of the Gospels are condemned have been eliminated. The historicity of the Gospels in general is clearly confirmed. A sentence appears whose core remains in the final version: the accounts of the Gospels are often reported "in the form of a proclamation" (*in forma praeconii*), that is, as kerygma.

The corrected chapter 5, on the Bible in the Church, was changed into a positive statement. Scripture is recommended unreservedly to all Christians as necessary for the spiritual life. We read a new sentence in which the Word of God is understood as God's saving action in the Church—a doctrine that will be developed further in the subsequent drafts. Already in the second draft it is stated that in Scripture God encounters His children and speaks with them, and that this speaking is in power and becomes the source of the Church's life.

The Relatio to the Third Draft

As already pointed out, the third schema represents a fresh reworking of the second draft. This third draft is not much different from the final text of the Constitution. After the conciliar debate on the third draft, only a few changes were introduced (draft 4), and the examination of the *modi* did not introduce any basic alterations into the text.

The new text, that is, the third draft, which was to be discussed by the Council Fathers at the third session, was explained and defended in a *relatio* prepared by the Theological Commission and read to the assembly by Archbishop Florit. After a few paragraphs dealing with the history of the schema, the *relatio* reports that a new chapter has been introduced in the draft, namely, chapter 1, on revelation itself. This is a revision of the Prologue of the second draft. The *relatio* reports that the bishops, in their remarks to the Commission, had expressed the wish that a deeper concept of revelation be made the foundation of the entire document.

Revelation, the *relatio* goes on to say, is "theocentric," that is, God reveals Himself. It must be made clear that revelation cannot be equated with the communication of divine teaching. Revelation is "historical," that is, it takes place in history. God Himself intervenes in history to save man. This saving action of God achieves its full power only through His Word, which gives meaning to the action

and renders witness to it. Revelation has thus a "sacramental" structure: it operates in the unity of action and word. The *relatio* distinguishes very clearly, though in an unusual terminology, between the "primary object" of revelation, namely, God as disclosing Himself in saving act and prophetic Word in history, and the "secondary object" of revelation, namely, the Word of God understood as the testimony through which God's self-disclosure is mediated to us in power. It is expressly stated that this witness to truth is not exhausted in the order of knowledge and understanding. "Since God becomes for us in Christ brother and mediator, this truth is in no way exhausted in the intellectual order; what is, in fact, demanded is that in and through Christ this truth becomes action through communion with the Most Holy Trinity. This is really an interpersonal communion." Salvational truth mediates interpersonal communion. The authors of the Constitution, the Theological Commission, were conscious of the fact, and did not conceal it from the Council Fathers, that the understanding of revelation proposed by them would lead to a new theological epistemology and a new understanding of Christian truth.

In the same first chapter, the *relatio* goes on to state, Jesus Christ is set forth as the culminating point of God's self-revelation. Revelation comprises not only the words of Jesus, but His entire life—above all, His saving action. Revelation happens in the total person of Christ (*in tota persona Christi*). Jesus Christ, the Son of God made flesh, is at the same time the "supreme act" (*summus actus*) of revelation and its "principal object" (*objectum praecipuum*).

What the *relatio* has to say concerning the new second chapter (chapter 1 in the previous drafts) is important for us. Already the new title is significant: "The Transmission of Divine Revelation." Already the title distinguishes very clearly between the transcendent revelation of God in history and the transmission of this revelation in the life of the believing community.

On the basis of the bishops' remarks, chapter 2 now presents the apostolic transmission of revelation in the Church as basically twofold (*biformis*), namely, both as oral preaching and religious practice and as the written word of Scripture. How are these two forms of apostolic transmission related to one another? In a terminology which is perhaps not quite satisfactory, the *relatio* explains that tradition and Scripture

are identical "qualitatively": both are the Word of God; in both God communicates Himself to men to form them into His people. The question is advisedly left open whether this identity is also "quantitative," that is, whether the teaching of the Scriptures is coextensive with the preaching of the apostles.

The *relatio* further explains that in the revision the concept of tradition, on the basis of the bishops' remarks, has been deepened. Tradition is not to be equated with doctrinal tradition. Tradition comprises the entire life of the community; it is thus concrete and dynamic. The influence of Yves Congar's writings is clearly apparent here. In this wider sense the apostolic tradition is the supreme norm of the entire life of the Church in subsequent ages. But since the *relatio* and, as we shall see, the final Constitution presuppose that this apostolic tradition, guarded by the Holy Spirit and stirred by the Scriptures, is essentially continued in the Church, it is not clear how one can critically apply this supreme norm to the life of the Church of subsequent centuries. The *relatio* insists that also for this time of the Church, tradition and Scripture are "qualitatively" identical, that is, both mediate the saving and communion-creating Word of God. This is the deepest meaning of the Tridentine formula "with equal reverence" (*pari pietatis affectu*). The question whether they are also "quantitatively" identical is advisedly left open.

According to the statutes of the Council, a minority within a working commission is permitted to present a minority report to the general congregation of the Council. Since the third draft on divine revelation had not been accepted by all the members of the Theological Commission, the minority was able to present their report to the Council Fathers. Speaker for the minority was Bishop Franic. In this minority report it was urged that the conciliar text should clearly state that tradition is wider (*latius patet*) than Scripture; for this, the report claimed, was already the teaching of the Church. The report cited especially from encyclicals of the last forty years. Bishop Franic complained that while the present schema intends to leave open the question whether or not there exists a constitutive tradition in the Church, in actual fact "the text, in some ways, seems to favor the position that there is only an interpretative tradition." I believe the Bishop is correct here. We shall see this later.

It is not necessary to trace further the development of the text in every detail. For our purposes, we may immediately turn to the final text of the Constitution. We will have to return to the history of the text only for the understanding of a few small points.

THE PRESENT TEXT OF THE CONSTITUTION

The Constitution on Divine Revelation is made up, just as is the third draft, of six chapters: (1) Revelation Itself; (2) The Transmission of Divine Revelation; (3) Divine Inspiration and Interpretation of Holy Scripture; (4) The Old Testament; (5) The New Testament; (6) Holy Scripture in the Church's Life.

Chapter 1: Revelation Itself

As we have been told in the *relatio* to the third draft, the first chapter of the Constitution contains a more profound concept of revelation. According to present teaching, therefore, divine revelation is historical and concrete. God reveals Himself and His redemptive design by intervening in deed and word in the history of mankind destined by Him to be saved. The structure of revelation is Trinitarian: the self-disclosure of God in history mediates, in view of Christ and finally through Him and Him alone, access to the eternal Father in His Spirit. The mutual relationship of deed and word in this saving personal revelation of God defines the structure of every self-disclosure of God in the believing community. God continues to communicate Himself in the unity of life and word.

Revelation is thus primarily the self-disclosure of God in history in view of man's salvation. Secondly, if one may say so, revelation is the Word of God through which the saving events in which God disclosed Himself are proclaimed, commemorated, and made present. Thirdly, according to the conciliar teaching, it is legitimate to call revelation that saving action of God by which the Father communicates Himself in the Church through the proclamation of His Word and the celebration of His gifts. Thus there is a sense in which the saving self-revelation of God continues to take place in the Church, even if the witness to this revelation and the celebration of His saving acts have been delivered to the apostolic Church once and for all and cannot be supplemented. Since the divine self-communication in the Church,

especially through the Word, has been rather neglected in traditional Catholic theology, the Constitution puts special emphasis on this aspect (see nos. 2, 8, and 21).

Jesus Christ is the fulfiller of revelation. In Him God speaks to all men; He fulfils the design of the Father; in Him the nature of the Father becomes visible. Through His words, His actions, His entire life, Jesus reveals the everlasting God, especially through the saving actions of His death and resurrection. In the *relatio* and in the third draft it is said, by way of summary, that revelation happens "in the person of Christ," that is, in and through His person. This expression was replaced in the final version by "in His total presence and manifestation." The reason for this textual change was the fear on the part of some Council Fathers that this modern concept of person would come into conflict with the classical concept of person, used in the ancient confessions of the Christian faith. We note, however, that the expression "in the person of Christ" is employed in its modern understanding in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (cf. no. 5)

The concept of faith in the first chapter (no. 5) is brought into conformity with the deeper understanding of revelation. This took place only in the fourth version, after some bishops had strongly criticized the concept of faith of the third version, where faith was still regarded as acceptance and profession of divine teaching. Faith is the surrender to the revealing God, surrender engaging the entire personality of man. We recognize, however, that the new formulation in the final version is not entirely consistent and unified. In the new formulation we still find an echo of the concept to be replaced. This occurs very frequently in conciliar documents. The new insights are not formulated with perfect consistency, but are put with a certain reserve, so that the older notions do not appear as totally discarded. This practice may well be due to the Catholic emphasis on continuity.

We must conclude that this profounder understanding of revelation introduces a new theological epistemology. The Constitution, it is true, says nothing specifically on this question. And yet it follows that divine teaching, and hence also dogma, is revelation only secondarily. It is secondary, not only because it is merely the witness to God's saving self-revelation, but also because it presents this divine witness in a literary form which is no longer the living, dynamic, concrete, and therefore often poetic manner of speech of the original witness. This

means, indeed, that dogma is relative, i.e., relative to divine revelation. Until now the official teaching of the Church has never taken up this important question. The danger that the concepts used in dogma make themselves independent and have a life determined by their own inner laws in a development of dogma, is only today being noticed in the Catholic Church in a systematic and formal way.

The first chapter, on revelation itself, brings up a further issue of great importance, an issue that was raised in an unofficial draft, recommended by several episcopal conferences during the first session of the Council, and distributed among the Council Fathers for study. This draft developed a teaching on revelation that would take into account God's saving design extended to all men. This draft tried to relate to the universal salvation history the Catholic teaching of an extrabiblical knowledge of God—for instance, through human reason meditating on the works of creation. Vatican I had taught that man could clearly recognize the true God outside of biblical revelation, through his "natural" reason, even if, on account of the actual situation of the human family, this does not happen very often. But how this knowledge of the true God is related to the saving actions of God revealed in Christ is a question which the Catholic Church in the nineteenth century did not ask and which, therefore, was not dealt with in the First Vatican Council. The above-mentioned unofficial draft, which circulated during the first session of Vatican II, tried to deal with this very question.

We find the same concern in the first chapter of the Constitution, if we read numbers 3 and 6 together. Number 3 treats of the saving care which God has for the entire human race. God spoke, so we are told, from the very beginning through His creation; from the beginning He promised His mercy to men; He constantly acts on behalf of men, in order to bring them to eternal salvation. This saving design of God, which is clearly expressed in the revelation to Israel and then visibly manifested in Jesus, is always and everywhere at work among men. This teaching is not worked out in detail here. The text simply repeats what was said already in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church concerning God's universal will to save, especially in number 2 under the theme "The Church from Abel on" and in number 18 under the theme "Salvation outside the Church."

The textual changes from the third to the fourth drafts of the Con-

stitution on Divine Revelation especially emphasized that God actually makes Himself known to the entire human race, even if in the final draft, in contrast to the third and fourth versions, a clearer grammatical separation is made between the witness God gives of Himself in creation and the saving care with which He unceasingly surrounds men. Following the account in Genesis 1-3, the text speaks first of creation and the first man, and then of the fall of man and the divine promises of salvation consequent upon it. In the explanations of the changes (*expensio modorum*) it is clearly stated that this use of the biblical account is not an attempt on the part of the Council to solve the great theological questions in connection with the Genesis account. We conclude that the only purpose of this section is to teach explicitly that God addresses Himself to men in view of their salvation always and everywhere. How the saving action of God through creation and conscience is related to the saving action in Jesus Christ remains unexplained; to seek such an explanation is the task of theologians.

The teaching contained in number 3 offers a new theological context, and perhaps even the theological basis for the teaching of Vatican I, taken up by Vatican II in number 6 of the Constitution on Divine Revelation. Vatican I taught that God does not conceal Himself altogether from those who seek Him: already in the works of His creation He appeals to men. Vatican I affirms that "God, the beginning and end of all things, can be known with certainty from created reality by the light of human reason." In accordance with Vatican II, we can now say that if God allows Himself to be found—across whatever distance—through the works of His creation as understood by human reason, this does not take place because of an independent or sovereign act of man, but rather because of the appeal which the gracious God through His creation makes to the mind and heart of men. The "natural" knowledge of God is related to the history of salvation appointed for the whole human family, which is revealed once and for all in Jesus Christ.

Chapter 2: The Transmission of Divine Revelation

The very title of the second chapter implies the transcendence of revelation over the divinely appointed means of its transmission. What in the first draft was designated by "sources of revelation" (*fontes*

revelationis) is now called "means of transmission." The deeper understanding of revelation contained in the first chapter puts the relationship of Scripture and tradition in a new light. The Word of God itself is the one source of revelation, in relation to which all testimonies to revelation must be regarded as dependent. In this sense the Constitution (no. 7) interprets the statement from the Council of Trent in which the gospel is identified as "the one source of both salutary truth and discipline of life."

As long as we understand revelation as divine teaching, it is a question of great urgency whether this teaching is entirely contained in Scripture or whether part of the teaching is contained in tradition alone. But if we understand revelation as divine self-disclosure, as Word of God, then it is essentially undivided, and it follows that this Word of God addresses us in Scripture as well as in tradition. According to the teaching of this second chapter, the apostles transmitted—and after them the Church transmits—the revealed gospel in a twofold way, through preaching and celebration as well as through the Scriptures inspired by the Spirit. In both means of transmission the Word of God, that is, God revealing, addresses Himself to the faithful. While the question concerning the quantitative relationship of Scripture and tradition remains open, it now appears as a secondary issue.

Correspondingly, a deeper concept of tradition is presented in number 8. Tradition is more than *traditio doctrinalis*, a teaching handed on in the Church. It is, rather, *traditio realis*, the real life of the Church, including teaching, worship, and other manifestations of the community. The gospel is thus daily transmitted in the Church through the faith and the faithful action of all her members. According to Catholic teaching, the Holy Spirit so works in the Church endowed with the Scripture and other gifts that the life of the Church transmits the gospel and at the same time guarantees its authenticity. Thus the second chapter describes tradition as "all that the Church is, all that she believes."

To understand this passage, we must compare it with the text of the third draft. There the Spirit-guided tradition in the Church was presented much more broadly, almost as if all manifestations of the Church's life belonged to the apostolic tradition. Tradition, it stated, is "all that the Church is, all that she has, all that she believes." In

the subsequent discussion some of the Council Fathers, especially the Canadians Cardinal Leger and Archbishop Flahiff, complained that this concept of tradition was too wide and unlimited. Not everything traditional in the Church is tradition. Nor is everything belonging to tradition actually taught and lived in the Church at all times. We must, therefore, avoid a facile identification of tradition with the Church's life. This, of course, raises the problem of the criterion by which we may judge the Church's life, or at least by which the bishops may evaluate the Church's life as being in harmony, or in discord, with the Word of God. But this is precisely the issue of the exact relationship between Scripture and tradition, which the Council did not wish to treat. Yet, to honor the suggestion of the bishops, the text of the third draft was modified, by eliminating from the sentence cited above the phrase "all that the Church has." The deletion of this phrase, it is stated in the official *relatio*, restricts tradition to what belongs to the substance of the Church (*quae substantialia sunt ecclesiae*). The present text, therefore, distinguishes between 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.

Perhaps one should mention here that while chapter 2 clearly teaches the uniqueness and the once-for-all character of the apostolic witness (*depositum fidei*), as it finds expression in Scripture as well as in preaching and celebration, this normative apostolic witness is not sufficiently distinguished from the witness of the postapostolic Church. The text always hesitates to make a contrast between the apostolic Church and the postapostolic Church. The text certainly indicates that the successors of the apostles were not witnesses to revelation as were the apostles, but only transmitted, protected, and clarified what they themselves had received from the apostles. At the same time the text also intends to express that the action of the Holy Spirit in the Church is continuous and that, therefore, a neat distinction between the apostolic and the postapostolic Church is hardly allowable. The way of transmission, understood as the action of the Spirit, was one and the same at the time of the apostles and in later ages. We may say, therefore, that the apostolic tradition lives on in the Catholic Church. It would have been gratifying if the chapter had clearly formulated (a)

how the unique apostolic tradition is distinguished from the subsequent transmission in the Church, and (b) how we must nonetheless affirm the continuity of this apostolic tradition in the Church. But this chapter avoided concise formulations, lest it take a position on the criteriological problem, which was to remain open.

The intention of the second chapter, repeatedly acknowledged, is to leave open the question of the quantitative relationship between Scripture and tradition. Since Scripture and tradition transmit to us the Word of God, we may strongly reaffirm the sentence from the Council of Trent that Christians venerate Scripture and tradition "with equal respect" (*pari pietatis affectu*). The question remains unsolved whether tradition is essentially only interpretative or is also constitutive for the Christian faith. The second chapter teaches us that Scripture and tradition are ordered to one another. Scripture never exists alone, but was written, read, and celebrated within the Church. Conversely, tradition is, in the first place, proclamation and application of Holy Scripture. This mutual penetration of Scripture and tradition is emphasized, even if the phrase of the second version "one is not extraneous to the other" (*altera alteri extranea non est*) was left out as favoring too much the thesis of an interpretative tradition alone. The chapter does not wish to exclude the possibility of a constitutive tradition.

As we have observed, the minority was convinced that the chapter tended nonetheless to exclude the possibility of a constitutive tradition. What were the grounds for this suspicion? There was, first of all, the fact that the first draft, in which a constitutive tradition had been asserted, had been rejected by the Council. Other reasons were the teaching of chapter 2 on the qualitative identity of Scripture and tradition, and also the emphasis on the quantitative cohesion and mutual dependence of the means of transmission.

At the last minute the minority still tried, through the Pope, to present a *modus* that would favor the wider opening (*latius patet*) of tradition. The Theological Commission, however, refused to change its position. The proposed phrase was accepted in the following altered form: "It is not from Sacred Scripture alone that the Church draws her certainty about everything that has been revealed." We note that there is question here not of the knowledge of revelation but of its

certitude, and that therefore the content of the sentence is not at variance with a principle accepted in many Protestant churches, namely, that the ultimate certitude of positions contained in the Scriptures in an unclear manner is derived from the action of the Spirit in the Church (cf. Faith and Order, Montreal, 1964: Section Report II). It would be quite incorrect if one were to regard this sentence as a last-minute insertion of the wider concept (*latius patet*) of tradition. In the official *relatio* the Commission emphasized that the question still remains open, but then added a sentence which clearly favors the thesis of an interpretative tradition alone. The new version, it is explained, "presents tradition neither as a quantitative supplement to Sacred Scripture, nor Sacred Scripture as a total codification of revelation" (*nec traditionem praesentari veluti quantitativum S. Scripturae supplementum, nec S. Scripturam praesentari veluti integrae revelationis codificationem*). This sentence is not conciliar teaching, but it shows clearly in what direction the conciliar teaching points.

The problem of the criterion of faith remains unclarified in details. The sentence added in the final version insists that in some cases the certainty for the understanding of the gospel comes from tradition. At the same time another sentence of the Constitution, in chapter 6 (no. 21), also stresses the normative function of Scripture. The entire number 21 should be read in conjunction with the second chapter. In number 21 we are told that Scripture, understood in the light of tradition, is the "supreme rule of faith in the Church," and this for two reasons: the Bible has been written under the inspiration of the Spirit, and as a book it has a once-for-all character. The Bible is a permanent norm. It transmits the Word of God "immutably" (*immutabiliter*). Therefore, "like the Christian religion itself, all the preaching of the Church must be nourished and ruled by Sacred Scripture." Scripture, therefore, has a critical role in the Church. "Must be ruled by" does not mean that Scripture always exercises this normative role, but rather that it should exercise it.

At the same time we must not read too much into this sentence and conclude that it should solve the entire criteriological problem. We may not do this in view of the fact that the corresponding sentence in the third draft was stronger. There we read: "The Christian religion itself and all the Church's preaching must always look to Scripture as norm

and authority by which it is ruled and judged" (*omnis ergo praedictio ecclesiastica atque ipsa religio christiana ad Scripturam semper respicere debent tamquam ad normam et auctoritatem, quibus reguntur et judicantur*). After some discussion the sentence was formulated with more reserve in the final version. The theologian must nonetheless relate this sentence to the criteriological problem broached, but not solved, in the second chapter.

Equally unsolved remains the question, connected with the criteriological problem, of the ecclesiastical magisterium. The chapter repeats the Catholic doctrine that the Church, equipped with the Scriptures and guided by the Spirit through all her members, is ultimately able to transmit the deposit of faith authentically and without error (infallibly) through the authoritative doctrinal decisions of bishops and the pope. What this means in detail is not clarified in this chapter. It is highly significant that the customary formulation contained in the first draft according to which the apostolic witness is the "remote norm" and the contemporary magisterium is the "proximate norm" of belief is not repeated in the final version. The magisterium, whose office it is to interpret the deposit of faith authentically, is "not above the Word of God but ministers to it"—a new emphasis in ecclesiastical documents. The chapter also abandons the advice contained in many papal documents and in the first draft that the highest task of theology is to show that the teachings of Scripture are in harmony with the contemporary magisterium. Such an attitude would hardly be in accordance with the transcendence of revelation and with the normative character of the apostolic witness as it is presented in this Constitution.

In the discussion of the third draft, Cardinal Leger suggested on the Council floor that we must clearly distinguish between the infallibility of the divine Word and a reality designated by the same word "infallibility," namely, the inerrancy of dogmatic definitions. The Theological Commission did not touch this complex question. A small textual change was introduced in the text which honored this important suggestion of Cardinal Leger. While the preceding draft said of the magisterium that it "guards scrupulously and explains faithfully" the Word of God, the final text adds that the magisterium first of all "devoutly listens" to this Word. The teaching Church is, therefore, first the listening Church. In the exercise of their teaching office, bishops and

pope remain listeners to the Word of God. This has never been stated so clearly in an ecclesiastical document.

The difficult question of how it is that Scripture, tradition, and the magisterium transmit the one Word of God in the Church is not discussed in detail. The same reserve of the Council in regard to the magisterium we also find in the third chapter of the Constitution on the Church (cf. no. 25). This is all the more remarkable because the first draft of this Constitution contained an entire chapter dedicated to the magisterium, which however in no way corresponded to the complexity of this serious problem.

Chapter 3: The Divine Inspiration and Interpretation of Holy Scripture

The third chapter announces the faith of the Church that Holy Scripture is inspired by the Spirit, that it has God as its author, and that it has been received as such by the Church. God works through men who freely use their own gifts and who thus must also be regarded as authors of the biblical books. Nothing more is said about inspiration. It is, therefore, the task of theologians to elaborate a better understanding of this charism. The chapter allows them great freedom for this.

Thanks to this inspiration, Scripture is the authentic and powerful message of God addressed to men. Catholic teaching speaks here of the inerrancy of the Bible. The third draft still stated that Scripture teaches "truth without any error." In the conciliar debate on this, several Fathers, especially Cardinal Koenig, insisted that the object of inerrancy must be narrowed, since there were obviously all kinds of historical inconsistencies in the Scriptures. The fourth draft took these remarks into consideration. It declared that Scripture teaches "saving truth" unshakably, faithfully, entirely, and without error. This narrowing of the object of inerrancy to the salvational provoked opposition from the minority bishops, who had not reconciled themselves to the methods of modern biblical scholarship. At the very end this group, through the Pope, succeeded in sending a *modus* to the Theological Commission for renewed study, a *modus* which proposed that the adjective "saving" be dropped. To avoid the idea that the adjective "saving" intended to limit inspiration to certain parts of Scripture, the Theological Commission was willing to replace the adjective by a

subordinate clause which expressed its meaning more clearly. In the final text of the Constitution we read that the Bible teaches "the truth which God for our salvation wished to be contained in the sacred writings firmly, faithfully, and without error." The object of inerrancy is thus clearly narrowed to the saving truth contained in each and every part of Scripture. One may not understand this as if only certain parts of Scripture teach truth without error. According to the teaching of the Church, the entire Scripture is inspired in all its parts. It is the saving truth contained in all these parts that is communicated without error.

The section on the interpretation of Scripture defends the application of the scientific method, with special appeal to literary forms. The text of the second draft, already positive in tone, was made stronger in the third, with special reference to the different ways in which history can be written. While speaking of the various ways in which truth must be understood in a complex book such as the Bible, the second version said that "truth is in one way in a historical text, in another way . . ."; the third and the following versions said, more widely, that "truth is in one way in texts in various ways historical, in another way. . . ." The chapter places itself unreservedly on the side of a scientific Catholic exegesis. The relationship of the exegetes to the magisterium is twofold: on the one hand, they help by their research to lead to maturity the judgment of the magisterium; on the other hand, they are ultimately placed under the magisterium, which has the task of guarding and clarifying the Word of God.

Chapter 4: The Old Testament

The chapter on the Old Testament, as noted above, contains, from the second draft on, a concept of personal and historical revelation. It was here that the concept of revelation-equals-doctrine was overcome. We are told that God revealed Himself in Israel. The people learned the way of God with men through experience. This economy of salvation—announced, narrated, explained—is contained as the Word of God in the books of the Old Testament. The three past participles allude to the prophetic books, the historical books, and the wisdom literature of the Old Testament. In this section, it is worth noting, the Constitution resolves an ancient controversy in the Church in perfect

keeping with the teaching already presented in the Constitution on the Church (no. 9). Was the work of God in Israel simply a preparation for the gracious coming of Jesus Christ? Or was it at the same time already an anticipation and thus a real presence of the gracious God, Author of salvation? (A history of this controversy is found in Y. Congar, *The Mystery of the Temple*, Appendix 3.) The Council offers here and in other contexts a clear declaration of the magisterium that in the old covenant God already acted graciously in the midst of His people.

The fourth chapter also stresses the lasting value of the Old Testament for the Christian Church. Through the books of the Old Testament, God continues to speak to the faithful. Understood in the light of the New, the books of the Old Testament initiate us into the pedagogy of God with His people—which people is for us today the Christian Church. The greater appreciation of the pilgrim character of the Christian Church, as it is found in the first two chapters of the Constitution on the Church, leads here to a greater esteem for the Old Testament, especially because of its message to the Church.

Chapter 5: The New Testament

This chapter stands, from the third draft on, on the side of modern Catholic exegesis. The principal problem it deals with is the interpretation of the Gospels. It is stated in the chapter that the Gospels enjoy a special place in the New Testament. This is not supposed to be a theological statement; it simply refers to the fact that the teaching and the life of Jesus are reported in the Gospels and that they thus have a special place in the liturgy of the Church. The Gospels, just as the other books of the New Testament, are inspired, the apostolic and (through the Spirit) divinely guaranteed testimonies to the saving acts of the covenant.

The Gospels are of apostolic origin and narrate real events. They are historical. But how is this historicity to be understood? The majority of Council Fathers were prepared to leave this question to the research of scholars. The minority, however, insisted that the Council should affirm the Gospels as historical documents in a naively literal sense. Shortly before the end the minority succeeded, through the Pope, in proposing to the Theological Commission a *modus* for study to the effect that the Gospels contained the actions and words of Jesus “ac-

ording to truth and historical faith" (*juxta veritatem fidemque historicam*). On the basis of the conciliar debate and the subsequent votes of the Council Fathers, the Theological Commission was no longer free to accept this position. In the treatment of the *modi* (*expensio modorum*), the Commission explained that the word "historical" can today no longer be used without explanation, since in technical literature a distinction is often made between *Geschichte* and *Historie*. It would be clearer to express the reality of the events of salvation concretely by speaking of the historicity of the Gospels. This terminology was accepted in the final text of the Constitution.

How this historicity is to be understood is explained in the sentences that follow.

Chapter 5 follows here the Instruction *Sancta mater ecclesia*, which was published by the Biblical Commission in the spring of 1964, between the second and third sessions of the Council. This Instruction was then celebrated as a great event by Catholic exegetes, who had been living in some unrest. In keeping with this Instruction, the chapter clearly says that the Gospel narratives reflect the deeper insight into the happenings and words of Jesus which was granted to the apostles after the resurrection of the Lord and the descent of the Spirit. In order to understand the Gospels correctly, one must furthermore consider (1) that the Evangelists first made a selection of material available to them, (2) that they presented the material in a synthesized form, (3) that they explained it with reference to questions that arose in local congregations, and (4) that they composed it as a proclamation of the good news (*kerygma*). In this way the Evangelists transmitted the truth and reality about Jesus. The historicity affirmed at the beginning of the chapter refers to the great events of salvation recorded in the Gospels, and it remains the task of scientific exegesis to examine in each case what intention the Evangelists had when they compiled and composed their reports.

Chapter 6: Holy Scripture in the Life of the Church

Already in the third draft the chapter on the Bible had been reworked as an entirely positive statement on the role which the Scriptures hold in the Christian Church. The cautious, negative tone of the first draft had been eliminated. The final text resembles the third draft.

Theologically important is the clear teaching on Scripture as the

dynamic and powerful Word of God in the Church. In the appended *relatio* it is noted that the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity had elaborated a longer draft on the Word of God, and that the Theological Commission had let itself be guided by this draft in the composition of number 21. The teaching of the Word as God's gracious action in the believing community is already proposed briefly in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (nos. 9 and 33). In the Constitution on Revelation this teaching is again briefly but clearly affirmed. God Himself speaks to us in Scripture. Since He addresses us in the power of the Spirit, the celebration of Holy Scripture produces faith and love. The Constitution does not hesitate to draw a parallel between the Word of God and the body of Christ: as God in Christ comes to us and feeds us in His Word, so He does in his Eucharistic body. The Bread with which God nourishes us from the one table has two forms: it is Word and Body.

In connection with the criteriological problem, we have mentioned that the doctrine of chapter 6 (no. 21) on Scripture as the living Word of God must be added to what chapter 2 teaches regarding the relationship of Scripture and tradition. We clearly see here that the old, post-Tridentine two-source theory of Scripture and tradition has essentially been overcome (even if the whence of certain doctrines remains to be solved in detail), because modern theology has deepened the fundamental concepts of revelation, tradition, and Holy Scripture. Scripture is for us today something other than it was for earlier generations of Catholic theologians. In the controversy between the promoters of the two-source theory and their opponents, it is not merely a question of two theoretical possibilities on the same plane, of which one is to be demonstrated and the other to be refuted. The question raised is deeper. What is at issue is a more profound and hence a new vision of the divine reality of salvation which confronts us in revelation and in the authentic means of transmission in the Church.

We have already noted that the Constitution has left the criteriological question open. Yet it would not be correct to say that the Council has made no progress in this question at all. The entire problem has been situated in a new way, and hence will have to be solved according to new principles that are yet to be clarified.

Looking back over the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation,

we recognize a remarkable unity of teaching. The deeper understanding of revelation in the first chapter is the key for the positions taken in the following chapters. Although the important controversies at the Council centered on positions contained in these other chapters, the *punctum saliens* of the Constitution is the new concept of revelation. From there new light falls on the concept of tradition, the understanding of Scripture, and the mutual relationship between the two modes of transmission. Since divine revelation is no longer regarded as equivalent to divine teaching, it is possible to come to a broader understanding of scriptural inspiration and inerrancy and to a less literal concept of the historicity of the biblical books. The Scriptures do not mediate sentences containing truths closed in themselves; they are accounts that give witness to the wonderful things the Lord has done, and still does, for the salvation of His people. The truth of Scripture points to the person of Jesus Christ. We conclude, then, that despite the questions that remain open, the Constitution on Divine Revelation represents a significant development of Catholic teaching—an astonishing development, for which the first draft proposed to the Council gave little hope.