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should be incorporated into the Roman Catholic Church'. Stransky said that the path should lead, not to Rome as it was, nor to Rome as it is, but to Rome in the process of reformation. For reformation, he added, dialogue is needed and therefore we should no longer engage in monologues.

This was the first meeting of its kind for the WEF, perhaps for all Evangelicals. At this point, therefore, we should ask ourselves what we accomplished in the 1993 consultation in Venice. We would list the following benefits:

1. We were able to remove certain misunderstandings Catholics had concerning the evangelical position. Likewise, we heard that we should free ourselves from certain misconceptions of Catholics.

2. We highlighted certain differences in teaching concerning the church and its mission in the world. (These topics will be addressed in a consultation in October 1997).

3. We have realized more strongly that we should not again issue a statement on Catholicism without consulting with them before publication.

4. We have been confirmed in our need to accept the other participants in the dialogue on the basis of their Christian testimony even as we were accepted by Christ and by them. Together we should draw closer to him.

5. There is sufficient reason for us to continue the discussion with Roman Catholics, for the following reasons.

- Evangelicals and Catholics live and evangelize in close proximity in many areas, sometimes in amiable relationships (as in the Billy Graham Crusades) and sometimes in unhappy and even hostile relations. Since we cannot ignore Catholics, if we do not talk with them, we can only comment on them from a distance. There is merit in sitting down together to express and hopefully resolve differences.
- Much if not most of world evangelism today is done by Evangelicals and Roman Catholics. We therefore cannot avoid brushing shoulders and in some occasions entering into competition with Catholic missionaries. In addressing the lost we cannot ignore the Roman Catholic Church.
- We recognize a significant continuing difference in view between us concerning the radicality of sin both in the sinner before conversion and in the convert to Christ. The role of tradition in the church remains also in need of further joint reflection. Our experience in Venice has convinced us that we should be fully aware of the official teaching of the Catholic Church as well as important developments that occur among its theologians.

Dr Paul Schrotenboer, served as the organiser secretary for the WEF Consultation with the Roman Catholic Church. p. 104

Revelation as the Basis for Scripture and Tradition

Avery Dulles, S.J.

Since this paper is composed for an ecumenical dialogue, I shall give primary attention to the official doctrine of the Catholic Church rather than to my personal theological opinions. The principal source will be the *Dei Verbum*, the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation adopted by the Second Vatican Council on October 29, 1965. With the help of contemporary theologians I shall try to spell out the implications of official Catholic teaching for the precise question assigned to me. In what sense, if at all, is revelation the *basis* for Scripture and tradition? Respecting the limitations of time and space, I shall make no attempt to set forth in these pages anything resembling a complete theology of revelation.

1. THE BESTOWAL OF REVELATION

When the bishops assembled for the first session of Vatican II in October 1962, they were presented with several schemas, the first of which was a five-chapter draft of a dogmatic constitution to be entitled *De Fontibus Revelationis*. The first chapter depicted revelation as issuing from Scripture and Tradition, rather than being the basis for them. It explained that the sources of revelation were two, since the entire revelation is contained not in Scripture alone but in Scripture and Tradition as in two sources, though in different ways.¹

When this schema came up for discussion on November 14, 1962, it was severely criticized by many of the leading bishops. Cardinal Achille Liénart of Lille faulted the schema for its failure to deal with the deeper source from which both Scripture and Tradition flow, namely the word of God. The entire tone of the schema, he objected, was too cold and scholastic, since it failed to p. 105 reflect love and gratitude for the mysterious ways in which God had manifested himself, especially through his incarnate Son. In this connection he remarked that the schema missed a splendid opportunity to inculcate reverence toward the word of God. 'Our separated brothers, who have such a love and veneration for the word of God' should be given an occasion to see 'that our devotion in this matter is not less than theirs'. After several further comments on the polemical tone of the draft and on its neglect of the role of the Holy Spirit, the French cardinal concluded: 'Our faith is not founded on scholastic arguments but on every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. It is to be regretted that the decree on the sources of revelation has not been conceived according to such a principle, unhesitatingly admitted by all, and therefore I strongly urge that it be totally rewritten.'²

The next speaker, Cardinal Joseph Frings of Cologne, spoke in similar terms.³ The schema should be rejected, he held, first because of its tone and secondly because of two major doctrinal points. With regard to the tone, he asserted that the Council here spoke not with the voice of the Good Shepherd who calls his own by name but with that of the professor or judge who is eager to condemn. The schema lacked the pastoral tone for which John XXIII had called in his opening allocution at the Council. The first doctrine to which Frings objected was that of the two sources. This manner of speaking, he said, was alien to the Fathers of the church, alien to the great scholastics, including St Thomas, and

¹ This approach in terms of two sources was not original with the 1962 schema. Pius IX in his letter *Inter gravissimas* (October 20, 1870) had declared that 'Scripture and tradition are the sources of divine revelation' (*Acta Pii IX*, part 1, vol. 5, p. 259). Pius XII in the encyclical *Humani generis* (1950) followed the lead of Pius IX. See the excerpts from *Humani generis* in Denzinger-Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion symbolorum*, no. 3886. This anthology will henceforth be abbreviated DS.

² *Acta Synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II*, vol. III, part 3 (Vatican City: Typis Polyglottis, 1974), 32–34. This collection will henceforth be abbreviated AS.

³ *Ibid.*, 34–36.

alien likewise to all the ecumenical councils. Although, in the order of discovery (*in ordine cognoscendi*), one may speak of two sources being used by a scholar seeking to ascertain the doctrine of revelation, it should be recognized that in the order of being (*in ordine essendi*) there is only one source, the word of God. It would be particularly unfortunate, said the German cardinal, if the Council in its opening statement were to offend the separated brothers (*fratres separati*) by emphasizing a point that no longer has the same importance that it did four centuries ago.

The second doctrine to which Frings objected was the handling of inspiration and inerrancy. The schema, he said, embraced a rigid, deductive theory, according to which the inerrancy of the Bible in all details was deduced aprioristically from a certain concept of inspiration. Some Catholic theologians hold different theories of inspiration, based on the biblical texts as they stand. Such theories should not be rejected, because it is not customary for councils to settle debates among Catholic theologians or to anathematize particular schools, but only to condemn heresies and very dangerous errors.

A succession of other speakers followed, several defending the schema but the majority opposing it for substantially the reasons already [p. 106](#) mentioned. After a predominantly negative vote, Pope John XXIII ordered that the schema be withdrawn and that a new text be composed by a mixed commission that would be chaired jointly by Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviani of the Holy Office and Cardinal Augustin Bea of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity.

The new text was circulated by mail in April 1963 and revised in the spring of 1964 on the basis of written comments from the bishops. On September 30, 1964 this revised text was discussed on the Council floor. Since there were disagreements within the drafting commission it was decided to present both majority and minority reports. The majority view, defending the text as written, was presented by Archbishop Ermenegildo Florit of Florence. In his explanation of the second paragraph, Florit lucidly summarized the position of the new text on the priority of revelation over both Scripture and tradition. He declared:

As regards the nature of revelation, it is said to be of divine origin, chiefly because it begins unconditionally from God and is carried forward by him.

In his revelatory action God is impelled by his goodness and wisdom, rather than solicited by the impotence and need of human beings. Thus the fact of revelation has a primarily theocentric character.

The constitutive elements of revelation are both the deeds wrought by God in salvation history and the words by which God himself wills his works to be explained. Hence appears the historical and sacramental character of revelation: historical, because it consists primarily in all the interventions of God, which are designated by the name of 'economy' insofar as they are unified by the single aim of procuring salvation; sacramental, moreover, because the total significance of the deeds is not known to us except by words, that is, by the 'speech of God', which is itself a historical event.

As regards the object of revelation, God himself is to be considered first of all, insofar as he reveals himself through the salutary works which he has done, and which are brought to a head in the supremely salutary event of the Incarnation of the Word, whereby Christ truly pertains to the history of every age. The logically secondary object, which however accompanies and perfects the history of salvation, is the speech of God, by which we learn the truth both about God and about human salvation. Inasmuch as God has become our brother and mediator in Christ, this truth is by no means exhausted in the intellectual order, but it demands that, in and through Christ, it should be put into practice

through communion with the most blessed Trinity: which therefore is a truly interpersonal communion.⁴

Because Florit, in the words just quoted, gives a very condensed summary of a single article in chapter 1, it may be desirable to expand his statement in the light of the final text of that chapter, which differs only in small details from the draft on which p.107 Florit was commenting. Like the archbishop, *Dei Verbum* describes revelation primarily as an action or process originating from God. God, out of sheer love, emerges from his silence, and enters into conversation with human beings in order to bring them into fellowship with himself and make them sharers in his divine life (DV 2). Salvation is here depicted in terms of communion, though of course there are other aspects to be considered. Vatican II could take it for granted that, as the Council of Trent had taught, justification involves the remission of original and personal sin as well as the interior renewal by which we are made heirs of eternal life (Trent, Session 6, chap. 7, DS 1528).⁵

The same article (DV 2) mentions in general terms the means whereby God establishes this revelatory communication: words and deeds intrinsically connected with each other. On the one hand, the works that unfold in the history of salvation exemplify and confirm what the words declare. On the other hand, the words make the deeds known and elucidate the mystery contained in them. In other terms, revelation is not conferred through uninterpreted facts or through non-factual interpretations, but through interpreted facts. The structure of word and deed is compared by Florit to that of the sacraments, in which words and actions are ordinarily joined together.

Revelation, of course, is not just a haphazard collection of revelatory words and deeds. Drawing on patristic authorities, the Council speaks of a unified plan of revelation and salvation: the economy. The teaching of Vatican II is at this point influenced by modern discussions of salvation history. The Council does not reduce the content of revelation to historical events, as some enthusiasts for salvation history have done. On the contrary, it holds that God himself, in his eternal reality, is the primary content or object of revelation. By his words and deeds in history God enables us to know him and his salvific intentions for his people.⁶

A further point, briefly mentioned in our quotation from Archbishop Florit, is the role of Christ in the economy. In a closely packed sentence the Council declares that Christ is ‘the mediator and the fullness of the revelation’. This sentence from *Dei Verbum* 2, further explained in no. 4, demands careful consideration. In what sense is Christ the revealer, the fullness of revelation, and the mediator of revelation? p. 108

⁴ AS III/3, 131–40. The minority report, given by Bishop Franic[v] of Split, Yugoslavia, dealt only with the disputed question on the relationship between the contents of Scripture and tradition, which concerns chapter II on the transmission of revelation. Franic[v] defended the position represented by the schema of 1962 to the effect that there are some revealed truths preserved for the church in tradition alone. See AS III/3, 124–29.

⁵ A possible weakness of *Dei Verbum* is its failure to deal with the negative aspects of the human condition. As Joseph Ratzinger observes in commenting on article 3, ‘The whole vast subject of sin, law, and the anger of God is gathered together here in the one little word *lapsus* (*Post eorum lapsum* ...) and thus is given neither its full weight nor is it taken seriously enough. The pastoral optimism of an age that is concerned with understanding and reconciliation seems to have somewhat blinded the Council to a not immaterial section of the testimony of Scripture’. Ratzinger’s commentary on chapters 1 and 2 of *Dei Verbum* may be found in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler, 5 vols. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 3:155–98; quotation from 174.

⁶ See the first and last sentences of DV 2, which speak of God revealing himself.

As the eternal Word of God, Christ is identified with God the revealer. God reveals by means of his Word, the Logos, the reflection of his glory ([Heb. 1:3](#)). The Word, when he comes into the world, becomes the agent who makes the Father known ([Jn. 1:18](#)). No one can know the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son reveals the Father ([Mt. 11:27](#)).

Christ is the fullness of revelation because he is the self-revealing truth, the expression of all that the Father has to say. Everything else is simply a preparation for, or a gloss upon, the essential message that God gives in his Son. At the Council one of the bishops (Archbishop P. Zoungrana of Ouagadougou, Upper Volta, speaking in the name of sixty-seven African bishops) declared that the very person of Jesus Christ is divine revelation. He supported this opinion by alluding to biblical texts such as [1 Jn. 1:2-3](#), [Jn. 14:9-10](#), [Col. 1:15](#), [Heb. 1:3](#), and [Mt. 17:5](#), as well as a famous passage from St. John of the Cross's *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* (Bk. II, chap. 22).⁷ The great Spanish mystic, after quoting from Hebrews ([1:1-2](#)) the passage that God in these last days has spoken to us in his Son, goes on to say that if Christians were to ask God for visions and revelations, God could reply: 'I have already told you all things in my Word, my Son, and if I have no other word; what answer or revelation can I now make that would surpass this? Fasten your eyes on Him alone, because in Him I have spoken and revealed all, and in Him you shall discover even more than you ask for and desire.' John of the Cross then cites from Paul's letter to the Colossians that in Christ 'are hidden all the treasures of the wisdom and knowledge of God' ([Col. 2:3](#)).⁸

Neither St. John of the Cross nor Vatican II intended to say that a passing glance at the man Jesus Christ is an adequate revelation of God's total plan of salvation. As the Constitution later explains, Christ reveals God by living among human beings, by speaking what the fourth Gospel calls 'the words of God' (in [3:34](#)), by his symbolic acts and miracles, and especially by his death and resurrection, crowned by the sending of the Spirit of truth (DV 4).

It is relatively easy, from the perspective of Christian faith, to acknowledge that Christ is both the revealer and the culminating revelation of God. More difficult, perhaps, is the thesis that Christ is the mediator of all revelation. In the perspectives of Vatican II there is only one economy of revelation. Every element in the economy finds its true revelatory meaning in relation to Christ, the centre, who stands first in the order of the divine intention. The saving truth that is mediated through nature and history comes from him and finds its final significance in him. In the Old Testament Christ the Logos was at work giving anticipations of himself, preparing [p. 109](#) the way for his own advent with this outlook, declare that the gospel was 'kept secret for long ages, but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles' ([Rom. 16-25-26](#); cf. [1 Cor. 19:1-11](#)). The latent significance of all the types and prophecies of the Old Testament

⁷ AS III/3, 212-14.

⁸ St. John of the Cross, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Book II, chap. 22, nos. 5-6; in *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez (Washington, D.C.: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1973), 180-81.

becomes manifest in the incarnate Son.⁹ The total message of God, spread out in the history of salvation, appears in concentrated form in Christ, the *Verbum abbreviatum*.¹⁰

Dei Verbum 3 gives some indications of the ways in which revelation was given prior to the Incarnation. The paragraph begins by mentioning the function of the Word in the creation and conservation of the world. According to biblical texts such as [Romans 1:19–20](#), God offers lasting testimony to himself in the works of creation. This general (or ‘cosmic’) revelation appears to be something different from natural theology—the work of reason by which the human mind, so to speak, climbs up to God.¹¹ Rather, reference is made to the activity of God who addresses the human spirit through the order of creation. The same idea seems to be conveyed by Paul in his speech at Lystra, in which he says the God ‘has not left himself without a witness in doing good—giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, and filling you with good and your hearts with joy’ ([Acts 14:17](#)). In its Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes* Vatican II stresses the universal availability of cosmic revelation: ‘All believers of whatever religion have always heard his [God’s] revealing voice in the discourse of creatures’ (GS 36). Since the Word manifests aspects of himself in the whole work of creation ([Jn. 1:3](#); [Col. 1:15–17](#); [Heb. 1:3, 10; 11:3](#)), revelation through nature is in its way Christological.

The next few sentences give a very brief summary of the course of salvation history. Although this history is not knowable to us today except with the help of Scripture, it is properly placed in chapter 1 of *Dei Verbum* because the patriarchs, Moses, and the prophets received revelation even before the Hebrew Scriptures, let alone the Christian Bible, existed.

2. THE COMPLETION OF REVELATION

When, if at all, does divine revelation come to an end? A decree of the Holy Office, in 1907, had condemned the Modernist proposition that ‘the revelation that constitutes **P. 110** the object of Catholic faith was not complete with the apostles’ (*Lamentabili sane*, prop. 21; DS 3421). Some Fathers at Vatican II, going even beyond this teaching about ‘the object of Catholic faith’, wanted the Council to declare that revelation had ceased, or was closed, with the death of the apostles.¹²

As is evident from the texts quoted above, Vatican II preferred to avoid this negative manner of speaking and to concentrate on Christ himself as the consummation of revelation. According to Christian faith the supreme and unsurpassable revelation of God has been made in Christ, the incarnate Son. The Christ event, properly understood in its total context, teaches all that we can wish or hope to know by way of revelation. Against progressivists such as Joachim of Fiore and his disciples, the Catholic Church teaches that there will be no post-Christian dispensation of the Holy Spirit, since the Spirit can declare

⁹ Thus the Council can say in DV 16, echoing a passage from Augustine: ‘Thus God, the inspirer and author of the books of both Testaments, has in his wisdom arranged that the New Testament be hidden in the Old, and the Old be made manifest in the New (cf. [Lk. 22:20](#); [1 Cor. 11:25](#)).’ In a footnote the text here refers to Augustine, *Quaest. in Hept.* 2:73; PL 34:623; CChr 33:106.

¹⁰ See Henri de Lubac, *La révélation divine*, 3d ed. (Paris: Cerf. 1983), 81–82.

¹¹ Far from rejecting naturally acquired knowledge of God, Vatican II affirms this in DV 6, but makes it clear that achievement of reason falls short of the knowledge bestowed by revelation. In contrast to Vatican I, which spoke of natural knowledge before revelation and faith, Vatican II discusses the natural knowledge of God only after treating revealed knowledge and faith in DV 1–5.

¹² See *relationes* of July 3, 1964 and Nov. 30, 1964; AS III/3, p. 77 and IV/1, p. 345.

only the revelation given in Christ ([Jn. 16:12-15](#)). *Dei Verbum* therefore preferred the positive formulation that 'the Christian dispensation, as the new and definitive covenant, will never pass away. No new public revelation is to be expected before the glorious manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ (cf. [1 Tim. 6:14](#) and [Tit. 2:13](#))' (DV 4). In this final 'manifestation' of the mystery of Christ the same revelation will be proffered in a new mode, that of glory, rather than, as at present, under the veil of faith. Because the eschatological revelation will clearly disclose what God has already attested in Christ, it will confirm the definitive character of the revelation we now possess.

Notwithstanding the centrality of the Paschal event, Christian revelation was not entirely complete with the Ascension and the day of Pentecost. The early church needed further interventions from the Holy Spirit so that it could rightly grasp the meaning of what God had disclosed in his Son and ascertain the essential structures and mission of the church itself. Karl Rahner makes this point persuasively:

Theologically speaking, we certainly cannot hold that the Church was already complete on the day of Pentecost. The Church indeed had then visible existence as a community, a legal structure (at least in its basic traits) and the Holy Spirit. Still, she was not yet complete. There really existed, in the literal sense of Batiffol's term, an *église naissante*, the Church in the process of birth, and the process took a certain amount of time. In order to understand this point, we have only to recall that the Church, whose 'only' mission, as it rightly said, is to conserve and interpret divine revelation, did not yet possess its complete being at Pentecost for the simple reason that there was further revelation after Pentecost (e.g. concerning the Canon of Scripture). The Apostolic Church had both more and less than the later Church's mission of conservation and interpretation; it had more because it was still [able] to receive new revelation, and it had less because it did not yet possess all the truths which the later Church p. 111 was given to preserve, since they had not yet all been revealed.¹³

With the end of the apostolic period, which coincides approximately with the completion of the New Testament, the era of constitutive revelation came to a close. Nothing substantively new is added to 'the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints' ([Jude 3](#)), the 'deposit of faith' entrusted to the apostolic church ([1 Tim. 6:20](#); [2 Tim. 1:14](#)).

The completion of constitutive revelation should not be understood as the cessation of revelation itself. As we have seen, Vatican II taught that God's revealing voice is still heard in the discourse of creatures (GS 36). God continues to speak to his people when they gather to hear the Scriptures proclaimed in the church (SC 7; cf. DV 8, 21, etc). He speaks through the voice of conscience (GS 16) and through the 'signs of the times', which are to be interpreted 'under the light of the gospel' (GS 4, 11, 44). All these forms of 'speaking' may be included under the category of revelation, provided that they are not seen as adding to the content of the definitive revelation given in the Incarnate Son.¹⁴ Emphasizing the permanence of the apostolic deposit, *Dei Verbum* treats God's subsequent conversation with his people under the rubric of 'The Transmission of Revelation', the title of its second chapter.

3. APOSTOLIC TRADITION AND REVELATION

¹³ Karl Rahner, *Inspiration in the Bible*, revised translation (New York: Herder and Herder, 1964), 47-48; cf. German original, *Über die Schriftinspiration* (Freiburg: Herder, 1958), 53.

¹⁴ For a discussion of the problem of 'continuing' or 'dependent' revelation, see Gerald O'Collins, *Retrieving fundamental Theology* (New York: Paulist, 1993), chap. 7, pp. 87-97.

According to the teaching of *Dei Verbum*, which echoes in part that of Vatican I, God in his providence saw to it that what he had revealed for the world's salvation would not be forgotten or corrupted (DV 7; cf. Vatican I. *Pastor aeternus*, DS 3050). What was to be preserved and handed down was nothing other than the gospel, which Vatican II, following Trent, described as God's revelation in Christ, promised in advance through the prophets and promulgated in its fullness by Christ (DV 7; cf. Trent, DS 1501). As we have already seen, Vatican II, under the prodding of cardinals such as Liénart and Frings, distanced itself from the rather academic view, current in the nineteenth century, that Scripture and tradition were the sources of revelation, and returned to the more traditional doctrine. Like the Council of Trent, Vatican II characterized the gospel of Jesus Christ as 'the source of all saving truth and moral discipline' (ibid.).

Dei Verbum gave a somewhat fuller description than did Trent of the mode by which the apostles transmitted to others the revelation they had received. Whereas Trent concentrated primarily on the verbal element in the gospel and apostolic tradition, Vatican II mentioned also the non-verbal components: 'The apostles handed on, by their oral preaching, exemplary actions, and [p. 112](#) ordinances, what they had received from Christ's lips, his way of life or his works, or had learned by the prompting of the Holy Spirit' (DV 7). Only after saying this did the Council mention the New Testament: 'The apostolic mandate was fulfilled, too, by those apostles and apostolic men who, under the inspiration of the same Holy Spirit, committed the message of salvation to writing' (ibid.).

For more than a century after its foundation, the church was without a canonical list of Holy Scriptures. The Christians did of course read the sacred books of the Jews, but there seems not to have been as yet a 'Hebrew canon', still less an 'Alexandrian canon' or a 'Christian canon', accepted by the church. Instead there was a rather indefinite set of books, including the Pentateuch, the prophets, the psalms and other 'hagiographa'. As we can see from the New Testament, the Christians in their citations made no clear distinction between books that were later received as canonical and others that are today regarded by most Christians as apocryphal. For example, the Letter of Jude cites the Assumption of Moses and the Book of Enoch as authoritative.¹⁵ We may therefore agree with Oscar Cullmann that the oral proclamation of the gospel had a clear pre-eminence over the written during the first few decades of the Christian era.¹⁶ The spoken gospel, even though Paul and others received it through the church, was not seen as a merely human tradition, because the Lord was held to stand behind the apostles as they transmitted his words and deeds. In Cullmann's words, 'Transmission by the apostles is not effected by men, but by Christ the Lord himself who thereby imparts this revelation.'¹⁷

Paul can therefore insist that the tradition he proclaims is truly the word of God ([1 Th. 2:13](#); cf. [Gal. 1:8-9](#); [1 Cor. 7:25](#); [11:23](#)). He puts his oral doctrine and his letters on the same authoritative level ([2 Th. 2:15](#)). The epistles of Paul began to be collected at a relatively early period, thus preparing them to be incorporated into what would eventually become the New Testament (cf. [2 Pt. 3:16](#)).

In one concise sentence Vatican II summarizes the stage of oral apostolic preaching: 'The apostles, after the Lord's Ascension, passed on to their hearers what he had said and

¹⁵ [Jude 6, 9](#), and [14-15](#). Allusions to, and echoes from, books that Protestants do not accept as canonical may be found in [Rom. 1:19-32](#) ([Wis. 13:1-15](#)), [1 Pt. 1:7](#) ([Wis. 3:5-6](#)), and [Heb. 11:35](#) ([2 Mac. 6-7](#)). These books, however, belong to the Catholic Old Testament.

¹⁶ See especially the essay 'La Tradition', which appears in English translation as chapter 4 of Oscar Cullmann's *The Early Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1956), 55-99.

¹⁷ Ibid., 73.

done, together with that fuller understanding which they now possessed, instructed by the glorious life of Christ and taught by the light of the Spirit of Truth' (DV 19, with references to a number of passages from the fourth Gospel).

An official footnote at this point in *Dei Verbum* refers to the Instruction of the Pontifical Biblical Commission *Sancta Mater Ecclesia* (1964), p. 113 which points out that after the resurrection of Jesus the apostles 'faithfully explained his life and words'. As an example the Biblical Commission mentions the speech of Peter to Cornelius and his household, summarized in [Acts 10:34-43](#). Just as Jesus after his resurrection interpreted to his disciples the words of the Old Testament as well as his own previous teaching ([Lk. 24:27, 44-45](#); cf. [Acts 1:3](#)), the disciples later interpreted his words and deeds according to the needs of their listeners. 'Devoting themselves to the ministry of the word,' they preached and made use of various modes of speaking that were suited to their own purpose and the mentality of their listeners' (SME 8, with reference to [Acts 6:4](#)). For this reason, the Biblical Commission observes, it is necessary to distinguish in the surviving records of the apostolic preaching a variety of literary forms such as catechesis, story, *testimonium*, hymn, doxology, and prayer.

As this last sentence implies, the apostolic proclamation was much more than a mere relaying of historical information about the words and deeds of Jesus. It was a creative interpretation of the teaching and career of Jesus, accomplished under the revealing light of the Holy Spirit. Because the early tradition is ascribed to the Lord as its true author, it may be seen as revelation.

Although the church did not yet have a fixed collection of canonical Scriptures, it was not a totally fluid community. Tradition, without being crystallized in rigid formulas, was a stabilizing force. The apostles exhorted their converts to hold fast to the traditions that had been committed to them ([2 Th. 2:15](#); [1 Cor. 15:1-11](#)). These traditions, according to Vatican II, were not merely historical and doctrinal; they included 'everything that helps the people of God to live a holy life and grow in faith' (DV 8). Vatican II's Constitution on the Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum concilium*, explains in greater detail the mission of the apostles to 'carry on the work of salvation that they were announcing, by means of sacrifice and sacraments, around which the whole of liturgical life revolves (SC 6). The formation of the will, emotions, and imagination of the faithful through prayer and actual practice is an integral part of the tradition.

The community and its tradition were under the authoritative direction of the apostles who, as *Dei Verbum* reminds us, 'left as their successors the bishops, "handing on their own teaching function to them"' (DV 7).¹⁸ The Pastoral Epistles enable us to glimpse the handing over of apostolic authority from the apostles to the heads of local churches through delegates such as Timothy and Titus. The Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, cites Tertullian and Irenaeus to the effect that the bishops became the guardians of the apostolic tradition (LG 20).¹⁹ For these second-century p. 114 theologians the teaching of the apostolic churches and their bishops was the principal norm of faith.

4. THE SCRIPTURES AND REVELATION

In the course of time the church did develop its own Bible, formed out of a combination of Jewish Scriptures with newly written Christian Scriptures. The apostolic message was

¹⁸ The quotation is from Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses*, III.3.1; PG 7:848; SC 210:31.

¹⁹ Reference is here made to several patristic texts, including Tertullian, *De praescriptione haereticorum*, 32; PL 2:52-53; Cchr 1:212-13; and Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.*, III.3.1; PG 7:848; SC 210:31.

committed to writing by the apostles and their co-workers (DV 7). Recognizing the eminent status of the Bible as a document of revelation, *Dei Verbum* devotes the last four of its six chapters to the Bible. In line with the teaching of earlier popes and councils, it asserts that the biblical books are inspired; that is to say, they were written under the influence of the Holy Spirit (DV 8). The nature of inspiration is explained in ways that bypass the mythological (or at least metaphorical) conceptions that had been current among the rabbis and some early Church Fathers. Inspiration, as understood by Vatican II, involves neither a 'mantic' or 'ecstatic' loss of the writer's faculties nor a process of verbal dictation from God to the human scribe. In positive terms, God is said to have brought about the composition of the sacred books by employing human agents, using their own powers and faculties, so that they wrote as authors in a true sense, and yet in such a way that they set down all that God intended, and nothing else (DV 11). The Council does not go into a speculative discussion of how God brings about this result.

In Catholic theology, Scripture is often said to be the inspired word of God. This terminology, correct though it be, may give rise to some confusion, since orally delivered prophetic utterance can also be the inspired word of God. What is distinctive to the Bible is that it is the written word that comes about through divine inspiration.

Vatican II asserts that the Holy Scriptures contain the word of God and, because inspired, really are the word of God (DV 24). Their special dignity is that, 'having been inspired by God and committed to writing once for all, they impact the word of God in unalterable form' (DV 21).

Inspiration is not the same thing as revelation. When he reveals, God communicates new knowledge of himself. When he inspires, God moves a human being to communicate and directs the process so that it achieves the divinely intended end. To say that the Scriptures are inspired is not *eo ipso* to say that they are revealed but only to say that they record what God wanted to be recorded.

Many Catholics make a distinction between the revealed word of God (described in the first chapter of *Dei Verbum*) and the inspired word of scripture (discussed especially in the third and sixth chapters). While this distinction has merit, it should not be pressed as though revelation and inspiration were mutually exclusive. For three reasons a very close connection must be acknowledged.

(1) It is quite possible for God to make a revelation through oral or written inspiration. A prophet or apostle who is moved to proclaim a message may be the organ by which God reveals. In the words of von [p. 115](#) Balthasar, 'Revelation to the prophets and promulgation by the prophets tend to merge together, and form virtually a single act of revelation effected by the Spirit in the service of the coming or past incarnation of the Son.... Revelation, then, is effected partly before the writing, partly in the actual writing; in other words, Scripture participates in God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ through the Spirit.'²⁰ Thus the oracles of Isaiah and of the Book of Revelation (to mention only two examples) are simultaneously inspired and revealed.

(2) Even when Scripture is not proposing new and original oracles, its contents coincide in great part with what has previously been revealed. This is evidently the case where the Scripture is laying down articles of faith, as occurs in credal or confessional passages such as [Dt. 6:4-5](#), [Rom. 10:8-9](#), and [1 Cor. 15:1-4](#). Since the prophetic and apostolic proclamation is by its nature transitory, Scripture is needed to give it a public and enduring existence, so that it becomes available in stable form for future generations.

²⁰ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Word and Revelation: Essays in Theology 1* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1964), 11.

(3) The particular events and words of revelation given at particular points of salvation history take on a new significance when viewed in the light of the whole biblical canon, which surveys the course of God's revelatory work from the dawn of history to the end of the apostolic age. This context is indivisible. One cannot carve the Bible up into revelatory and non-revelatory passages, as though it were possible to make an anthology of the former, excluding the latter. To excise parts of the Bible would alter the meaning of the whole.

A distinguished Catholic exegete has objected that certain passages in the Old Testament, such as the genealogies in the first nine chapters of 1 Chronicles, contain no revelation.²¹ My own impression would be that these chapters contribute to our grasp of the self-understanding of the people of God of the Old Testament, and more especially their understanding of the Davidic monarchy, which is a type of the kingship of Christ. It might be difficult to distil propositions of faith from these chapters, but they affect our comprehension of what was fulfilled in Christ and the church, and hence pertain to revelation.

The revelatory character of the Bible as a whole has often been seen as excluding error in any part. The doctrine of inerrancy was vigorously debated at Vatican II, with some defending and others attacking the prevalent Scholastic formulations. p. 116 Eventually a satisfactory compromise was reached. Omitting any sweeping claim of inerrancy in all respects, the Fathers contented themselves with declaring: 'Since everything asserted by the inspired authors or sacred writers must be held to be asserted by the Holy Spirit, it follows that the books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching firmly, faithfully, and without error that truth which God wanted put into the sacred writings for the sake of our salvation' (DV 11).

Some interpret this statement as though the Bible could be divided into passages that present divinely given truth and others that present fallible human opinions. But according to the intentions of the Theological Commission there was no question of dividing the Bible into materially distinct parts, some of which would be subject to error and others guaranteed against error. The distinction is to be understood in terms of the formal object, that is to say, the aspect under which the Bible is considered. When seen with reference to the communication of salutary truth, the Bible as a whole is free from error. Every passage has its place in this communicative process, since the purpose of the Holy Spirit in inspiring the sacred writers was to point the way to salvation. Certain sentences, if read with a view to scientific or historical information, or without regard to the total biblical context, might seem to be misleading, but when seen in the framework of the entire Bible, viewed as the inspired record of God's gradual self-revelation to his people, these passages can be grasped as belonging to the divine message of salvation, and thus as revelatory.²²

²¹ Raymond E. Brown, in *The Critical Meaning of the Bible* (New York: Paulist, 1981), 7, criticizes the position of Vatican II (and my own) to the effect that the whole Bible not only transmits, but is, the word of God. He objects to this statement on the ground that it seems to make inspiration and revelation coextensive. He goes on to say (p. 8) that for his purposes revelation applies only to 'biblical claims to receive or transmit the word of God' and not to the church's understanding of the Bible as the word of God. This seems to me to be an unwarranted narrowing of the concept of revelation.

²² On this point see A. Grillmeier, 'Excursus on Article 11', in Vorgrimler, *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, 3:233–37; Johannes Beumer, *Die katholische Inspirationslehre zwischen Vatikanum I und II* (Stuttgart: Katholische Bibelwerk 1967), 92–95; more briefly, R.A.F. MacKenzie in *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter A. Abbott (New York: America Press, 1966), 119, note 31. Grillmeier and Beumer both point out that the Theological Commission, in its responses to proposed changes in the text, insisted that the text implied no restriction of inspiration or inerrancy to certain portions of Scripture. For an argument to the

If this be true, it follows that the Bible, inspired as a whole to guide the church in the way of salvation, is a document of revelation. The church does not interpret it from a merely human point of view, as a document of science or secular history. To understand what God wanted to communicate for the sake of our salvation, we must read the Scripture, as a work composed under the influence of the Holy Spirit, with the help of that same Spirit (DV 12). If the interpreter stops at the merely philological or empirical level, without rising to the perspective of faith, the resulting exegesis will be deficient, with the result that the word of God will not be found in the sacred text. But once the interpreter adopts the perspective of faith, reading the Bible from within the living, worshipping, praying church, the whole Bible can be seen as revelatory and as the word of God. In its total significance p. 117 it communicates what is salvifically important about God and God's ways.

With reference to the theme of the present paper it must be asked whether the Bible is a constitutive element in the conferral of revelation or whether it simply transmits a revelation already given. In the light of the preceding paragraphs we can say that it both transmits past revelation and completes it. As noted above, the particular revelations that had occurred in the course of salvation history, including the apostolic age, were recorded in the Bible, which consequently serves as a channel of transmission. But when so recorded the revelations acquired added full significance as components of a single revelation and became available for the guidance of God's people. Since Christian revelation is by its very nature organic, public, and enduring, the production of the inspired text is integral to the very bestowal of revelation. By God's grace, the church in its formative period was able to express its faith in an original manner that could enlighten all future generations. In producing normative documents of faith by which the church of later ages was to measure itself, the apostolic church was able to make itself, for the sake of posterity, a 'historically tangible concretization of God's grace in Christ'.²³ The production of the Scripture therefore pertains to the process by which the church is constituted as a self-perpetuating community of faith.

5. POST-BIBLICAL TRADITION

The church's acquisition of a full set of canonical Scriptures was not accomplished in a moment, but it would seem that by the middle or end of the second century the main questions had been settled. Debates concerning the precise limits of the canon continued, of course, down through the fourth century, and have erupted from time to time since that date. Only with the passage of time did the councils of the church (beginning late in the fourth century) seek to achieve complete agreement on the canon. For present purposes, however, we may regard the canon as substantially settled in the practice of the church some time before the councils issued their decrees.

If the late second century is an acceptable date (and I recognize the plausibility of other dates), one may say with Oscar Cullmann and others that the church drew up its biblical canon at a time when oral tradition was becoming unreliable, as may be seen, for instance, from the surviving fragments from Papias, who accepted many later legends as though they were apostolic traditions.²⁴ Cullmann combines this assertion with another, which is more controversial. He regards the adoption of the canon as a great act of

effect that Vatican II disavowed the idea of biblical inerrancy see Oswald Loretz, *The Truth of the Bible* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), 92–95 and *passim*.

²³ Rahner, *Inspiration in the Bible*, 48–49.

²⁴ Cullmann, *Early Church*, 89.

humility by which the church submitted all its judgments to the norm of Scripture, as though the last word were that of Scripture.²⁵ This position rests upon a theory of the formal sufficiency and clarity of [p. 118](#) Scripture that Catholics find unconvincing. The acceptance of the Scriptures as a trustworthy guide does not logically demand the rejection of any other guide, at least where the two do not conflict. In its proclamation the church has used its authenticated tradition conjointly with Scripture and not in opposition to it.

Cullmann's position, to be sure, contains an element of truth. By the time the canon was drawn up, tradition as a distinct quarry of revealed truth was disappearing from view. In the first few generations the apostolic churches, under the direction of their bishops, were accepted as authoritative witnesses to particular teachings and practices instituted by the apostles. As late as the sixteenth century the Council of Trent rejected the Protestant *sola scriptura* by asserting that the church was perpetually bound to unwritten traditions that had been passed down from the apostles as it were from hand to hand (Session IV, DS 1501).

The Council of Trent refrained from giving examples. In the conciliar discussions mention was made of practices such as infant baptism, the sign of the cross, and turning toward the East in prayer, and of beliefs such as the perpetual virginity of Mary and the identity of Anne as Mary's mother.²⁶ Many of the Fathers at Trent spoke as though some revealed truths were contained in tradition alone. But with the introduction of more critical methods in history, increasing numbers of Catholic theologians came to the conclusion that at our present distance from the apostolic age, we have no way of historically verifying the apostolic origin of doctrines and practices that are not attested by the New Testament.

Aware of this difficulty, Vatican II adopted a somewhat different concept of tradition, partly drawn from the Tübingen theologians of the nineteenth century. Unlike Trent, which had spoken only of traditions (in the plural), *Dei Verbum* spoke of tradition in the singular.²⁷ Tradition, for the recent council, consisted not in particular truths but in a dynamic process of transmission under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. By continuously handing down the faith received from the apostles 'the Church, in its teaching, life, and worship, perpetuates and transmits to all generations all that it is and all that it believes (DV 8). This is seen as progressing in the Church, bringing about a growth of understanding that moves forward to the day when the words of God reach their fulfilment in the Church' (ibid.).

This global, dynamic, non-verbal concept of tradition differs markedly from the atomized, static, and oral view usually (but somewhat too simplistically) attributed to the Council of Trent. Far from entering into competition with Scripture, tradition disposes the faithful to apprehend more fully and accurately what is implied in Scripture. By dwelling in [p. 119](#) the faith-community and participating in its living heritage, the Christian believer becomes more responsive to what authors such as Cullmann call the interior witness of the Holy Spirit.²⁸

As an example of what is known only with the help of tradition, and not by Scripture alone, *Dei Verbum* mentions 'the full canon of the biblical books' (DV 8). This statement

²⁵ Ibid., 90.

²⁶ Joseph Ratzinger, 'On the Interpretation of the Tridentine Decree on Tradition', in Karl Rahner and Joseph Ratzinger, *Revelation and Tradition* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966), 50–68, 73–78. See esp. 61.

²⁷ The only exception is in a quotation from [2 Th. 2:15](#) in DV 8.

²⁸ Cullmann, *Early Church*, 97.

need not and should not be understood as though the apostles or their associates had provided a full list of the canonical books, which was then handed down by word of mouth. As Karl Rahner shows, this hypothesis is historically unfounded and is difficult to reconcile with the known facts about the history of the canon. The meaning is rather that the post-apostolic church was in a position to judge which books were pure expressions of the faith because the church already possessed the apostolic faith, thanks to the tradition that had been handed on. In Rahner's apt expression, the church had acquired a certain 'connaturality' with the authentic revelation through its participation in the living tradition of faith, and was thereby equipped to discern the books of the apostolic age that embodied the truth faith.²⁹ The decision regarding the canon is an early instance of what Catholic theologians call the development of doctrine.

Without seeking to settle the question raised at the beginning of this article, that of the 'material sufficiency' of Scripture, Vatican II seemed to favour the view that the totality of revelation is somehow contained both in Scripture and in apostolic tradition. A number of passages from Vatican II suggest that there are no truths contained in Scripture alone or in tradition alone. 'Sacred tradition and sacred Scripture are in close connection and communion, for both of them, flowing from the same divine wellspring, merge together in some fashion and tend toward the same end' (DV 9). 'Tradition and Scripture together form a single deposit of the word of God, entrusted to the Church' (DV 10). They are so intimately connected with each other, and with the magisterium, that none of the three can stand without the other two, but all together contribute effectively to the salvation of souls (ibid.).

With regard to the revelatory character of tradition, a distinction should be made between tradition in its apostolic and post-apostolic phases. In each case we have to do with apostolic tradition (tradition stemming from the apostles), not with merely ecclesiastical traditions (those originating with the church). In the apostolic period the tradition was still developing under the active influence of the Lord, who was at work through the Holy Spirit, completing the revelation. In the post-apostolic stage we have to do with tradition as the transmission of a revelation that is already complete.

Even in its post-apostolic phase tradition is not a merely human process of transmission. In every generation tradition is sustained by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit makes the documents of revelation, so to speak, come alive, so that the [p. 120](#) church can hear God's revealing voice in the Scripture. Thanks to tradition, says the Council, 'the Holy Spirit is active, making the living voice of the gospel resound in the Church, and through it in the world, bringing believers into the fullness of the truth, and making the word of Christ dwell in them in all its richness' (DV 9). Tradition enables the word of Scripture to become effective as revelation for its readers today, rather than being a document of merely historical interest.

6. CONCLUSION

With reference to the question proposed for this paper, we may say that the first schema of the Vatican II Constitution on Revelation was rejected partly because it seemed to give the impression that Scripture and tradition were the basis of revelation, rather than the reverse. While the schema could be defended as describing the order of discovery, the Council preferred to follow the genetic or causal order. In successive chapters of the final text it reversed the order of the schema, taking up first revelation, then tradition, and finally Scripture. This order is fundamentally correct insofar as Scripture presupposes

²⁹ Rahner, *Inspiration in the Bible*, 67–72.

tradition, while tradition presupposes revelation. But the public, historical revelation that lies at the basis of Christian faith was not complete until it was proclaimed in the apostolic tradition and formulated in the inspired language of Holy Scripture. Even then, the apostolic tradition and the canonical Scriptures still had to be recognized and interpreted in the tradition of the church in order for the revelation to be actual in later generations. The relationship, therefore, is not linear but rather circular. Revelation gives rise to tradition and Scripture, but Scripture and tradition, in turn, transmit revelation and make it resound in the minds and hearts of believers today.

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Scripture and Tradition: An Evangelical Response

Henri Blocher

It is almost too great an honour to be called on to respond to such a distinguished scholar as Dr Dulles, whose fame has reached my shores. Yet I am grateful indeed for it and for the opportunity to learn further from our exchanges. Though difficult, the task is not impossible: the balance and clarity of the paper render it feasible, and also the fact that I was not disconcerted by the development of the argument as I easily recognized a perfect expression of the moderate conservative stance, the one favoured by the highest authorities in the Church.

The lack of consensus in the Evangelical-Roman Catholic relation makes itself apparent at the outset of our enterprise. There is no Evangelical document which would enjoy in our community a status comparable to that of *Dei verbum*. The relatively high degree of spiritual and doctrinal consensus among Evangelicals is not nearly enough to change their taste for independence and, even, a mild organizational anarchy. Since Evangelicals understand themselves to be the true heirs of the Protestant Reformation, our point of reference is the Reformers' teaching, and the various confessions which issued from the Reformation, especially the fuller ones, the *Confessio helvetica posterior*, and the Westminster Confession. In some respects, they match the Council constitutions. In recent times, the Chicago Statement of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy—Summit I (October 1978) stands as a landmark for the majority view within the World Evangelical Fellowship constituency (without commanding a unanimous approval): the leading theologian behind its wording, Dr James I. Packer, now of Regent's College, Vancouver, is probably the best-known, and loved, systematician in the Evangelical world. The symposia emanating from the largest and most prestigious divinity schools¹ also give

¹ D.A. Carson & John D. Woodbridge (of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School), ed., *Scripture and Truth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983) and *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986); Harvie M. Conn (of Westminster Theological Seminary), ed., *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic. A Tradition. A Challenge, A Debate* (Grand Rapids: Baker Bk H., 1988). In French, we may add Paul Wells, ed., *Dieu parle! Etudes sur*