

"SCRIPTURE AND REVELATION
ACCORDING TO VATICANUM II"

by

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

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Title of Thesis "SCRIPTURE AND REVELATION ACCORDING TO
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Chapter 1 : Study of the vocabulary used for "revelation" in Hebrew and Greek shows that basically the word means "uncovering" or "opening out" of something for a person to see.

Revelation takes place in free and voluntary personal encounter involving dialogue between persons. Biblical revelation is both the uncovering of the person and nature of God and the uncovering of man's eye and ear so that he may respond appropriately to God. Such dialogue between God and man is pointed to through the Old Testament Covenant of grace and in the fulfilment of this covenant in Jesus Christ in the New Testament. He is the unique event of God's self-revelation, transmitted to all through a living witness to Him, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Revelation has therefore a basically Trinitarian structure. Faith is involved right at the centre of this dialogue between God and man, for faith is the response to what is imparted in revelation and through it revelation is received.

Chapter 2 : Revelation needs a continuity in its medium which is the community of mankind and its history, as is to be found in the life and history of Israel and in the Church's life. This chapter deals first with the concept of Tradition and then its development during the Apostolic and Post-Apostolic periods of the Church, with the developing need for a norm or "rule of faith".

Chapter 3 : The New Testament Canon of Holy Scripture becomes the norm for all future tradition in the Church. Various lists of books were regarded as comprising the New Testament Canon, but ultimately Apostolicity was the criterion which came to prevail in the choice of books forming the Canon. Reference is made to Vincent of Lerin's

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axiom that the norm of the Church's faith is that which has been believed everywhere, always and by all. Reference is also made to Aquinas's attitude to Scripture and the interpretations of it by the Fathers.

Chapter 4 : A discussion of the Tridentine decree on Scripture and revelation, in the light of its first draft and of the concept of Tradition in Cardinal Cervini's basic draft, shows that three principles - Scripture, Gospel and revelation of the Spirit in the Church - appear to be affirmed in the decree, the text of which is concerned with defining and affirming principles which had always governed the Church's life. The position reached by Trent was that "traditions" are guaranteed by "Tradition", whose principle is the Holy Spirit. The relation between and the meaning of Scripture and tradition in the decree is examined.

Chapter 5 : A discussion follows on the Church's understanding of the statements made at the Council of Trent and how Scripture and tradition were related and interpreted from Vatican I to Vatican II. The important documents of this period are the decree of Vatican I on revelation, Leo XIII's encyclical "Providentissimus Deus", the answers of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, Pius X's "Pascendi" and Pius XII's encyclicals "Divino Afflante Spiritu" and "Humani Generis".

Chapter 6 : The background to the Constitution, "De Divina Revelatione" is described. The Council's aim was to maintain the continuity of theological thinking since Trent, while at the same time to proclaim Salvation in a relevant manner to the contemporary world. Reference is made to the various drafts of the "Schema" of 1962 leading up to the fourth draft which appeared in the eighth public session of the Council and which was proclaimed by the Pope on 18th November.

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Faith is the correlative of revelation. It is the free response of men, in a total personal commitment in obedience, to the God who reveals Himself. The nature of faith is described and also its relation to the work of the Holy Spirit.

Chapter 8 : The transmission of revelation, discussed in this chapter, is the work of God. The means of transmission was the spoken word of the Apostles who handed on nothing more nor less than what they received from Christ at the prompting of the Holy Spirit, under whom they committed the message of Salvation to writing. Teaching, life and worship are the three ways in which tradition is handed on. The connection between Scripture and Tradition is described and also the particular function of the Magisterium in relation to them both.

Chapter 9 : This chapter deals with the inspiration and interpretation of Scripture and how the idea of inerrancy is to be understood. Both inspiration and inerrancy are to be understood primarily from the Will of God, who desires to communicate His saving truth to men. Interpretation of Scripture requires full examination of the customary and characteristic patterns of perception, speech and narrative, prevailing at the age of the sacred writer. This is part of the exegete and interpreter's task.

Chapter 10 : This chapter deals with the treatment in "Dei Filius" of Holy Scripture in the Church's life. The Old Testament's economy is described and how it is related to the New Testament by being shown forth in it. The relation between the divine and human

Use other side if necessary.

authorship of Scripture is described. An account is also given of the significance of the New Testament writings as a witness to the life and work of Jesus Christ and also of the place of Scripture in the Church's life. Reference is again made to the relation between Scripture, tradition and Magisterium and to the dialogic nature of Scripture.

Chapter 11 : In the concluding chapter revelation of God which He wills to be communicated to His world through His Church is considered under six aspects. Revelation is understood as a divine "economy" and also as dialogue, which expresses its personal aspect. Next the connection between revelation and tradition is examined. Following this, revelation as mystery is expounded which involves its relation to inspiration and the work of God's grace through the power of the Holy Spirit. Finally we examine the connection between revelation and the continuous activity of the Holy Spirit in the world.

Abstract of Thesis

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Revelation takes place in free and voluntary personal encounter involving dialogue between persons. Biblical revelation is both the uncovering of the person and nature of God and the uncovering of man's eye and ear so that he may respond appropriately to God. Such dialogue between God and man is pointed to through the Old Testament Covenant of grace and in the fulfilment of this covenant in Jesus Christ in the New Testament. He is the unique event of God's self-revelation, transmitted to all through a living witness to Him, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Revelation has therefore a basically Trinitarian structure. Faith is involved right at the centre of this dialogue between God and man, for faith is the response to what is imparted in revelation and through it revelation is received.

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CHAPTER I

The Meaning of Divine Revelation

(a) The meaning of "revelation"

The English noun "revelation" and the verb "to reveal" come from the latin verb, "revelo", which means "to unveil" or "lay bare". The noun "velum", from which the verb is formed, means a "covering", or "curtain".

Hebrew uses the verb, הִלָּךְ , which means: (1) make bare, open, or uncover in the sense of uncovering a person's ear, that is, to inform him privately; (2) in the passive forms it means "to be uncovered", "to be discovered", or "to be revealed". There is also the reflexive sense of the verb meaning "to reveal oneself", or "to disclose oneself".

In Greek both a noun and a verb are to be found in use in the New Testament texts: ἀποκαλύπτω the verb means "to uncover", "to reveal", "to be disclosed", to be distinctly declared (Romans I : 17-18), "to be set forth" and "to be announced" (Galatians 3 : 23): ἀποκάλυψις , the noun, means, "revelation", "disclosure", "an uncovering" and is most frequently used in the Pauline literature¹.

"Revelation", then, is, in the general sense, the uncovering or the opening out of something for a person to see and understand, like the drawing back of a veil

¹Cf. Romans 2 : 5. 16.25.
1 Corinthians 14 : 6. Galatians 1 : 2.
Ephesians 1 : 17. 3 : 3 (cf. also Revelation 1 : 1).

from someone's covered face. It is the bringing into the open for all to see, that which hitherto remained hidden.

In the Bible, however, "to reveal", or "revelation" are hardly ever used in these general senses, for they are used here almost exclusively in reference to God and divine things. In two places (2 Corinthians 3 : 13f. and 1 Corinthians 11 : 5f), St. Paul speaks of a veil and the covering of a woman's head, but in both passages he uses different compounds to describe the removal or absence of the covering.

The two basic modes through which revelation of any kind is communicated are speech and action. Revelation remains incomplete, and indeed meaningless, unless it is understood by the person or persons to whom it is communicated. A response, therefore, of some sort is required if what is revealed is to have any use, or implication, or relevance to the person to whom it is revealed. As Edward Schillebeeckx writes:

"A truly human encounter takes place only when the one human person voluntarily reveals himself to the other, who opens himself to this revelation"¹.

Revelation is the uncovering of mystery or hiddenness in a free and voluntary personal encounter which involves dialogue between two or more persons. When, however, we speak of Biblical revelation the proper subject of revelation is God Himself in His being and works for, as G. S. Hendry

¹E. Schillebeeckx. "Revelation and Theology".
(Sheed : Ward: 1967).

writes: "God reveals Himself and we are dependent on His revelation of Himself for all our knowledge of God. Had we no revelation, God would remain absolutely hidden (John 1 : 18. 1 Timothy 6 : 16)"¹.

When we speak of revelation as "mystery", in this context it does not refer to its modern usage as "secret", or "riddle" to which an answer has not been found. Here we use "mystery" in the New Testament sense of a secret which has been or is being disclosed; because it is a divine secret it remains mystery and does not become transparent to man. St. Paul uses the idea most often in reference to God's purpose or plan of Salvation disclosed in His revelation. In Pauline usage mystery is correlative with revelation; the substance of Revelation is the mystery of the Gospel² or the mystery of God³, that is, the divine purpose which was kept hidden from former ages and has been made known in the fullness of time through Christ. God is transcendent. He is not an object accessible to our observation in the world. He cannot be "imaged" in the categories at our disposal. "The knowledge of God must be given to us by God Himself"⁴.

Divine revelation is a disclosure of His mystery, which God makes to man. It is a disclosure which God makes voluntarily and by way of a personal encounter with man. Without God taking the initiative to reveal

¹G. S. Hendry. "Revelation" in "A Theological Word Book of the Bible" (ed. A. Richardson) S.C.M. 1950.

²Ephesians 6 : 19

³Colossians 2 : 2

⁴Op. cit.

Himself, man can only remain in ignorance. As G. S. Hendry writes:

"Revelation is not a thing to be procured from God by any technique; it is a living encounter with God Himself, and it is to be received only by waiting upon Him"¹. God is both the subject and the object of revelation and man can know God only in as far as God communicates Himself to man.

Divine revelation is not only the uncovering of the person and nature of God; it is also the uncovering of the ear and eye of man so that he is given to ascertain what is the true, appropriate response to the God who reveals Himself. Divine revelation, however, is not a total disclosure by God of Himself, which would freeze us for ever in our chosen state and put a stop to history. God reveals Himself to us within and along with our knowledge of the world and of one another; God being the Lord of all things can make use of the whole of creation for the purpose of His self-disclosures, although no single one of these means is capable of expressing Revelation in its fullness and so His revelation is fraught with mystery and even in His self-disclosure He remains a hidden God, the Lord of all life whose ways are higher than our ways and whose thoughts are higher than our thoughts². Even in the heart of this revelation, knowledge of God is

¹Op. cit.

²Isaiah 45 : 15. 55 : 8f.

distinguished from all other knowledge. The disclosure which God makes to us of Himself is a disclosure through created signs, guaranteed by God not to mislead us, though they may be very imperfect. These signs are events, realities, actions and words, all which go to make a dialogue, which takes place between the living God and man. At no point do the signs "image" God or "contain" God in any sense; God remains transcendent to all our receiving of His revelation so that even in His revelation God does not fall within the control of our thought or manipulation. God and His revelation are inseparable, for He and what He reveals of Himself are identical, so that we can never master what He reveals any more than we can master God. This being so, revelation has an awful, holy, numinous, fear-inspiring element, for we creatures are confronted with the sheer majesty of God in all its objective actuality and reality, and can only acknowledge it with awe, fear, reverence, humility, obedience and love.

Although God's revelation to man is in accordance with the mode of the receiver, nevertheless, if it is really to be revelation of what is new and beyond him, it must adapt the receiver, enlarge his capacity, and heighten his mode of receiving, so that in actualizing itself revelation lifts the receiver up to a higher dimension of which he is quite incapable in himself, and which stretches infinitely beyond him.

(b) The beginning of revelation: revelation in the Old Testament

Revelation, to be of any universal value, is given not only to individual persons but to a community of people as a whole, by whom it is passed on from one generation to the next. So God's revelation creates reciprocity or mutual relations with us. This reciprocity which God creates is a community of reciprocity. Revealed truth is to be found in the consciousness of a living human community, in so far as this community is directed towards reality which ultimately is truth. That reality is the Person of God Himself, who freely chooses to enter into dialogue, as He did through His covenant of grace with the people of Israel and ultimately through the Incarnation - event of the man Jesus Christ, through whom He reveals to the world His purpose of Salvation.

Let us examine briefly what is entailed in this covenant dialogue between God and His people. To do so we must first examine two closely related concepts, (a) the "Name of God" and (b) the "Word of God", both of which imply a dialogistic relationship.

(a) The "Name of God": the "name" which expresses the essence of a being or a thing also constitutes a revelation. It is by the name that a living being becomes self-conscious and free and capable of entering into relations with another. As E. Jacob writes: "..... we may say that the name, which we know always expresses the essential nature of a being, manifests the totality of the divine presence even more than the angel, the face or the glory, and at the same time this concept of the name

safeguards the unity of God because name and person are identical. To make God known to men is to make His name known (cf. St. John 17 : 6-26). The name associated with a person in history will mark the consummation of all the groupings of ancient Israel to resolve the problems so vital to it of the presence of God"¹.

The frequent use in the laws of the formula, "I am Yahweh", (cf. Leviticus 18), is a reminder that "the Law" is revelation. Also, the "Thou shalt" of "the Decalogue" and of the other laws in the apodictic style is intended to express that "the Law" is a revelation before it is an instruction. E. Jacob continues to write that:

"..... the "Thou shalt" is a corollary of the "I am" of Exodus 3 : 14, for the revelation of God as a sovereign and present person can only have as counterpart the revelation of man as a dependent and obedient creature"². The "Name of God", therefore, freely declared by Him to His people, by which He chooses to be known by them, is part of the reciprocal nature of His personal revelation to them. For the community to know God in turn demands of them certain responses which they must make to the God who in His free grace reveals Himself to them as a person.

(b) The "Word of God": the "Word of God", is the Old Testament expression for God who addresses man personally. Israel made no distinction between word and event or thing expressed in words. " דבר " meant

¹E. Jacob: "The Theology of the Old Testament", p.85. (Hodder and Stoughton 1961).

²Op. Cit. p.273.

both a spoken or written word and an event in nature or history. "Word" was a full manifestation of a person through speech and action. The revelation of God by His Word exhibits its character as an essentially personal transaction, for "word" as rational and intelligible address, is the proper means of communication between person and person. Revelation is essentially a dialogue in which God speaks His Word, addresses it to man's understanding, and seeks to elicit an understanding response. As

G. S. Hendry writes:

"..... the Word is never to be thought of in an intellectualistic sense as the communication of abstract truth. The Hebrew term for "word" means also thing, act, event, and with God word and work are one, (cf. Genesis 1 : 3. Psalm 103 : 7); the Word of God is the speaking or significant side of His work"¹.

Revelation in the Old Testament is never in any special way dependent on the written word, although at an early date reverence for the Word of God began to be shown by writing it down. While in revealing Himself to man God concedes to their powers of apprehension, as the concept of "Word" again suggests, nevertheless He remains the Initiator and Master of His self-revealing activity. This therefore implies that God's Word is spoken through the human words and phrases of men, which He takes up and

¹G. S. Hendry, "Revelation" in "A Theological Word Book of the Bible" (ed. A. Richardson) p.197. (S.C.M. 1950).

makes the fit vehicle for the expression of His eternal Word among mankind. All our knowledge of God is through God and through Him alone. His revelation breaks into our language and culture and speech and alters them, but in such a way as to lift us up to partake of God's knowledge of Himself, so that in revelation somehow we are sharing a meeting of God with Himself.

Holy Scripture assumes that God is in no way bound to man, that His revelation is thus an act of His freedom, contradicting man's contradiction. The language of the prophets and Apostles about God's revelation is not a free, selective, decisive treatment of well-founded convictions - it is witness. "Their order of knowing corresponds to the order of being in which God is the Lord but in which man is God's creature and servant"¹. Revelation is the event by which God discloses Himself to man within the created order in which God has placed men to live as His creatures. "Their thought and language follow the fact of God's revelation, freely created by Him"². Man's conception of what is possible with God is guided absolutely by his conception of what God has really willed and done and not vice-versa. In making Himself the object of human knowledge God still remains its active, free, and mysterious subject. He has revealed Himself through

¹K. Barth : Church Dogmatics I 2 "The Doctrine of the Word of God" (T. & T. Clark 1963). *chap II p7-78.*

²Op. Cit. p7.

His Word and will not disavow His Revelation, but this revelation is offered only to him who is prepared to receive it as a creature humbly conditioned by space and time, and who gratefully recognises that the revelation is a saving action.

The author of the letter to the "Hebrews" begins his writing by saying:

"In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets"¹.

There is contained here a deep insight into the nature of revelation expressed throughout the Old Testament writings. The "Word of God" to Israel, so precious because it was the manifestation of God Himself, was handed on from father to son, first by an original oral tradition employing much of the language and imagery of the Middle and near East valley where the sacred history was to unfold, then by the reading and interpretation of inspired texts. The prophetic message acted as a constant critical authority in Israel, sifting what was authentic in these traditions from what was not authentic. The sacred books of Israel gradually emerged against this background of saving history and traditions brought about or critically sifted by the message of the prophets and it was in these books that Israel's consciousness of Salvation was reflected by way of the critical interpretation of the prophets, God's appointed witnesses and spokesmen. Israel's history of Salvation is distinguished from the universal

¹ Hebrews 1 : 1.

history of Salvation by the presence of the prophetic message in Israel's history.

In his book: "Scripture and Tradition in Judaism", Geza Vermes¹ points out that various currents of biblical tradition, whether written or oral, did not remain separate units. A new tradition, whatever its written purpose, neither simply supplemented, nor wholly replaced previous traditions, but by a process of osmosis completely transformed them. Vitality and movement later, in the history of the Haggadah, was inspired by what was the ultimate purpose of all Jewish exegesis, that is, to fuse Scripture with life. While respecting the letter of the Bible, yet anxious to respond to contemporary needs, the Haggadah constantly searched for fresh insight into the spirit of the ancient teachings of Moses and the prophets. As a result, G. Vermes continues to point out, Scripture renewed and revived was able to maintain its full impact on the Jewish mind as a source of ever-present revelation and light.

The covenant-dialogue between God and Israel was expressed through words, signs, symbols and actions, which always pointed away from and beyond themselves. The fact

¹Geza Vermes in "Scripture and Tradition in Judaism" (Haggadic Studies in "Studia Post-Biblica Vol. IV Leiden : E. J. Brill 1961) has made a detailed study of the exegetical traditions of the Rabbis, showing how certain ideas have been developed by Rabbinic tradition, for example "Pharaoh", "Lebanon", "Abraham", "Balaam etc. and a history of interpretation has been built up. He points out the importance of the metaphorical value of a word in ancient biblical commentary and how it acquires its new value from an association of various biblical texts. He sees this development in Jewish tradition as a period of great creative activity in which the vitality and movement in the history of the Haggadah was inspired by the purpose of all Jewish exegesis, which was to fuse Scripture with life.

that God has spoken suggests the deeply personal nature of His revelation, which came to the people by way of word, vision, and event, complementing one another and pointing them to the purpose of their existence as they pondered on what happened in their national and individual history. They saw here a pattern in episodes which still retained reality for them in their contemporary world. They were convinced that Yahweh had revealed Himself directly to them in vision and word. This direct revelation removed the ambiguity which may otherwise have faced them in grasping the meaning of their history. Also, the divine help was there to interpret what they experienced, ensuring that the events of their history were understood in terms of a personal relationship with Yahweh. This revelation remained unique and specialised while containing within it the seeds of a more universal dialogue between God and all mankind.

In Israel we have not only the revelation of God taking place within a relation of covenanted community-reciprocity, but even within that covenant-relationship it takes place in such a way that all the time there is being forged a divinely shaped and a provided way of covenant-response to God. As T. F. Torrance writes:

"All through the history of Israel in the Old Testament the Word of God which had bound Israel into covenant-union with itself insisted on being translated into the flesh of Israel so as to adapt Israel to its purpose, to fashion

within it a womb for the Incarnation of the Word and a matrix of appropriate thought- and language-forms for the reception of the incarnational revelation¹.

It is that covenanted-response in its adequacy to the divine revelation that we have finally in the fullness of Christ. "Although the Word of God and the existence of Israel are bound up inextricably together, the concrete form of Israel in the Old Testament is revealed by the Incarnation to be a passing form which exhibits the judgment of our stubborn and rebellious humanity in its restoration to union with the Word of God"². In the finality of the Incarnation and the new concrete human situation begotten by it in the Church, there is exhibited the permanent form of the Israel of God, which will endure throughout all the changes of history. We must turn now to examine this more definitive form of revelation as it is expressed through the Incarnation of Jesus Christ.

(c) The definitive revelation: the Incarnation

Christianity came into the world as a religion of revelation, claiming that its ultimate source lay in the Person, words and works of Jesus Christ, in whom it was understood and believed, all that was being revealed by God to Israel of His way and purpose for Israel and all mankind is now brought to completion. As the author of the letter to the Hebrews continues his thesis:

¹T. F. Torrance : "Theology in Reconstruction" p.145. (S.C.M. 1965).

²Op. Cit. p.145.

"..... in these last days He has spoken to us by a Son, whom He appointed the heir of all things, through whom also He created the world"¹.

In His Person, word and event, which are part of revelation, find their ultimate unity of expression within this cosmos which is known to us. Karl Barth writes of the Incarnation: "We conclude from the reality of Jesus Christ that God reveals Himself, that He is free for us, in such a way that God's Son or Word assumes a form at least known to us, such that He can become cognisable by us by analogy with other forms known to us. His humanity is the covering which He puts on, and therefore the means of His revelation. We return at once to the fact that it is humanity. But as such it is a form belonging to the cosmos, whose reality is also known to us in another way. God could have revealed Himself immediately in His invisible glory. Or in order to be manifest to us, the Word might have assumed the form of a being previously and otherwise wholly foreign to us, a being belonging to some other cosmos of reality. But that is not the case. As a mystery, revelation does not anywhere infringe the nature and history of our cosmos as we know them. Although with signs and wonders, things happen as they have always and everywhere happened since this cosmos began to exist. That is to say, at a definite point in space and time there lives and dies a human being like us. In this human being, God's Word is revealed to us"².

¹Hebrews 1 : 2.

²K. Barth : Church Dogmatics I : 2. "The Doctrine of the Word of God" (T. & T. Clark 1963). Chp. II p.354.

Through the Divine revelation in Jesus Christ, God intended that all men should be saved in Him. What is brought about in the concrete appearance of the same saving will of God, ^{in the God-man, Jesus Christ, is the clear saving will of God,} which is the eternal purpose of God revealed by Him throughout the whole course of His dealings with men in their history. Whereas other revelation of God in time past was vague, ambiguous, easy to misinterpret and therefore frequently misinterpreted, the Incarnation of Jesus Christ cannot be misunderstood. He is the unique revelatory event, in which the dialogue between God and mankind is brought to completion, and so for this reason we may say that He both uncovers the "Word of God" to man, by being the Incarnation of that Word, and uncovers man's ear and eye to see the appropriate, obedient answer to revelation. The vital covenant relationship that God wants to establish with man is perfect and definite in Jesus Christ. He is the revelation of all that we can know or need to know of God.

The time within which the whole history of Salvation is unfolded is past, present and future, but it has a centre which serves as a vantage point or norm for the whole stretch of this history. This centre or focal point is constituted by the period of direct revelation, that is, the Incarnational period consisting of the period from the birth of Christ to the death of the last eye-witness who saw the risen Christ and who received either

from the incarnate Jesus or the risen Christ a direct and unique order to bear witness to what he had seen or heard¹.

The revelation of God is not confined to the words of Christ which are merely, what G. S. Hendry calls, "the running commentary"² upon His work; the New Testament lends no countenance to any practice of isolating the Sermon on the Mount as the essence of Christianity. Revelation is to be found in the whole fact of Christ, His Person and work, His life, death, resurrection, ascension and promised advent in glory. It is of the grace of God that He has chosen to reveal Himself not in His naked, divine majesty, but clothed in the vesture of humanity; He has accommodated Himself to our creaturely capacity and so is God's Word in our midst.

(d) The transmission of revelation: the period of the Church

In his "Church Dogmatics" (1 : 2) Karl Barth writes that:

"The covenant of God with His people through the Incarnation is in truth the mysterium, the true mysterium, the mystery of the Old Testament"³.

¹O. Cullmann develops this idea of the incarnational period, the central period of revelation, which is a time of the unique revelation of God through Jesus Christ, witnessed to in a unique manner through the unique office of the Apostolate, in his book, "The Early Church", (S.C.M. 1966).

²G. S. Hendry: "Revelation" op. cit.

³K. Barth: "Church Dogmatics" 1 : 2 p.84.

And he then continues to say that:

"The mystery of revelation, which is the mystery of free, unmerited grace, includes the Church of the New Testament inseparably with the people whose blessing is attested for us in the Old Testament as expectation of Jesus Christ. And this very mystery acts not only as a barrier but as a bond between Church and Synagogue"¹.

Since this revelation of the mystery of God in Jesus Christ is unique and final, confined to a particular period and place in time and history, yet destined for all mankind, it requires to be handed on through witness both in word and action by those who have received it. Revelation is passed on to all people through oral and written witness to Him who is revelation in Himself; therefore, the New Testament witness originates in the eternal Word of God who chose, sanctified and assumed human nature and existence into oneness with Himself, in order thus, as "very God and very man", to become the Word of reconciliation spoken by God to man.

Logically and chronologically, testimony stood prior to written documents and so it is more correct to say that the latter were valued because they were held to enshrine the former. The living witness to divine revelation was transmitted through Kerygma or preaching, that is, an oral tradition which preceded the editing of the written Gospels. This transmission by the Apostles, whether by word or in written documents, is not effected

¹Op. cit. p.101

by men, but by Christ the Lord Himself, who thereby imparts this revelation. All that the Church knows about the words of Jesus, about His life, or about their interpretation, comes from the Apostles, who essentially pass on what they have received by revelation, but the exalted Christ Himself stands as the one unique source behind the Apostles who transmit His words and work.

Besides the oral or spoken witness to divine revelation there is also the written witness. When we speak of the Holy Scriptures as the "Word of God", the written account of divine revelation, we do so only with the understanding that they are an account of the "Word of God", but not identical with the "Word of God". They represent the gathering and sifting of the various apostolic traditions, of the preaching and witness to the Risen Lord, as He has imprinted His Word of revelation on His Apostles' minds and through the light of faith has enabled them to grasp more in the mystery of revelation than could be said about it in conceptual terms or more than history could tell us about it. They were able to see the unique revelatory event in all its fullness, to receive it and understand it and yet not attempt to explain away the mystery. Karl Barth writes:

"The central statement of the Christology of the early Church is that God becomes one with man: Jesus Christ "very God and very man". And it describes this event in the "conceptus de Spiritu sancto, natus ex Maria virgine".

The merit of the statement is that it denotes the mystery without resolving it away"¹.

The Holy Scriptures point us beyond themselves to the reality of revelation but they themselves are not or do not contain that reality. The oral and written word of the Apostles is not identical with objective revelation, that is, with the Divine Word. It is important to stress that revelation is not revelation-in-word alone, but also revelation-in-reality, that is, a "mysterion", an historical event in which God Himself accomplishes a deeper saving mystery through the appearance of Christ in the flesh, in a visible earthly form. Holy Scripture provides us with a precise expression of the revelation as it appeared in God's saving activity in Christ, in a veiled manner in Christ's pre-history in the Old Testament, and indeed even in the remote pre-history of the whole of mankind². Christ Himself, both in His actions and His words is revelation or God's disclosure of Himself. He is known only through the Apostolic witness to Him by those whom He has appointed and given power to proclaim His Word through the Holy Spirit. Their witness, through the power of the Holy Spirit, is an essential element of the redeeming mystery of Christ as divine revelation. Whatever is said regarding Scripture and tradition must be examined in the light of this norm.

¹K. Barth: "Church Dogmatics" 1 : 2 p.125.

²cf. E. Schillebeeckx: "Revelation and Theology", p.13.

We cannot read the Bible as divine revelation if we posit a direct identification between the human words of Scripture and the Divine Word. The Bible can only be read as revelation if, as it is read, the human words miraculously point beyond themselves to the Divine Word of God, which they are given power to do through the power of the Holy Spirit taking them and using them to bear witness to the Son of God in the heart of men. The Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son makes the revelation of God the Father in Jesus Christ the Son a present reality to all through faith stirred up by Him in each believer's heart. Through the power of the Holy Spirit the Apostles were the unique witness to the Incarnate Word of God. St. John points this out in his Gospel where he portrays Christ saying to His disciples:

".... the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you"¹.

He is the Spirit of truth, the interpreter of divine revelation in the hearts and minds of the Apostles and through them in the hearts and minds of all who are confronted with their witness so that all are confronted with the unique revelation of the Word of God in Jesus Christ. The doctrine of God's "three-in-oneness", as K. Barth refers to it², gives an answer to the question about the

¹

St. John 14 : 26.

²

K. Barth: "Church Dogmatics" 1 : 2 p.1.

subject of revelation attested in Holy Scripture.

Revelation attested in Holy Scripture is revelation of God, who, as the Lord, is the Father from whom it proceeds, the Son, who fulfils it objectively for us, the Holy Spirit who fulfils it subjectively in us. He is the one God in each of these modes of being and action, which are quite distinct and never to be identified with each other. Revelation has, therefore, a basic trinitarian structure.

The Holy Spirit is the dynamic producing the light of faith both in the community of the Church and in the individual believer, by virtue of which a view of the revealed reality with which we associate ourselves in faith is given, so that what is passed on is received by a living, active subject. The Holy Spirit while producing the light of faith also gives direction and completion to the dialogue between God and His people in relation to the vicarious humanity of Christ and the definitive pattern of revelation in Him. The Incarnation is the unique event of revelation and the Holy Spirit fulfils it subjectively in us through the light of faith, but it does not continue it in the life of the Church. If revelation involves an encounter and a dialogue between God and man, as we maintain it does, something is freely given and received, as in all dialogue, and so faith is involved right at the very centre of the encounter.

It is, indeed, the active response to what is imparted. As far as we are concerned, the era of the Church is the era of our response and the sphere of the Church is also the sphere of our response. The time of those responses that are stirred up in us is brought to its fulfilment within the life of the Church founded upon the unique Apostolic witness. It will therefore be necessary to examine how the Church has received this unique revelation encounter in Jesus Christ and what part the spoken and written witness to Him play in the Church's life and worship. As there is no criterion of revelation apart from revelation itself, at the most it can be examined only in regard to its own internal self-consistency. There is no external test by which it can be authenticated, for revelation by its nature is unique and incomparable. It cannot be explained or proved; it can only be received in faith and humility.

CHAPTER 2

Tradition in the Apostolic and Post-Apostolic Age

Revelation takes place within the context of man's relation to the natural world and other persons living together in community; this is, as it were, the medium which reflects its meaning. The Father sent the Son, His Word, into the world to live amongst men, to share their experience in the world and so to speak God's Word of revelation to them within the context of the world in which they were living, so that the Word of the Father might be fully received and understood by them. But revelation also needs a continuity in the medium if it is to be reflected objectively and not just given privately. A similar need occurs with regard to language; apart from the relation of language to the public world around us, it would be quite private and of no use in communication with others. It is through its correlation with the determinate world that goes on that it has this public reference and also that universal aspect which gives it continuity, in the midst of all changes.

Revelation likewise needs a continuity in its medium, which is the community of men and women with its history of living and sharing life together in this world; however, it creates the pattern of the medium and shapes it into an adequate medium, with the result that the continuity of the medium also comes under the power of revelation. Israel, for example, provided that sort of continuity of

medium for the Old Testament revelation through living as a Covenant-people, called together by God and bound together by a Covenant-relation with Him. As Dr. T.F. Torrance writes:

"A doctrine of revelation and inspiration in the Old Testament Scriptures must doubtless work with the correlativity of the people of God with the work of His Spirit, so that Revelation is bound up with the history of that people, and the "Heilsgeschichte" with the acts of that people"¹.

Tradition in the New Testament corresponds to the Old Testament Covenant-tradition through which God's grace is revealed to His people. In the New Testament, however, we have to reckon with the decisive reconstructing of the human medium in the new humanity of Christ and the reconstructing of the historical medium of Israel into the Body of Christ, the Church of the New Covenant. Yet, behind all the changes it is the covenant that gives continuity to the medium in its transformation under the impact of the divine revelation. "In the New Covenant a doctrine of revelation and inspiration has to work with the fundamental and absolute importance of the Humanity of Jesus Christ, for with the Incarnation the "Heilsgeschichte" is bound up exclusively with Him"². Revelation was fully

¹T. F. Torrance: "Conflict and Agreement in the Church" (Volume I) p.17. (Lutterworth 1959).

²Op. cit.

complete and whole with the Incarnation, Resurrection, and Ascension of Christ, and therefore nothing can be added to it. The Holy Spirit witnessing to God's revelation in the hearts of people in the Church does not speak of Himself but only reveals what Christ had taught His disciples. Therefore, throughout the history of the Church the revealing work of the Spirit is bounded by the particularity of the Incarnation and the form of the Incarnate Word, the historical Jesus. "In this New Covenant the people of God are made one Body with Christ and the Holy Spirit is poured out upon their hearts, for God's New Covenant is not only cut into the flesh of the Body through the Crucifixion of Christ but cut into the innermost being of His people in the heart and mind of the Church"¹. It is here we find the difference between the Old Testament Church and the New Testament Church; in the New Testament Church the Word of God incarnate in Christ is incorporated into our humanity, and it is in that incarnate Word that the Church is given to participate in the Covenant as it is fulfilled in Jesus Christ in His incarnation, life, death, and resurrection. The Apostles were given a special place in that New Covenant at its inauguration at the Last Supper and it is through their unique relation to the Incarnate Word and the Holy Spirit that they are constituted the foundation of the New Israel, the People of God filled with God's Spirit and incorporated

¹Op. cit. p.25.

into Christ as His Body. It is the covenanted faithfulness of Christ which undergirds the whole foundation of the Church and the whole of its continuity throughout all the changes of history. The Apostles are given the special function of passing on the unique revelation of God which was fully completed in Jesus Christ but they do so as special instruments in the hand of God, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Dr. T. F. Torrance writes of the continuity of the Church saying:

"The whole continuity of the Church in its apostolic foundation depends upon the unique character and function of the apostolate. The Apostles were the chosen vessels appointed to be with Christ, to receive His Revelation and to assimilate it in their obedience to Christ and to be assimilated to it, and in that way to pass it on to the Church. But they did that as special instruments in the hand of God under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, for through the Spirit Jesus Christ Himself returned to them clothed in His Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, and gave Himself to be fully known - the same historical Jesus but now shining forth in the glory of the resurrection"¹.

We must turn now to examine the nature of tradition and the expression of that unique tradition given to the Apostles by their Lord to be handed down through them to His Church.

¹Op. cit. p.26.

Writing of the problem of primitive revelation and tradition, in his book "The Meaning of Tradition"¹, J. R. Geiselman says that primitive revelation cannot be proved, for historians of religion can only observe that, however far back they trace the phenomenon of religion, it is a thing transmitted by tradition. When they reach the end beyond which they cannot advance for lack of historical material, they can only assume that prior to the earliest historically observable tradition, there must have been another and yet another tradition, so that tradition is lost in limitless distance.

More specifically, "tradition is the handing on of good news regarding a gracious intervention of God in the history of man"². It is more than merely historical recollection of a great event of the past. It is that event itself rendered present in the joyful proclamation that divine election continues and endures in the ever new fidelity of Him, who has separated His people from among all the nations to be His own. It is a living link between generations, establishing a community between them and it brings the powerfully effective religious rites into line with those that have preceded them.

We must now look more closely at the etymology of "tradition" and its special use and significance in the New Testament, where it is especially referred to the transmission of revelation.

¹G. R. Geiselman: "The Meaning of Tradition". *CHP* v. 1, p. 39-48.

²Op. cit. v. 1.

(BURNS + OATES, LONDON 1966).

(1) The Meaning of "tradition":

The verb from which "tradition" is derived, means basically, "to give, hand over, or hand down". "Tradere", from which the English word, "tradition", comes, is used to render the Greek verb, παράδιδοναι, which in turn is used in the "Septuagint" to render the Hebrew root, [לָּבַן], meaning "to give, make, do, constitute; and in the NIPHAL form, "be given, or be delivered". παράδιδοναι, is used to cover a wide range of meanings; it can mean, "deliver up", or "deliver verbally" such things as customs, rules, commands, facts of knowledge. It is used frequently in this sense in the writings of the New Testament¹; hence, in the Gospel according to St. Mark, our Lord speaking with the Pharisees tells them that they make void the word of God, through their "tradition", which they hand on; or, St. Peter speaks of "the holy commandment delivered to them" (i.e. the people); or, the author of the letter of Jude tells those to whom he is writing, that they must, "contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints".

This verb has also the meaning of "entrusting"², "committing", "commending", "yielding up". Another

¹cf. Mk. 7 : 13 : 1 Cor. 15 : 3; 11 : 23; 2 Peter 2 : 21; Jude 3;

Mk. 7 : 13 : ἀκυροῦντες τὸν λόγον τοῦ Θεοῦ τῇ παραδόσει ὑμῶν ἣν παρεδώκατε.

2 Peter 2 : 21:

Jude 3:

²cf. St. Mt. 11 : 27.

important series of passages from the "New Testament" writings¹, show it having the meaning of delivering as a matter of injunction or instruction, so St. Luke² begins his Gospel narrative by saying that he is compiling a narrative of "the things which have been accomplished among us, just as they were "delivered" to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word".

Less frequently used in the New Testament writings than the verb, is the noun, *παράδοσις*, which means always in these writings, "that which is handed on" and never the deliverer, or process of delivery of tradition. This is the normal word for "tradition" in the "New Testament"; it occurs thirteen times there³, nine of them referring to "halakah" or Rabbinic elaboration of the law, three of them denoting Christian tradition or traditions, with one uncertain reference which could not refer to Christian tradition. There are other passages in the New Testament where Christian tradition is referred to without the actual word, *παράδοσις* ,

¹(St. Mk. 7 : 3-13 as in 1 p.28); Lk 1 : 2; Acts 6 : 14.
Lk 1 : 2 : καὶ ὡς παράδοσιν ἡμῶν.....

²Lk. 1 : 2.

³ (a) *παράδοσις* referring to "halakah", e.g. Mt. 15:2,3,6. Mk 7 : 3,5,8,9,13; Gal 1 : 14.

(b) Referring to Christian tradition: 1 Cor. 11 : 2; 2 Thess 2 : 15; 3 : 6.

(c) Col 2 : 8; but this passage could not refer to Christian tradition.

being used¹. The contents of this tradition are not often precisely stated, but they would probably at least include some of Jesus' words and works, and also some short stereotyped formulae, such as the account of Jesus' actions at the Last Supper, a brief Christological statement and a list of Resurrection appearances².

Παράδοσις then, refers to what is transmitted in the way of teaching, precept or doctrine³, so St. Paul instructs the Corinthians to "maintain the traditions", even as he has delivered these to them.

Παράδοσις is also used in the Septuagint to translate the Hebrew, $\gamma\dot{\iota}\tau\ddot{o}\chi$, which means "a bond or fetter". The verb, $\pi\alpha\rho\alpha\delta\acute{\iota}\delta\omicron\nu\alpha\iota$, "to hand on", or "transmit", has an active meaning, that is, "handing down", or "transmitting doctrine". The noun, $\pi\alpha\rho\acute{\alpha}\delta\omicron\sigma\iota\varsigma$, meaning a deposit which is handed on, indicates an object or content.

(c) The Book of Acts 2 : 42:

There is one further reference in the New Testament in the "Acts of the Apostles", which is of prime importance here, although neither the verb nor the noun used for "tradition" occurs in it. In chapter two of the "Acts of the Apostles" the author writes of the early Church community saying:

¹ e.g. Lk 1 : 2; Rom. 6 : 17; 1 Cor. 11 : 23f.; 15 : 1f; 2 Peter 2 : 21; Jude 3.

² So at least would Rom. 6 : 17; 1 Cor 11 : 23f. and 15 : 1f. suggest.

³ 1 Cor. 11 : 2: $\kappa\alpha\theta\omega\varsigma\ \pi\alpha\rho\acute{\epsilon}\delta\omega\kappa\alpha\ \eta\mu\acute{\iota}\nu\ \tau\acute{\alpha}\varsigma\ \pi\alpha\rho\acute{\alpha}\delta\omicron\sigma\iota\varsigma\ \kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\epsilon\tau\epsilon.$

cf. also 2 Thess. 2 : 15; + 3 : 6.

".... they devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers"¹. To know Jesus as revealer one must continue in Jesus' speech and be rooted in His instruction. The point of importance here is that the task of the Apostles is not finished once they have delivered their message; those who have been touched by the preaching, the Apostles continue to instruct. This is a very important aspect of the working out of tradition, which we must not overlook. Ph. -H. Menoud² speaks of a "perseverance" of the Church expressed through adherence to the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and prayers. This is what "tradition" in the New Testament is about. The proper task of the faithful is to live the instruction given through the Apostles. Christianity is a unique act of redemption and a relative tradition to this unique act; to the fidelity of the Apostles in their specific ministry of witnesses of Christ, corresponds the fidelity of believers to follow the Apostolic instruction, but the Apostles alone are witnesses for it is through them alone that the Christian act became known. Tradition, then, rightly understood in the New Testament sense is the handing on by the Apostles what they had received from the Lord Himself through preaching and instruction. The Church of the faithful

¹Acts 2 : 42

²Ph. -H. Menoud: "La Vie de l'Eglise Naissante" p15-8. (Delachaux et Niestle'). (1969)

persevere in the teaching given by the Apostles, in the fellowship gathered around them, in the Eucharist through which the presence of Christ is realised visibly in their midst, and in the life of prayer through which thanks is rendered to the Lord for the redemption given through Him in the plan of Salvation. Through these means the Apostolic tradition is properly continued throughout the life of the Church.

(2) Oral and written tradition:

It is obvious that Christian tradition must have commenced by being oral tradition. Our Lord left no written records behind Him after His earthly ministry. The earliest "history" of the Church, "the Book of the Acts", does not suggest that anybody thought of writing down an account of the work or words of Jesus for several years after His Resurrection. Up until about the year 170 A.D., when the New Testament substantially in the form in which we now know it, is recognised widely in the Church as authoritative Scripture, comparable to the Scripture of the Old Testament, oral and written tradition have been existing side by side in the Church, with the open possibility that either one may be as authoritative and reliable as the other. As the period goes on the reliability of oral tradition must have become restricted to some extent by the increasing authority given to the written tradition.

Cullmann¹ points out that the oral tradition of the Apostles, which precedes the first Apostolic writings, was quantitatively richer than the written tradition. As can be conjectured, oral tradition in the process of transmission, may develop vivid touches and circumstantial detail, interesting, but not original. So, the written word will inevitably appear more permanent, more objective and more authoritative than the oral word. In situations, therefore, where both written and oral tradition exist the written tradition will tend to replace oral tradition. The situation of the Church in the years approximating to 60 A.D. to 160 A.D., is precisely one in which oral and written tradition are circulating in the Church side by side. By the middle of the second century, this oral tradition was subject to a growing uncertainty, made larger indeed by the influence of Gnostic thought throughout the Church. By the mid-third century oral tradition was so faint as to be almost non-existent.

Henceforth, the revelatory events can only be known as history in general is known, that is by testimony, and written testimony at that. But it must not be forgotten that an oral tradition did precede the writing and the editing of the New Testament books; the text incorporated it and expressed the faith of the community, though that faith was not the creation of the community itself.

¹O. Cullmann: "The Early Christian Church" p5f.
(S.C.M. 1966).

In the part of his letter in which St. Paul¹ writes to Corinth about the institution of the Eucharist, he says that he himself "received" from the Lord what he transmits, however, everything in the Eucharistic passage in the first letter to Corinth shows that St. Paul received this tradition, not by a direct revelation from the glorified Lord, but from Apostles who were present at and took part in the "Last Supper".

(3) "Tradition" in the time of the Apostolic Fathers:

E. Schillebeeckx² speaks of two phases in the development of the Apostolic faith into the dogma of the Church: (i) a constitutive phase, which includes the whole reality of revelation and which closed with the end of the early Apostolic Church, i.e. with the death of the last Apostle, as the last authentic witness of the mystery of Jesus Christ; (ii) what he calls an interpretative phase, during which nothing new has been added to the faith's content, but "its hidden wealth" has been more sharply defined, since the closing of revelation. This aptly describes the age of the early Apologists.

Before the early second century the Apostolic testimony had not yet come to be known as "tradition". Clement³ spoke of "the rule of our tradition", but the

¹1 Cor. 11 : 23 and Gal. 1 : 12.

²E. Schillebeeckx: "Revelation and Theology" p63.f. (Sheed/Ward: 1967).

³1 Clement 7 : 2.

term, *παράδοσις* , occurred only rarely in this period. Justin Martyr used it only once¹, and then only to indicate the tradition of the Jewish teachers.

παράδοσις , was used more frequently. Polycarp spoke of "the word" transmitted "from the beginning"² and Justin Martyr³ spoke of the apostles "delivering" to the Gentiles the prophecies about Jesus, or "handing down" the institution of the Eucharist.

In this period, when "tradition" is used, it is used in a context which has often nothing to do with Christianity. When it has reference to Christianity, it is sometimes to Christ Himself or sometimes to the teaching contained in Scripture. Although the idea of "tradition" may have been present in embryo, no single term had been set forth to denote "tradition" in the sense of authoritative handing down of doctrine or doctrine so handed down.

The author of the first letter of Clement⁴, when exhorting the Corinthians to repent, says to them,

"Wherefore let us give up vain and fruitless cares and approach to the glorious and venerable rule of our tradition". Here, however, "tradition" has more the sense of a calling or kerygma of the Church.

Polycarp⁵ in the letter to the Philippians, calls them to return "to the word which has been handed down

¹Justin: 1 Apology 53 : 3.

²Polycarp: Philippians 7 : 2.

³Justin: 1 Apology 49 : 5 : 66 : 3.

⁴1 Clement 7 : (τῆς παραδόσεως ἡμῶν).

⁵Polycarp: Philippians 7.

to us from the beginning", though here he appears to be quoting "Jude". By the middle of the second century there is a much clearer distinction made between Scripture and the Church's living tradition, as co-ordinate channels of this Apostolic testimony became more clearly appreciated. Greater importance began to be attached to "tradition", which development was largely due to the struggle between Catholicism and the Gnostic sects. Tertullian, in his polemic against the heretics, is faced with the difficulty of excluding false interpretations of the Scriptures. Not only must there be an authorised collection of books and an authorised text, but the need is now seen for an authorised exegesis also. Here is the place for tradition as well as Scripture¹. Tertullian himself places great weight on "regula fidei", (which we shall be discussing at greater length further on). He sees it as the embodiment of the oldest and best tradition; "regula fidei una animo est; sola immobilis et irreformabilis", he writes. He believed it to have been handed down from Christ: "haec regula a Christo instituta"².

For both Irenaeus and Tertullian, Christ is the ultimate source of Christian doctrine, since He is the Truth, the Word by whom the Father has been revealed. But He has entrusted this revelation to His Apostles; it is through them alone that knowledge of it can be obtained.

¹E. C. Blackman: "Marcion and his influence", p.35.

²Tertullian: "De praescriptione" 13.

Tertullian said that the sole authority for Christians is the Apostles, who have themselves faithfully transmitted Christ's teaching. Both Tertullian and Irenaeus on occasion described this original message as tradition, using the word to denote the teaching delivered by the Apostles, without any implied contrast between Scripture and tradition. Tertullian refers to the whole body of Apostolic doctrine, whether delivered orally or in epistles as "apostolorum traditio", or "apostolica traditio".

Irenaeus believed that "apostolic testimony", or "tradition", had been committed orally to the Church by the Apostles where it had been handed down from generation to generation. The Church preserves the tradition inherited from the Apostles and passes it on to her children. It is a living tradition which is, in principle, independent of written documents. In his argument with the Gnostics, Irenaeus was led to apply "tradition" in a new and restricted sense, that is, specifically to the Church's oral teaching as distinct from that contained in Scripture. For practical purposes, he held that this tradition could be found expressed in what he called, "the canon of truth", that is, a condensed summary, fluid in its wording, but fixed in its content, setting out the key-points of Christian revelation in the form of a rule. He also took it for granted that apostolic tradition had

been deposited in written documents; that is, what the Apostles first proclaimed by word of mouth, they afterwards, by God's will, conveyed to us in Scriptures. He believed, like the "Apologists", that the whole life, passion and teaching of Christ had been foreshadowed in the Old Testament, but the New Testament is the written formulation of the Apostolic Tradition. He used such phrases as, ἔγραφως παράδιδοναι, to convey this idea. His test for books belonging to the New Testament is not simply Church custom, but apostolicity, or the fact that they had been composed by Apostles or followers of them and so could be relied on to contain apostolic testimony. In opposition to the Gnostic's appeal to their "secret tradition", Irenaeus was forced to stress the superiority of the Church's public tradition. Tradition itself is confirmed by Scripture, which he calls, "the foundation and pillar of our faith".

Tertullian extended the meaning of "tradition" to cover what had been customary in the Church for many years, for example practices like triple renunciation and triple immersion at baptism, and the sign of the Cross. But, in its primary sense, apostolic, evangelical, or Catholic tradition stood for faith delivered to the Apostles. Tertullian did not contrast "tradition", so understood, with Scripture. Rather, it is enshrined in Scripture, for the Apostles subsequently wrote down their oral preaching in epistles. He considered unwritten tradition

to be virtually identical with "regula fidei", which he preferred to Scripture as a standard, when disputing with Gnostics. He meant by "regula fidei", the intrinsic shape and pattern of revelation itself¹. He states explicitly that "the rule" has been handed down by Christ through the Apostles and that it points the way towards correct exegesis.

From the third and fourth centuries onwards more attention was given to the development of Christian doctrine. This was the beginning of the age of the great Oecumenical Councils of the Church, starting with Nicea in 325. In the fourth century, writes Schillebeeckx, "a very clear distinction was made between scripture or the Apostolic *καθ' ἑαυτὰ* and the "tradition of the fathers". In its content, tradition is the same as the Apostolic teaching. This was called "tradition" in so far as it had not come directly, to the generation living at the time in Holy Scripture, but had been passed on "from hand to hand" by previous generations, with their own elucidations, but nonetheless with the original inheritance faithfully preserved - to the subsequent generations. Thus the "traditio patrum" was the "tradition of the older generations"².

In the third and fourth centuries, the supreme doctrinal authority remained the original revelation given by Christ and communicated to the Church by His

¹Op. cit.

²E. Schillebeeckx: "Revelation and Theology". p.216.

Apostles, that is, it was a divine or "apostolic tradition" in the strict sense of the word (defined above). Cyprian in the third century spoke of "the root and source of the dominical tradition"¹, or "the fountain-head and source of the divine tradition". Athanasius, in the fourth century, points to "the tradition which the Lord gave and the Apostles proclaimed"², as the Church's foundation stone.

Throughout the third and fourth centuries, Scripture and tradition ranked as complementary authorities. They were media different in form but co-incident in content. Tradition was recognised as the surest clue to the interpretation of Scripture. In tradition the Church retained, as a result of what was handed down by the Apostles, an unerring grasp of the real meaning of revelation to which Scripture and tradition alike bore witness.

We must now turn briefly to a consideration of the "rule of faith", "regula fidei", or "canon of truth", to which reference has already been made above. Though transmitted in oral form, the rule of faith was accepted as a norm alongside Scripture only because it was considered as having been fixed by the Apostles³. The earliest reference to it is to be found in the works of Irenaeus, who used the phrase, "rule of truth", *κανὼν τῆς*

¹Cyprian: Ephesians 63 : 1; 64 : 10.

²Athanasius: "Ad Serapionem" 1 : 28.

³O. Cullmann, in "The Early Christian Church", emphasises this idea.

ἀληθείας and also the words, "preaching" (κήρυγμα), "the faith", (ἡ πίστις) and "tradition" (παράδοσις) to express the same thing¹. Tertullian frequently refers to the "rule of faith", using the expression, "regula fidei", usually. It is obvious that a writer's expression of the rule varied with his own interests.

Evidence of its use in the writings of the Early Fathers weighs against the theory that the rule of faith could have been regarded as, in any sense, a creed, but it does not exclude the possibility that the "rule" could have had some relation to the creed.

R. P. C. Hanson² makes the convincing suggestion, at the end of a very detailed analysis of the available documents, that the rule of faith was simply an account, divided into subjects, of the preaching and teaching of

¹R. P. C. Hanson: "Tradition in the Early Church" p. 75. (S.C.M. 1962).

²Op. cit. After a very careful analysis of the references to the "rule of faith" in Irenaeus, Tertullian, Hippolytus, "Didascalia Apostolorum", Origen, Cyprian, Novatian and Dionysius of Alexandria, offers this suggestion. He writes: "It is obvious that a writer's expression of the rule varied with his own interests and predilections or those of his local church. Irenaeus introduces into his rule his characteristic doctrine of "recapitulation" when he says that Christ came to sum up all things (ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι). Tertullian expresses a peculiarly Montanist tenet when he lists in his rule of faith that Jesus Christ "preached a new law" (nova lex), and when he includes the fine phrase (coined, no doubt, by Tertullian himself) "the plenipotentiary power" (vicaria vis) of the Holy Spirit. We are struck by Hippolytus' doctrinal elaboration concerning the heavenly part and the earthly part in Christ. Origen's rule of faith is strongly Alexandrian, indeed Origenistic, with Allegory, based on Philo's of the "spiritual law", and its formidable list of subjects additional to the conventional ones, such as the speculative minds of Alexandrian churchmen would find interesting" (Chp. 3 p. 91 f.).

the Church contemporary with the writer who mentions or quotes the rule of faith. This would account for the fact that while the rule preserves a general simplicity everywhere, it varied in detail from place to place and from writer to writer, also, why it tends to run into doctrinal or speculative elaboration with some fathers, why it can be used against heretics and why, though closely associated with Scripture, it is not regarded, as in form, precisely the same as Scripture. The definition of it, Hanson writes, which will cover more of the uses of it than any other, is that which regards it as an account of the teaching of the Church as it is known to the writer who uses the concept of the rule, believed to be continuous and virtually identical with the teaching which the Church has been given from the time of the Apostles. All the Fathers believed that the rule of faith was, in its contents, identical with Scripture's contents and that it was open to being proved from the Bible. None of them regarded the Bible as open to being supported in its authority by the rule.

If the rule of faith is an example of tradition, it is an oral tradition. There is no solid evidence that there was such a thing as a written formula circulating widely in the Church at this period, known as the rule of faith. It is not an original, authentic tradition, independent of the Bible. Rather, it is, says Hanson,

"more like a graph of the interpretation of the Bible by the Church in the second and third centuries"¹, though this is not to submit the Bible to the control of the Church. In the various forms of "the rule of faith", we have a guide to the mind of the Church as it selects its material for teaching and preaching, as it wrestles with the deep truths and encounters the difficulties and grasps the drift of Scripture². The most important aspect of the rule of faith is that it gives us what the Church conceived to be, "the main body of truth" (Irenaeus' phrase)³. We have in it a key to what the Church thought the Scriptures came to, where it was that their weight fell, what was their drift. This interpretation of their drift was itself a tradition, a way of handling the Scriptures, a way of living in them and being exposed to their effect, which, while not an original part of the Christian Gospel, - not itself the *πρῶτον δόγμα* par excellence, - had been developed from the Gospel itself, from its heart, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, as an essential part of the existence of the Christian faith in history. Though we cannot recognise "the rule of faith" as original tradition, going back by oral continuity, independently of Scripture, to Christ and His Apostles, we can, however, recognise it as the tradition in which the Church was interpreting Scripture under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and as such, claiming it as an essential ingredient of historical Christianity.

¹Op. cit. p.127.

²Op. cit. p.128.

³Op. cit. p.129.

(3) The Unique nature of the Apostolic Tradition:

In the New Testament teaching, as has been pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, there is strong evidence for saying that the authors of the Gospels and Letters regarded *παραδδοσις* as the form in which the Gospel of Jesus Christ comes to us. The content of the Apostles' witness which they hand on is their testimony to Jesus' life, sufferings, death, and resurrection as saving events, that is, the sacred history of redemption which is concluded by the Ascension. Ultimately *παραδδοσις* is based on the fact that the history of redemption is concluded; what took place on earth in Jesus is concluded and cannot be repeated in the Church.

The mode of "tradition" is determined by the nature of what is handed on. As the events connected with the name of Jesus are not historical events of the usual kind, but God's saving and redeeming action, *παραδδοσις* cannot be of the same kind as the "tradition", by which ordinary historical events come down to us. *παραδδοσις* is composed both of report and "kerygma". It is not a mere report concerning an historical "Jesus"; it is not the old idea of "halakhoth" or laws to be handed on in detail, an idea which Jesus Himself severely repudiated; it is not merely "kerygma" regarding Jesus. It is report in the form of "kerygma", or proclamation of the joyful message of Salvation which has been realised in these historical

events and which is made present again and again in "kerygma", so that we are summoned to hear and believe. For St. Paul¹ Christ above all in His Person and work is the fulfilled "new Law", and from this is derived the role of lawgiver as one who in His words imparts new "halakhoth" and gives instruction by the example of His life. What distinguishes $\pi\alpha\sigma\delta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon\lambda\omicron\varsigma$ of Christ from the Rabbinic principle of tradition is (i) the mediator of tradition is not the teacher, the Rabbi, but the Apostle as direct witness; and (ii) the principle of succession does not work mechanically as with the Rabbis but is bound to the Holy Spirit. We know Jesus Christ through Apostolic witness and through that alone. The collection of events, truths, realities which constitute or form the basis of this relationship between men and God in Christ has been given once for all by the Apostles and no one can substantially add to it. $\pi\alpha\sigma\delta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon\lambda\omicron\varsigma$ cannot really reproduce "literally", what Jesus once said, because it is intended to be Jesus' Word, "now", in the Church's situation as God has brought it about. When St. Paul reproduces the "tradition" which he had received from "the Twelve", he does it in such a way that he interprets it at the same time; that is, the "now" is taken account of; for this to happen an intelligent reception of and transmission of the Apostolic tradition

¹cf. Philippians 2 : 5.

is required. The Gospel in the form of interpretative Apostolic *παραδόσεις* remains, however, from first to last, the Gospel announced by Jesus; the fact that it was "received from the Lord" is not affected by its assuming the form of *παραδόσεις*, for this is the form in which the Gospel is proclaimed within the Church's sphere. Apostolic *παραδόσεις* was concerned with proclaiming Salvation in Jesus Christ and at the same time with understanding what was announced.

The Apostolic tradition is a norm because it rests upon eyewitnesses chosen by God through Jesus Christ; they belong to the unique central period of God's revelation through Jesus Christ. The period of the Church is, on the other hand, as Oscar Cullmann says, "a prolongation of the central period, but it is not the central period; it is a prolongation of the period of the Incarnate Christ, but it is not the period of the Incarnate Christ and of His Apostolic eyewitnesses"¹. Post-apostolic tradition is a valuable help for the understanding of the Divine Word, on condition that we do not consider it as a norm. We must set ourselves face to face with the tradition of the Apostles, as they themselves were face to face with the Divine Revelation in Jesus Christ who is "Tradition" in the widest possible sense of the word. To enable him to perform the task of handing on tradition,

¹O. Cullmann: "Scripture and Tradition", in "Christianity Divided" pg. (King : Barth : Cullmann etc. Stag. Books).

the Apostle not only needs his own unique calling, but also the Holy Spirit. St. John¹ expounds this function of the Holy Spirit, whom the Lord is sending to bring to His Apostles' mind all that He has said to them. The Apostle transmits tradition but his office depends on the gift of the Holy Spirit. So the function of the Apostle respecting tradition can be traced back to the Lord Himself who is the Spirit² and who controls the transmission of the Apostles, so that there is no antithesis between the Apostolic tradition and direct revelation. The Holy Spirit was to revive the authentic Word of Christ in the memories of the Apostles and was to lead them into all truth. They were thus assured of the infallible assistance of the Holy Spirit and were successors of Christ in the faithful transmission of the Word of God.

Through the Holy Spirit Christ and the Apostles were one in their world-wide mission and in their founding of the Church. Their word is His Word. They are transmitters of revelation. They impart the truth and this they do in the light of the Holy Spirit who illuminates them and by the power of Christ who assists them. The Gospel has its existence in them, says Max Thurian, and in their

¹John 14 : 25f.

²2Cor. 3 : 17.

transmission of it¹; but he continues to point out that neither this individualised existence, nor this transmission would jeopardise the truth, for it is the Holy Spirit who produces that existence and directs that tradition so that the Gospel will continue in its purity.

¹Max Thurian: "Visible Unity and Tradition".
(Darton: Longman: Toda. 1964). p.55f.

CHAPTER 3

The New Testament Canon of Holy Scripture and Tradition:

(1) The formation of a Canon: early canons:

The earliest known list of New Testament books regarded as authoritative is the fragment known as the "Muratorian Canon", which came from the Church at Rome near the end of the second century, although as R. P. C. Hanson points¹ out, it is possible to trace the existence of a list of books concerned with the new revelation given in Christ, earlier than this fragment. Evidence which has recently appeared from the Gnostic document, the "Gospel of Truth", discovered at Nag-Hammadi, suggests that a list of books of the New Testament was known and was regarded as in some sense authoritative as early as 140 A.D., and possibly considerably earlier, in Rome. The "Gospel of Truth", suggests, from its content, that its author knew of not only the Synoptic Gospels and The Gospel of St. John, but also the Epistles of St. Paul, the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Apocalypse of St. John, already existing as a collection. The "Muratorian Canon", referred to above, omits five of the Epistles of the present canon.

Marcion made his own New Testament canon, the "Apostolicon" or "Marcionite canon", which comprised a

¹R. P. C. Hanson: "Tradition in the Early Church"
(S.C.M. 1962) p.189.

mutilated version of Luke, Romans, both letters to the Thessalonians and Philemon. However, as is sometimes suggested, it was not Marcion's selection of authoritative biblical texts which set in motion in the Church the process of forming a canon of the New Testament; from the evidence produced at Nag-Hammadi it would appear that a canon of the New Testament was known before the middle of the second century. mgf.

It cannot be said that the four gospels were the earliest part of the New Testament to receive recognition as canonical. The fourth Gospel had to overcome considerable suspicion and even opposition before it was given an unquestioned place in the Canon. As early, perhaps, as 180 A.D., Tatian had formed his harmony of the Gospels known as the "Diatessaron", but there is some evidence that Tatian included a fifth Gospel in his harmony, possibly the "Gospel according to the Hebrews"¹, and so we may not regard the "Diatessaron" as a sign of the recognition of the four Gospels. As R. P. C. Hanson writes: x

"A better case could be made for assuming that a collection of St. Paul's epistles was the first part of the canon of the New Testament to circulate as a collection of documents with special authority; perhaps it was in circulation as a collection before the year 120"².

"The really critical decision about the formation of the Canon of the New Testament seems to have been taken

¹G. Quispel: "L'Evangile selon Thomas et le Diatessaron", pp 181-96 as referred to by R. P. C. Hanson in "Tradition in the Early Church". p.191.

²Op. cit. p.196.

between about 100 to 120 A.D."¹. The evidence available deriving from that period, which could help us to determine the standards by which the Church at that time decided which books were to join its collection of documents relevant to the New Covenant and which were not, is virtually non-existent. But it is clear that one of the most important qualities which any book, to be admitted into the Canon, had to possess, was antiquity.

The canonicity of the whole of the New Testament was only established after a long hesitation. The books over which there was longest hesitation were the epistles of James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude, Hebrews and the book of Revelation. In the West the canon was not established until about 380-390, while in the East, where there was still a question concerning the book of Revelation, it was not established until the end of the seventh century. The first official document which prescribes the twenty seven books of our present New Testament as alone canonical, was Athanasius's Easter Letter of 367, but the process was not everywhere complete until at least a century and a half later.

(2) The Apostolic foundation of the Canon of Scripture:

"The formation of the canon", says Westcott, "was an act of the intuition of the Church, derived from no reasoning, but realised in the course of its natural growth as one of the first results of its self-consciousness"².

¹Op. cit. p.213.

²B. F. Westcott: "The Canon of the New Testament" p57. London (1896).



The documents of the New Testament were chosen by the Church, at a period so early in Church history that it is difficult or impossible to determine how the Church chose, but it was a conscious act of choice by the Church. Also, it is to be noted that the fixation of the finally agreed list of books, and of the order in which they were to be arranged, was the result of a very gradual process. J. N. D. Kelly¹ lists three features of the process of choice which should be noted:

- (a) the criterion which ultimately came to prevail was apostolicity;
- (b) there were certain books which hovered for long on the fringe of the Canon, but in the end failed to secure admission to it, usually because they lacked the indispensable stamp of apostolicity;
- (c) some of the books which were later included had to wait a considerable time before achieving universal recognition. The Gospel according to the Hebrews was rejected; the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were chosen. The Epistles of St. Paul were very early on collected into a group; the first Epistle of Clement and the Epistle of Barnabas remained in an uncertain period and in the end were finally rejected.

We may not evade the obvious truth that the Church determined the canon of the New Testament, but the Church made this choice at a period in history when it was open

¹J. N. D. Kelly: "Early Christian Doctrines" p. 60.
(A and C. Black 1965).

to the Church to do so, for between the years 100 and 150 the Church was in a position to know what were the authentic and original records of Christianity and what were not. When we adopt the canon of the Church we do not say that the Church itself, but that the revelation which underlies and controls the Church, attests these witnesses and not others as witnesses of revelation and therefore as canonical for the Church.

The fixing of the Christian canon of Scripture means that the Church itself at a given time traced a clear and definite line of demarcation between the period of the Apostles and the period of the Church, between the time of foundation and that of construction, between Apostolic community and Church of the bishops, that is, between Apostolic tradition and ecclesiastical tradition, else the formation of a canon would be meaningless.

By establishing a principle of canon the Church recognised that from that time the tradition was no longer a criterion of truth; ecclesiastical tradition had to be controlled, and, with the help of the Holy Spirit, it will be controlled by the Apostolic tradition fixed in writing, and under which a line was drawn. It declared implicitly that from that time every subsequent tradition must be submitted to the control of the Apostolic tradition; that is, here is the tradition which forced itself upon the Church, and which constituted the Church.

The canon of Scripture is part of the pattern of God's revelation and of its being handed down to all people through the Church's witness. Here too the principle

of God giving and man receiving is at work. For, as Karl Barth writes:

"The fact that there exists a canon of Scripture, i.e. a prophetic-apostolic witness of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ which in principle is prior to all proclamation, teaching and decision of the Church, is posited in and with revelation itself. What this canon is, of course, is also decided with revelation by God Himself and therefore in heaven, but not in such a way that the Church on earth is spared from having to decide it itself, that is, to know and confess what is "in concreto" the compass of that witness posited with revelation by God Himself. As a human document, this witness waits for human faith in its character as witness, and therefore for the counter-witness of this human faith"¹.

Canon means "rule", that is, "the rule of truth"; the Church cannot "form" the canon, it can only confirm or establish it as something which has already been formed and given and it does so in the venture of obedience and faith, receiving that truth of God as it has been given by Him in Jesus Christ and handed on through His Apostles through their preaching and instruction.

By setting up a principle of a canon, the Church of the second century, took a decision that committed the whole future, O. Cullmann² points out. It did not fix a norm for others but for itself and committed the Church

¹K. Barth: "Church Dogmatics" 1 : 2. p.597.

²O. Cullmann: "The Early Church" (S.C.M.)c34. p87-98.

for all future generations to this norm. By doing this the Church did not deprive itself of its teaching office, but it gave to this teaching office its exact character. The Holy Spirit will be at work in this very submission. Within this framework revelation will continue to be given to the Church. It is inadequate, therefore, to describe the formation of the canon purely as a process of human history or as an official measure taken by the Church. Rather, "we should accept the judgment of faith and knowledge with it that the canon is a special gift of God to the Church, and that in its efficacy we can see the working of the Holy Spirit which was promised to the Church"¹.

(3) The Vincentian Canon:

The Apostolic foundation of the canon became the working criterion for distinguishing true doctrine from innovations in the history of the Church. The "Apostolic teaching and the doctrine of the Gospel" came to be the norm by which membership of the Church was judged. For example, Theodosius I issued this statement in his "Cunctos populos" of 380:

"It is our desire that all the various nations which are subject to our Clemency and Moderation, should continue in the profession of that religion which was delivered to the Romans by the divine Apostle Peter, as it hath been preserved by faithful tradition; and which is now professed

¹P. Neuenzeit: "Canon of Scripture" (Sacramentum Mundi Vol. I. ed. Rahner: Ernst: Smyth) (Burns & Oates 1968). p156.

by the Pontiff Damasus and by Peter, Bishop of Alexandria, a man of apostolic holiness. According to the apostolic teaching and the doctrine of the Gospel, let us believe the one deity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, in equal majesty and in a holy Trinity". We authorize the followers of this law to assume the title Catholic Christians...."¹.

Vincent of Lerins took it as an axiom that the Scriptural canon was sufficient and more than sufficient for all purposes. However, the problem of the interpretation of the canonical books arises, because of different interpretations put upon them, which lead to doctrines contrary to the Catholic faith being held. His attempt to deal with this problem takes the form of a "canon of truth", that is, a theological criterion for what is to be held as true.

In his "Commonitorium" of 434, he asks, how he can secure a "kind of fixed and as it were, general guiding principle for distinguishing the true Catholic faith from the degraded falsehoods of heresy"². It may well be asked, he says, that if "the canon of Scripture is complete, and is in itself abundantly sufficient, what need is there to join to it the interpretation of the Church"³. The answer, he says, "is that because of the very depth of Scripture all men do not place one interpretation upon it"⁴. He

¹H. Bettenson: "Documents of the Christian Church" (2nd edition) p31 Oxford 1964.

²Vincent of Lerins: "Commonitorium 2" (in "Documents of the Christian Church" ed H. Bettenson 2nd edition (Oxford 1968).

³Op. cit. Paragraph 2.

⁴Op. cit. ibid.

then continues to illustrate this point by showing how Novatian expounds Scripture in one way, Sabellius in another, Donatus in another, Arius, Eunomius, Macedonius, Apollinaris, Pelagius, and Nestorius in yet other ways. Because there are such intricacies of error in so many forms, there is great need for laying down a rule for the exposition of the Prophets and Apostles "in accordance with the standard of interpretation of the Catholic Church"¹.

He suggests that both the authority of the Divine Law, that is, the Canonical Scriptures, and the Tradition of the Church are necessary. He concedes that in itself Scripture is "sufficient and more than sufficient", but because it is susceptible of such a variety of interpretations, we must have recourse to Tradition. So he takes as his norm of the faith of the Catholic Church, "that which has been believed everywhere, always and by all" (*quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est*)². Thus, he says, "We shall follow universality if we acknowledge that one Faith to be true which the whole Church throughout the world confesses; antiquity, if we in no wise depart from those interpretations which it is clear that our ancestors and fathers proclaimed; consent, if in antiquity itself we keep following the definitions and opinions of all, or certainly nearly all bishops and doctors alike"³.

He suggests that there should be reference to decisions of a general council, if in doubt about "opinions"

¹Op. cit.

²Op. cit. paragraph 3.

³Op. cit. *ibid.*

and, failing a general council, he will collate the views of representative fathers, especially of those who, living at different times and in different parts of the world, have remained steadfast in the faith and communion of the Church. He admits that it has been the business of councils to perfect and polish traditional formulae and even concepts in which the great truths of the original deposit are expressed, thereby declaring, not new doctrines, "but old ones in new terms"¹. Also he would seem to allow for an organic development of doctrine, analogous to the growth of the human body from infancy to age. But this development, he is careful to explain, while real, must not result in the least alteration to the original significance of the doctrine concerned. So in the end Christianity must be like Timothy and, "guard what has been entrusted to it" (1 Tim. 4 : 20); that is, the revelation enshrined in its completeness in Holy Scripture and correctly interpreted in the Church's unerring Tradition, received from the Apostles under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The unchangeable nature of dogma and the need to keep to what was handed down, was stressed by the fathers of the early centuries of the Church's history. From the third and fourth centuries onwards, more attention was given to the development of Christian doctrine, as the result of the necessity to combat heresies, as Vincent of Lerins' treatise reveals. While in theory

¹Op. cit.

the canonical Scriptures were to be the norm for the Church's faith and life, in practice it was found that the same Scriptures were open to many varied and differing interpretations. Vincent of Lerins had tried to solve this problem through pointing to the guide given by the common belief of the Church at all times in the past, which was to be found expressed in the Scriptural canon, which he believed was fully sufficient, but whose content required interpretation. When one looked for such interpretation, one could only find it, he believed, in that which has been believed everywhere, always and by all. So, he has to take as his norm of the faith, the Catholic Church, where this common belief and practice would be most likely to be found, if at all. During the period to follow throughout the Middle Ages to the outbreak of the Reformation, while in theory the Western Church was committed to being basically biblically orientated, the Church had come to occupy a decisive place in the interpretation of the Scripture, and to such an extent that it was carried a long way past the Vincentian Canon.

While it was believed that Scripture contained all truths of faith necessary for Salvation, critical problems arose concerning the "rule of belief" and how the connection between the "extra", held as normative by the Church over and above what was attested by Scripture, was to be determined. E. Schillebeeckx writes saying that,....

"we must bear in mind that as yet no clear distinction was made in medieval theology between Holy Scripture itself, the fathers' commentaries on it (expositiones Sacrae Scripturae), and their writings and statements in general (dicta sanctorum et doctorum)"¹.

St. Thomas Aquinas put the question whether "everything that the "doctores sancti" have said is subject to the impulse of the Holy Spirit", and his answer was that, ".... Holy Scripture was composed and commented on by the same Spirit, especially in matters of faith". In "Quaestiones Quodlibetales" he writes as follows:

"Ergo expositiones Sanctorum sunt a Spiritu sancto. quod ab eodem Spiritu Scripturae sunt expositae et editae et praecipue quantum ad ea quae sunt fidei, quia fides est donum Dei, et ideo interpretatio sermonum numeratur inter alia dona Spiritus sancti"².

Aquinas admitted the possibility of error on the part of fathers, but only in those matters of faith that had not yet been defined by the Church. Again in the "Quaestiones Quodlibetales" he says:

".... dicta expositorum necessitatem non inducunt quod necesse sit eis credere, sed solum Scriptura canonica"³.
He divided the different "auctoritates" into theological

¹E. Schillebeeckx "Revelation and Theology" p.251

²Thomas Aquinas: "Quodlibeta Disputata"12, q.17, a.1.

³Op. cit. ibid.

categories: (1) those of canonical Scripture provide us with proper and apodeictic arguments; (2) those of other doctors of the Church provide us with undoubtedly proper, though not apodeictic, but "probable" arguments; (3) finally those of the philosophers are extraneous and only "probable" arguments in theology¹. Holy Scripture, because it embraces revelation, provides "argumenta propria et necessaria". As E. Schillebeeckx writes:

"The medieval position is clearly reflected in this article, (*Summa Theologiae* 1, q.1, a.8, ad 2), - in it, Aquinas does discuss the problem of "tradition", which did not arise in so pronounced and one-sided a form as it was to arise at a later period. It is, however, clear from all other texts that Aquinas considered proper and (ap)odeictic arguments of authority to be present elsewhere as well"².

Speaking of Holy Scripture Aquinas says:

".... enim fides nostra revelationi apostolis et prophetis factae qui canonicos libros scripserunt, non autem revelationi, si qua fuit aliis doctoribus factae"³.

Scripture embraces the "principia fidei", or principles of faith, and it would seem that this principle of Scripture was meant to be exclusive. He writes:

"Ea enim quae ex sola Dei voluntate proveniunt, supra omne debitum creaturae, nobis innotescere non possunt nisi quatenus in sacra Scriptura traduntur, per

¹E. Schillebeeckx refers to these categories in Aquinas's theology. Op. cit. p.252.

²Op. cit. p.254.

³"*Summa Theologiae*" 1, q.1, a.8, ad 2.

quam divina voluntas innvtescit"¹.

However, the "sola scriptura" position cannot be called a medieval view. Scripture was less sharply defined in the Middle Ages than now; even St. Thomas Aquinas defines it as either the canonical bible or the writings of the fathers:

".... aut enim Sacra Scriptura dicitur canon bibliae, aut dicta sanctorum"².

The authority of the Apostolic traditions was certainly accepted in the Middle Ages and especially by Aquinas, even though no conclusive ideas were reached about these traditions at this period. However, Aquinas did not restrict the teaching of the Apostles to the Apostolic teaching of Scripture alone; he attributed a decisive authority to traditions going back to the Apostles themselves, hence the place given to the writings of the fathers in the early centuries of the Church which were believed to enshrine some of these early traditions. Aquinas, therefore, affirms that we find the truth of revelation in Holy Scripture and in the doctrine of the Church; in "Summa Theologiae" he writes:

"Formale autem obiectum fidei est veritas prima secundum quod manifestatur in Scripturis sacris et doctrina Ecclesiae"³.

Also, he stated that the Church was the "infallible and

¹"Summa Theologiae" 3, q.1, a.3.

²"In Quattuor Sententiarum P. Lombardi Libros" Id 33, q.1, a.5, ob 3.

³"Summa Theologiae". *Secunda S. II-II* q.5, a.3.

divine norm"¹ of the fathers' interpretation of Scripture, because the fathers' authority was derived from the Church. This ecclesiastical illumination of the faith of Holy Scripture was, in his view, to be found in the Pope, in the Councils of the Church and in the life, liturgy and practice of the whole Church; the practice of the Church was, indeed, regarded as a very high authority, since it was guided by the Holy Spirit. While still affirming Scripture to be the all-important foundation of the Church's life and teaching, it is clear that the authority of the Church came to play a very large role in the handing on of what was regarded as the true interpretation of revelation received from the Apostles.

Regarding the "rule of belief", therefore, in the period leading up to the Reformation opinion oscillated between the idea of objective rules to be found in the canonical Scriptures and that of the Church as a "rule". Gradually the two authorities, Scripture and Church, were forced into competition. The problem of the relation between the two was posed in terms of the primacy of the one over the other. When the time came for the outbreak of the Reformation, the question was often posed in terms of a false alternative, that is, Church above Scripture or Scripture above Church; the result was that the two realities were conceived of as separate from and competing with each other.

¹Op. cit. *ibid.*

The Eastern Church during this period conceived of Tradition as a dynamic, living continuity, not reducible to its external aspects and not attainable except from within, that is, by living in the communion of the Church. Tradition can only be understood as a work of the Holy Spirit, who guides the Church in the plenitude of truth, interiorising for each individual, both in sharing and in appreciation of the gifts given to each and all, the truth which God has revealed to the fathers and His revelation which He unceasingly brings about in the Church. It is to be regretted that the Western Church during the course of its development in the medieval period did not lay more stress upon the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit both in the Church's life and in the minds and hearts of individuals, instead of attempting to define tangible "authorities" which could be appealed to in order to confirm the true Apostolic witness to the revelation handed down by the Apostles to the Church. Instead, during the medieval period the Church had gradually come to occupy a decisive place in the interpretation of the Scripture, and this carried the Church a long way past the Vincentian Canon.

CHAPTER 4

Scripture and revelation according to the decree of the Council of Trent:

(1) The Reformation Protest

The Council of Trent is set against the background of Luther and the Reformation protest. Luther was convinced of the absolute primacy of Scripture over all other authority, and in this, Congar¹ regards him as being completely Catholic. In his eagerness to defend the sovereignty of Scripture, he pressed it to an extreme, making it exclusive, so that everything must be judged according to the criterion of Scripture. He treats the traditional ceremonies of the Church as "buffoonery", for what is not from God must, he claims, be fathered by the devil. However, he does not ask whether, besides Scripture, there are other God-given things. It is against precisely this position that the Council of Trent spoke.

For Luther, Zwingli and Calvin, it is a question of restoring to God - not to God first, but to God alone, - the full determination of religious existence. A false option between the primacy of Scripture and the primacy of the Church resulted, though how to avoid such a position tended to be a more difficult task than is at first apparent, as the proceedings of Trent itself were to show.

¹Yves M. J. Congar "Tradition and Traditions". p. 138f.
(Burns and Oates).

The Reformers affirmed that Scripture has God for its author, Jesus Christ as its objective content and the Holy Spirit as its subjective principle of understanding, since it is sacred and saving Scripture. They quote from the early Church fathers, but do so making the condition that they quote such writings in so far as these are in accord with Scripture, the Word of God. The contribution of tradition has no value in isolation from Scripture, still less if it contradicts it.

In rejection of certain observances, customs, or "traditions", the Reformers insisted on the content of Scripture, rather than on a particular text, as the criterion for judgment. Whilst the principle of tradition is not actually denied by them, the Reformers rigorously submit its application to the sovereign criterion of Scripture, which is taken as much in its material aspect as in its formal aspect. Chemnitz¹, for example, one of the founders of Lutheran orthodoxy, distinguished seven types of tradition which he allowed as in conformity with Scripture. These were: the message of Christ and the Apostles as a whole; the transmission of Scripture; the primitive form of the creed; apostolic exegesis; dogmas taken from the Scriptures; the consensus of opinion among the Fathers; the ancient rites.

¹ Op. Cit p.145.

(2) The Preparation for the Tridentine Decree on Scripture and Tradition:

Two questions faced the Council members of Trent when they began to prepare their decree on Scripture and Tradition. First, should they accept the decree on Scripture of the Council of Florence, held on 4th February 1441, or second, should the council meet difficulties raised both in former and more recent times by distinguishing different degrees of authority within the Canon. The legates were not of one mind regarding the first question, but the decision to accept the Florentine canon, without further discussion, as an article of faith, already contained the answer to the second question.

As early as 1533, John Driedo of Louvain, had understood "active tradition", in the sense of a handing on of the substance of the faith as actually identical with the Church's authority. So, any discussion of the principle of tradition was bound to lead to a discussion of the Church's authority and this all the more surely as the fight against the "human statutes in the Church" - an attack based on the principle of the Scriptures - became more fierce. In a note for the programme of the 18th February, the question, it said, was to decide now whether they should first discuss the "Apostolic Tradition", or abuses which had crept into the use of Holy Scripture in the Church. The Bishop of Fano proposed that to the decree about the

canon of Scripture which was being planned, an addition should be made to the effect that the Church receives, "what is revealed by the Holy Ghost in the Scriptures and the Traditions". Both this proposal and Cervini's concluding remarks were calculated to drag the authority of the Church's teaching office into debate.

The draft of the "Decree on the acceptance of the Holy Scriptures and the Apostolic Traditions", of 22nd March 1546, stated that the "glad tidings" of Jesus Christ, promised in the Old Testament, are contained partly in the Sacred Scriptures and partly in the unwritten traditions which the Apostles received from Christ's own lips or which, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, were by them, as it were, passed down to us from hand to hand. Following the example of the Fathers, the Council receives with the utmost reverence as holy and authentic all the books of the Old and New Testaments, since the one God is the author of both, as well as the traditions which proceed either from Christ's own mouth, or from the Holy Spirit and have been preserved in the Catholic Church by an unbroken succession of the ministry and to which is due the same loving adhesion (as to the Holy Scriptures)¹. The Council further declared that these twin sources of Revelation would be the basis of dogmatic definitions and the reform of morals.

¹H. Jedin: "A history of the Council of Trent" (Vol.II). 247f

The debate on this draft decree in the Council which follows, reveals strongly that the Council had two streams of opinion present within itself about the meaning and place of Scripture and Revelation in the Church. The question arose again whether it would be possible to omit all mention of ecclesiastical traditions in addition to Apostolic ones, without risking depreciation of the former. The Bishops of Sinigaglia, Fano, and Bertinoro, felt that it had not yet been made sufficiently clear that not all Apostolic traditions were to be regarded as an essential part of Catholic dogma and so placed on the same level as Holy Scripture, but only those which had been handed down without alteration by a constant tradition.

Bonuccio in his criticism of the draft of the decree rejected the words, "partim partim". In his opinion the stream of the New Testament revelation does not divide into Scripture and Tradition, as had been taken for granted by every speaker in the previous debate. Rather, Scripture is complete in its content, containing all truths necessary for Salvation; "tradition" is essentially an authoritative interpretation of "Holy Writ", not its complement.

"Though the majority of the theologians of Trent may not have approved the formula, "partim partim", they approved the thing itself, that is, that dogmatic tradition was a channel of revelation which supplemented the Scriptures", so writes H. Jedin in his history of the Council of Trent¹. Thirty-three votes were in favour of

¹Op. cit. p.53f.

the unqualified parity of Scripture and Tradition; eleven desired a toning down, that is, they wanted the word "equal" to be replaced by, "similar".

The chief theological problem, the parity of Scripture and Tradition, was still regarded as unsolved before the general congregation of 5th April. Four prelates advocated again the substitution of "similar" for "equal". The Bishop of Chioggia, Macchianti, remarked that to put Scripture and Tradition on the same level was "ungodly", as he could not accept the practice of praying Eastward with the same reverence as St. John's Gospel. At the conference with committee members in the course of the afternoon of 5th April, the legates yielded to the minority and replaced the "equally" of the decree by "similarly", though the vote of 1st April had settled the question. Only in the general congregation of 7th April was the decree finally approved. At this very latest moment, "partim..... partim" was replaced by "etet", so the wishes of the minority were after all met in a decisive passage of the decree. The first decree put a full stop to the development of the Biblical canon and countered the Reformers' principle of "Scriptura sola" with the principle of the traditions on faith and morals which go back to Christ and which come down to us, being passed on, "as it were from hand to hand", from the days of the Apostles, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The suggestion to discriminate between two separate currents of revelation, was put aside. Instead of defining

the content of the current of Tradition by listing the individual traditions, the decree connects it with the uninterrupted succession of the officials of the Church (continua successione), whilst its authority, after a lengthy discussion, was given parity with that of Scripture.

(3) Pneumatological version of the concept of Tradition:

J. Ratzinger¹ draws attention to the pneumatological version of the concept of tradition in Cardinal Cervini's basic draft of 18th February 1546, saying that, "the whole text must be understood against the background of Cervini's idea". Cervini enlists three "principia fidei": (1) the sacred books which were written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit; (2) the Gospel, which our Lord did not write, but taught by word of mouth and implanted in men's hearts and part of which the Evangelists later wrote down; (3) because the Son of God was not going to abide with us for ever, physically, He sent the Holy Spirit, who was to reveal the mysteries of God in the hearts of the faithful and teach the Church all truth until the end of time. A second more detailed version of the speech developed the third line of thought a little further. We are told that Revelation has been made known differently at different times: (1) to the patriarchs whose faith we have in the Scriptures and which we call the Old Testament; (2) in Christ, who implanted His Gospel not

¹J. Ratzinger: "The Tridentine decree on Tradition". p. 51 f.

in writing, but orally, not "in charta", but "in corde". Some of what derived from Christ was written down, other things remained in the hearts of men. This whole Gospel of Christ constituted in this double way is, "secundum principium fidei, nostrae", the Old Testament being the first; (3) because the Son of Man was not to remain with us always, He sent His Holy Spirit into the world; He was to reveal the mysteries of God and make clear anything which remained doubtful in men's minds.

A letter to Cardinal Farnese (28th February 1546)¹ speaks of two steps: (1) the revelation of our Lord was not all written down, but a part remained in the hearts of men and in the Church's tradition; (2) what is suggested by the Holy Spirit in the Church.

Not two, but three principles are affirmed, that is, Scripture, Gospel, and revelation of the Spirit in the Church. By "Scripture", the Old Testament is meant. The Christ-event is included in the more comprehensive concept of "Gospel", which itself includes what is written and what is inscribed in the hearts of the faithful. The third principle, revealing the activity of the Holy Spirit throughout the age of the Church is divided as to its basis between two contrasted principles, (a) "Gospel", as a principle which is always only partially transposable into Scripture; (b) the operation of God's Spirit in the age of the Church. The three-fold conception can be discovered in the background of the decree on tradition

1. J. Ratzinger: *Op. cit.* p. 51.

itself, though obscured and weakened by all kinds of insertions intended as supplements or in service of other themes.

(4) The content of the accepted Constitution: 8th April 1546:

The "fathers" who had come together at Trent proceeded with (a) defining and affirming the principles which had always governed the life of the Church, and (b) eliminating abuses present here as elsewhere. "De Canonibus Scripturis", promulgated in the fourth session on 8th April 1546, was, (1) concerned with conserving in the Church the essential elements of the Gospel in all their purity, and (2), removing errors from the Church. This Gospel had been promised by the prophets, then promulgated by Jesus Christ, Son of God, who had charged His Apostles with the task of preaching it to every creature as the source of all saving truth and all moral discipline. The Council affirms above all that there is but one source and that the Gospel as that source has full and complete value. The fountain-head of this vital force is the mouth of Jesus. But, no explicit reference is made to the means by which it reaches out to every creature, that is, the Apostolate continued on after the Apostles. It is content to make it clear that the saving truth and the moral code, whose source is the Gospel of Jesus, are contained in the sacred Scriptures and the unwritten traditions, which, received by the Apostles from the mouth of Christ, or transmitted by

the Apostles themselves under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, have come down to us, "as though passed on from hand to hand".

The Council of Trent considers, "Gospel", under its aspect as revelation of divine rules of belief and behaviour, rather than as active power of Salvation. It refers, not to the text of the four Gospels, but to the content relating to the saving event of Christ, and as such was clearly different from "Law and Prophets". The document proceeds to speak of this truth and discipline being contained, "in libris scriptis et sine scripto traditionibus"¹. It continues: "... quae ab ipsius Christi ore ab Apostolis acceptae, aut ab ipsis Apostolis Spiritu Sancto dictante quasi per manus traditae ad nos usque pervenerunt...."².

As was forecast right at the beginning of the discussion, a clear distinction began to be made between Apostolic and Ecclesiastical traditions. The Council finally confined itself exclusively to a discussion of the Apostolic traditions, written or unwritten. The issue involved is whether or not Scripture and Tradition are two independent and complementary sources of revelation. There were grounds for believing that the Council might proceed to present unwritten traditions and Scripture as two independent and parallel sources of the rule of

¹"Decretum de libris sacris et de traditionibus recipiendis": Council of Trent: Session IV. "Enchiridion Symbolorum" (Denzinger) 1501.

²Op. cit. ibid.

truth which is the "Gospel". The position reached by Trent was that "traditions" are guaranteed by "Tradition", whose principle is the Holy Spirit. The time of the Church and the time of the Apostles and Prophets, the Tridentine fathers held, cannot be put into opposition to one another; they cannot even be dissociated since the principle operating in both is the same, that is, the Holy Spirit. The Council of Trent was claiming that neither Scripture nor Church had prior authority but both of them have it similarly and conjointly; that is, there is a single authority under two forms, that of the Apostles and that of the Holy Spirit, "auctor" of both. The Council went no further than to apply the assistance of the Holy Spirit to the conservation and authority of the Apostolic traditions. Instead of seeing tradition as having its reference to the past, there is a tendency to see it in reference to the current Magisterium of the Church expressing itself in the passing of time.

J. A. Möhler of the School of Tübingen in the nineteenth century, criticised the idea of a revelation handed on partly in texts and partly by oral tradition. He regarded tradition as a mode of communication which covers the whole of Christianity and encompasses Scripture. Scripture and Tradition are not two independent and parallel sources; they include, fulfil and condition one another, the one

living in the other. Tradition contains and preserves everything; it is the Gospel living in the Church. For Möhler, living tradition is what was called at the time of Trent, "the Gospel written in men's hearts", but understood within a framework of a theology of communion. What in tradition is not pure repetition of Scripture, is not, for Möhler, the simple hand to hand transmission of an element of Apostolic deposit either. It is a particular understanding of the whole primitive deposit developing in the Church, which is animated by the Holy Spirit.

Following the example of the Orthodox Fathers, the Synod receives and venerates with equal pious affection and reverence all the books of the Old and New Testaments, "since one God is the author of both"¹. It receives them with the said traditions, "as well as those pertaining to faith as those pertaining to morals, as having been given either from the lips of Christ or by the dictation of the Holy Spirit and preserved by unbroken succession in the Catholic Church" (continua successione in Ecclesia Catholica conservatas)². There then follows a list of the books of the Old and New Testaments and a warning against those who refuse to receive either them or the traditions. But it states that what the Gospel contains in the way of truth and rules of conduct is not contained in Scripture alone, but in both the books and unwritten traditions.

¹Op. cit. ibid.

²Op. cit. ibid.

The Council, seeing these traditions within the framework of Apostolicity regards respect for them as a condition of fidelity to the fullness of the Apostolic inheritance. The Gospel is considered here to be the source of all Christianity, which came from the Apostles.

Tradition, Yves M- J. Congar writes, is not only noetic but real¹. It is a handing over of Salvation, of the Christian life and of the reality of the Covenant. In the Old Testament the Gospel is present as promise. In itself, it is the joyful announcement of Christ come upon earth, of Salvation now offered to men; as such, it unites two aspects of revelation and of God's saving power, respectively a noetic and a dynamic stress. The Council of Trent takes "Gospel", as announcement of Salvation under its aspects of truth and law. This Gospel is the source of everything in Christ's life at the level of truth and law, handed on by Him since the time of the Apostles, either by way of their writings or in unwritten traditions.

The three different theological conceptions which were brought together in the final text of the decree on tradition, J. Ratzinger writes², were not brought into exact agreement, but to some extent were simply juxtaposed, despite their considerable differences: (a) Cervini's "pneumatological" conception with its doctrine of three,

¹Yves M.-J. Congar: "Tradition and Traditions". p279-280.

²J. Ratzinger: "The Tridentine decree on Tradition". p62f.

"principia fidei", laid stress on the dynamic character of Christ's reality present in the Church and so understood "Tradition" primarily as the reality of, "institutio vitae Christianae", under the guidance of the Holy Spirit;

(b) a ceremonial conception regarded "Tradition" essentially as the domain, (parallel to "fides"), of "consuetudines", as, "usus ecclesiae" - a view concerned with defending the antiquity and Apostolic dignity of the traditions; (c) a dogmatic conception, emphasised the fact that the phenomenon of "traditio" extends to the domain of "fides" also. Ratzinger continues to say that if Cervini's view with its focus on the present, and the more historical perspectives of the other groups, had been each taken separately there would have been a danger of neither being tenable. Taken together their respective differences and mutual limitations make a correct view possible, whether or not it remains so in practice is another question. In the present text of the decree, both points of view are represented, though not in detail; that is, the factor that concerns the present and that of the ἐφ' ἡμῶν . Both elements are essential and go to constitute the Christian reality; that is, both the presence of the Spirit and the link with the unique events once occurring in history.

The Council of Trent perceived very clearly the connection of the concept of Tradition with that of Revelation. In accordance with Patristic and mediaeval tradition, it still conceived the notion of revelation

in a far less material way than was subsequently the case. According to Trent, revelation is indeed closed as regards its material principle, but is present and remains as regards its reality. Revelation certainly has its ἐφάπαξ to the extent that it was accomplished in historical facts, but it has also its perpetual reality today, because what was once accomplished remains perpetually living and effective in the faith of the Church, through the Holy Spirit, and the Christian faith never simply refers to what is past but equally to what is present and what is to come. But how did it conceive of the relation between Scripture and Tradition as regards Revelation?

There may be two relations put forward as existing between Scripture and Tradition; one conceives of Tradition arising out of and being ultimately dependent upon Scripture; the other conceives of tradition existing as an independent factor alongside Scripture. It is J. R. Geiselman's view that Trent left this question unanswered, he writes: "What exactly, then, was actually decided by the Council of Trent about the doctrine concerning the relation of Scripture and Tradition? We may now answer: neither the sufficiency of the content of Holy Scripture was proclaimed, nor was the relation of Scripture and Tradition decided in the sense of "partly.....partly". One cannot emphasise enough that nothing, absolutely nothing, was decided at the Council of Trent concerning the relation of Scripture and Tradition".¹

¹J. R. Geiselman: "The Council of Trent" in "Christianity Divided" p.47

The Council clearly holds that there are divine traditions not contained in Holy Scripture, revelations made to the Apostles either orally by Jesus Christ, or by inspiration of the Holy Spirit and transmitted by the Apostles to the Church. Ambiguity arises in the decree when it speaks of the truth contained, "in libris scriptis et sine scripto traditionibus", for there is no precise guidance given as to the nature and content of these "unwritten traditions". It proceeds to make a distinction between the unwritten and the written and the decree's insistence on both being accepted and honoured, "pari pietas affectu ac reverentia"¹, only emphasises the relation of independence in which the two stand.

Professor J. K. S. Reid in his book, "The Authority of Scripture"², suggests three possible meanings of the phrase "traditio sine scripto". (a) It may be thought of as Apostolic tradition and a clear distinction may be made between it and ecclesiastical tradition. Authority will then be given and reverence offered to the first primarily and not in the same measure to the second. However, as he points out:

"....the Tridentine statements make it clear that, whatever the tradition is of which they speak, it has been "conserved by continuous succession in the Catholic Church". No attempt is made at this crucial point to make a distinction. If it is thought that there ever was

¹"Decretum de libris sacris et de traditionibus".

²J. K. S. Reid: "The Authority of Scripture" p.137f.

a distinct apostolic tradition, it has been drawn into the veins of the Church in which runs the ecclesiastical tradition, and there merged indistinguishably with it, not, however, without imparting to this ecclesiastical tradition the prestige and authority which once belonged to it alone"¹.

(b) "Traditio sine scripto", may be interpreted as the Church's own commentary upon Holy Scripture. There was a time when this clearly was the meaning assigned to the term, "Tradition". In the Pat istic writings, as has been pointed out previously, there is frequent reference and appeal to, "the tradition of the Church", "the Church's rule of faith", etc. "What is meant is the Scriptures as interpreted by the Church, in the life of the Church, because to the Fathers, the Scriptures are the Church's tradition"². If the Church contributed anything to what was contained in Holy Scripture, it was a tradition of Scriptural interpretation and exposition. But again as J. K. S. Reid points out: "By the time of the Council of Trent, however, this simple meaning of the term, "tradition", is no longer in use"³. Its connotation becomes disconnected from its relation to Scripture and therefore from its dependence upon Scripture; it would seem now that Tradition stands alongside Scripture as an independent source and authority.

Though St. Thomas, prior to the Tridentine decree, did attach a high value to Tradition, however the Tridentine

¹Op. cit. p.138.

²Op. cit. ibid

³Op. cit. ibid.

doctrine on the subject was foreign to his thinking, for he did not assign to Tradition, in matters of faith, an authority co-ordinate with Scripture, nor did he attach to "the unanimous consent of the Fathers", the same importance attached to it by the Tridentine decree. It was at the Council of Trent that the new view of Tradition's authoritativeness was first formulated as a dogma. For many years a certain, indefinite value had been assigned to Tradition; but the primary position of Scripture had remained unchallenged. The Tridentine decree, while nominally co-ordinating Scripture to Tradition, really subordinates Scripture to Tradition, or at least makes this a possibility. According to Trent, Holy Scripture is one, but not the only source of our knowledge of Revelation. "What was really intended", writes Karl Barth, "was the identification of Scripture, Church and Revelation. This lay behind the decree about Tradition and might well have been stated in it"¹. And,,as he has previously pointed out:

"Even in the sixteenth century the charge could be brought against the decree that it speaks of Apostolic traditions without stating concretely what it wants to be understood as such"².

(c) Not fully recognising the fact that in God's providence, through the careful guardianship of the early believers, there has been handed down to us in the New Testament

¹K. Barth: "Church Dogmatics" 1 : 2 p.551.

²Op. cit. p.548.

sufficient authentic primary witness to Him who has revealed the Saving will of God to men, the Church during the Council of Trent has been forced to impose another meaning upon the term "tradition". As J.K.S. Reid writes;

"It constructs the hypothesis of a strand or seam of tradition which never reached written form, delivered by our Lord or by the Holy Ghost, to the Apostles, and by them orally transmitted to those who by the further hypothesis of Apostolic succession, narrowly conceived, are regarded as not only their successors, but their equals in status and function"¹.

Even though, as J. R. Geiselman suggests, no really positive statement was made at Trent regarding the relation of Scripture and Tradition, what reference was made to tradition coupled with the indecision regarding its relation to Scripture has led to an overstatement of the place of tradition in the Church as the years following the Council of Trent were to prove.

¹J. K. S. Reid: "The Authority of Scripture" p.139-140.

CHAPTER 5

The Church's understanding of the Council of Trent and the interpretation of Scripture and Tradition from Vatican I to Vatican II

The majority of theologians who wrote and taught during and after Trent took Tradition and Scripture as two distinct, independent sources of Revelation. This theory was worked out as part of a scientific methodology rather than as a part of a theology of Revelation. Scripture and Tradition were accepted as the two most authoritative "loci theologici", from which theological proof could be drawn, because they each contained Revelation.

Vatican I did little more than underline the conclusions reached at Trent. The two source theory seems to have gone largely unchallenged. While the documents of the council are almost as non-committal as those of Trent on the relation of Scripture and Tradition, the two are never called "sources of Revelation" in the official documents. It is stated in, "Dei Filius":

"Haec porro supernaturalis revelatio, secundum universalis Ecclesiae fidem a sancta Tridentina Synodo declaratam continetur "in libris scriptis et sine scripto traditionibus, quae ipsius Christi ore ab Apostolis acceptae, aut (ab) ipsis Apostolis Spiritu Sancto dictante quasi per manus traditae, ad nos usque pervenerunt"¹.

¹"Dei Filius": Vaticanum I "Enchiridion Symbolorum" p. 306 f.

It had given the Church a synthesis on the nature of Revelation. It had stated that God revealed Himself and His plan for the supernatural destiny of mankind, but in standard theology there remained a tendency to interpret this as meaning that God had revealed "truths" about Himself and man's supernatural life. Revelation was viewed as a complex of truths to be believed and theologically analysed. The question of Biblical inspiration occupied the minds of most theologians during this period. The theories of Biblical inspiration which were propounded were many and varied from theories of Content inspiration to verbal inspiration. The theory of content inspiration was promoted by the Jesuit theologians during the latter half of the nineteenth century, while "Sacra Scriptura est Verbum Dei", was the dictum of the more Conservative party. For example, Charles Billuart wrote, "This is my opinion: It is more probable that not only the truths and statements of Holy Scripture, but also its individual words be dictated by the Holy Spirit"¹.

It was against the background of current theological thought, influenced by the rationalism and idealism of Hegel, for which the important thing was not the historical thing, but the idea, not Jesus, the man, but the ideas He instituted, that "Dei Filius" was written. Its opening paragraphs refer to it:

¹Referred to by J. T. Burtcheell in "Catholic Theories of Biblical Inspiration since 1810" (Cambridge University Press 1969). p121.

"Even the Holy Scriptures, which had previously been declared the sole source and judge of Christian doctrine, began to be held no longer as divine, but to be ranked among the fictions of mythology"¹ The document continues to speak of the widely spreading doctrine of rationalism, or naturalism, "which opposes itself in every way to Christian religion as a supernatural institution and works with the utmost zeal in order that, after Christ, our sole Lord and Saviour, has been excluded from the mind of men, and from the life and moral acts of nations, the reign of what they call pure reason or nature may be established"².

Vatican I reaffirmed that supernatural Revelation, in the face of the tendency towards naturalism, is contained in the Holy Scriptures, (and unwritten traditions), which the Church holds to be sacred and canonical, "... non ideo, quod sola humana industria concinnati, sua deinde auctoritate sint approbati; nec ideo dumtaxat, quod revelationem sint errore contineant; sed propterea, quod Spiritu Sancto inspirante conscripti Deum habent auctorem, atque ut tales ipsi Ecclesiae traditi sunt"³.

Liberal theology of the nineteenth century was attempting to effect some kind of synthesis between theology and contemporary culture and so the statements of Holy Scripture were being interpreted by many theologians, for example, David F. Strauss in his "Life of Jesus",

¹"Dei Filius". E.S. 3006.

²Op. cit. ibid

³Op. cit. E.S. 3006.

A. E. Biedermann and Ernst Troeltsch, in terms of rationalistic principles. The results in many instances were quite contrary to the ancient and traditional interpretations of the Church. Realising that it is insufficient to say that Scripture is the norm without saying what the method of interpretation ought to be, the constitution "Dei Filius", states:

"....Nos idem decretum renovantes hanc illius mentem esse declaramus, ut in rebus fidei et morum ad aedificationem doctrinae christianae pertinentium is pro vero sensu sacrae Scripturae habendus sit, quem tenuit ac tenet sancta mater Ecclesia, cuius est indicare de vero sensu et interpretatione Scripturarum sanctarum; atque ideo nemini licere contra hunc sensum aut etiam contra unanimum consensum Patrum ipsam Scripturam sacram interpretari".¹

So, it would seem by these statements that the Church was firmly closing the door against all modern Biblical scholarship, claiming sole right to keep and interpret supernatural revelation contained in Holy Scripture according to her own traditions. It cannot be denied that that was the intention of Vatican I and also of Leo XIII's, "Providentissimus Deus", published in 1893. Leo XIII takes up again the problems raised by rationalism and "Higher criticism". He reaffirms that supernatural revelation is contained both in unwritten Tradition and

¹Op. cit. E.S. 3007.

in Sacred Books, which are called sacred and canonical because they have been written under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. Answering the "Liberal" viewpoint that Holy Scriptures contain "the forgeries and falsehoods of men, he points out that, "... the language of the Bible is employed to express many things which are beyond the power and reason of man - that is to say, divine mysteries and all that is related to them"¹. Again, the Vatican Council's position that the Church alone has the right to judge the true sense and interpretation of Scripture according to an authentic interpretation either from the sacred writers themselves or from the Church, both of which have been assisted by the Holy Spirit. In his encyclical, Leo XIII lays down the hermeneutical principle that, "all interpretation is foolish and false which either makes the sacred writers disagree with one another, or is opposed to the doctrine of the Church"². However, the study of oriental languages is advocated and also the "art of criticism", in order to meet the criticisms raised against the Christian Faith. To further these ends he recommends the establishing of ancient languages and especially Semitic studies, in all academic institutions.

Whilst the encyclical points to the fact that there may be copyists' errors in the Bible's text and that

¹Leo XIII: "Providentissimus Deus" (Enchiridion Symbolorum).

²Op. cit.

there may be some passages in which the sense is ambiguous, any theory of a restricted inspiration, such as, for example, F. Lenormant propounded when he distinguished between inspiration and revelation, asserting that everything in the Bible is inspired, but not necessarily revealed, is severely condemned. The view set forth by Leo's statement is that God has seen to it that the mind of the inspired man will propose to write down those truths which God wishes to communicate to the Church throughout Scripture and that his will will be drawn to write down those truths and those alone. So:

"....nefas omnino fuerit aut inspirationem ad aliquas tantum sacrae Scripturae partes conangustare aut concedere sacrum ipsum errasse autorem"¹.

It is not possible for any error to co-exist with inspiration, just as it is impossible that God Himself, the supreme Truth, can utter that which is not true.

As can be seen, the encyclical is largely negative in its attitude to those trying to grapple with the difficulties produced by too materialistic a view of Biblical Inspiration; those systems which approach the problem by attempting to consider not so much what God has said in a passage as the reason and purpose which He had in mind in saying it, are not to be tolerated and under this head all forms of "Higher Criticism"

¹Op. cit. 3291.

would appear to be classed. Nevertheless, a positive note is struck when he is forced to point out that, through the crisis of rationalism, a new and more acute interest in biblical studies is forming and therefore the setting up of faculties for biblical and oriental studies in the academic institutions is called for.

This growing concern for biblical studies is given more definite expression by the setting up of the Pontifical Biblical Commission in 1902, which Pope Leo XIII initiated through his Apostolic letter, "Vigilantiae". The Commission was set up for the promotion of biblical studies and their protection against errors of the time.

During this period, Alfred Loisy, who is regarded as the principal representative of Roman Catholic modernism, was at work in the field of critical exegesis. Jean Levie writes of him:

"Explicitly and immediately by means of the texts, Loisy sought to find in every doctrinal statement of Christ's the way in which a consciousness that, in his view, was only human and limited would state the doctrine then under consideration"¹.

When "Providentissimus Deus" was promulgated in 1893, it was generally assumed that the encyclical letter, although concerned with the effect on biblical studies of recent archaeological finds, and the new literary criticism, was aimed specifically at the work of D'Hulst and Loisy.

¹Jean Levie S.J.: "The Bible, Word of God in words of men" (Chapman). p71.

The Encyclical, "Pascendi" (1907) points out that the modernists' method "is to put themselves into the position and person of Christ, and then to attribute to Him what they would have done under like circumstances"¹.

One of the problems of the time was the difficulty, from an historical point of view, of the way in which the message of Jesus was given in history, was received and understood by the primitive Church and is in agreement with what the Church believes and understands today. At the end of the nineteenth century and in the twentieth this problem was raised in a far more acute way than ever before. To their generation the Modernists were saying, in Loisy's words, ".... we do not believe in the Church because we believe in the Bible, but rather, we believe in the Bible because we believe in the Church".

Leo XIII regarded the Biblical Commission as an instrument of progress in biblical exegesis, intended to provide secure and effective guidance to the Church's teaching of Holy Scripture. In 1905/15 its replies were published, which concerned almost all the literary problems of authorship, date and integrity of the inspired writings. They were directed against the errors of Modernism.

On the Mosaic authenticity of the Pentateuch, for example, it stated that, "Moses the author of the Pentateuch (is) essentially speaking, either directly or by means of writers approved by him"². On the historical character

¹"Pascendi" (1907) (Enchiridion Symbolorum). cf. A. A. S. XL 553f. : 1907

²"Resp. Commiss. de re Biblica 1906f. (Enchiridion Symbolorum).
cf. A. A. S. XXXIX 377-8. : 1905.

of the early chapters of Genesis it speaks of "the substantial historical truth of these events of the origin of humanity but maintaining the literal historicity of certain features as "formatio primae mulieris ex primo homine ... divine praecepti, diabolo sub serpentis specie suasore, transgressio"¹.

McKenzie points out that since 1905/15, "Catholic biblical studies have taken a more definite form and the work of the Commission has been less to correct error and more to encourage scientific work.... The Commission has rarely decided a strictly exegetical or critical question"².

Still concerned with the problem of hermeneutics and with current rationalistic views, Pius XII published his encyclical, "Divino Afflante Spiritu" in 1943, which deals at length with the importance of exegesis involving "genera litteraria".

The encyclical was prepared for, in a certain sense, by an incident in 1941, which attracted little attention outside Italy. An anonymous Italian pamphlet entitled, "a grave danger to the Church and to souls: the Critico/Scientific system in the study and interpretation of Sacred Scripture; its dangerous tendencies and its errors". The author of this work condemns the scientific study of the Bible as so much "rationalism, naturalism, modernism, scepticism and atheism". He speaks of the scientific

¹Op. cit.

²"Higher Criticism" in "The Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture" Dyson and McKenzie. 7/9 (Nelson & Son 1953).

spirit as one "of pride, of presumption, of shallowness". The study of oriental languages is a mere show of learning, of questionable value; textual criticism is said to bring the sacred text down to the level of the merely human writings; to correct or criticise the text of the Vulgate is to reject the authority of the Church in proclaiming the Vulgate's authenticity. Rather, the Vulgate text is the Bible, and no other need be taken into account. In place of a pedantic exegesis of the literal sense, a meditative exegesis should be adopted. All kinds of allegorical interpretations should be sought out and these become the Spiritual message of God's Wisdom.

Contrasting with such exaggerated conservatism and obscurantist fundamentalism, "De Divino Afflante Spiritu" pays a tribute to textual criticism; it comments that, while this criticism was once used completely arbitrarily and in a way suggesting a means of introducing the critic's own preconceived ideas into the text, today it has achieved stability and has become an excellent instrument for providing a purer and more accurate edition of the Word of God and any abuse of the method can now be detected.

The encyclical continues to give a prominence to analysis of "genera litteraria" as a key to the "literal sense" intended by the sacred authors. As the exegete cannot determine "a priori" but only from careful study of ancient, oriental literature, what these forms were, the encyclical emphasises how vitally important it is for

the interpreter to "go back in spirit to those remote centuries of the East and make proper use of the aids afforded by history". Archaeology, ethnology and other related sciences are to be used by the exegete in that he may be more familiar with the literary forms used by the biblical writers. Of particular interest to him will be the idioms peculiar to the Semitic tongues. It states:

"Nihilominus etiam apud Sacros Scriptores, sicut apud ceteros antiquos, certas quasdam inveniri exponendi narrandique artes, certos, quosdam idiotismos, linguis praesertim semiticis proprios, approximationes quae dicuntur, ac certos loquendi modos hyperbolicos, immo interdum etiam paradoxa, quibus res menti firmissime imprimantur, nemo sane miretur, qui de inspiratione biblica recte sentiat"¹.

So, further critical research is encouraged, which is a marked change in the Church's attitude from that of "Dei Filius" or "Providentissimus Deus". Whilst the encyclical contains a warning against indiscreet zeal, it points out that the rules laid down by the Church concern faith and morals and that the Church has declared the sense of only a few of the many matters set forth in the legal, historical, sapiential and prophetic books of the Bible; there remain many important matters in the exposition and explanation of which the wisdom and

¹"De Divino Afflante Spiritu". "Enchiridion Symbolorum" (Denzinger) p.756 3830 Referred to here as E.S.

ingenuity of the Catholic interpreters can and ought to be freely exercised. Nevertheless, affirming the position reached in "Dei Filius", the encyclical forbids any interpretation which makes the inspired writers inconsistent with one another or opposed to the Church's teaching.

The two main principles of hermenetics which are laid down are: (1) to discover and determine what the sacred writer meant to say, using all the critical, historical and scientific methods available to this end; (2) to reject any interpretation which makes the inspired writers either inconsistent with one another or opposed to the Church's teaching.

The central principles of inspiration and authenticity of the Holy Scriptures and their value as "a most precious source of doctrine on faith and morals"¹ reiterates

"Providentissimus Deus", but Pius XII points out how, since Leo XIII's time, the conditions of biblical studies and their related sciences have changed greatly, with more abundant and more accurate information being now available from recent archaeological research. The Church must make use of these findings which God has placed at the disposal of our age. The document emphasises that it is the exegete's duty to "search out even the least shade of meaning, which, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, proceeded from the pen of the sacred writer that he might

¹Op. cit.

more fully and more intensely understand his mind"¹.

However reference must be made to the Church's teaching authority, interpretations by the Fathers and the "analogy of faith"; the document therefore states:

"Sacrarum autam Litterarum exegetae, memores de verbo divinitus inspirato huic agi, cuius custodia et interpretatio ab ipso Deo Ecclesiae commissa est, non minus diligenter rationem habeant explanationum et declarationum magisterii Ecclesiae, itemque explicationis a sanctis Patribus datae, atque etiam "analogiae fidei"....².

The exegete's duty is also to discern the literal meaning and define it clearly; similarly he is to state clearly the spiritual sense intended by God:

"Quare exegeta, sicut "litteralem", ut aiunt, verborum significationem, quam hagiographus intenderit atque expresserit, reperire atque exponere debet, ita spiritualem etiam, dummodo rite constet illam a Deo fuisse datam. Deus enim solummodo spiritualem hanc significationem et novisse potuit, et nobis reverare"³.

Obviously basing his theology of the Holy Scriptures on the analogy of the Word become flesh, Pius XII states here:

"...as the substantial Word of God became like to men in all things, sin excepted, (Hebrews 4 : 15), so the words of God, expressed in human language are made like to

¹Op. cit. in English translation in "Four Great Encyclicals of Pope Pius XII (Deus books, Paulist Press N.Y.) p.71.

²Op. cit. E.S. p.755. 3826

³Op. cit. E.S. 3828.

human speech in every respect, except error"¹.

Because of this the commentator should be free to grapple continually with difficult problems hitherto unsolved, not only that he may refute objections of adversaries, but also,

".... ut et certis quosque profanarum disciplinarum conclusionibus debito modo satisfaciat"². Such solutions, however, must be in full accord with the doctrine of the Church and in particular with the traditional teaching regarding the inerrancy of sacred Scripture.

During the opening years of this century the debates of modern critical theology were continuing. A new strand of thought was concerned more specifically with the historical issues involved in the New Testament and the nature of Biblical Eschatology. There was an attempt to gather together apocalyptic materials and relate them to the person and work of Jesus Christ. J. Weiss in 1900 published his book, "The Preaching of Jesus about the Kingdom of God". In 1906, Albert Schweitzer published, "The Quest for the historical Jesus", in which he attempted to build up, from biblical studies, an historical account of Christ's life. R. Bultman³ published "Jesus and the Word" in 1939 and in 1941 there appeared his essay, "The New Testament and Mythology", in which he sets out his programme of demythologising.

In this climate of questioning and debate in biblical studies, Pius XII published the encyclical, "Humani Generis"

¹Op. cit. (English translation. Op. cit.).

²Op. cit. E.S. p.757. 383l.

³ cf. English text in Fontana books 1958.

in 1950. As with his former encyclical he is anxious to promote critical biblical studies and exegesis which keeps up to date with modern scientific enquiry and research. The encyclical is headed: "De nonnullis falsis opinionibus, quae Catholicae Doctrinae fundamenta subruere minantur"¹.

E. Schillebeeckx draws attention to the fact that in the Middle Ages during the rise of progressivism, which appealed to Aristotelian and Arabian philosophy in order to explain the faith, Pope Gregory IX expressed his concern at reason being given too great a place in theology. With regard to the similar position that Pius XII was in he points out that:

"In different circumstances, but with the same concern for the soundness of faith, Pius XII in, "Humani Generis", reacted against the tendency to minimise the value of human thought in theology. "Human reasoning, which was in the first case, because of its newness, the cause of unrest in the Church, became in the second, the element which the teaching authority of the Church attempted to safeguard"².

"The encyclical itself pointed to the possibility of and the need for a perfecting and refining of the traditional concepts, and added that theologians had nothing to

¹"Humani Generis" in "Acta Apostolicae Sedis" Vol. 42, number 11. Referred to here as A.A.S.

²E. Schillebeeckx: "Revelation and Theology" p.159/160.

fear if they simply attempted to adapt the Church's teaching methods of present day conditions and needs"¹. Such statements stand in striking contrast to the attitude to contemporary thought and culture adopted by "Dei Filius" and "Providentissimus Deus", both of which severely judged current thought trends, advocating that they should be dismissed and that the criticisms raised by rationalism be disregarded.

The opening paragraph of "Humani Generis", while being lenient towards human reason, mentions some false opinions and tendencies outside the Church. It speaks of Divine Revelation as being "morally necessary", so that truths, religious and moral, beyond man's power to reason, may be known by all: it states:

"Quapropter divina "revelatio" moraliter et necessaria dicenda est, ut ea, quae in rebus religionis et morum rationi per se impervia non sunt in praesenti quoque humani generis, condicione, ab omnibus expedite, firma certitudine et nullo admixto errore cognosci possint"². The confusion caused by "various modern scientific and philosophical theories"³, is referred to; the theories listed are evolution, communism, existentialism and historicism. There is admiration for a desire to return to the Word of God as "the fountain of divinely communicated truth"⁴, but regret is expressed that many diminish

¹Op. cit. p.161. E. Schillebeeckx quotes in a note the following conclusion from "Humani Generis":

...." in quaestiones novas, quas hodierna cultura ac progrediens aetas in medium protulerunt, diligentissimam suam conferant pervestigationem, sed ea qua est prodentia et cautela".

²"Humani Generis" A.A.S. p.562.

³ Op. cit. ibid.

⁴ Op. cit.

the value of human reason, and, "the more they exalt the authority of God the Revealer, the more severely do they spurn the Church's teaching office: so Pius XII writes:

"Ad simul dolendum est haud paucos istorum, quo firmiter verbo Dei adhaereant, eo magis humanam rationem adimere, et quo libentius Dei revelantis auctoritatem extollant, eo acrius Ecclesiae Magisterium aspernari, a Christo Domino institutum, ut veritates divinitus revelatas custodiat atque interpretetur"¹.

The Church's Magisterium is defined here as follows:

".... hoc sacrum Magisterium in rebus fidei et morum, cuilibet theologo proxima et universalis veritatis norma esse debet, utpote cui Christus Dominus totum depositum fidei - Sacras nempe Litteras ac divinam "traditionem" -- et custodiendum et tuendum et interpretandum concedidit"². However he continues to write:

"Verum quoque est, theologis semper redeundum esse ad divinae revelationis fontes: eorum enim est indicare qua ratione ea quae a vivo Magisterio cocentur, in Sacris Litteris et in divina "traditione", "sive explicite, sive implicite inveniantur"³.

The two-source theory of Revelation is still rigidly adhered to here, but there appears to be a new and greater emphasis upon the unique place of Holy Scripture in the Church's teaching, evidenced by the statement that it is through the study of its sacred sources that theology remains ever fresh, while speculation, neglecting a deeper

¹Op. cit. A. A. S. p.563.

²Op. cit. A. A. S. p.567

³Op. cit. A. A. S. p.568

search into the deposit of faith, proves sterile.

However the document states:

"una enim cum sacris eiusmodi fontibus Deus Ecclesiae suae Magisterium vivum dedit, ad ea quoque illustranda et enucleanda, quae in fidei deposito nonnisi obscure ac velut implicite continentur"¹.

A warning is given against "symbolic" or "spiritual" exegesis which attempts to diminish difficulties, also against referring to the Old Testament narratives as "myths", while the doctrine of divine inspiration applying to all Holy Scripture, is emphasised.

More than any other official document of the period since Vatican I, "Humani Generis" appears to have come to terms with current trends in culture, science and archaeology, in attempting to take seriously the place of human reason and the problems raised in theology due to the steady advance in human knowledge in all fields over the period.

It points out that "speculative theology" which fails to make any further examination of the deposit of faith has, from past experience, turned out to be barren and lifeless, yet it emphasises that "study of the sacred sources", invigorates the "sacred disciplines". Of this same "deposit of faith", the document states:

"Quod quidem depositum nec singulis christifidelibus nec ipsis theologis divinus Redemptor concedidit authentice interpretandum, sed soli Ecclesiae magisterio"².

¹Op. cit. A.A.S. p.569

²Op. cit. A.A.S. p.569

Retaining, as it does, the two-source theory of revelation and its expression and interpretation through the teaching authority of the Church, the encyclical still shows a desire to return in a scholarly and humble fashion to the origin and source of the Church's teaching tradition and, in a scientific way, to expose itself to its given object, to find a source of renewal there, and so remain a fresh and living witness to God the Father, as He has chosen to reveal Himself through the Son, Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

CHAPTER 6

The Background to the Constitution, "De Divina Revelatione", of Vaticanum II.

The Council of Trent was occasioned by the crisis of the Reformation; Vaticanum I's constitution "Dei Filius" was part of that Council's attempt to stem the tide of Rationalism, which, at the end of the nineteenth century, was to lead to the rise of Modernism and the ensuing controversies, to the encyclical, "Pascendi" (1907), to the oath against Modernism and to a series of cautious decrees of the Biblical Commission on the interpretation of the Bible. When Vaticanum II began in 1962 no new crisis made it necessary to prepare a statement of a polemical nature on Holy Scripture and Revelation; yet, various pastoral and academic ferments, taken up in such encyclicals as Pius XII's "Divino Afflante" (1943) and his "Humani Generis" (1950), provided the theological background to "De Divina Revelatione", along with several Biblical, Liturgical and Catechetical movements and currents of renewal, which had opened up and raised on the level of pastoral practice the subjects, Tradition, Scripture and Magisterium. They seemed to be using Scripture and Tradition in new ways and with an altered balance, appearing to be dangerously independent of the Magisterium. These pastoral and academic ferments fused and provided the theological background to the treatment

of Scripture, Tradition and Magisterium in the Constitution on Divine Revelation.

In the province of Holy Scripture, before the end of the nineteenth century exegetes had begun to apply rigorous methods of scientific criticism to the Bible. The Founding of the "Ecole Biblique" at Jerusalem, of the "Institute" at Rome, and the setting up of the Biblical Commission in the Vatican, gave the movement a powerful impetus which carried it forward to the present time. The Magisterium of the Church had already accepted and actively promoted the approach to Scripture found in the present Constitution. The encyclicals "Providentissimus Deus", "Spiritus Paraclitus", "Divino Afflante Spiritu" and "Humani Generis", witness to this. For the Council in 1962 the real problem lay, not so much in exegesis of Scripture itself, as in the theological use that would be made of it in the Church and in its relation to Tradition and Magisterium.

The subject of Tradition is more involved. Interest in historical studies, improvement in critical techniques, and philosophical preoccupation with evolution as a dimension of all reality, had provided the mental climate for a re-examination of the nature of Tradition and its place in the life of the Church. Fundamental, of course, to any debate on this issue, was the exact meaning of the decree on Trent on Scripture and Tradition. While most theologians writing and teaching during and after both Trent and Vaticanum I took Tradition and Scripture as two

distinct, independent sources of Revelation, some theologians, seeing an identity between the Church of today and the Church of Apostolic times in terms of historical continuity, pointed out that Scripture and Tradition could not be counted as numerically distinct and independent sources of Revelation, but were, rather, two organically connected factors in the transmission of the Gospel. The reaction of "established" theology was sharp, protesting that this new view down-graded Tradition in the Church, that in suggesting that Scripture somehow contained the entire deposit of faith, it identified itself with the Protestant principle of "Sola Scriptura", which had been condemned at Trent.

The difference in thought went deeper than is immediately apparent; it was not simply a matter of one group holding for two sources of Revelation and the other for one, rather, the clash is revealed by the use each group made of Scripture and Tradition.

These disputes about sources had led theologians to reconsider the nature of Revelation itself. The tendency since Vaticanum I had been to think of God revealing truths about Himself in complex manner, which had to be believed and theologically analysed. A new theological emphasis, which was consistent also with the new approach to the "sources", insisted that God revealed Himself as much by what He had done as by what He had

said. The events of Sacred History were the very essence of Revelation, the coming of Christ its climax and the supremely revealing event, and faith meant not alone the acceptance of truths, but also a committing of oneself to an historical experience within the Church, through which one was put in touch with Christ at the centre of history. Such a view of Revelation is supremely expressed in Oscar Cullmann's book, "Christ and Time"¹.

There was not much theoretical debate about the fundamental nature of the ~~M~~agisterium prior to Vaticanum II although some felt that its rights were being neglected by a few theologians; this fear found expression in "Humani Generis". The Magisterium of the Church did not itself pretend to be the source of divine faith. It received the Word of God from Scripture and Tradition; it could not add or subtract from this Revelation but could only expound, defend and clarify what it had received and all its teaching had to proceed from the living Word of God. Such issues the Council would be expected to raise regarding the Magisterium and to stress and commend them to the contemporary world.

The intention of the Council is set out clearly in the Prologue:

"Propterea, Conciliorum Tridentini et Vaticani I inhaerens vestigiis, genuinam de divina revelatione ac de eius transmissione doctrinam proponere intendit, ut salutis praeconio mundus universus audiendo credat,

¹O. Cullmann: "Christ and Time" (S.C.M. 1962). *cf.* Pt. II p. 124.

credendo speret, sperando amet"¹.

It aims not to break the continuity of theological thinking since Trent in setting forth the true doctrine on Divine Revelation and its transmission, while at the same time proclaiming Salvation in a relevant manner to the contemporary world that it may be led to faith and through faith to hope and that through hope it may come to love.

Its entire purpose is to show how revelation given once for all in Jesus Christ to mankind as a whole, becomes life in the Church for all those who, by baptism, have been incorporated into Christ. As G. H. Tvard puts it², "Revelation is neither essentially a doctrine, although it implies one; nor a set of propositions and formulations to be believed, although it may be partially expressed in such propositions; nor the promulgation of an ethical law of prescriptions and proscriptions, although it also implies judgment of the morality of human behaviour. Essentially, revelation is a life. It is the very life of God imparted to man through the incarnation of the Son; it is the communication of God's Word understood by man in the Holy Spirit".

Here, in a return to its origin in the Revelation of the Word made flesh, and here alone, would the Church find its way to renewal in the present. This was an

¹Prologue to "De Divina Revelatione", referred to as "Dei Verbum" (Text in Harrington/Walsh: "Vatican II on Revelation" (Scepter Books 1967)). p156.

²G. H. Tvard: Commentary: "The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation" p.17 (Darton: Longman: Todd 1966).

historical event which could only be reached by consulting the records of Revelation, which serve as a means of communication between present and past. But, as Liam Walsh writes, "if the Church was to have renewal and not revolt the search for the original Gospel had to be carried out under the control of the Church's teaching authority (Magisterium). The status and functions of that authority would have to be clearly understood and firmly exercised if the inevitable tensions between conservatism and renewal were to be solved, and if the Gospel were to be re-expressed for the Church of the twentieth century"¹.

Also, in terms of Christian Ecumenism, it was clear at the time of Vaticanum II that Scripture represented a common ground from which the work of Christian reunion could begin, although there remained considerable disagreement among Christians about the norms for interpreting Scripture, with views ranging from naive literalism to the cynicism of extreme rational critics. The theological problem of the application of the critico-historical methods to the interpretation of Scripture emerged more clearly as the Council aimed at dealing with this matter.

When the successive forms of the document on Revelation are compared, the revisions are seen to be made in three directions. The explanation of the fact and notion of revelation, which had not been introduced in Text I, was added and developed in the successive

¹Harrington/Walsh. "Vatican II on Revelation" p.10.

revisions so that it became the prologue in Text II and the first chapter in Texts III-V. Also, the explanation of Scripture and its relation to Tradition became less controversial; whereas Text I adopted one particular interpretation of Tradition, the subsequent texts did not take sides in the debate on the quantitative extension of Scripture and Tradition and left open the matter of where Revelation was to be placed. Finally, the description of the controverted questions on the nature of biblical inspiration and on the methods of scientific exegesis became more and more aware of modern requirements and less inclined to take sides among contending exegetical methods.

A "Schema Constitutionis dogmaticae de fontibus Revelationis", in five chapters, was produced and sent to the Fathers in a large volume together with six other schemata in the course of the Summer of 1962: this text, J. Ratzinger writes, "amounted to a canonization of Roman school theology"¹; all the relevant questions were decided in a purely defensive spirit; tradition predominated over Scripture; there was a largely verbalistic conception of the idea of inspiration; the narrowest interpretation of inerrancy was given and it contained a conception of the historicity of the Gospels that suggested that there were no problems involved. Chapter one was a strong statement of the "Two Source Theory" and there was an insistence that preaching by Word of mouth was the

¹J. Ratzinger: in "Commentary on the documents of Vatican II" ed. H. Vorgrimler. Vol. III. p.155f. (Burns & Oates: Herder & Herder 1969). (This work shall be referred to as "Commentary" from here onwards).

primary organ in the transmission of Revelation, with a second rôle given to the written word of Scripture.

The rights of the Magisterium, (which it referred to as the proximate and universal norm of belief), to interpret the deposit were asserted and that among its functions is that of clarifying what is contained obscurely and implicitly in both sources.

Chapter two, devoted to inspiration, inerrancy, and literary composition of Scripture, introduced Scripture as another source of Revelation, apart from the "living voice" of the prophets and Apostles, and one in which the Word of God was "more accurately" conserved. In a technical definition of Inspiration, it insisted that it is a personal charism given to individual sacred writers, not to the Christian community as a whole. Absolute inerrancy follows from inspiration, but truth is contained in Scripture in different ways according to the literary style in use by the human author and so this, along with the cultural setting in which the author wrote, has to be taken into account in judging the truth of Scripture.

Chapter three dealt with the permanent value of the Old Testament and its relevance to the New, reminding interpreters to hold sacred whatever the sources of Revelation had to teach about the authorship of the books of the Old Testament. The ultimate judgment remains with the Church where this matter involves questions of faith. Chapter four, on the New Testament, condemned the error of minimising the historicity and objective values of

the Gospels, mentioning specifically the danger of doubting the narratives of Infancy, the miracles of Christ and His Resurrection and Ascension. It condemned the view that the words attributed to Christ in the Gospels were not His own, but reflected the mind of the evangelists or of the Early Church; also condemned was any suggestion that the doctrine in the New Testament books developed in a purely human fashion, under the influence of pagan or Jewish thought.

Finally, chapter five dealt with the place of Scripture in the Church. The faithful were warned that in approaching Scripture they had to be well informed in the Church's doctrine. It is to the Magisterium and not to learned men that the Bible had been entrusted. Exegetes had to expound Scripture according to the "analogy of faith" and according to the directives of the Holy See. Scripture and Tradition were presented as the very soul of theology, by returning to which theology is constantly rejuvenated.

The first draft was debated in November 1962, was ruthlessly criticised and a strong plea was made for it to be rejected; the doctrine of the document, it was said, was entirely out of line with Pope John's direction indicated for the Council. Opposition to it was so strong that Pope John decided that there would be little point in continuing the debate on the basis of such a controversial document. Cardinals Ottaviani and Bea were appointed to preside over a Doctrinal Commission to revise the document before it would be submitted again to the

Fathers.

The Second Draft, circulated by the Commission in May 1963, took a neutral stance on the question of two sources. It had the title, "De Divina Revelatione". It attempted to show the organic unity of Scripture and Tradition, instead of separating them and affirming one at the expense of the other, and it avoided the problem of whether there were truths in Tradition which were not found in Scripture. A "Preface" presented an outline of the idea of Revelation, in which strong emphasis was put on Salvation history; new forms were found for the question of Scripture and Tradition; the problems of inspiration and interpretation were treated in a relatively open way and a number of positive things were said about the use of Scripture in the Church. However, the new draft was too inadequate and vague; it was felt that it said too little about Tradition and that a fuller explanation of what it is and its place in the Church was called for; also, it was felt that the nature of Revelation needed to be stated in more detail, as it did not make clear that Revelation was not alone a complex of truths about God, but that God had revealed Himself in person, and had done so not only in words but by the events of the history of Salvation. The New Testament confined itself too specifically to the four Gospels, despite its broader title.

On the basis of these suggestions the Commission prepared a third draft in which the treatment of Revelation, which had been presented in a Prologue in previous drafts, was now given a separate chapter and the Prologue was reduced to a brief introductory paragraph. The chapter on Revelation itself explained it in "economic" rather than in abstract terms; God reveals Himself to man for his Salvation by actions as well as words in the economy of Salvation History, which reaches its climax in the person of Jesus Christ.

It is affirmed with Trent that the Gospel of Christ is the unique source of saving truth; there follows a detailed explanation of the dynamics of Tradition, which was careful not to isolate Tradition from Scripture. The unity and intercommunion of the agents of transmission were strongly affirmed. The deposit of faith, constituted by Scripture and tradition, is committed to the entire Church, but authority to interpret it authentically belongs to the infallible Magisterium alone, which is not superior to, but rather Servant of the deposit, teaching only what it contains. The main problem of the material completeness of Scripture remained.

There was strong opposition to the third draft from a minority group within the Commission, who did not think that the Church could refuse to say that Tradition contained truths which were not found in Scripture. It held that this was the official teaching of the Church and

could not be left an open question by the Council. The draft was, however, accepted by the Fathers and amendments carried in the Council did not change the text substantially on any major issues. A clearer, stronger, fourth draft appeared and on 18th November 1965 in the eight public session of the Council, the final vote was taken with the following result: 2350 voters; 2344, placet, 6, non placet¹. J. Ratzinger writes of it as follows:

"The text, which was solemnly proclaimed by the Pope on this day, (18th November 1965), naturally reveals traces of its difficult history; it is the result of many compromises. But the fundamental compromise which pervades it is more than a compromise, it is a synthesis of great importance. The text combines fidelity to Church tradition with an affirmation of critical scholarship, thus opening up anew the path that faith may follow in the world of today. It does not entirely abandon the position of Trent and Vaticanum I, but neither does it mummify what was held to be true at those Councils, because it realises that fidelity in the sphere of the Spirit can be realised only through a constantly renewed appropriation. With regard to its total achievement, one can say unhesitatingly that the labour of the four-year long controversy was not in vain"².

Chapter one of "De Divina Revelatione" explains how God reveals Himself in the economy of Salvation through the Person and Work of Jesus Christ; chapter six shows

¹J. Ratzinger in "Commentary" p163.

²Op. cit. p.164.

how Christians may develop the life of God in themselves by a better following of the mind of God, as shown in Holy Scripture, - the God who comes to us as a spoken Word which has resounded temporarily upon earth, after resounding eternally in God Himself, and who is to be perceived through the words of Scripture. Between these two chapters there come four of a more technical nature: revelation was given through the Word, speaking to the patriarchs and prophets of the Old Testament and through Himself made flesh in Jesus Christ; as this Revelation was meant to reach all men and not only those who were able to see and testify, it reached the Apostles directly so that they could bear witness to the light they had seen and so through them it could reach those coming after them.

In the following chapters we shall have to examine in detail how this concept of Revelation and faith is handled and how it is related to the living Church as the witness to the Self-revealing God in the contemporary world through the power and inward light of the Holy Spirit.

CHAPTER 7

Revelation and Faith

When Vaticanum I approached the subject of revelation and faith in its Constitution, "Dei Filius", it reflected the concerns of the second half of the nineteenth century, when what mattered most was the rationality of the faith and the acceptability of revelation by reasonable beings. As the Church was facing a rationalistic age, she had to express her position adequately in the mentality of the time. Since then the climate of thought has changed and present day theologians are more concerned with existential and personal values than with rationality. More interest is placed in investigation of Christian experience, than the rational aspects of revelation. The steps towards the faith which used to be carefully analysed through evidences of credibility and rational assent, now appear to be quite secondary and what primarily matters now is revelation itself rather than its impact on intellectual knowledge and its importance as a source of ideas. God revealing Himself and man's personal response to God are at the centre of modern theological reflection on revelation.

The opening words of the Prologue, "Dei Verbum"..., are carefully chosen to indicate the subject of the document, to suggest a particular emphasis in the

treatment of the subject, but above all to convey the majestic dominance and sovereign supremacy of the Word of God above all human eloquence and the activity of the Church, whose role is described in the following words, "religiose audiens et fidenter proclamans". The Church, under the Word of God, is a listening and proclaiming Church, whose whole life is opened upwards and whose whole being is gathered together in the attitude of listening. Its role is that of a herald, who, as R. Latourelle¹ points out, faithfully proclaims what has been given to him, thus calling to mind the *παρρησία* or attitude of confidence and assurance of the Apostolic preaching (Acts IV 29-31; IX 28; XIX 8).

"Dei Verbum"... is significant as an opening theme, since the "Word of God" has become prominent in modern Christian thought and practice: Biblical studies have analysed its meaning; the liturgical movement, Catechetics, pastoral theology and ecumenism, have seen its importance. By opening the Constitution with these words the Council would seem to be putting itself in line with these trends.

Biblical scholars have pointed out that the Hebrew understanding of *דבר* is different from the Greek, *λόγος* -. The Greek mind tends to see a word as a product of thought, a vehicle of a concept, an instrument of an intellectual communication. The Hebrew mentality is more concrete; sounds, gestures, actions, events, are all words, for they reveal and communicate, not only the mind of the

¹R. Latourelle: "Theology of Revelation" p.456. (Mercier Press).

speaker, but also his entire personality, his thoughts, love and will alike. "The word" is also an instrument of power and action. In God's case it is productive and creative. It is in these terms, then, that the "Word of God" is more than a message or a doctrine about God, rather, it is God revealing Himself as much by doing as by saying. History, as much as metaphysics, is involved here. Even when this history is written down under inspiration or recorded in any other way, it is still the Word of God, (cf. Hebrews IV 12); it is "living and active", and more than recorded history for it "pierces" through the whole being of man, impregnating "his thoughts and intentions, and so it continues to make history. God remains present through His Word, which is constantly being activated in the community of believers for the Salvation of souls. This Biblical theme of the Word of God underlies all the Council's teaching on revelation.

"The Word of God refers first of all to revelation, that first intervention by which God steps out of His mystery and speaks to humanity to disclose to it the secrets of the divine life and to communicate to it His plan of Salvation. This is the great fact which dominates the two Testaments and from which the Church draws her life. This Word of God, spoken once for all, endures throughout the ages, through Tradition and Scripture, always living and relevant"¹. It is uttered in its fullness in Christ, "the Word made Flesh", in His person

¹Op. cit. p. 157f.

and actions, as well as in His teachings. This Word lives on in the Church, where it is daily re-actualised by preaching, reading of the Scriptures and the celebration of the liturgy.

The quotation from St. John I v2-3 is most significant here; earlier drafts of the Constitution had the opening words of the Epistle to the Hebrews at this point, which tended to support the narrower view of revelation as a "speech of God", whereas the opening words of the Gospel according to St. John present revelation as an event, the coming of an historical person. The "Word of life" spoken of by St. John is a person who was seen and heard by the Apostles and announced by them in the community of the Church, so that men entering that community would reach fellowship with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ; in this the whole movement of revelation is described.

However, whilst this Biblical citation makes clear the significance of the Christian proclamation, in the particular context of this constitution it presents a difficulty in that it does not appear to be completely logical, in so far as the Council uses it to describe its own activity, that is, to classify, in terms of Scripture, the significance of the Constitution. We must read and understand it in its much wider context, if it is not to defeat its purpose of proclaiming the sovereignty of the Word made Flesh.

This opening sentence of the Prologue states also the attitude of the Magisterium of the Church, speaking in this Constitution, to the Word of God; the Fathers

hear (audiens), and proclaim (proclamans), but also assent to the particular word spoken by St. John, (obsequitur). The Magisterium is not superior to the Word of God, but its servant; the Council will accept and follow what he has said, though it will not simply repeat his words, for it has the task of explaining what it finds in the Word of God, to the faithful of the present day.

In doing so, its purpose is to continue, yet develop, the work undertaken by the Councils of Trent and Vatican II: "Propterea, Conciliorum Tridentini et Vaticani I inhaerens vestigiis, genuinam de divina revelatione ac de eius transmissione doctrinam proponere intendit,...."¹. This statement suggests that the problem of one or two sources will to some extent be by-passed and that a more dynamic, descriptive, historical approach will be taken to the question of how revelation, once made, reaches us. It is significant that it devotes Chapter I to revelation and Chapter II to transmission, and in this sentence relates the two, in doing so it certainly affirms the significance of both.

J. Ratzinger², points out that, "inhaerens vestigiis".. was chiefly intended to allay the fears of the "conservative" group and bring out the continuity of the Church's teaching in Vaticanum II with the previous Councils, however, a

¹"Constitutio Dogmatica De Divina Revelatione": Vaticanum II. (referred to henceforth as "Dei Verbum") Chp. I art. 1.

²J. Ratzinger: "Commentary on De Divina Revelatione", in "Commentary on the documents of Vatican II": Volume III edited. Vorgrimler: p/66 (Burns & Oates: Herder & Herder 1969).

continuity which is not a rigid external identification with what has gone before, but a preservation of the old, established in the midst of progress". He also says we best summarise its significance by using the term, "relecture", which this constitution is of the corresponding texts of Trent and Vaticanum I, and in which what was written then is interpreted in terms of the present, thus giving a new rendering both of its essentials and its insufficiencies. He points out, too, that K. Barth translates this formula as, "moving forward from the footsteps of those Councils", thus suggesting that we might perhaps see the relation of this text to its predecessors as a perfect example of dogmatic development, of the inner "relecture" of dogma in dogmatic history. Vaticanum I had formulated its continuity with Trent in the words, "Nos idem decretum renovantes hanc illius mentem esse declaramus"¹.

The last sentence of the Prologue contains a sentence, which was inspired by St. Augustine, expressing the pastoral aims of the Fathers in this Council; they want the whole world (mundus universus), not just the Roman Catholic faithful, to hear the summons to Salvation, which is what revelation ultimately leads to, so that through hearing the Truth the world may believe (credat) and through faith it may be led to hope and so come to love, (credendo speret, sperando amet). This pastoral preoccupation, so beautifully expressed in these words, inspires all the efforts of the Council.

¹"Dei Filius": Vaticanum I.

The first Chapter is an attempt to describe what the Christian faith means when it speaks of revelation or appeals to it. One of the most important events in the struggle over the Constitution on revelation was the liberation from a narrow view of restricting "revelation" to a teaching which one acquires from different "sources". There is a return to what actually happens in positive sources, before being crystallized into doctrine, when God "reveals" Himself, and thus a re-appraisal of the whole nature and basis of Christian existence. Only by going back to the comprehensive reality of the deeds and words of God is it possible to do away with the positivistic idea of the "duplex fons". Only by going back to the common foundation of all Christian discourse, could the question of the individual elements of the passing on of revelation be removed from the field of controversy. This chapter was not in the original draft of the Constitution, but grew directly out of Conciliar debates. An explanation was called for which would present revelation as a personal disclosure of Himself by God, made through happenings of sacred history for man's Salvation.

The text has a quite different structure from that of Vaticanum I, which starts from natural knowledge of God and considers "supernatural revelation only in close connection with this idea, in order to proceed immediately to the question of its transmission in Scripture and tradition. Vaticanum I had the abstract values, "sapientia

et bonitas", whereas Vaticanum II has a reference to God Himself, whom it pleased (placuit), "in sua bonitate et sapientia Seipsum revelare et notum facere sacramentum voluntatis suae"¹. This gives a far greater emphasis to the personal and theocentric starting point when compared with Vaticanum I. It is God Himself, in His person, from whom revelation proceeds and to whom it returns and thus revelation reaches into the personal centre of man, touching him in the depth of his being and not only in his individual faculties of will and understanding.

Instead of the words, "the eternal decree of His Will", we have the "sacramentum" of His Will, in Vaticanum II; that is, a legalistic view which sees revelation largely as an issuing of divine decrees, is replaced by a sacramental view which sees law and grace, word and deed, message and sign, the person and His utterance, all within the one comprehensive unity of the mystery (cf. Ephesians I 9), the unity of mankind in the one Christ. Thus the cosmic dimension of what is Christian, the relation of revelation to history and finally its Christological centre are all expressed. The mystery of God is ultimately nothing other than Christ Himself, the person, and so there follows from this an understanding of revelation that is seen basically as dialogue, as the words, "alloquitur" and "conversatur" suggest. This idea is taken up again in Article 25, where the reading of Scripture is described as, "colloquium inter Deum et hominem". The dialogue of God is always carried

¹"Dei Verbum" Chp. 1 : art. 2.

on in the present and it is He who takes the initiative freely and lovingly; it is given here and now in the present with the intention of forcing us to reply. Thus we can see how the idea of revelation also outlines the conception of man as a creature of dialogue who, in listening to God's Word, becomes contemporaneous with the presentness of God and in the fellowship of the Word receives the reality which is indivisibly one with this Word - fellowship with God Himself. L. Walsh writes: "Revelation is a gratuitous call to personal intimacy with the Blessed Trinity"¹. Revelation proceeds from God (the Father), comes to us through Christ (the Son) and admits us to fellowship with God in the Holy Spirit.

Though the text is composed in definitely Christological terms, it does not present a one-sided Christocentric view; Christ stands in the centre as mediator, His "place" characterised by the mediating word "per"; He enfolds us in the dimension of the Spirit, and our being in Him means at the same time that we have been led to the Father. The Pneumatological dimension is not overlooked here and at the same time the theocentric position is given appropriate emphasis, towards which the Christocentric view, properly understood, is necessarily orientated.

A new view is offered of the relation between word and event in revelation's structure. The Fathers were concerned with overcoming a Neo-scholastic intellectualism, for which revelation chiefly meant a store of mysterious

¹L. Walsh: "Vatican II on Revelation" (Harrington/Walsh) (Scepter Books 1967). p. 31.

natural teachings, which automatically reduces faith to an acceptance of these insights. As opposed to this the Council desired to express the character of revelation as a totality in which word and event make up one whole, a true dialogue, which touches man in his totality, not only challenging his reason, but as a dialogue, addressing him as a partner and giving him his true nature for the **first time.**

The sentence in this article which describes revelation as an "economy" (oeconomia), a divine providence directing men and their history towards salvation, is one of the most fundamental and characteristic of the Constitution. Direction is given by an interplay of word and action in such a way that neither words alone, nor actions alone can provide revelation. Events get significance and became revelation, when their meaning is expressed in words; for example, one of the most central truths of the Old Testament, is the revelation expressed in words spoken by God to Moses at Mount Sinai (cf. Exodus 19: 5-6), but the words here have scarcely any meaning apart from the dramatic events of the Exodus from Egypt and the making of the Covenant. The statement has little credibility unless one remembers all the wonders and signs by which God actually made the Hebrew people His very own, but also, it is only in the light of the divinely inspired words of Moses and the other Hebrew prophets that these events became a great manifestation of God's personal love and care for His people and all mankind.

"Sacramentum" and "mysterium" are used and also "verba" and "res", words belonging to the language of sacramental theology. In every statement there is a putting together of words and actions (form and matter; *verbum et elementum*); words determine the significance of action and action makes words concrete and individual, but it is only when the two coincide that there is a "sacrament", a mysterious presence of Christ, acting through signs of human communication to sanctify men. So also in revelation there is a coming together of words and events before the mystery of God's saving presence is unfolded to men. Mystery in this sense is not just a supernatural teaching; it is a supernatural reality (*res*). It is Himself, God is revealing, not just truths about Himself. The Council here has used the analogy of the sacraments to make this point. Its view of revelation may, therefore, be called "sacramental". Christ, who is God and man, not alone brought us ultimate inner truth about God and man's Salvation, but is Himself, in His own person, the fullness of revelation.

Article 3 continues to enlist the stages of revelation; God had prepared the way for this ultimate fullness by revealing Himself to man from the beginning of time. God, creating (*creans*) and preserving (*conservans*) all things through His Word (*per Verbum*), "*in rebus creatis perenne sui testimonium hominibus praebet* (cf. Romans I 19-20)"¹. This "via salutis", is described in its

¹"*Dei Verbum*": Chp. 1 : art. 3.

historical stages of preparation from "our first parents" down through Abraham, the patriarchs, Moses, the prophets down to the "promised Saviour". God's intention was to offer man some higher way of Salvation. The Council did not wish to settle the problem of whether men ever knew God by natural means or whether grace helped them from the beginning to discover God. It is simply stating the fact that there were two distinct levels on which man could know God from the beginning. The historical character of revelation is emphatically asserted, for it comes to man not as a timeless idea but as the historical operation of God in our own time; man is set in the context of this history as the place of his salvation. Though a theology of Salvation history in the technical sense is not spoken of, there is here a certain approximation to the position of O. Cullmann.

The cautious, hesitant attitude of the Council is confirmed in its answer to the question of "Creation" and "revelation" or "salvation". The Christological nature of Creation is made clear and the self-testimony of God in creation is placed in a Christological context, when it makes the point that God had perfected His Creation "per Verbum". The point is also made that Creation was already orientated towards Salvation.

The second concern of the text was to bring our changed historical perspective, into the historical understanding of Salvation. It was a matter of achieving a dialectic combination of two apparently contrary series of statements, in that the particularism of Salvation

history and the universalism of the divine saving will have to be seen as related one to the other; though one can appeal to Scripture itself in support of this intrinsic relationship, the new task is to ensure to universalism the full breadth given by our changed conception of history. The text sees the whole of history (1) under the sign of "the Fall", as "fallen history" but (2) under the sign of the promise and care of God who alone makes possible eternal life. No mention is made here of the mystery of God's anger, which would be in place at this point; the whole subject of sin, law, and anger of God is gathered together in the one word, "lapsus" and thus is given neither its full weight nor is it taken sufficiently seriously. As J. Ratzinger remarks, "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"¹.

The next paragraph deals with Christ as the last Word of God, the fullness of revelation. Using the opening words of the Letter to the Hebrews, Christ is shown as the climax of all prophetic history, Himself in line with the prophets, yet totally surpassing them, because He is the Son of God. He is the fullness of revelation, the Word of God in Person, sent as a man among men, to enlighten them in the most complete way about the interior, personal life of God. He reveals

¹J. Ratzinger: Op. cit. p174.

what is truly "new" in the New Testament, for instead of words we have "the Word". God has nothing more to say to man when He has sent His Word, for in Him He has said Himself. In Him the dialogue of God has attained its goal and has become a union. K. Rahner writes of the matter saying:

"Nothing new remains to be said, not as though there were not still much to say, but because everything has been said, even given in the Son of love, in whom God and the world have become one"¹.

The nature of revelation is not concerned with talking "about" something that is quite external to the person, but is concerned with the realisation of the existence of man, with the relation of the human, "I", to the divine "Thou", so that the purpose of this dialogue is ultimately not information, but unity and transformation. Revelation is made by Words and events ("verba Dei loquuntur et opus salutare consummat verbis et operibus, signis et miraculis, praesertim autem morte sua et gloriosa ex mortuis resurrectione, misso tandem Spiritu veritatis, revelationem complendo perficit ac testimonio divino confirmat")². He used every feature of His human presence on earth to communicate with men. An earlier draft of the text made this point by stating that Christ gave revelation "by His very Person"; the word "Persona" raised difficulties because of its special meaning in the

¹K. Rahner: "The Development of Dogma" in "Theological Investigations 1" (1961). p.49.

²"Dei Verbum" Chp. 1: art. 4.

dogma of the "Hypostatic Union", but without changing the idea, the Fathers altered the words and the text now speaks of Christ bringing revelation to perfection by the total fact of His presence in our world. He Himself and everything about Him is revelation, the fullness of the Divine self-disclosure in human terms, man being constantly addressed by God. The text details some of the complex elements that go into this revelation: Christ's words, what He did and suffered, His signs and miracles, His supreme work of death and resurrection, which is both mystery and miracle, and His sending the Holy Spirit, who gave the Apostles full understanding of Christ's own person, words and actions. Through Him we know that God is with us and we are called to resurrection and eternal life. If the point is made that Christ was the end of God's speaking because after Him there was nothing more to say, then that means that He is the constant address of God to man, that **nothing** comes after Him, but that in Him the whole extent of God's word begins to reveal itself. We are able to regard this as the basis for the following treatment of revelation and tradition and at the same time the true nature of revelation; its truth becomes apparent, that in the man Jesus, the man who is God, we are able to understand the whole nature of man. In Him the truth and deception of human existence appear because He comes entirely from God and is "una persona" with God Himself.

The works of Christ viewed as miracles have interested

Catholic theologians in recent centuries, but the apologetical approach employed sometimes gave the impression of reducing the miracles of Christ, even His Resurrection, to the level of extrinsic signs, guaranteeing divine origin and therefore the credibility of Christ's teaching, but having little or nothing to say for themselves as revelation. Earlier drafts of the Constitution had reflected this theology, identifying revelation with what Christ taught, His works being introduced later as signs which guaranteed authority for His teaching. The Council reacted against this narrow view and emphasised that it is not only the miracles of Christ, but everything about Him, His words and works, which confirm His divine origin; all the individual miracles are set within the one decisive divine miracle, (σημείον and μυστήριον), that Jesus Christ Himself exists. The witness cannot be separated from what is borne witness to and the final point is made that the whole stands in an eschatological context, for the Christian faith is essentially also hope and thus can find its final attestation only in the fulfilment of hope.

The last sentence of this section speaks again of the "Oeconomia christiana", which is the ultimate, definitive stage of man's religious history. It will never be replaced, as was the Old Testament, nor will it ever be augmented by further public revelation. The only divine manifestation which the world may now look forward to is the second coming of Christ at the end of time. The text is not pronouncing here on the theological

problem of whether or in what sense revelation is "closed" with the death of the last Apostle. It is stating the much more basic fact that revelation is completed with Christ. How and when this total revelation is discovered and expressed by men in the Church is another problem, which the Council did not wish to solve at this point.

Article five is devoted to a treatise on faith, opening the subject with a quotation from the Epistle to the Romans: "oboeditio fidei" (Rom. XVI 26 : IV and 1 Cor. X 5-6). Faith is the correlative of revelation. It is the response which men make to the God who reveals Himself; "Deo revelanti praestanda est "oboeditio fidei", qua homo se totum libere Deo committit "plenum revelanti Deo intellectus et voluntatis obsequium" praestando et voluntarie revelationi ab Eo datae assentiendo"¹.

There are three points made here. First, there is given a description of faith, with a special emphasis on the personal freedom of the act (libere). Faith is "obedience", but obedience must be understood in its full Scriptural sense, rather than in any narrow, moral sense, for faith is a theological, not a moral, virtue. The Fathers introduced the highly personalist phrase, "homo se totum libere Deo committit", in the face of opposition. It corresponds to the emphasis in the earlier part of the chapter on the personal quality of God's self-manifestation, for, if God reveals Himself as a

¹"Dei Verbum" Chp. 1 : art. 5.

person, man must respond with a total personal commitment and such a response can only be free. In the next part of the sentence this is more technically put when faith is spoken of as a submission of the intelligence, commanded by a free will, by which man assents to a revelation made by God, who is at once supreme truth and man's final beatitude.

This sentence establishes continuity with the Vaticanum I teaching on faith, deriving its significance as a further development of the 1870 Council, both from the new context in which it places the analysis of faith and from the nature of the selection which it makes from the preceding document. The context in Vaticanum II is determined by an understanding of revelation that is wholly Christological and that sees the dualism of word and reality reconciled in Him, who as the true "Logos", is at the same time the true ground of all that is real, and that consequently sees the antithesis, between intellectual dogmatic faith and the yielding up of one's whole existence in trust, as overcome through the total acceptance coming from the person, which recognises Jesus Christ as both the truth and the way. Thus the total character of faith inevitably emerges strongly here, expressed in the Scriptural phrase, "oboeditis fidei", "by which man entrusts his whole self freely to God"¹.

The second point made here is the intrinsically supernatural quality of faith. Man can only exercise this

¹"Dei Verbum" Chp 1 : art. 5.

faith before the challenge of the truth of Revelation if God has drawn him to Himself, for the mind must be enlightened by the enfolding action of divine grace and the interior gift of the Holy Spirit, "qui cor moveat et in Deum convertat, mentis oculos aperiat, et det "omnibus suavitatem in consentiundo et credendo veritati"¹.

Some of this statement on faith dates back to the Second Council of Orange, which was defining against the naturalistic tenets of Pelagianism; these were repeated with even greater clarity by Vaticanum I and need little comment from the present Council.

The third point made is that progress in our understanding of revelation is a continuity between the first assent to it and the gradual penetration of its meaning through the work of the Holy Spirit", "quo vero profundior usque evadat revelationis intelligentia"². Both in individuals and in the whole community, advance in faith always comes from the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Vaticanum I had mentioned three elements in the genesis of faith: (1) the inner aids of the Holy Spirit; (2) the external "argumenta revelationis", with which a main part of the section was concerned; (3) the inner illumination of the Holy Spirit, which, as the active working of grace, must be differentiated from the aids to understanding. Faith is described both as "donum Dei" and as "opus ad salutem pertinens". Vaticanum II has simplified the statement by speaking of an acceptance of revelation "ab Eo datae". The change, also, from "revelato"

¹"Dei Verbum" Chp. 1 : art. 5.

²"Dei Verbum" Chp. 1 : art. 5.

to "revelatio", opens up a new vista, which again in no way removes the intellectual component of faith, but understands it as a component in a wider whole. The final sentence of this article is also an innovation compared with Vaticanum I, where it speaks of a constant perfecting of faith through the gifts of the Holy Spirit and sees the effect of these as an ever deeper insight into revelation. The Holy Spirit appears here as the effective subject of the perfection that is related to the "opus", thus God remains here as the one who is really acting, but His activity penetrates man steadily and increasingly.

There is already here the intention to provide a foundation for the idea of tradition, developed in Chapter II, which takes place essentially as the growing insight, mediated by the Holy Spirit, into revelation that has been given once for all; it is the perfection of faith which the Holy Spirit brings about in the Church. This is the crux of the difference between the Roman and Protestant theology in the question of tradition, which emerges in Chapter II.

It is not without significance that the attempt to present the total character of faith primarily makes use of the idea of obedience and only secondly takes up the idea of trust, for this makes it clear that self-abandonment in faith is not without direction, but includes commitment to the Word, and that this self-abandonment of faith makes a readiness for the concrete manner of the encounter with God and His claim, as these are brought

to a person historically through the preaching of the Church. As J. Ratzinger writes: "...faith proclaims Christ as the one who has come and as the one who is to come and thus bears within itself both the infinite openness of man and the finality of the divine answer that does not put an end to man's development, but makes him conscious of his true, infinite nature"¹.

The final paragraph of this chapter contains a statement on the content of revelation, repeating, in an abridged form, sections (1) and (2) of the chapter, "De revelatione", from Vaticanum I. The only new thing added to the text is the substitution of "manifestare ac communicare" for "revelare", again emphasising the character of revelation as a reality which goes beyond merely doctrinal interest, pointing to a revelation which does not merely present "divine ordinances" but is a dialogue of Salvation, a communication from person to person that takes place in the world. In 1870 people tended to start, also, with natural knowledge of God and had moved on from this to "supernatural" revelation. Vaticanum II has not only avoided the technical term, "supernaturalis", which belongs too much to the world of physical thinking, but it has also followed the reverse procedure. It develops revelation from its Christological centre in order then to present the inescapable responsibility of human reason as one dimension of the whole. It shows that the human relation to God does not consist of two more or less independent parts, but is indivisibly

¹J. Ratzinger: Op. cit. p.177.

one. There is no such thing as a natural religion in itself.

Revelation manifests the inner mystery of God, the intricacies of His personal life and the special design of His love for man's Salvation. This is the primary object of revelation. It is intrinsically supernatural in the sense that no one has a right or power to penetrate these secrets. Also, revelation throws light on certain fundamental truths about God and human destiny, which, ideally speaking, could be discovered by unaided human reason. However, by saying that the unaided human reason can know certain religious truths, it is not saying that such a purely natural religion ever in fact existed. The text here is making necessarily theoretical distinctions rather than describing actual human situations. It is not saying that any known system of metaphysics has in fact succeeded in demonstrating all the truths of natural revelation; normally it is within the framework of belief that theology has presented its rational demonstration of truths such as the existence of God. It has seen them as natural "preliminaries of faith" (*praeambula fidei*), rather than as an independent system of religious truth. For the Christian there is only one way to know God and our relations to Him and that is through historical revelation which reaches its fullness in Christ.

To sum up the content of this Chapter's statement on revelation and faith, we must primarily say that what matters is revelation itself, rather than the impact of revelation on intellectual knowledge and its importance as a source of ideas.

Revelation is considered in the two related dimensions of (1) history, in which it has been couched in the human language of inspired authors who, in the Old or New Testaments, have recorded the great acts of God in His dealings with men; and of (2) personal relationship, in which revelation is inseparable from the act of hearing and of responding, by which man acknowledges in his heart and in public that God spoke in the past and that He speaks here and now. Revelation as communication of "revealed truths" comes only at the end of the Chapter, after a condensed survey of revelation as a sacred history, as "Heilsgeschichte".

"Revelation, in the context of this document, is the appearance of Emmanuel, of "God-with-us", in the course of human history and in the texture of our lives. The faith with which we answer this coming down of God toward us is much more than an intellectual assent"¹. It requires personal commitment to Himself, and the Holy Spirit's mission is to guide men toward such a loving response to Jesus Christ as Saviour and the totality of God's revelation. Through the Holy Spirit, the believer is orientated toward divine encounter in the Person of Jesus Christ, his eyes opened as he passes from blindness to sight in an anticipation of the full vision.

¹G. H. Tvard: "The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation" p.25 (Darton: Longman: Todd 1966).

CHAPTER 8

The Transmission of Divine Revelation:

Just as the original giving of revelation for the Salvation of all peoples was the work of God, so too the transmission of this divine revelation to all generations must be attributed to God. Article seven, which begins the more technical chapters of the Constitution on Divine Revelation, states that Christ the Lord, in whom God's self-revelation is summed up, commanded the Apostles to preach the Gospel, which had been promised by the prophets and which He fulfilled in His own person and promulgated with His own lips. In preaching the Gospel they were to communicate the gifts of God to all men. This Gospel was to be the source of all saving truth and moral discipline.

The means of transmission were the spoken word of the Apostles' preaching, the example they gave and the institutions they established. What they handed on by these means was nothing more or less than what they received, whether from the lips of Christ, from His way of life and His works, or whether they had learned it at the prompting of the Holy Spirit. It was done by those Apostles and other men associated with those Apostles who, under inspiration of the same Holy Spirit, committed the message of Salvation to writing.

That there might be a continuous preservation of the full and living Gospel in the Church, the Apostles left

bishops as their successors, to whom they gave "their own position of teaching authority". The sacred Tradition and the Scripture of both Testaments, are like a mirror in which the pilgrim Church on its earthly journey contemplates God, from whom it receives everything, until it is brought face to face with His reality.

At this point, apart from one phrase, Vaticanum II borrows the language of Trent. The additional phrase, "... eis dona divina communicantes", is characteristic and makes the point that the Apostles were not only teachers of truth but ministers of grace, thus emphasizing again that revelation is more than a set of ideas.

Following Trent, the content of the Apostolic preaching is here described as "the Gospel" (Evangelium), meaning the total message of Christ, the "good-news" of Salvation which includes everything the Apostles knew about the person, actions and words of Christ. They learned about Him not only from direct experience while they lived with Him, but also by the illumination they received about Him from the Holy Spirit after His resurrection. The Gospel is described still in the language of Trent as, "fontem omnis et salutaris veritatis et morum disciplinae". This is the only time "fons" appears in this chapter; it occurs in the singular and before any distinction has been made between Scripture and Tradition. Whether Scripture and Tradition are two sources or not, there is certainly a single source which precedes them both in time and importance, which is neither Scripture alone, nor Tradition alone, but the

Gospel of Christ which is the sum total of revelation.

The two new additions to the Tridentine text occurring in the sentence beginning, "Ideo Christus Dominus" - firstly, after "ante per Prophetas Ipse", "adimplevit" and then "eis dona divina", referred to above, - contain the idea of grace and the principle of dialogue, thus providing a new starting point for the question of tradition.

"Quod quidem fideliter".... which now describes the beginning of the process of handing down, continues along the same lines. Vaticanum II sees three different kinds of events: (i) "exempla" and "institutiones" of the Apostles are placed beside, "praedicatio oralis" and as far as Christological origin is concerned, above and beyond the Word of the Lord, both being with Him and seeing what He did are described as the origins of tradition; (ii) the same process of extension is seen also in the mention of the new pneumatological component of the origin of revelation, as when the Tridentine phrase, "Spiritu Sancto dictante", is changed to "Spiritu Sancto suggerente", which is also more in accordance with Scripture; (iii) the guidance of the Paraclete promised to the disciples is not a "dictatio" but a "suggestio", the remembering and understanding of the unspoken in what was spoken once, which reaches down to the depths of a process that cannot be measured by the terms "praedicatio oralis", and the transmission of which cannot be merely a process of handing down words.

When Trent used the idea of "tradition", it used it only in the plural, but Vaticanum II, except for a quotation from Scripture (II Thessalonians II v15) uses it only in the singular, "traditio". For Trent the question of tradition was more a question of reform of Church life than of Church teaching.

An important point which this paragraph brings forward is that the Apostles had a unique function in the setting up of the Gospel. While they lived, they continued to give an authoritative witness about Christ to men. When they died, this authoritative, creative witness ceased. The Gospel was constituted for all time. The revelation of God in Christ was, at least in this sense, closed. The "vertical" transmission of the Gospel is ended, now begins the horizontal transmission, forward along the plane of history, from the Apostles to the Church. The Apostles gave the Church the Gospel in a communicable form, written and unwritten to ensure that the message would come through these lines of communication in its unchanging fullness and living vigour, the Apostles appointed Bishops to succeed them in the Church. "Apostoli successores reliquerunt Episcopos, ipsis "suum ipsorum locum magistarii tradentes"¹.

The "bishops" do not inherit all the powers of the Gospel; they cannot add to or take from the Gospel itself, but they have received a Magisterial power, which ensures faithful transmission of the Gospel.

1. "Dei Verbum" article 7: 7162 (HARRINGTON-WALSH)

The final sentence of this paragraph takes us back to the beginning; the transmission of revelation ends with God as it began with Him. Scripture and Tradition must be understood in this deeply theological sense. They carry revelation from God through Christ and His Apostles to the Church and they lead the Church back to God at the end of time.

Article eight on Tradition within the Church was added at the third draft of the Constitution to satisfy many requests for a more satisfactory treatment of Tradition. The Constitution is talking here solely about Apostolic Tradition, and also it places its main emphasis on the active sense of Tradition which is the handing on of the Gospel. The very first sentence with its reference to "praedicatio apostolica" shows that the activity of Tradition cannot be separated from Scripture; the function of Scripture is to transmit the "apostolic preaching", but this preaching is also expressed in a special way in the inspired books. The link between Tradition and Scripture is also indicated by texts from Thessalonians and Jude, which the paragraph goes on to use. The written and spoken word are both part of a single process by which the Apostles hand on the faith. The Thessalonian passage had been used in theology as a proof text of the "Two Source Theory", but by adding a foot-note reference to the fourth Council of Constantinople, in which St. Paul's words were used in a more neutral sense, Vaticanum II dissociates itself from the argument.

The Apostles hand on everything which is needed to make the people of God live their lives in holiness and increase their faith, and so, "... Ecclesia, in sua doctrina, vita et cultu, perpetuat cunctisque generationibus transmittit omne quod ipsa est, omne quod credit"¹. It is everything that it is as well as everything that it believes, its teaching, life and liturgy, which the Church hands on and which is the full embodiment of Tradition.

The Tradition that comes from the Apostles makes progress in the Church, with the help of the Holy Spirit. The document here speaks of a growth in the insight (perceptio) into the realities and words that are passed on, which comes about in various ways; it comes through contemplation, study, intimate sense of experienced spiritual realities, and preaching of those "cum episcopatus successione". The result is that over the passing centuries, the Church is always advancing "ad plenitudinem divinae veritatis, ...donec in ipsa consummentur verba Dei"². Thus again in this statement we find the refusal to see revelation in terms of a body of doctrine, or a set of propositions, or "nova lex", which is handed on, instead we have the emphasis on the dynamic, creative essence of revelation which can be communicated only through words and actions in a living body inspired by the power of the Holy Spirit.

¹Op. cit. art. 8

²Op. cit. ibid.

Vaticanum I had dealt with the progress of doctrine in the context of faith and reason, showing how rational investigation brought about a progressive understanding (intelligentia) of revealed mysteries. Vaticanum II, as L. Walsh¹ points out, "while making its own doctrine of the previous Council, widens the perspective" and instead of a growth in "intelligentia", suggesting a merely intellectual progress, it speaks of a growth in "perceptio", which suggests a progress not only of intelligence but of all human faculties. The text goes on to attribute this progress to contemplation as well as study, to spiritual experience as well as to authoritative preaching of bishops and so the Church makes progress in "all that she herself is, all that she believes"².

This Tradition, as the sayings of the Fathers point out, is a life-giving presence, pouring out its riches in the practice and life of the Church, in its belief and prayer. The paragraph goes on to point out that the very canon of Scripture itself is to be attributed to the same Tradition and also by means of it the Holy Scriptures are both more thoroughly understood and constantly actualised in the Church, a statement which again emphasises the dynamic, active character of Tradition. It means that God who spoke His Word of revelation, converses with His Church in the present and through the Holy Spirit the living voice of the Gospel still rings out in the Church

¹L. Walsh: "Vatican II on Revelation" p.43

²"Dei Verbum" article 8: "...omne quod ipsa est, omne quod credit".

and through the Church it rings out in the world, leading believers to the full truth and making the Word of Christ dwell in them. So, through the joint action of Tradition and Scripture, God speaks here and now to the Church and the Gospel becomes a living voice (viva vox) rather than a historical record.

This section is an attempt to express clearly and positively what is meant by tradition. It reflects the influence of Y. Congar and the Catholic school of Tubingen of the nineteenth century, with its dynamic and organic idea of tradition. Primarily Tradition means the many-layered yet the one presence of the mystery of Christ throughout all ages and the totality of His presence in this world. Teaching, life and worship are named as the three ways in which Tradition is handed on. It has its place not only in the explicitly traditional statements of the Church doctrine, but in the unstated elements of the whole service of Christian worship of God and the life of the Church. This is the basis of the final comprehensive formulation of Tradition as the "perpetuation", the constant continuation and making present of everything that the Church is, of everything that it believes. There is, however, a latent danger here; not everything that exists in the Church is a legitimate tradition, not everything arising in the Church is a true celebration and keeping present of the mystery of Christ, for there is a distorting as well as a legitimate tradition. This is the greatest weakness in this otherwise fully comprehensive and dynamic concept of Tradition. The last part

of this article brings out clearly the pneumatological character of the idea of Tradition, for Tradition is ultimately based on the fact that the Christ-event cannot be limited to the age of the historical Jesus, but continues in the presence of the Spirit, through whom the Lord who "departed" on the Cross "has come again" and through whom He "reminds" His Church of what had happened, so that it is led, as it remembers, into its inner significance and is able to assimilate and experience it as a present event. J. Ratzinger comments on this saying:

"In this necessary correction of a Christocentric view that had become too narrowly incarnational, the Council was able to learn much from the views of those fathers who stood in the tradition of the Eastern Church"¹.

Article nine takes us to the focal point of the controversy over the question of a mutual relation of Scripture and Tradition and the text here shows clear signs of a firm position taken during the discussion against the idea of two sources of revelation. It is emphasised that both Scripture and Tradition are bound closely together and communicate with one another, for both of them flow out of the same divine well-spring, coming together to form one thing and moving towards the same goal: "Sacra Traditio ergo et Sacra Scriptura

¹J. Ratzinger: "Commentary on Revelation in Vatican II p.190. (Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II ed. Vorgrimler).

arcte inter se connectuntur atque communicant. Nam ambae, ex eadem divina scaturigine promanantes, in unam quodammodo coalescunt et in eundem finem tendunt"¹.

In order to avoid a clash between the singularist and the pluralist understanding of the word "fons", the word "scaturgio" is used instead and it is then possible to continue to speak of "duo fontes"; "Scaturgio" is an exotic Latin word meaning, "well-spring". The common divine origin and purpose of the two means of transmission has to be kept firmly in mind, if one is to have theology and not merely a methodology of Scripture and Tradition. It is only on this level that one can understand how they "coalesce into one thing" in spite of their difference.

Sacred Scripture is next defined as "locutio Dei quatenus divino afflante Spiritu scripto consignatur", and Tradition, "verbum Dei, a Christo Domino et a Spiritu Sancto Apostolis concreditum, successoribus eorum integre transmittit"². It is transmitted to the Apostles' successors so that they in turn, "enlightened by the Spirit of truth, may faithfully preserve, expound and spread it abroad by their preaching"³. So, the Church does not draw her certainty about all revealed truths from the Holy Scriptures alone. Both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honoured, "pari pietatis affectu ac reverentia".

¹"Dei Verbum" article 9

²Op. cit. ibid.

³Op. cit. ibid.

The Word of God is common to both Scripture and Tradition; Scripture gives the Church not merely the Word, but the very speech of God, since it is written down under inspiration, Tradition transmits the Word of God from the Apostles to whom it was given by Christ and the Holy Spirit, to the bishops who continue to preserve, explain and preach the Word in the Church. The Church hears the Word from both Scripture and Tradition. The sentence referring to the Church not drawing certainty from Scripture alone was put into the text only in the final draft. What is said here is not a solution to the two source theory. It is not saying, either, that Scripture does not contain all of God's revelation and so has to be supplemented by Tradition. What it does want to say, as Trent had said before it, is that the Church cannot rely solely on Scripture for its hearing of the Word of God; whatever quantity of truth Scripture may contain, its quality is such that in the dispensation of God, it cannot stand as an all-sufficient, independent means of transmission of the living Word of God, for God never meant it to do so. It is important to note here that only Scripture is defined in terms of what it is; it is the Word of God consigned to writing. Tradition is only described functionally in terms of what it does, it hands on the Word of God, but it is not the Word of God. There was a heated discussion on the problem of the material completeness of Scripture and the third suggested

formulations now stand in the text. The last sentence of this article, repeats the heavily discussed formula of Trent, which says that Scripture and Tradition are to be accepted and revered, "pari pietatis affectu ac reverentia"; it presents here more difficulties for ecumenism, though it is not a total description of the relation of Scripture to Tradition.

Article ten continues to state that Scripture and Tradition make up "unum verbi Dei sacrum depositum", which is entrusted to the Church. Adherence by the whole Church to it always means faithfulness to the Apostolic teaching and worship and should result in harmony. Preservation and active realisation of the Word of God is the business of the whole people and not merely the hierarchy.

Comparing this text with the corresponding text of "Humani Generis", progress is evident; the latter stated, that the Saviour had "entrusted His Word neither to individual believers, nor to theologians as such for its authentic explanation, but solely to the teaching office of the Church"¹. This idea of "solo magisterio" is taken up again by Vaticanum II in the next paragraph of this article, but the context makes it clear that the function of authentic interpretation which is restricted to the teaching office is a specific service which does not embrace the whole of the way in which the Word is present

¹"Humani Generis" A.A.S. (August 12th 1950) p.569.

"Quod quidem depositum nec singulis christifidelibus nec ipsis theologis divinus Redemptor concredidit authentice interpretandum, sed soli Ecclesiae magisterio".

and in which it performs an irreplaceable function precisely for the whole Church, the bishops and laity alike. An important achievement of the renewed theology of the laity is seen here in connection with the theology of the Word, and it makes clear not merely the secular function, but also the truly ecclesiastical and spiritual function of the layman.

"*Humani Generis*" underlies the content of this second paragraph of article ten and a comparison with it reveals the progressive nature of the revision of the largely prohibitive statements of the former document, which the Council has carried out here. It is now stated that the entire people of God, each in his own rank, has a community responsibility for maintaining, professing and expressing the deposit of faith. There was no mention of the layman's contribution in earlier drafts of this Constitution, but it is made clear in this passage that the faithful do not exercise this function apart from but in community with their bishops.

However, when it comes to a decisive judgment about the meaning of the Word of God, whether in its written or traditional expression, the living Magisterium of the Church is the sole authority. This authority is not man-made but God-given; it is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ, and since it is a Christian authority it will take the form of a service rather than a dominance, rooted in Christ's own example of humble service. The Magisterium, while carrying divine authority, is not

above the Word of God but its servant. It can only teach what it has received through Scripture and Tradition; it must first listen to the Word and then preserve and expound what it hears and nothing more. It can only bind the faithful to believe on divine faith what it has itself heard in the deposit of faith. A truth is already believed by the Church at large before the Magisterium makes it a dogma that must be believed by everyone.

The last paragraph of the article is a summing up in that it gives expression to the reciprocal and inseparable functional relation of Scripture, Tradition and teaching office of the Church, none of which could be conceived independently of the other. Scripture cannot be conceived separately from Tradition, nor Tradition separately from the Church, nor the Church separately from either of the other two, without the specific function of these three entities being thereby called in question. The whole is placed within a pneumatological context which avoids the danger of being seen in terms merely of ecclesiastical functionalism.

The last clause brings in the idea of the "saving power of the Word", thus again contributing an important element to a theology of the Word, which no longer appears merely as a preliminary condition for an actual sacramental reality of Salvation, but itself as the dialogue of Salvation. The primary cause of the interdependence

of Scripture, Tradition and Magisterium of the Church, is the wisdom of God and the unifying principle of action is the Holy Spirit. The common purpose of all is the Salvation of souls, thus giving the doctrine of revelation a very definite Soteriological orientation.

CHAPTER 9

The Inspiration and Interpretation of Sacred Scripture

The position, title and text of this part of the Constitution on Divine Revelation underwent important changes in the course of the growth of the text as a whole. By the time form E of the text was reached it was more clearly stated that inspiration does not mean exclusion, repression or replacement of the human activity of the hagiographers. Any memory of the old theories of verbal inspiration was to be omitted and hence any form of an impersonal, mechanistic interpretation of the origin of Scripture.

In the third session of the Council a change was made, in the title of article 11; "inerrantia" was replaced by the positive term "veritas". On 2nd October 1964, Cardinal König pointed out that a new situation now exists in relation to the question of inerrancy. Oriental studies have clarified our picture of "veritas historica" and "fides historica", though not all the difficulties have been solved by this. Inerrancy requires sincere, unambiguous and direct, handling by the Church; the Bible is set within the context of history and of what was possible at the time and this is too profoundly realised for one to be able to deduce from the fact of inspiration as such, that the sacred

cf. A. Grillmeier: "Commentary on Revelation in Vat. II" 2103 (ed. Vorgrimler)

writers were absolutely independent of the limitations of their statements because of the time in which they were living. So, a positive expression is given to the doctrine of inerrancy. It is a question of the truth of Salvation. Inerrancy is not a static quality, communicated in a unique fact once and for all, it is, rather, a continual act of God, who stands by the revelation, saving truth and promise of Salvation set out in Scripture and in fidelity to His covenant. Precisely in its inerrancy, inspired writing becomes the expression of the truthfulness of God, whose Word is to remain forever in the world. In order to bring out still more clearly the Salvation significance of inspired Scripture which had been expressed in this way, reference to 2 Timothy 3 : 16/17 was added, thus the effect of inspiration is that in all the books of Scripture and in all their parts, the truth of Salvation is taught unshakably and faithfully, wholly and without error.

Anxiety was expressed over the phrase "veritas salutaris", in the vote taken in September 1965 and a large number present suggested a return to form E, that is, "salutaris" should be cut out and only "veritas" should remain.¹ It was desired now to make a distinction in the statements of the sacred writers, by saying that the sacred books contained the truth, but in different ways, according to the particular character of the

¹Id. OP. CIT. p. 204f.

statement of the sacred writer. Other Fathers wished to state that everything "that God intends to communicate to us" is to be free of error because it is inspired.

The first two versions of article 12 give only a very short account of the long statements of "Divino Afflante". The "litterarium genus", so important in the encyclical no longer appear here. The final text of article 12 distinguishes between "nativi, dicendi, narrandive modi" and "litteraria genera", however closely they may belong together. Here the Constitution recommends ways of establishing what the sacred writers intended to say and hence ways of critical, historical research; these include, the investigation of literary forms in various texts, the establishing of the particular situation in which a writer and his statement are placed and the particular temporal and cultural conditions of this statement which can be expressed in various literary forms, the study of inherited or native ways of feeling and thinking, of language, spirit of language and various modes of narration and attention to forms of ordinary daily social intercourse. Up to now there had only been talk of critical historical methods of establishing the meaning of Scripture but it was not until form F that mention was made also of the principles of theological exegesis. The meaning of Scripture was to be investigated in the light of the whole, that is, within the unity of all the books, but especially of the

Old and New Testaments within each other and further with the aid of tradition and the analogy of faith. The final form of the text refers to the work of the Holy Spirit as the real guide to the understanding of Scripture, either for scientific work on it, or for its religious study. Exegetes, whose work was rather narrowly defined in text E, are called upon to address themselves to Scripture as a whole constantly, in order to discover an even profounder level in its meaning, which statement reflects the pronouncements of "Providentissimus Deus".

In article 13 the Incarnation and the inspiration of Scripture are seen as two modes of the condescension of God and His accommodation of Himself to us. At the suggestion of Cardinal König emphasis on this condescension acquired a meaning which was precisely opposite to that given in the schema of 1962.¹ It is not absolute inerrancy of Scripture that is deduced from it, but, on the contrary, the admission that this condescension also accepts the human failings of the writers.

Scripture is in a special way the vessel of divine revelation of Salvation, of which Chapter one spoke. Article 11 opens by stating that the divinely revealed realities, contained and presented in the text of Holy Scripture, "have been written down under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit"; (Spiritu Sancto afflante consignata
1 of Op Cit. sec 15 p 207 f.

sunt)¹. The Church, relying on the faith of the Apostolic age, accepts as sacred and canonical the books of the Old and New Testaments, whole and entire, with all their parts, on the grounds that, "Spiritu sancto inspirante conscripti, Deum habent auctorem, atque ut tales ipsi Ecclesiae traditi sunt"². Here reference is made to St. John's Gospel, 2 Timothy 3 : 16 and to two texts in the second Petrine letter.

It was difficult to give complete expression to the relation of revelation to Salvation, which determines the whole, as no decision was to be made on whether Scripture contained the whole of revelation or not and it also prevented the fuller account of the relation of Scripture to the revelation of Salvation. From the earliest times in the teaching of the Fathers and theologians of all ages the Church's belief in divine inspiration is clear; it may be summed up by saying that God is the author of Scripture and the human writer is the instrument of God. The Council of Florence in 1441 brought forward the view that God is the sacred author of both Testaments because the sacred writers of both have spoken under the influence of the same Holy Spirit. The Councils of Trent and Vatican I repeated this, Vatican I making clear what inspiration is not.

"Providentissimus Deus" gives a positive definition of

¹"*Dei Verbum*" article 11

²Op. cit. *ibid.*

inspiration and certain aspects of it are further developed in "Spiritus Paraclitus" and "Divino Afflante Spiritu". The present Constitution draws attention to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and the consequent divine authorship of Scripture as well as to the divinely inspired realities which it contains, stressing, also, the freedom enjoyed by men chosen by God as His instruments in writing these books.

Apart from 2 Timothy 3 : 16f, the word "inspiration", does not appear in the Bible, but the reality of spirit-possession is met with frequently, being described with great variety: in the Old Testament "the Spirit of Yahweh" is a mysterious force entering mightily into history, (particularly that of the chosen people), and accomplishing God's works as Saviour and Judge; it seizes upon and transforms chosen men, empowers them to play exceptional roles and by their instrumentality it guides the destiny of Israel and the stages of Salvation; the Spirit also stirs up prophetic enthusiasm and ecstasy, power to work miracles, the gift of prophecy and the explanation of dreams and in all these cases the Spirit comes to men as a supremely free gift of God. The Lucan concept of Spirit in the New Testament is close to that of the Old Testament. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of prophecy and is presented as a supernatural, divine power. Jesus as Messiah is the Bearer of the Holy Spirit; His whole public ministry is put under the sign

of the Spirit and all the works and teachings of Jesus must be seen in this light. In St. Paul the Spirit is basically a divine, heavenly, dynamic force, existing in a special way in the living Christ and pervading His Body the Church. Though the action of the Spirit is varied, it may be classed under two headings: it is an inspiration to act, an efficacious movement taking hold of a man in order to make him accomplish certain deeds, which are not only sporadic exploits or symbolic gestures, but also enterprises of great and decisive historical import; it is inspiration to speak, as the prophets, who are interpreters of the Spirit did while they proclaimed the "oracles of Yahweh", which teach and direct the people. The Biblical notion of inspiration is that of a movement of the Spirit which touches the whole man and makes him think or know only by first urging him to act or speak or write; it is inspiration to act, to speak, or to write and all three together form biblical inspiration.

The text of the Constitution continues to state that God chose certain men to compose the Holy Scriptures and all the while He employed them in this task He made full use of their powers and faculties. He acted in them and by them, nevertheless, it was as true authors that they consigned to writing whatever He wanted written and no more.

"Providentissimus Deus" had described the action as follows: "... by supernatural power, He so moved and impelled them to write, He so assisted them when writing, that the things which He commanded, and those only, they, first, rightly understood, then willed faithfully to write down, and finally expressed in apt words and with infallible truth; otherwise it would not be said that He was the author of the entire Scripture"¹.

There are two acts here, that of acceptance of truth by the sacred writer and that of communication of the truth. The sacred writer is, most often, not aware that he is being used and moved by God and so he sets about his work in a perfectly natural way, while being guided by the Holy Spirit. Inspiration is a mystery. God in using a man as an instrument in a unique and personal way, fully respecting his intelligence and his freedom, proclaims His Word of revelation.

If the whole Bible is to be attributed to God, it follows logically and necessarily that all of it is inspired. Therefore verbal inspiration, that is, inspiration extending to every word, must be admitted. However, verbal inspiration is excessive if we conceive of inspiration as being exactly the same in every part

¹"Providentissimus Deus" (H. Denzinger: *Enchiridion Symbolorum* 1952): "Nam supernaturali ipse virtute ita eos ad scribendum excitavit et movit, ita scribentibus adstitit, ut ea omnia eaque sola, quae ipse iuberet, et recte mente conciperent et fideliter conscribere vellent et apte infallibili veritate exprimerent; secus non ipse esset auctor sacrae Scripturae universae".

of Scripture. As all that the inspired authors affirm should be regarded as affirmed by the Holy Spirit, we must consequently acknowledge that the books of Scripture, "firmiter, fideliter et sine errore",¹ teach that truth which God, for the sake of our Salvation, wished to see confided to the sacred Scriptures. Here the text from 2 Timothy 3 : 16f is quoted to conclude article 11. All the parts of Scripture are truly inspired but they are not all inspired in quite the same way, but each thing in its place and according to its role. In other words, the Bible is inspired literature.

The Constitution speaks of the truth (veritas) of Scripture here rather than the "inerrancy" of the Bible. It asserts that the divine authorship of Scripture guarantees that the truths taught and the realities described in the Bible provide the sure way of Salvation without error, though Scripture can be positively inerrant only where something is taught; when we speak of the truth of Scripture we do not imply that truth must be positively taught in every part of Scripture; that is, just because Scripture is everywhere inspired, it does not follow that it is always and everywhere inerrant. Each book of the Bible puts before us an aspect of the one, true, living God and the whole Bible is a revelation of the living, **existential** truth, a personal encounter

¹"Dei Verbum" article 11.

with God, Creator and Saviour. Just as the whole Bible is God's self-revelation, so it is the whole Bible that teaches us the ways of God with men and shows us the paths that lead men to God.

The Council's contribution to a new doctrine of inspiration consists, Alois Grillmeier maintains¹, primarily in what it says on the relation of inspiration, inerrancy and the meaning of Scripture as a whole in terms of the theology of Salvation. It is a relation of Scripture inspired as a whole and in all its parts to the revelation of Salvation, that properly shows for the first time its theological genus. To have given us a new awareness of this is the real contribution of the Council to a deeper understanding of inspiration and of the manner in which "truth" is contained in Scripture.

The main point to note is that inspiration and inerrancy are to be understood primarily from the Will of God, who desires to communicate to men His saving truth and this in such a way that this "truth" is taught "firmly, faithfully, and without error". This new version of the inerrancy of Scripture, which is presented, seeks to avoid the danger of intellectualisation and the significance of inerrancy of Scripture is that it

¹Alois Grillmeier: "Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II" ed. H. Vorgrimler. Vol. III (Burns & Oates: Herder & Herder 1969). p230.

is a special guarantee of the permanent existence and the effectiveness of the saving truth of God among men. To have the truth written down in the sacred books for our Salvation is presented as the motive of inspiration. In Scripture, P. Grelot¹ points out, not only are truths of Salvation communicated as a "material object", but that "communication of saving truths" is the whole "formal object" of Scripture; the so-called secular truths or narratives also acquire through this a relation to Salvation, for they are chosen and presented, not as saving truths in themselves, but as the medium of communication of Salvation. They serve as a framework to what is essential, and are chosen and presented only in so far as they fulfil this purpose.

Since God speaks through men in human fashion in Holy Scripture, if the interpreter of Holy Scripture is to ascertain what God wishes to communicate to us, he should carefully search out the meaning which the sacred writers really had in mind, that is, that meaning which God had thought well to manifest through the medium of their words. Article 12 points out that to do this attention must be paid to "genera litteraria", for truth is differently presented and expressed in the various types of historical writing, in prophetic and poetical texts and in other forms of literary expression. The exegete must look for that meaning which the sacred

¹P. Grelot: quoted apud. ~~P. A.~~ Grillmeier in "Excursus on article 11, 2(d), in Part II of "Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II" ed. H. Vorgrimler. Volume III.

writer, "pro sui temporis et suae culturae condicione, ope generum litterariorum illo tempore adhibitorum exprimere intenderit et expresserit"¹. To understand rightly what he wanted to affirm in his work, attention must be paid both to the customary and characteristic patterns of perception, speech and narrative which prevailed at the age of the sacred writer, and to the conventions which the people of his time followed in their dealings with one another.

There is a parallel here with article 13. God's Word to man became incarnate both in human language and in human flesh; as God's Word "became like unto man in all things, except for sin" (Hebrews 4 : 15), so we can say that the written Word of God is like human language in every way, except that it can contain no formal error. Christ is not only like men, He is truly man and truly God; Scripture is not only like human language, it is human language in the fullest sense, while at the same time it is the Word of God. It is a matter of utmost importance to determine what the sacred writer had in mind. The use of literary forms is of first importance; the basic distinction is between prose and poetry, but in practice a given literary unit is not just "prose" or "poetry" as such, but some particular species of either; the truth of poetry, for example, is not the same as the truth of drama. All these forms are different

¹"Dei Verbum" article 12.

efforts to express the truth, but because the truth is larger than any single form, the truth expressed, while it is a conception of the same reality, is often quite different in one form from what it appears to be in another. Also, we have to be aware of the literary conventions of an age in which a writing took shape, before we can establish its form. The sacred writers may have used any of the literary forms in use among their contemporaries, so long as they were in no way inconsistent with God's sanctity and truth, though we can hardly ever decide, in the abstract, in this matter, what is becoming or unbecoming to God, for the divine condescension goes even deeper than we can ever realise. That the truth of Scripture is bound up with what the sacred writers intended to convey, in which what God intended to convey expresses itself, is important primarily for understanding the inspiration of Scripture. The truth of Scripture, it is to be noted, is contained in meanings that have first to be discovered in single words and sentences; this gives to inspiration itself a new depth and a particular relation to the revelation of Salvation. However, all searching for "sensus plenior" must start with the findings of critical historical research, which must proceed according to legitimate methods of theological scholarship. In calling upon scholars to investigate and evaluate the historical conditions of the statements of Scripture, the Council

is according a more comprehensive and profound task to critical, historical research, (though not so fully elaborated), than the encyclical "Divino Afflante Spiritu" did. The final draft of article 12 is more comprehensive than "Divino Afflante Spiritu" in content and than the first forms of the present text; in all these documents, all hermeneutics was conceived exclusively in terms of solutions of problems of Scriptural inerrancy, as they were understood at the time.

Besides coming to terms with the literary forms used in Holy Scripture, the exegete must also strive to understand the People of the Word; he must appreciate the Semitic origin, cast and background of the Bible, for this is an essential part of it and necessary if we are not to ignore the human conditioning of God's Word under peril of misinterpreting God's message. For example, the Biblical writers used concrete terms and imagery, whereas Western man tends more towards abstract ideas; for us "to know" means to grasp an idea, but for the Semite it involves much more than that and so knowledge of God in the Bible is not primarily a speculative notion of God, but includes acceptance of all He stands for and so the man who "knows God" is one who lives in the presence of God, one whose "knowledge" is a rule of conduct. What we should seek in the Bible is not teaching neatly arranged in logical order, but the living image of a God who acts, who enters into our

history, who speaks to our hearts, then we shall understand why the Old Testament speaks of God as Shepherd of His people; we shall understand why He can be presented as the spouse of Israel and how in the New Testament the Church is the bride of Christ.

The fundamental truth is that God has spoken to us in human language and in a human life; the Bible is not only the Word of God, it is also the word of men and the human aspect of it is something we may not ignore. Our only way of knowing what God has to tell us in His Scripture is by knowing first of all what the human writer wishes to say. God has used and moved him; in speaking to man He has used the mouth of a man whom He has chosen for that purpose and it is only by listening carefully to that human voice that we can catch the accents of God Himself.

The last paragraph of article 12 speaks of the Bible in the Church. Attention must be devoted also to the content and unity of the whole of Scripture, taking into account the Tradition of the entire Church and the analogy of faith, if we are to derive the true meaning from the sacred texts. It is the task of exegetes to work, according to these rules, towards a better understanding and explanation of the meaning of sacred Scripture in order that their research may help the Church to form a firmer judgment. Finally it points out that all that has been said about the manner of inter-

preting Scripture is ultimately subject to the judgment of the Church, "quae verbi Dei servandi et interpretandi divino fungitur mandato et ministerio"¹, which statement reflects the teaching of Vaticanum I on revelation.

On the solid foundation of a scientific and critical exegesis, which takes into consideration every human quality of the book, the exegete will be able to erect a theological and spiritual exegesis which will disclose the intentions and teaching of God with firmest guarantees, but in order to achieve this desired result it is necessary that the scholar should be guided not only by his scholarship, not only by his faith in the divine origin of Scripture, but also by the teaching authority of a divinely founded Church. The Church is concerned with questions of faith and morals and matters directly connected with them. "Res fidei et morum" mean not only dogmas but other truths that are so connected with matters of faith that their denial would involve the denial of a dogma, at least of the dogma of inspiration or so it would appear in this context at any rate. The interpretation of texts of Scripture proposed by the Fathers is a principle of authentic interpretation, but only when it is a matter of faith and morals and when there is unanimous agreement. The "Instruction" of the Biblical Commission reflects the positive achievement of Catholic scholars since 1943 and the most remarkable of all is the consistent Scriptural orientation of the

¹Op. cit. ibid.

decrees and constitutions of Vaticanum II; the teaching authority has thus acknowledged its indebtedness to Scriptural scholars and to other theologians who are fully in touch with the revival of biblical studies. If the interpretation of Scripture is to consider the whole of revelation, as presented within the one body of Scripture and lived in the Church, then one statement can be seen in the light of another, and they can be combined to yield new knowledge. This is the analogy of faith and the method it operates. The final short article of this chapter sums up theologically all the principles referred to in the interpretation of Holy Scripture. Without prejudice to God's truth and holiness, the marvellous condescension, (*admirabilis condescensio*), of the eternal wisdom is plain to be seen in Holy Scripture, so that we may come to know God's loving kindness and see how far He has gone in adapting His language with thoughtful concern for our nature. Here the words of St. John Chrysostom have been used. The words of God, expressed in the words of men, are in every way like human language, just as the Word of the eternal Father, when He took on Himself the flesh of human weakness, became like men. So, the humanity of the Word of God in the words of Scripture is understood from the greater mystery of the humanity of God, which He showed in the Incarnation. Attention is drawn again here to the human aspect of the Bible and with the

example of the Word made flesh, spoken of by St. John in his Gospel and St. Paul in the Letter to the Philippians, we have no need to be troubled by the human limitations of Scripture.

This chapter reveals strongly that the Constitution is not a break with the past, but a rendering fruitful of an older and richer tradition. Exegetes are now given greater freedom for the future, corresponding to the very nature of the Word of God as it has emerged in history and to the nature of the Church. By pointing the way to a clearer understanding of the co-operation of God with men in the inspiration of Scripture, it also frees us from false attitudes in the search for truth in Scripture. Starting from the Council one is able to move along a path of what Alois Grillmeier calls, "balanced demythologization and depsychologization of the teaching on inspiration"¹, which still preserves the essentials of tradition, precisely in order to give a new account of its meaning and make it more acceptable to modern man.

God's Word communicates itself to us unfalsified in the fragile vessel of human language and human writing and His purpose is that His Word of Salvation is received in all its fullness. To it He gives the guarantee of full authority. This is the true meaning of inspiration and the assistance of the Holy Spirit. One can accept inerrancy in a true sense of the whole of Scripture, as

¹Alois Grillmeier: Op. cit. p 230.

inspiration also applies to all the books and their parts and everything in Scripture has a share in the truth that God wanted to have written down for the sake of our Salvation, either directly and in content, or indirectly and by reason of its service for the statement of Salvation. What secular science regards as material mistakes and inaccuracies in Scripture should not be considered in isolation and simply described as error; it should all be seen within the total framework of Scripture and judged in terms of its service for the Word of Salvation.

In this text, questions of criticism are now directed at the validity of the way in which Scripture understands Salvation itself, about the justification of Scriptural ideals and moral demands. It requires wrestling with the theological content of Scripture, with the reality of deeds performed by God for our Salvation, as, for example, the resurrection of Jesus. It is a question of the interpretation of the person, mission, work, whole life and death of Jesus. We are also concerned with the facts connected with the foundation of the Church and with its nature. These, as the Constitution hints, are the concern of Holy Scripture and its interpreters, rather than given historical dates, or given Geographical or Scientific details.

On the other hand, the Bible is not a sum of abstract "truths", a body of doctrine. Scripture reveals God Himself, a living person, a Creator who governs the world, a Holy One who summons men to the service of love, the Lord of History who guides times and events towards a goal of Salvation. God reveals Himself by His impact on the lives both of individuals and of His whole people. In the full revelation of the New Testament what Jesus made known was not a system to be grasped but a way to be followed. He spoke, but His person and actions spoke louder than His Words. The Bible as revelation includes the whole field of God's self-manifestation, embracing actions as well as words, for God is not an abstract essence but a living person. The Mediator or interpreter of this revelation is himself a man who had an encounter with God and one who has come to recognise the Saviour and Creator, one who has experienced the creative and salvific love of God. Revelation is the manifestation of the Word; inspiration is the movement of the Spirit. These are two distinct but inseparable divine powers, or correlative aspects of the one divine power, which, while distinct, operate simultaneously.

CHAPTER 10

"Holy Scripture in the Church's Life".

The three concluding chapters of the "Constitution on Divine Revelation", set forth how the Divine plan of Salvation has been passed down through the Church in the writings of Holy Scripture. In Old Testament and New Testament writings alike faithful witnesses, in obedience to the Word of God, as He makes Himself known to them throughout the various experiences of their lives, have set down in writing His Revelation of Himself. The Constitution reaches its highest point in the last chapter, "Holy Scripture in the Church's Life"; in the Scriptures, (the Constitution insists), God the Father Himself addresses His children so that the very strength and vigour of the Church comes from His Word. There must be a diligent scanning of Scriptures by those who enjoy the gifts of scholarship.

God, out of His loving concern, contemplating and making preparation for the Salvation of the whole human race, chose for Himself a people to whom He would entrust His promises. By means of a covenant He revealed His Will to Abraham, Moses and the race of Israel. He revealed Himself in words and deeds to them as the One, true, living God, so that Israel might experience the ways of God with men. They were made able to understand fully and clearly His Will for them through listening to His

voice speaking to them through the prophetic ministry. This economy of Salvation, foretold, recounted and explained by the sacred authors, appears as the true Word of God in the books of the Old Testament.

The economy of the Old Testament was deliberately so orientated that it should prepare for and declare in prophecy the coming of Christ, redeemer of all men, and of the Messianic kingdom, and should indicate it by means of different types. The books of the Old Testament provide an understanding of God and man and make clear to all men how a just and merciful God deals with mankind. Though in places these books may be imperfect and provisional, they show us authentic, divine teaching. In them the mystery of our Salvation is present in a hidden way.

God, who is the inspirer and author of the books of both Testaments, has brought it about, in His Wisdom, that the New should be hidden in the Old and that the Old should be shown forth in the New. Though Christ founded the New Covenant in His blood, the Old Testament books, caught up into the Gospel message, reach and show their full meaning in the New Testament, shedding light on it and explaining it.

This chapter on the Old Testament is theocentric and Christocentric throughout, having also a strongly soteriological character. The books of the Old Testament are presented as a record of Salvation history, which is both a history of men's experience of salvation and a history

of what God has done in the lives of men in order to fulfil in them His saving purpose. The Old Testament is a record of the time of preparation for the culminating event of Christ, the mid-point of Salvation history, as O. Cullmann¹ describes the period of His life and ministry on earth. In the text the word "economy" ("oeconomia") is used of God's plan of Salvation. The Old Testament economy of Salvation retains its importance because it was a preparation for and a prophetic proclamation of the Messiah, who was to redeem all men, and of the establishment of the Messianic Kingship. When we view the Bible as a record of Salvation history from Genesis to the Apocalypse, we receive a sense of the impressive sweep of a great historical outline, animated by the same economy of God. Although the absolute limits of it go beyond history in our sense of documented events, Creation and Parousia are real events. This history is God's self-revelation, which He accomplishes in and through the history of Salvation, showing us, by His active intervention among men, who He really is. The history of Israel is permanently valid for us because it is the immediate, concrete prehistory of the Incarnation as the history of revelation and because the basic outline of the New Testament revelation is already to be discerned in it. Israel's history was basically that nation's experience of God's grace and

¹O. Cullmann: "Christ and Time". (S.C.M. Press 1962)
see Part II p.121f.

her election by God, which meant for her the realization that hers was a destiny different from the destiny of any other people. The purpose of election is to constitute a holy people, consecrated to Yahweh, and so in its light the covenant is more than ever a mystery. To express the link existing between God and His people the Old Testament uses the word, אָוֶן, "covenant", ("foedus" in the text); in its technical theological sense, it concerns the relations of men with God, but it was borrowed from the social experience of men, who made treaties and alliances with one another.

Messianism is an essential feature of the Old Testament and pervades the whole of it. In the Biblical view history is meaningful; it has a beginning and, tending towards a God-given goal, it will have an end. This concept of history is the basis of the messianic hope, although the Messiah was never the object of Israel's messianic expectation, for He was the one through whom that expectation was to be fulfilled.

The rest of article fifteen brings out the abiding worth of the Old Testament. However, there is a marked development within the Old Testament, for God dealt with men as He found them and patiently led them on to a better understanding of Himself and of themselves and of their duties to Him and to one another and so, of necessity, the books of the Old Testament contain matters that are imperfect and provisional.

Article sixteen repeats a very old Anti-Gnostic and Anti-Manichaeian formula when it states that God is the founder of both economies. Though the Bible is the literature of a chosen people, yet in a true sense it may be considered as the one great work of a divine author. The human writer speaks in one book only, and then for a determined age and milieu, but the divine author speaks in all the books from Old Testament to New Testament. By reason of the inspiration of the human author by the Holy Spirit, God becomes the author of all the books in the sense that chapter three of the Constitution set out in more detail. The Council is careful here not to use the idea of primary and secondary author; each is within his own sphere of action the whole author and this co-operation involves a close connection between the two Testaments and their mutual illumination. Though the old canon of Salvation is fulfilled and surpassed, it still retains elements that retain their validity in the new one. All the revelations of God are external; they contain new truth, the light of which can never be extinguished and so the New Testament can only be understood with certainty if one grasps the themes that go through the Old Testament writings.

The New Testament writings give an account of God's new economy of Salvation. Article seventeen begins by stating that, "Verbum Dei, quod virtus Dei est in salutem omni credenti, in scriptis Novi Testamenti praecellenti

modo praesentatur et vim suam exhibit"¹. In the fullness of time Christ, the Word made flesh, established on earth the Kingdom of God, revealed His Father and Himself by deeds and words, and by His death, resurrection and ascension, as well as by sending the Holy Spirit, completed His work. He draws all men to Himself, for He alone has the words of eternal life. This mystery was not made known to other generations as it has now been revealed to His Apostles and prophets by the Holy Spirit, that they might preach the Gospel, stir up faith in Jesus, Christ and Lord, and bring together the Church: "Quarum rerum scripta Novi Testamenti exstant testimonium perenne atque divinum"².

Among all the inspired writings the Gospels have a special place, because they are our principal source for the life and teaching of the Incarnate Word, our Saviour. The Church has always maintained the Apostolic origin of the four Gospels. The Apostles preached and, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they and others of the Apostolic age handed on to us in writing the same message they had preached, which is the foundation of our faith. This is the four-fold Gospel, according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

The Church affirms that this testament faithfully hands on what Jesus, the Son of God, while He lived among men, really did and taught for their eternal salvation. After the ascension of the Lord, the Apostles handed on to their

¹"Dei Verbum". Chapter 5. article 17.

² Op. cit. ibid.

hearers what He had said and done, but with that fuller understanding which they, instructed by the glorious events of Christ and enlightened by the Spirit of truth, now enjoyed. The Gospel writers in their works selected certain of the many elements which had been handed on, either orally or already in written form, but always in such a fashion did they use their material in preaching that they have told us the honest truth about Jesus, for, as St. Luke expresses in the opening verses of his gospel, their purpose in writing was that we might know the "truth" concerning the things of which we have been informed.

Article twenty is devoted to the remaining writings of the New Testament which it says "firmly establish those matters which concern Christ the Lord, formulate more and more precisely His authentic teaching, preach the saving power of Christ's divine work and foretell its glorious consummation"¹, all in accordance with the wise design of God. Christ, as He had promised, was with His Apostles and had sent to them the Spirit, the Counsellor, who would guide them into all the truth.

The unity and deepest concern of the Council is again revealed in this chapter and in its return to the theme of the Word of God, to which idea it gives the importance that the whole New Testament, and especially St. Paul, gave to it.

¹Op. cit. article 20 "... ex sapienti Dei consilio, ea quae sunt de Christo Domino confirmantur, genuina. Eius doctrina magis magisque declaratur, salutifera virtus divini operis Christi praedicatur, Ecclesiae initia ac admirabilis diffusio narrantur eiusque consummatio gloriosa praenuntiatur".

Since the Son is the uncreated Word, He is at the same time revealer of this Word and object of the revealed Word.

The Apostolic origin of the Gospels brings out the pre-eminence of the Gospels and this is justified by saying that the books of the New Testament are the chief witness to the life and teaching of the Incarnate Word, our Saviour. The apostolic origin of the four Gospels belongs to the tradition of the Church's faith, for the Gospels, preached at Christ's discretion, were written down under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Article nineteen deals with the relations between history and the Gospels and is the heart of this Chapter on the New Testament. When compared with what was stated at previous Councils, it comes as something truly new. It is to be understood in the light of article twelve, (Chapter three), on the literary types and the possibility of a text being historical in various different ways. The test here is also inspired by "Divino Afflante Spiritu" and by the instruction of the Biblical Commission on Scripture and the historical truth of the Gospel. There are two positions between which the Council had to move cautiously: (1) an excessive clinging to literal meaning, which led to unreal results and (2) the risk which arises from questioning the historical value of the Gospels. The important positive point which the Council wanted to make was that the Christian faith is bound up with a

rational affirmation of facts. It states quite clearly that between the events and the original account of them in the Gospels, there is a gap, which, without the reality of the events being affected, has given a particular form to the version of the text.

Again we are reminded here of the general view of the Constitution; the person of Jesus is combined with His words and deeds and with what He did both before and after Easter. The Apostolic message rests on the truth of events, on their authentic interpretation and on the missionary power of Salvation proclaimed. The books of the New Testament transmit to us the living Word of Tradition, while also preserving it and giving it a form that is at the same time profoundly unified and yet diversified in its modes of expression. The eternal presence of the living and active Jesus and the activity of the Holy Spirit guarantee the eternal continuance of what the Word of God, sovereignly set down in the New Testament, intended to convey to us. From the beginning to the end the New Testament in the relevance of its teaching bears witness to the activity of the Spirit whom Christ had sent upon His Apostles. It was the same Spirit who had inspired the first Christian preachers and the chosen writers.

The final chapter of this Constitution deals with the place of Scripture in the life of the Church. Scripture, which is a compact and unique expression of Revelation, is the Word of God, written in a book, which is in the hand

of a preacher when he evangelises and teaches. The Church's veneration of the Scriptures is likened to the veneration of the Lord's Body, in so far as she never ceases to partake of the bread of life and to offer it to the faithful from the one table of the Word of God and the Body of Christ. The Church has always regarded and continues to regard the Scriptures, taken together with sacred Tradition, as the supreme rule of her faith. As they are inspired by God and committed to writing once and for all time, they present God's own Word in an unalterable form, and they make the voice of the Holy Spirit sound again and again in the words of the prophets and apostles. Therefore all preaching of the Church, as indeed the entire Christian religion, should be nourished and ruled by sacred Scripture, in whose books God comes to meet with and talk with His children, and so in a most perfect way it verifies the words of Hebrews 4 : 12, "The Word of God is living and active".

For this reason Scripture ought to be open wide to the Christian faithful, hence the great need for many translations of the sacred books. The Vulgate was the translation which the Church has given pride of place to but the Constitution recognises the necessity of suitable and correct translations made into various languages from the original texts so that the Word of God is readily available at all times. Also here there is a reference made to translations made jointly with "the separated brethren", which translations may be used by all Christians.

The Church, who is the bride of the Incarnate Word, is taught by the Holy Spirit and so must strive to reach a more profound understanding of the sacred Scriptures so as to sustain her children with food from the divine words each day. This beautiful metaphor is expounded in terms of the work which exegetes and linguistic scholars are required to do, under the guidance of the Magisterium, using appropriate techniques to examine and explain the sacred texts so as to aid the relevant preaching of the Word of God to the People of God. Biblical studies, as in the Encyclical "Divino Afflante", are encouraged, though they are to be carried on "in accordance with the mind of the Church"¹.

The permanent foundation of theology is composed of both the written Word of God and Tradition. By this Word theology is firmly strengthened and constantly renewed, as it searches out, under the light of faith, the full truth stored up in the mystery of Christ. All forms of pastoral work also are nourished through the Word of Scripture.

All clerics and all others who are officially engaged in the ministry of the Word are exhorted to constant reading and diligent study of the Scriptures. Indeed all Christians are exhorted to learn what St. Paul calls "the surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ", (Philippians III 8),

¹Op. cit. Chapter VI : article 23 : "Sacra Synodus Ecclesiae filiis, biblicarum rerum cultoribus, animum addit, ut opus feliciter susceptum, renovatis in dies viribus, omni studio secundum sensum Ecclesiae exsequi pergant".

by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures, remembering at the same time that prayer should accompany the reading of sacred Scripture, so that a dialogue takes place between God and man. The bishops, "with whom the apostolic doctrine resides", as St. Irenaeus points out in his "Adversus Haereticos" 4 : 32 : 1, must instruct the faithful entrusted to them in the correct use of the divine books, especially of the New Testament and in particular of the Gospels. This they do by giving them translations of the sacred texts which are equipped with necessary and adequate explanations. Editions of Scripture provided with suitable textual notes are recommended and should be prepared for the use of even non-Christians and adapted to their circumstances. So, by the reading and study of the sacred books "the Word of God may speed on and triumph (2 Thess. 3:1) and the treasure of revelation entrusted to the Church may more and more fill the hearts of man. Just as from constant attendance at the eucharistic mystery the life of the Church draws increase, so a new impulse of spiritual life may be expected from the increased veneration of the Word of God, which "stands forever".

The quality of the veneration which the Church pays to Scripture is likened to and linked with her veneration for the eucharistic body of our Lord, but the key to understanding this analogy really lies in the idea of the "bread of life", which is Christ Himself. He feeds those who believe in Him in two distinct but closely related ways, (1) by bread which is His Word and (2) bread which is His

flesh. There is one food, which is Christ Himself, and one life to be nourished, which is that of faith but there are two forms in which this is given and received, and so the Fathers of the Church, developing this theme, spoke of the "Table of the Word" and "Table of the Sacrament". Christ is present at both or rather on one table, because in the liturgy, word and sacrament are joined in a single meal, though the kind of presence differs in each case. The Scriptural Word does bring a real presence of Christ, contributing to His total presence in Word and Sacrament, as the bread of life on which the faithful are nourished.

Scripture has always been the Church's supreme rule of faith but since Scripture cannot exist apart from Tradition in the Church, the rule of faith is described here as Scripture taken along with Tradition. The text here concentrates on inspired Scripture as the Word of God in unchangeable form for it is its permanence which makes Scripture an appropriate rule of faith. Tradition, because it is fluid and flexible lacks definition and practicable availability required in such a role as a rule of faith, which has to serve over a long period of history. Through the recorded words of the Apostles and prophets, which make up Scripture, the Holy Spirit continues to speak to the Church, for it is the Holy Spirit and not the dead letter of Scripture which moves the Church to faith. However, Scripture has the power to convey this voice when it is read in the Church, within the Apostolic Tradition

and so it is the living Word of Scripture which is the supreme rule of faith.

Reference is made here to the Magisterium of the Church; in preliminary drafts of the Constitution it was described as the proximate rule of faith, but this phrase disappeared in the course of debate. Its function is now defined as that of equating and pointing out Scripture and Tradition for the faithful and guiding their understanding of the Word. It formulates and defines the meaning of the Word in dogmatic statements, but it can only do this when it has itself listened to the Word of God.

Article twenty-two, dealing with the reading of Holy Scripture by all the faithful, marks the end of the Post-Tridentine reserve on the reading of Scripture by the faithful. The special mention of the "Vulgate" here is more significant for what it does not say than for what it does say. The Council of Trent declared that the Vulgate was, "the authentic version among the Latin Bibles" then in existence and to it as the official Bible of the Catholic Church special authority was given. The true position of the Church on the matter was put by Pius XII in "Divino Afflante Spiritu", who said this concerned only the Latin Church and her public use of Scripture and in no way takes away from the value and authority of original texts; the subject of discussion at that time was not the original texts, but the Latin versions then circulating.

The overall intention of article twenty-three, on the Study of Scripture, is pastoral, though it is primarily addressed to the professional, Scriptural scholars. The purpose of the technical study of the Bible in the Church is always the breaking of the bread of the Word to the Christian faithful for their Salvation. Again, here, the Council notes that the study of Scripture cannot be separated from the study of Tradition, represented by the writings of the Fathers and the different liturgies of the Church.

In article twenty-four theologians are reminded that the unchanging foundation of their science is the written word of God, taken together with Tradition. There was, however, considerable discussion of this first sentence's formulation in the Council, for the problem was to do justice to Tradition as well as to Scripture. It was proposed in one draft to speak of "the written Word of God explained in the light of Tradition", but this seemed to reduce Tradition to the role of interpreting Scripture, which was not acceptable to those holding that Tradition was independent of Scripture and broader in its content. The Council did not want to pass judgment on this controversy and so the formulation was changed. The main emphasis of the final text is on Scripture, as this is the subject of the entire chapter, but it is made clear throughout that Scripture cannot serve as a basis for theology apart from Tradition.

Scripture is described as the "foundation" of theology; "fundamentum" is a non-technical word which requires further and more precise definition, but as a metaphor it suggests that it is from Scripture that theology gets its contact with solid reality, which is the rock on which science must always build. Theology is the science of the reality that is God, as He has been manifested in Christ, and Scripture expresses this reality. Unless theology constantly returns to Scripture it will lose touch with its proper reality and remain lost in unfounded speculations. "Theology is about God, but not the God of the philosophers, nor the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but is about the God who revealed Himself in the face of Jesus Christ. It is only in the mystery of Christ, who is the centre and climax of Scripture that the full truth about God, the beginning and end of all things, can be studied"¹. So writes L. Walsh in his study of article 24.

The metaphor of "foundation" is developed further in the Constitution when theology is said to be, "firmissime roboratur semperque iuvenescit"², by Scripture. A positive prospect is given to theology here, as it is told to draw its strength, that is its reality and its faith, from its closeness to Scripture. It is the business of theology to answer questions which the human mind puts to the Word of God, but the human mind is always moving on to new

¹L. Walsh: "Vatican II on Revelation" (Scepter books) p.122.

²"*Dei Verbum*" chapter VI article 24.

questions and so theology will seek new answers to new questions by returning again to the Word of God. It will discover there new facets of revealed reality, new shades of truth and will itself become richer as a result and will have more to say to contemporary generations. The written Word, as article twenty-five continues to state, must be heard and understood in the light of the living Word that has always been preached in the Church.

The idea of dialogue has again become prevalent in this chapter. Reference to the original colour of Scripture is placed in the context of the idea of dialogue and this again is to be seen against the background of the original dialogue of the Spirit of God, which created men, with men themselves. Scripture preserves for us the basic dialogue of God with man and constantly renews this possibility.

In article twenty-three, the juxtaposition of the phrases, "sub vigilantia Sacri Magisterii" and "aptis subsidiis", which is a reference to the ecclesiastical nature of exegesis, on the one hand, and to its methodological correctness on the other, again expresses the inner tension of Church exegesis, which can no longer be removed but must simply be accepted as a tension.

Scripture is the Word of God, only as, and in, the human word. It also includes an element of mediation and cannot be dissolved into a direct immediacy of the divine. The text, at this point, is not concerned with the problem of mediation and immediacy, but is attempting to bring out the special importance of Scripture that is ultimately based on the fact that it is as a whole the Word of

revelation, because it is inspired. This cannot be said of any other document of the Christian past and so proves Scripture to be the fundamental form of "Tradition".

The final article of this chapter returns again to the comparison of the mystery of the written Word with the eucharistic mystery, with which, the chapter began. The Word of God and the body of Christ, Word and Sacrament, belong together and are the twofold, yet only way, in which the Incarnate *λόγος* is with His Church and gives it life. Once again the universalistic idea of the Preface returns: "thesarusque revelationis, Ecclesiae concreditus, magis magisque corda hominum impleat"¹.

¹Op. cit. article 26.

CHAPTER 11

Conclusion

We are living in a world environment today in which "communication" has become the all-important thing in the ordering of our lives and in our dealings with one another. The mass media - International Press, Television and Radio - have greatly increased and developed this movement. Communication between nation and nation, between person and person, has become a vital element in world affairs and international diplomacy. It is not surprising, therefore, that when we consider Divine Revelation that we should think of it in terms primarily of "communication", or that we should conceive of the Church's mission to the world as one of communication of that which has been entrusted to her by her Lord. This is not a new idea; it is as old as the Church herself, for right from the very beginning, the Church has been called to preach and teach through life and witness, that is, to communicate to others, what has already been communicated to her through the unique, divine mission of her Lord. It is this communication which is strongly and rightly emphasised throughout the Second Vatican Council and particularly in the "Constitution on Divine Revelation". The great truth which this Constitution emphasises is that Jesus Christ did not just bring the revelation of God, He is that Revelation Himself.

The pastoral plea of Cardinal Zoungrana of the Upper Volta, at the third session of Vaticanum II, was¹, "Say to the world that Jesus Christ is the revelation of God so that the figure of Christ may shine forth over the earth".

That is a plea for communication and that is what the unique communication of the Church is all about. Above all else, this Constitution on Divine Revelation has made clear that the ecumenical problem of the relation between Scripture and Tradition can be tackled effectively only by discussing the nature of revelation itself. E. Schillebeeckx writing of the Council says:

"It was well aware that Christianity is not merely an ideological or doctrinal system, but must also be an event in which real salvation history is enacted"².

The Council, not being satisfied with communication in the sense of handing on propositional truths, speaks of the communication of Divine revelation as something more personal and as a part of the history of Salvation, a saving, historical event which is inwardly clarified by God's prophetic word, an event which makes history and accordingly has a beginning, a development and a fulfilment in the historical appearance of the man Jesus, the Son of God, the consummation of the faith.

We shall now consider six aspects of this Divine revelation which it is God's Will should be communicated to His World through His Church: (1) Revelation as a

¹Quoted in "La Schema" ... cols. 1401-1402.

²E. Schillebeeckx: "Vatican II; the real Achievement", 1972-73.

divine "economy"; (2) Revelation as dialogue, which expresses its personal aspect; (3) Faith, as the obedient response by man to God's revelation; (4) Revelation as Tradition, or the handing down and the making continually present to all peoples at all times, the revelatory events of God in the Old and New Covenants; (5) Revelation as mystery, which finally is understood only as such, by inspiration and the work of God's grace through the power of the Holy Spirit; (6) Revelation as the continuous activity of the Holy Spirit in the world.

(1) The Economy of Revelation:

Right at the very beginning of the Constitution Revelation is spoken of as an "economy" (oeconomia), or the plan of God, who in His goodness and wisdom chooses to reveal Himself to man through Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, by whom man has access to the Father in the Holy Spirit and comes to share in the divine nature. Through this revelation, the invisible, unknown and unknowable God, out of love speaks to men as friends and lives among them, so that He may invite and take them into fellowship with Himself.

This plan or economy of revelation is realised by deed and words interacting with one another in such a way that neither words alone, nor actions alone can provide revelation but that they must both come together in a single revelatory event. What God does in the history of Salvation shows forth and confirms the teaching and realities signified by the words, while the words proclaim the deeds and clarify the mystery contained in them.

Such a view of revelation and Salvation, which provides the basis for the Constitution is biblically and theologically very sound. In the Old Testament God who not only speaks His Word to His chosen spokesmen but also acts through them in their country's history. implies not only speech but also action and these two are never separated in Old Testament theology. In the New Testament, likewise, Jesus Christ does not only speak about Atonement through Sacrifice to God, but rather He is and makes complete that sacrifice by His self-offering at the Crucifixion; likewise the Church is not only responsible for proclaiming God's Word of reconciliation but is also called to be herself a reconciling community in the world through the life she lives.

The economy of revelation involves also the transformation of God's Word into human language. Just as God became incarnate in human flesh through Christ, God's Word becomes incarnate in human words spoken by different people, in different languages, in different places and at different times in man's history. R. Schnackenburg¹ writes:

"The transformation of God's Word into human language, therefore, is a 'kenosis', that is, an emptying, similar to the Kenosis of the divine Logos in the Incarnation".

It is therefore primarily as human words and concepts that God's Word reaches us. The Constitution recognises, emphasises this fact and deals adequately with its implications; here, following and enlarging upon the

¹R. Schnackenburg: "The truth will make you free", p.39. (Sheed/Ward: Stagbooks 1967).

work done by the Encyclical "Divino Afflante Spiritu", it encourages the study of biblical languages and literary forms, so that the reader of Holy Scripture may be more fully equipped to interpret the Word of God through the words of man contained therein.

Unfortunately the Constitution leaves the matter of economy there and does not discuss it at greater depth. It is therefore weak in this matter. More discussion is required here on the full implications of the self-humbling of God the Son in becoming man and being made a servant for our sakes. The economic condescension means, "that the Eternal 'Logos', without ceasing to be 'Logos', has adapted Himself to us in our weakness and lack of ability in order to effect real communication with us"¹. St. Luke speaks of Jesus growing in wisdom and in favour of God and man (cf. St. Luke 2:52). His very growth in obedience and wisdom was regarded by the fathers as opening up a way for man to rise to true knowledge of the Father. This also is involved in the economy of the coming of the Word of God into our midst; indeed it is central to the whole economy of the Word becoming flesh, yet it is scarcely referred to in "Dei Verbum", when the economy of revelation is discussed. Revelation is not only truth about God communicated to us in our own terms, it is also the way of living and receiving that truth into our lives. As T. F. Torrance writes:

"Jesus Christ is not only the Truth who has accommodated Himself to us in order to reveal Himself, not only the Word

¹T. F. Torrance: "Theology in Reconstruction", p.38. (S.C.M. Press 1965).

become flesh, but He is also Man hearing and obeying that Word, apprehending that Truth throughout His life on earth, so that He provides for us in His own obedient sonship within our human nature the Way whereby we are carried up to knowledge of God the Father"¹.

However, Christ became incarnate through the operation of the Holy Spirit. It was through the power of the Holy Spirit that He advanced in wisdom and stature; through the power of the Spirit He wrought miracles and was raised from the dead. St. Basil speaks of this as "the economy of the Spirit", for every operation of God in the economy of our salvation was wrought with the co-operation of the Spirit². It is this work of the Spirit in the economy of Salvation and revelation which could have been stressed at this point also in "Dei Verbum". It is through the power of the Spirit that we participate in His growing in obedience and wisdom and so rise through the Son to true knowledge of, and communion with God. As St. Basil continues to point out in "De Spiritu Sancto", this is a movement which continues to take place in the power of the Spirit from our creation to final judgment and renewal, when God's works of creation and redemption will be brought to their ultimate completion.

Salvation offers itself to us as a supernatural and an historical reality - the humanity of Christ - therefore

¹Op. cit. ibid.

²St. Basil: "De Spiritu Sancto" 16:39.

this reality appears as given and as revealed to us in the Word through the power of the Spirit. The manifestation of the historical appearance of Salvation in Christ includes Christ's prophetic message as an essential element in its constitution, but it also includes His growth in obedience and wisdom as a man like one of us in this life.

The special character of biblical revelation is that God has revealed Himself in historical events. The economy of revelation is God speaking His Word to us through such events. That revelation of God remains throughout the centuries, expressed and re-expressed throughout all the changing circumstances and experiences of Man's life in the world, until it finds ultimate formulation in the eschatological revelation of His Son. "And yet, not even the Son's revelation can show us everything in perfect clarity. Instead, much remains prophecy and mystery until in the perfection of Salvation in the world to come, even these veils shall be lifted"¹.

(2) Revelation as dialogue.

The economy of revelation is supremely expressed through God's eternal Will to enter into dialogue with men; that is, the omnipotent, omniscient and eternal God has freely willed to make Himself known to man through speaking with man and has desired to listen to man's response to His Word of revelation. Whilst one of the great insights which "Dei Verbum" has shown is the giving of a new emphasis and expression to the idea of God's revelation of Himself taking

¹R. Schnackenburg: Op. cit. p.45.

the form of a dialogue between God and man, it has not fully stressed the fact that our faith is implicated in Christ's faith, that He has made an obedient response in faith on our behalf to the revelation given to us by the Father. He is not only the Word of God come to man and become man, but He who as man bears and is the Word of God, conveys in Himself, also, the active possibility of true and faithful response on the part of all men to God's Word. In the form of humanity in all its lowliness, weakness and limitation God's Word has reached us and made provision for free and adequate response on our part. That is not to say that He is a dispensable medium to be discarded as soon as the target is reached; the humanity of God's Word, His condescension to be one with us in our humanity, remains the proof that in His own eternal being He is not closed to us, and it manifests His freedom to unveil Himself to man and share with him His own divine Life. This is an important part of the dialogue between God and man and should have been emphasised also in this Constitution where revelation is discussed as taking the form of such a dialogue.

The uniqueness and importance of dialogue, however, is hinted at throughout all the chapters of the Constitution. Besides being terribly relevant to man in the modern world who has begun to see the importance of communication through dialogue between person and person, the idea is central to the biblical concept of God who speaks His Word in order to make Himself and His Will known to mankind. The image

most often used in the Bible, which brings together the many different dimensions of revelation is, "God spoke a word", or "Thus saith the Lord", or, "the Word of the Lord came to me ..." God's Word is expressive of the power and call of God directed to man, the spatio-temporal and social being, whose communication with others of his kind takes the form, primarily, of words forming a dialogue.

The "word" is that which is spoken by a person to a person; it is an invitation to some kind of personal interrelationship. Freedom is essential to all true and constructive dialogue. Revelation as dialogue between God and man, therefore, implies that God out of His freedom, speaks to man in his freedom, and, without injuring His own nature, speaks with man in space, time and community, calling to man's freedom. Because God is taking man to Himself, then His loving invitation was and is expressed through a multiplicity of human symbols, that is, words, actions, attitudes, gestures, that are expressive of man. Foremost among these symbols is the human word, and so it was especially in human words that the divine power shone forth.

As R. Schnackenburg writes: "God's revelation in human language is plain and simple, yet impenetrably profound. We see this in the New Testament, in the language of Jesus. Even the Son, who brings us a direct message from God, speaks no other language save that of His own time. He makes use of simple images and parables, of examples from daily life; He speaks so that the common people can

understand. ... God in His revelation has surely become closely united with men through their language - often their daily language"¹.

In the fact of the embodiment of revelation in human language, its historicity is already evident. God's revelation was issued to men of historical existence, men of a definite time and environment, through whom revelation was mediated and transmitted. God's dialogue with men has involved both the condescension of God and the elevation of man; through His intervention in human history and through His revelation having come down through these many centuries a distinct revelation history has been fashioned, which at all points reveals the depth and nature of God's dialogue with man in all his changing circumstances.

To have spoken of and elucidated revelation in terms of dialogue rather than in terms of propositions of God handed on from age to age is one of the great advances which "Dei Verbum" has made in our understanding of and in the deepening of the concept of revelation. This is of great importance for the historical understanding of revelation, for, if we speak of revelation as historical events, this can only mean events in the life of a human subject who takes part in and to some degree consciously grasps the meaning of these events as relating him to God. To place revelation outside man, whether in a book, in an institution, or in a schema of historical reports, can only result in depersonalising revelation and exhausting it of

¹Op. cit. pp.46-48.

its central significance. We must therefore begin by conceiving of revelation as an historical and continuing intersubjective communion in which man's answer is part of the revelation. As G. Moran writes, "... if revelation is found in the intercommunion of God and man, then one must look for the highest expression of this covenant bond and dialogue in the Lord Jesus. He is man receiving as well as God bestowing; the very meaning of the Incarnation is this intercourse of divine and human. The highest union of God and man is not that between Christ and His Apostles; the one perfect union is the Word which comes from the Father and is united to the humanity of Christ"¹.

"The Word of God communicated to man includes within itself meeting between man and God as well as meeting between God and man, for in assuming the form of human speech the Word of God spoken to man becomes at the same time word of man in answer to God"². Whilst Jesus did present truths of God to be heard, understood and even written down and learned by people as, for example, in the instructions given to His disciples for their work as His heralds and in such discourses as "the Sermon on the Mount", nevertheless He did present Himself as the one, also, who lived in prayerful communion with the Father, responding as a real human being to the Father's Will. But He also invited men

¹G. Moran: "Theology of Revelation", pp.64-65.
(Burns & Oates 1966).

²T. F. Torrance: "The Word of God and the Response of man" in "Bijdragen" (1969), p.172.

to join with Him in this communion of knowledge, love and obedience. This in its totality comprises the life and mission of Jesus Christ the Word made flesh who mediated between God and man, reconciling them in and through Himself. In this way He established a correlation between God's self-giving and man's receiving within which alone God's revelation could be actualised in man and a true and faithful response could be yielded by man to God. As T. F. Torrance writes:

"Jesus Christ is Himself the hearing man included in the Word of God, and He is that in a final and definitive way. In the Gospels we do not have to do simply with the Word of God and the response of man, but with the all-significant middle term, the divinely provided response in the vicarious humanity of Jesus Christ"¹.

Revelation is not a thing, an object, that can be placed somewhere and kept intact. Revelation is what happens between persons and exists only as a personal reality. If there is revelation anywhere in the Church today, it can only be in conscious experience of people, for, if the Word of God is to enter the forum as speech to man through the medium of human words, it must be directed to man in community, and, if that Word creates reciprocity between God and man, it must, as T. F. Torrance points out, "create a community of such reciprocity within human society as the appropriate medium of its continuing communication to man"². Revelation does concern knowledge, but it is

¹Op. cit. p.177.

²Op. cit. p.178.

knowledge which is personal, historical and social, which arose out of the community's experience before God, both as the people of Israel, to whom He spoke His Word through the prophets, and through the Covenant relationship, as "Dei Verbum" so rightly stresses in chapter 4, article 14, and as the disciple band who heard, saw and touched that Word made flesh in their midst and latterly as the Church who receives that Word through the Apostolic witness through the power of the Holy Spirit. This knowledge was made more explicit by the reflection upon the life of the community, and in turn the knowledge helped to direct the community. However, we must continually bear in mind that the response of the Apostles, whilst it had been taken up into the proclamation, was of a second-order nature compared to that of Christ, for the primary text of the Word remained that of the humanity of Christ Himself. T. F. Torrance writes of their response saying:

"The place given to the response of the apostles in the kerygma is certainly of authoritative and critical significance for the whole history of the Church, but its purpose there is to enable us to stand with the original witnesses under the impact of the Word they received and to be drawn into the sphere of its effective operation where we, like them, may learn to repent and believe the Gospel, give thanks to God and live in communion with Him"¹.

¹Op. cit. p.183.

The "revelation-in-word", as E. Schillebeeckx calls it, "is directed, through the medium of the history of salvation and therefore through the medium of Scripture as well, to the whole of humanity, and inwardly to the heart of each individual, including ourselves, who live in the Church today"¹.

We must, therefore, recognise Holy Scripture too as part of the whole dialogue-movement of Revelation, in which divine things are conveyed to us in the manner to which men are accustomed. The encyclical "Providentissimus Deus", likewise realised the implications of the Incarnation in this way. The point of importance is that in the man Jesus, the Christian must recognise the Son of God, the Eternal Word, the perfection of God's dialogue with man, so too God speaks to man in Holy Scripture through human speech with all its limitations yet here too it would be a kind of docetism to refuse to see the depth of His penetration into humanity.

The dialogue between God and man is continued through Holy Scripture and the Church listening to the Word of God through them. Here both Divine Word and human words meet inseparably but unconfusedly. The relation between divine inspiration and human co-operation is very difficult to define. By reason of its divine authorship the Holy Scriptures are "inerrant", but this allegation can easily be misunderstood. As R. Schnackenburg writes:

"The biblical statements are 'true' in that they say what the human author intended to say. This means, however,

¹E. Schillebeeckx: "Revelation and Theology", p.16.

that we must pay attention to the particular purpose of the author when he wrote what he did, as well as to the literary form which he used in writing"¹.

To give this hermeneutical and literary study a re-emphasis and to put it on such a high level of importance is one of the great achievements of Vaticanum II, for it puts the Biblical scholar in the position of being able to see and understand more clearly the depth and meaning of God's dialogue with man in revelation both in the past and in the present.

(3) Faith as obedient response to revelation.

Dialogue between persons involves the elements of acceptance of and response to what is being communicated. Article five of "Dei Verbum" treats of faith, opening the subject with St. Paul's words in the Letter to the Romans, "the obedience of faith" (Rom. XVI 26 : I 5). It rightly sees faith as the correlative of revelation and the response which men should make to the God who reveals Himself through entering into dialogue with them. Here again in this part of the Constitution the advance in Biblically centred theology is evident. In the description of faith there is a special emphasis on personal freedom. Faith is "obedience", but obedience in the full Scriptural sense of committing one's whole life fully and freely to God who has given Himself to man in love and because He longs for man to be made one with Him again. If God reveals Himself as a person, man must respond with a total personal commitment.

¹R. Schnackenburg: Op. cit. p.40.

The intrinsically supernatural quality of faith is also emphasised, thus putting it in a fully God-centred and Christ-centred context when it states that man can only exercise this faith before the challenge of the truth of revelation if God has drawn him to Himself. Faith is a gift from God and not a subjective, moral virtue which man tries to work up out of psychological conditions inside himself. So, as "Dei Verbum" states, the mind must be enlightened by the enfolding action of divine grace and the interior gift of the Holy Spirit. Also, progress in our understanding of revelation is a continuity between the first assent to it and the gradual penetration of its meaning through the work of the Holy Spirit, which applies both to individuals and the whole community. An innovation here compared with Vaticanum I occurs when "Dei Verbum" speaks of a constant perfecting of faith through the gifts of the Holy Spirit, which results in an ever deeper insight into revelation.

Seeing and believing both must come together if we are to be truly confronted with revelation. E. Schillebeeckx¹ points out that we do not come into contact with the act of revelation and its supernatural saving content in the revelation-in-word and revelation-in-reality unless God addresses us inwardly. St. Thomas Aquinas called this inward divine impulse towards faith the "human fidei", the "light of faith", or "inner illumination", which is an

¹E. Schillebeeckx: "Revelation and Theology". p 23 + f.

"inner instinctus" of God, an instinct implanted by God, which prompts us to believe. It is through this inward attraction proceeding from God that the subject who encounters the Church in the course of his life is inwardly adapted to the supernatural dimension of the mystery of revelation. This "light of faith", expressing itself as an obedience in a person, enables one to grasp more in the mystery of revelation than is said about it in conceptual terms and than history tells us about it. Such inner illumination is not a new revelation, but an inner impulse through the grace of faith whereby we are able, in a supernatural way, to judge whether or not we are confronted with a datum of faith.

Faith and revelation are personal and so there must be a true interpersonal reality which is not merely the juxtaposing of subjective and objective elements. Such an interpersonal reality is Jesus Christ Himself who not only is Revelation but is also man obediently responding in faith to revelation. Both object and subject meet in His Person. He offers the obedient response of faith as a man to the revelation of God which is perfected in Him. He is God as a person communicating revelation and man as a person receiving that revelation through faith and obediently responding to it. The human person, as Christ has shown, is himself within the revelation and not outside it and this fact must be considered seriously else all attempts to unite "revealed truths" with "revelatory events" will be unsuccessful.

¹ cf. Aquinas: S.T. II-II, q. 2, a. 4, ad 3.

It is unfortunate that this aspect of faith has not been stressed in "Dei Verbum", and the content of the document is weak at this point due to its omission. It is this very fact of Christ's vicarious response of obedient faith which gives objectivity to man's response in faith to God's self-revelation, and which takes it out of the danger of being a purely subjective state of mind, an attempt to raise ourselves by our own effort up to the glorious majesty of God - an effort which is doomed to failure right from the very start because, as God's revelation of Himself has shown, no approach made by man in the weakness of his sin is able to raise him up to God. Man waits upon God's power to be reborn in the integrity and wholeness of his physical and spiritual existence, which power to make new He has revealed through the whole life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, affirming as good what He had made in Him. "So, to those who receive Him power and freedom are given to become sons of God, not in virtue of any natural birth through the will of the flesh or the will of man, but in virtue of their birth from God, a rebirth from above. Now that God's saving grace has taken this way, in the provision of man's true and faithful response in the vicarious humanity of Jesus Christ, it thereby invalidates all other ways of response"¹. It is through Jesus Christ and His response of faith that God addresses us inwardly through the power of the Holy Spirit and unites us to His obedient

¹T. F. Torrance: "The Word of God and the Response of man"
pp.177-178.

response of faith on our behalf. Through the Holy Spirit continually witnessing to His love, His hope, His faith in our hearts and minds we are given to share in these gifts and so receive an ever deeper insight into revelation.

9 (4) Revelation as Tradition.

All human knowledge and all human customs both of living and understanding life depend very largely upon the handing on from age to age, person to person, certain information gleaned from different experiences in life.

There is always a looking back to what has gone before in order to interpret and understand what is happening in the present. Tradition means just this, that is, the handing on of knowledge, and also in a more passive sense, that which is handed on.

This is true of the revelation of God for the Salvation of all people. Jesus revealed God the Father, but He gave authority to certain men, His Apostles, to hand on this revelation through the preaching of the Gospel to all the world. The spoken word; first, through preaching and the written word in the Scriptures given to the Church by them in their unique witness to Christ, are the means which the Apostles used to hand on what they received from the Lord. They personally received Christ's revelation which it is their specific duty to hand on and this they did through preaching, that is, proclaiming and teaching the Word, and through a written witness to revelation which they left for the Church of all ages as a guide and norm, for with

Christ and the unique witness of His Apostles to Him, God has revealed to man all that is necessary for his Salvation.

Though public revelation is closed, God's address to man is still a present reality. His revelation in Christ is a personal giving of Himself in a personal gesture to be intimately known and experienced by us. He comes forward in this gesture to meet man, inviting him to share a living communion with Himself. Tradition, therefore, through which such revelation comes cannot be a dead and lifeless thing, rather, it must, by the very nature of its subject, be a living reality in the life of the Church. It cannot be tied down either to a book of sacred writings from the past, nor to a series of ecclesiastical laws.

As R. Schnackenburg writes:

"Revelation transforms the abstract divine truth into actuality. Revelation introduces us to the thought of God, directs us towards the divine Will for our Salvation and points the way to the attainment of that Salvation.

Revelation accosts each one of us immediately, personally, here and now, and demands a decision. Revelation answers for us, for all mankind, the question of our existence on this earth, a question in the face of which we would otherwise stand hopeless and perplexed"¹.

Tradition can never be a static thing. It is not an end in itself but rather is a means of directing our minds

¹R. Schnackenburg: Op. cit. p91.

to a reality beyond itself. This is always the case with tradition of any kind; it is a starting point and aid to progress in understanding and therefore it fails in its function when it becomes an end in itself and so hinders full understanding. As O. Cullmann points out¹, when we speak of traditions in the early Church, we must constantly bear in mind the parallel in the Jewish traditions of the Rabbis. Jesus rejected radically the "tradition" of the Jews, which He realised was standing in the way of men's full understanding of God. Instead of "tradition", St. Paul sometimes used, "the Lord", especially in quoting from Jesus; for St. Paul, "tradition", in so far as it refers to the confession of faith and to the words and deeds of Jesus is really Church tradition, which has a parallel in Jewish παράδοσις. But in Christ alone there can be a tradition which is not παράδοσις τῶν ἀνθρώπων. The formula of I Cor. IX 23 refers to Christ who is present in that He stands behind the transmission of the tradition; that is, He works in it. ἀπὸ τοῦ κυρίου can quite well mean a direct communication from the Lord, without it being necessary to think of a vision, or to exclude intermediaries through whom the Lord Himself transmits the παράδοσις. These intermediaries are the Apostles and their essential function is to be bearers of direct revelation, one being concerned with one fact, another with another. But it is the united testimony of the Apostles which constitutes the Christian παράδοσις, in which the Lord Himself is at work.

¹O. Cullmann: "Tradition in the Early Church". p2f. (S.C.M. Press).

The greatest achievement of "Dei Verbum" is its stress on the fact that Jesus Christ is the source of revelation and that the reality of Divine revelation is to be met with finally in Him alone and not in Holy Scripture or in Church Tradition, which are secondary authorities which receive their authority only from pointing the way to Him. However, it must be pointed out that "Dei Verbum" has not made any progress on Trent on the criticism of Tradition. Indeed, it has more or less ignored this whole question and by so doing it has missed a valuable and important opportunity for ecumenical dialogue. "It would", as J. Ratzinger points out, "have been better to work out the positive possibility and to stress the necessity of the criticism of Tradition within the Church than to engage in what must be called an unreal controversy concerning the quantitative completeness of Scripture"¹.

To speak in terms of the quantitative completeness of Scripture belies the living quality of Scripture and tradition, which makes them an active force within the life of the whole people of God as it moves onwards in the power of the Holy Spirit. Tradition in "Dei Verbum" has not been thought through thoroughly enough in terms of the relation of the Holy Spirit to the Church.

A. J. Philippou points out that the gift of the Holy Spirit in the Roman Catholic view "is understood in terms of

¹J. Ratzinger: Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II, ed. Vorgrimler (Vol. III) (Burns & Oates: Herder & Herder 1969).
p 185.

'possession', making the magisterium of the Church the link between Christ and the believer"¹. "Thus the Church becomes a divine institution (de iure divino), a perfect society (societas perfecta), with the explicit task of exercising Christ's Apostolate as teacher, king and priest"².

If we are to confess the Holy Spirit as the living, free and active life-giver to the Church, then under no guise can the Church be thought of as possessing or controlling the Spirit. The work of the Holy Spirit cannot be safeguarded and shaped by dogmatic formulas; He, rather, is free to exercise control over all the formulations of man and the life of the whole Church. Central to Eastern Orthodox tradition is the belief that the presence of the Holy Spirit means that in the Church it is the living Lord Jesus Christ who exercises His own authority over His people. The Second Ecumenical Council defines the first attribute of the Holy Spirit as "Lordship". Therefore, as A. J. Philippou writes:

"His presence, as the giver of life, is not to be interpreted in terms of an immanent principle by which the Church succeeds to the authority of her Lord. In His sanctifying presence it is the Lord God Himself who exercises his own authority over His chosen and elect people"³.

¹A. J. Philippou: in "The Orthodox Ethos", Vol.I, Chp.3, pp.78-79, ed. A. J. Philippou. (Holywell Press: Oxford 1964)

²Op. cit. ibid.

³Op. cit. p.91.

We can only rightly interpret the biblical testimony to our salvation in the living tradition of the Church's life, where Christ exercises His own authority in the Lordship of the Holy Spirit. Writing of tradition in the Church's life, G. Papadopoulos says:

"Holy Tradition is a divine process; it is not ours but God's, reaching out from the 'soma' to the fullness of the 'pleroma'. Holy Tradition is not something static, to be safeguarded by dogmatic formulas; it is the dynamic movement of God in history, in which man shares as part of the perfect humanity of Christ. It is in this sense that we dare to speak of the tradition as 'Holy'."¹.

It is along these lines of tradition being a dynamic movement of God in history as He exercises authority over His Church as her Lord, through the power of the Holy Spirit, that Vaticanum II could have and should have worked out fully, developed and emphasised in the concept of tradition, rather than remaining bound by traditional formulations and speaking of it as a "deposit", which is "entrusted to the Church" and its teaching-office to "guard" and "expound"². If, as is so rightly stressed in "Dei Verbum", Jesus Christ is the source of revelation and the reality of divine revelation is to be met in Him alone, then it is He who controls this gift and gives life and light to His Church through the Holy Spirit whom the Father sends to the Church in His name (cf. St. John 14:25-26), so that the Church may move

¹G. Papadopoulos: "The Revelatory character of the New Testament and Holy Tradition in the Orthodox Church" in Chp. 4 "The Orthodox Ethos", p.101.

²cf. "Dei Verbum", chp.2, especially article 10.

onwards from age to age continually feeding upon Him and proclaiming anew His Word of revealing truth to each generation.

There is, however, a much greater emphasis on Scripture in the Constitution, "Dei Verbum", than on tradition, which reveals a more biblically centred theology than former documents contained. It is to be noted that, as against one chapter on tradition, in which in any case tradition is considered entirely in relation to Scripture, there are four chapters concerned more or less entirely with Scripture. Even the external structure of the text shows what importance it accords to Scripture in the life of the Church and in the building up of its faith. Scripture is factually presented as a yardstick, and that is stated in article 21, which says that all preaching of the Church and the whole Christian religion must be "nourished and ruled by Scripture":

"Omnis ergo praedicatio ecclesiastica sicut ipsa religio christiana Sacra Scriptura nutriatur et regatur oportet"¹.

There is also a similar statement in article 10 which declares that the Church's teaching-office does not stand above the Word of God, but serves it. An indissoluble interpenetration of Scripture, and tradition, and teaching office is spoken of here which also underlies the uniqueness of the one revelation of God in Jesus Christ and the serving function of all the Church's modes of expressing this; nevertheless, it is still emphasised that the Church serves by possessing and controlling what is handed to it by way

¹Op. cit. article 21.

of a "deposit of faith".

Another important emphasis in the Constitution is that on preaching as a means of transmitting and making present the revelatory event of Salvation. In his book, "La Vie de l'Eglise Naissante", Philippe-H. Menoud¹ points out that evangelical experience is not confined to one decisive moment; it is "a perseverance", a constant attitude, taken once for all, which ought to endure. After hearing the Apostolic testimony, it is the instruction, or teaching through preaching, of which the members of the Church have need. They have still to devote faithful attachment to this teaching and also to do this for the whole duration of their lives. The Gospel is the proclamation that Jesus is the Lord and the Christ, He is a person, Jesus Christ; but it is at the same time a teaching, a collection of affirmations about this person and about his significance for humanity. The teaching explains the person and about His significance for humanity. The teaching explains the person, but it is not exterior to the person; in and through the teaching, Jesus Christ, a real person, is proclaimed to all.

G. Ebling has stressed that the difference between the Reformers' principle of "sola scriptura" and the Roman Catholic formula of "Scripture and Tradition", "makes that which they both have in common, that is, the revelational authority of Scripture, its soteriological relevance involving its relation to the contemporary scene, a matter

¹Philippe-H. Menoud: "La Vie de l'Eglise Naissante",
chp. 1. p. (Foi Vivante: Delachaux et Niestle S.A. 1969).

of debate"¹. The central issue in this debate about the subject of Scripture is whether the object of Scripture is to establish the authority of the content of Scripture, that is, to define whether and in what way, Scripture is the determining factor of its own content, and what Scripture can do to establish its own validity.

According to Roman Catholic interpretation, the Church as the present reality of grace is the subject of Scripture and hence is only to be found in Scripture in a very restricted sense, because the clarity of Scripture is only to be attained in the conjunction of Scripture and Tradition, or Scripture and Church.

According to the Reformers' interpretation, Jesus Christ is the substance of Scripture, and this "Dei Verbum" has also emphasised. The Reformers said that "sola Scriptura" is the necessary result of such an interpretation, since it is only in Scripture that Jesus Christ is to be found. However, His presence in Scripture must not be thought of as competing with His presence in the Word preached in the Sacraments and in the Church; both these aspects of Christ's presence are inseparable but the direction is irreversible. Only Christ to whom the Apostolic Scriptures bear witness is the present Christ; the Word alone is the way of His presence and only through faith aroused in a person through the power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the Church ought to take up a position regarding any interpretation proposed by the exegetes of Holy Scripture

¹G. Ebling: "The Word of God and Tradition", chp. 4, p.132.

and ought to pray for the help of the Holy Spirit in reaching the right decision. The Church, fulfilling properly its active role in transmitting the Gospel, ought to translate the biblical message into the language of today, but in doing this the Church ought to know that it is fulfilling its duty for its own period and is not doing something which, like the testimony of eye-witnesses, binds all the future centuries of the period of the Church, so that future generations will be bound by its decisions in the same way as they are bound by Scripture. The earlier decisions of the Church will serve as guides to exegetes but not as norms or criteria. We would have liked more discussion on this aspect of tradition in the Constitution, particularly where it discusses the role of the Magisterium. It would appear in the context that "silence speaks louder than words" and therefore, while emphasising the duty of the Magisterium to be servant of the Word, if the Church be a listening and proclaiming Church, and the important role of exegetes to enquire into the linguistic and literary structures behind Holy Scripture, the Church is still bound to a very narrow and restricted view of tradition which must inevitably take the place, not of a guide, but of criteria for the faith of Church members. In this respect, therefore, little advance in the theology of tradition has been made on Trent and Vaticanum I, as has been pointed out above.

The Constitution has, however, made some attempt to point beyond this to the dynamic aspect of Tradition, in

which it is seen as living tradition, not only as a body of doctrine, but also as the life and sacraments of the Church through which God's saving grace in Christ is proclaimed. Tradition is the very life of the entire Church under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit,

"..... per quem viva vox Evangelii in Ecclesia, et per ipsam in mundo resonant, credentes in omnem veritatem inducit, verbumque Christi in eis abundanter inhabitare facit" (cf. Col. 3: 16).¹

Church tradition does not, for example, transmit first and foremost a doctrine on the Eucharist, but rather it transmits the living reality of the Eucharistic celebration itself, the living and saving reality, whose doctrine is but an elucidation of its inner significance. It is a pity that this line of thought was not further developed in the discussion on tradition, and the function of the teaching office further examined in the light of it. We do not acquire certainty about God's revelation only from Scripture; Scripture is accompanied by preaching, the administration of the Sacraments and the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit. Where these are working together in the Church's life and witness, there tradition is implied in a very real and active way.

The text of Holy Scripture, as G. Moran says, "assumes its full revelatory 'event' value as it is spoken aloud at the liturgical service. Revelation happens here and now because the word that is spoken is the inspired word of God;

¹"*Dei Verbum*", article 8.

this is the Word that is efficacious in uniting us to the mind of Christ"¹. It is the word through which He enters into dialogue with men. The proclaiming of the Word of Holy Scripture, through which the unique Apostolic Witness to God's revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ is handed on, together with the listening to and the reflecting upon that Word in faith in the power of the Holy Spirit as He influences the whole living Church, is what tradition has been and still is about. The minister of the Word, even if he must explain in detail the meaning of Scripture, remains a servant and a witness to that living Word of authority that has been transmitted from the Apostles, always being controlled by it, but never controlling it, always being possessed and influenced by the Holy Spirit, but never possessing or directing Him. His aim, which is the Church's aim, is always to bring about the understanding of God's invitation and a willing acceptance of His love and its demands.

(5) Revelation as mystery.

A former age in which Rationalism pervaded the minds of men, believed it possible to explain in rational terms, so that the mind could fully grasp them, what the Holy Scriptures were pleased to call "the mysteries of God". Advance in science and learning, if nothing else, has at least brought home to us that not everything that happens in life can be rationally and neatly tied up in words and

¹G. Moran: "Theology of Revelation", chp. 6, p.122.

propositions for consumption by our minds and for their edification. The same is true of matters of Theology as of all other scientific studies. There comes a point when we have to stand silent before mystery, too profound for our limited understanding to grasp fully. Vaticanum II rightly emphasises that the essential datum of revelation is a *μυστήριον*, that is, a temporal plan of Salvation, intelligible to human understanding, as the appearance of the eternal, trinitarian mystery of God revealed for the Salvation of mankind. The word "mystery" as it pertains to revelation does not signify unintelligibility and lack of meaning for the Christian life. "On the contrary, the word 'mystery', as it is used in connection with revelation has exactly the opposite meaning; it signifies a super-luminous intelligibility, in inexhaustible depth of meaning. God revealed in Jesus Christ is incomprehensible not because there is nothing to say of Him, but because there is always more to say"¹.

As G. Moran writes:

"Anything which can be exhaustively analysed, anything which can be placed into human statements, is not a mystery. That is to say, if something is not a mystery after it has been made known, it was never a mystery to begin with. Mystery does not cease to be mystery as it is more and more revealed. The more God's 'secret' was revealed to Paul, the more could he appreciate the depths of God's wisdom, the incomprehensibility of His judgments, and the unsearchableness of His ways" (Rom. XI 23)².

¹Op. cit. p.133.

²Op. cit. *ibid.*

"Dei Verbum" relates the inspiration of Holy Scripture to the Incarnation, speaking of both as two modes of the condescension of God and His accommodation of Himself to us. The Incarnation is the one great "mystery" of the Church and the Constitution rightly emphasises the "mystery" of God's accommodating Himself to us in the frail words and thought-forms of men, to this one great "mystery". Scripture is in a very special way the vessel of divine revelation of Salvation and the divinely revealed realities, contained and presented in the text of Holy Scripture, "have been written down under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit". The fundamental truth is that God has spoken to us in human language and in a human life. This mystery He has made known to His Apostles and prophets by the Holy Spirit so that they might preach the Gospel and stir up faith in Jesus, Christ and Lord, and bring together the Church. Through the recorded words of the Apostles and Prophets, which make up Scripture, the Holy Spirit continues to speak to the Church, for it is the Holy Spirit and not the dead letter of Scripture which moves the Church to faith, so that Scripture is possessed by the Spirit and used by the Spirit to awaken faith in the hearer.

The Constitution has made a remarkable advance over all other Church documents up to Vaticanum II in now stating clearly that inspiration does not mean exclusion, repression or replacement of the human activity of the hagiographers. Any memory of the old theories of verbal inspiration was to be omitted and hence any form of an impersonal, mechanistic

interpretation of the origin of Scripture. The formulation of inerrancy here has also a more positive form. "..... Scripturae libri integri cum omnibus suis partibus veritatem sine ullo errare docere profitendi sunt"¹.

"Inerrantia" is replaced by the positive term "veritas" and it is pointed out that inerrancy received its particular and narrow formulation in the nineteenth century at a time when secular historical research and criticism were used to investigate the secular, historical accuracy of Scripture. Cardinal König pointed out the new situation that exists in relation to the question of inerrancy; as a result of intensive Oriental studies, our picture of "veritas historica" and "fides historica" of Scripture has been clarified, though not all the difficulties are solved. The fact that the Bible is set within the context of history and of what was possible at the time is actually too profoundly realised for one to be able to deduce from the fact of inspiration as such that the sacred writers were absolutely independent of the limitations of their statements because of the time in which they were living. From a theological point of view, also, we can only see the "condescensio Dei" as brought out in article 13; God takes the human author with all His weaknesses and failures and still achieves His aim of teaching us the truth of Revelation and Salvation.

It is emphasised in the final form of the text that the Holy Spirit must be the real guide to the understanding of Scripture, either for scientific work on it, or for its religious study. Exegetes are now urged to address themselves

¹"Dei Verbum" (Form E), article 11.

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to Scripture as a whole in order to discover its meaning at an even profounder level. The main point to note in the discussion on inspiration and inerrancy in "Dei Verbum" is that these are to be understood primarily from the Will of God, who desires to communicate to men His saving truth and this in such a way that this truth is taught "firmly", faithfully and without error". Exegetes are now given a greater freedom for the future, a freedom that corresponds to the nature of the Word of God as it has emerged in history and to the nature of the Church. By pointing the way to a clearer understanding of the co-operation of God with men in the inspiration of Scripture, it also frees us from false attitudes in the search for truth in Scripture. In declaring the purpose of all hermeneutics to be the discovery of the "sensus divinus" in the "sensu humano", and the purpose of the inspiration of Scripture, the sure, faithful and infallible making known to us of the truth of Salvation, the Constitution is presenting the word of Scripture as the medium of a constant spiritual dialogue of God with man. Here again the Christological principle lies behind all that is said about the communication of the Divine "mystery" to men, for Christ, the Word of God, who is one with God, made the Father known to men and did so not only by His teaching but also and above all by His deeds. Significantly the text speaks of revelation "by deeds and words" and goes on to list His Death, Resurrection, Ascension, and the sending of the Spirit. Revelation is fully and entirely understood in its Biblical

sense, there being no place for an inadequate theoretical notion which had prevailed for so long. The supreme revelation of Jesus Christ is the great saving event; by preaching Jesus and the Salvation to be found in Him, the Church is brought together. He is the mystery of the Godhead and yet He reveals the mystery of God to man. At bottom there is only one mystery; God's incomprehensibility as God is not simply the remote horizon within which our existence moves, or the infinitely distant point towards which the multiplicity of finite realities move asymptotically as towards a single inaccessible unifying point. Without ceasing to be God, God gives Himself to us without an intermediary; He Himself as He is becomes the innermost reality of our being. The one mystery is that this is possible, real and known to us through grace in faith. This one mystery has a double aspect; (1) God Himself as mystery and (2) God's self-communication to us, through which as abiding mystery He becomes our innermost reality, through the work of the Holy Spirit. Here once again, "Dei Verbum" could have stressed the fact that like the whole life of the Church, Holy Scripture is possessed by the Spirit and used by God in a very special way as the witness to the divine revelation of Salvation through Jesus Christ. The particular relationship in which the Holy Spirit is regarded as standing towards the Church affects greatly our whole concept of progression in revelation, and the Constitution on revelation has not thought this idea out

fully for, on the one hand, it speaks in article 23 of the Church being "taught by the Holy Spirit" (a Sancto Spiritu edocta), while striving to reach "a more profound understanding of the Sacred Scriptures", and, on the other hand, a little further on in the same article, it speaks of the exegetes and other theological students carrying on their studies "under the watchful eye of the sacred Magisterium", implying that finally it is the Magisterium that has authority to define what is to be believed by the faithful. Furthermore, it adds that those engaged in biblical studies are to carry on their work "in accordance with the mind of the Church". It is only when the Holy Spirit possesses the mind of the Church that the Church can come to the knowledge of truth for each new age of the Church's life. It is part of the mystery of revelation that God has taken and still takes the frail words, sentences and concepts of man contained in Holy Scripture, just as He took their original authors, and uses them to proclaim His truth anew, so that Scripture is always possessed by God acting through the Holy Spirit, but Scripture itself can never possess the Spirit as its soul.

(6) Revelation as the continuous activity of the Holy Spirit in the world.

Right from the very first chapter, "Dei Verbum" sets down the need for the "obedience of faith" (Rom.XVI 26) which must be given to God who reveals, an obedience by which man entrusts his whole self freely to God, offering the full submission of intellect and will to God who reveals,

and freely assenting to the truth revealed by Him. If this faith is to be shown, the grace of God and the interior help of the Holy Spirit must precede and assist, moving the heart and turning it to God, opening the eyes of the mind. The Holy Spirit constantly brings faith to completion by His gifts, in order to bring about an even deeper understanding of revelation.

Inspiration, and hence too revelation, through the Holy Spirit continues in the sense that the Paraclete is the Spirit of truth. The revelation of the Word of God continues in the Church, but it will no longer be the norm or criterion like the revelation granted to the Apostles. However, revelation and the criterion of revelation must not be confused. Unfortunately the text of "Dei Verbum" says little or nothing at all about the continuing revelation of God in the world today; there is a strong emphasis on the revelation granted to the Church in the past and which has been handed down through Scripture and tradition, however this still tends to suggest revelation as some kind of body of information which must be passed on, without helping us to understand the extremely dynamic content of revelation which is inherent in it through its relation to the work of the Holy Spirit in the present life of the Church and of the world. It would have been better for the Council to have taken up and discussed revelation on a more Trinitarian basis. We must ask here whether or not the Roman Catholic Church really takes

seriously the "filioque" clause and applies it thoroughly to the doctrine of revelation.

The "filioque" clause in the traditional statement of the Holy Trinity means that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. The Spirit comes to us as "formed" Spirit, witnessing to us in the experience of faith what God has done for our Salvation through the Son. Through the Holy Spirit God really communicates Himself as love and forgiveness. He produces this communication in us and maintains it by Himself. As K. Rahner writes:

"We suppose that, when God freely steps outside of Himself in self-communication (not merely through creation positing other realities which are not Himself), it is and must be the Son who appears historically in the flesh as man. And it is and must be the Spirit who brings about the acceptance by the world (as creation) in faith, hope and love of this self-communication"¹.

In the end, the statements of "Dei Verbum", would tend to suggest that it is the Church who receives the self-communication of God through the power of the Spirit, and through the Church, in her guarding, controlling and interpreting functions, this self-communication is given to the world, so that in the end it is the Church possessing the Holy Spirit, which communicates this self-disclosure of God to us, rather than the Holy Spirit who possesses the Church and uses it as His means of communication in the

¹K. Rahner: "The Trinity", p.86. (Burns & Oates: Herder & Herder 1969)

world. The implications of K. Rahner's thesis ~~on~~ the 'economic' Trinity¹ "would have to be carried out much further in "Dei Verbum", if we are to have a clear idea of the Holy Spirit as the "Paraclete", that is to say the personal Being which fulfils, makes present, and works among men here and now the salvation and revelation of God the Father given in the Son, Jesus Christ. "He is the Spirit which was from the beginning with the Son, creating the world, leading the prophets, incarnating the 'Logos' of God in man, being with Jesus always, raising Him from the dead and constituting the Apostolic Church, uniting it as the Body with its head which is Christ on the day of Pentecost. Without this idea of the 'Paraclete' there can be no true Christian theology"².

Whilst we must always consult the interpretations of the norm which have been given in order to understand it, we must also be ready always to revise them and even to abandon them by setting ourselves before the norm itself and removing the screen of earlier interpretations. "Dei Verbum" appears to evade this issue and certainly the problems connected with its consequences for the Church.

It is true, as R. Schnackenburg writes, that:

"There is no need for further revelation in so far as the way to Salvation is pointed out and opened by Christ, so that we both know our goal and have the power to attain it The revelation of the Son is the crown and summit

¹Op. cit. p.22 + d. 994.

²Nikos C. Nissiotis: "The importance of the doctrine of the Trinity for Church life and theology", chp.II of "The Orthodox Ethos", p.39.

of all divine revelation, the last Word of God to mankind, the Word of truth and of life, because the Son is the 'pioneer of Salvation', who is called and empowered to bring 'many sons to glory'" (Heb. 2:10)¹.

But, as we now live in the age of the Spirit who witnesses to the Son in our midst, we must be able to hear Him speak His Word of truth to the total situation in which we are living, for He, as the revelation of God, has come to make the Word of God relevant to man. Revelation is closed only in the sense in which a never to be surpassed high-mark has been reached which opens revelation to men. This high-mark is the beginning of the infinite pouring out of Christ's fullness into that of the Church, of the Church's growth into the fullness of Christ and of God. God has said all He wished to say or could say in the Word of God. There is no going beyond the Word, no leaving Him behind. The Spirit's age has indeed come, but it is the Word proclaimed through the Son that the Spirit reveals in the continuing Pentecost. There is no increase of revelation, but there is a movement of the Spirit to conform the minds of the faithful to the mind of Christ, where revelation continues in fullness. He has left us that He may come to us in the Spirit, but He comes to us in the Spirit in the totality of our human experience, pervading every aspect of our life here upon earth. He is

¹R. Schnackenburg: "The Truth will make you free", pp.64-65.

the Father's revelation active in the world, for the one God communicates Himself in absolute self-utterance and as absolute gift of love. "Here is the absolute mystery revealed to us only by Christ: God's self-communication is truly a 'self'-communication"¹. A profoundly deep mutual relationship is created in which God addresses His Word to man by giving it human form without any diminishment of its divine reality as God Himself speaks it, and in which He enables man to hear His Word and respond to it without any cancellation of his human mode of being. Through the operation of the Spirit, the Son, Christ Jesus, the Word of God to us, grew up in our midst; since He came to share our human nature and we are united to Him through the Spirit which He gives us, it is through the power of the same Spirit that we participate in His growth in wisdom and truth and so rise through the Son to true knowledge of, and communion with God the Father.

¹K. Rahner: "The Trinity", p.36.

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