

2003

The Nature of Holy Scripture in Roman Catholic Discussion from Vatican II to the New Catechism

John D. Morrison

Liberty University, jdmorrison@liberty.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/lts_fac_pubs

Recommended Citation

Morrison, John D., "The Nature of Holy Scripture in Roman Catholic Discussion from Vatican II to the New Catechism" (2003).
Faculty Publications and Presentations. Paper 76.
http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/lts_fac_pubs/76

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary and Graduate School at DigitalCommons@Liberty University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications and Presentations by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Liberty University. For more information, please contact scholarlycommunication@liberty.edu.

TRINJ 24NS (2003) 259-282

THE NATURE OF HOLY SCRIPTURE IN ROMAN CATHOLIC DISCUSSION FROM VATICAN II TO THE NEW CATECHISM

JOHN D. MORRISON*

I. SCRIPTURE IN THE DOCUMENTS OF VATICAN II

Among the sixteen documents of Vatican II, *Dei Verbum*, "Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation," makes a number of concise statements describing the nature of Holy Scripture. In an excellent statement in ch. 2, reflecting both Christocentricity and the multiplicity of the modes of divine disclosure, *Dei Verbum* states:

In His goodness and wisdom God chose to reveal Himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of His will by which through Christ, the Word made flesh, man might in the Holy Spirit have access to the Father. . . . Through this revelation, therefore, the invisible God out of the abundance of his love speaks to men as friends. . . . This plan of revelation is realized by deeds and words having an inner unity: the deeds wrought by God in this history of salvation manifest and confirm the teaching and realities signified by the words, while the words proclaim the deeds and clarify the mystery contained in them. By this revelation then, the deepest truth about God and the salvation of man shines out for our sake in Christ, who is both the mediator and fullness of all revelation.¹

Herein the interrelation of the divine acts in history and the necessity of the divine words of interpretation of those acts, represented as aspects in, of, and under the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ, are well presented.

But soon clarification is made. While emphasizing that, through revelation, God communicated himself and the decisions of his will for human salvation, the document asserts that "those divinely revealed *realities* which are contained and presented in Sacred Scripture have been *committed to writing* under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit."² Recalling earlier councils, the document adds that the

*John D. Morrison is Professor of Theological Studies at Liberty University and Seminary in Lynchburg, Virginia.

¹"*Dei Verbum*," ch. 1, sect. 2, *The Documents of Vatican II* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1965), 375-76. Cf. ch. 1, sect. 4.

²*Ibid.*, ch. 1, sect. 6, p. 377.

books of the Old and New Testaments in their entirety, "with all their parts, are sacred and canonical because written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they have God as their author and have been handed on as such to the Church itself."³ Then, after acknowledging debates since Vatican I, it adds that, given the revelatory nature of Scripture, "everything actually asserted as true by the inspired authors must be held to be asserted by the Holy Spirit," so that it follows that "the books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching solidly, faithfully and without error that truth which God wanted to put into sacred writings for the sake of salvation."⁴ Catholic theologians often take this last soteriological phrase as formative of how Scripture can be construed as "Word of God," i.e., *as used* redemptively by God.

But this statement which appears to affirm Scripture as Word of God is balanced by recognition of the humanity of Scripture. Because God speaks in Holy Scripture through human beings and in a human manner, one must "investigate what meaning the sacred writers really intended, and what God wanted to manifest by means of their words."⁵ This human fashion in which God revealed himself and his will is developed in the document, focusing especially on literary genres. So the focus is first upon proper hermeneutical method before mention is made of the "living tradition of the whole Church." Thus the point of *Dei Verbum* on the nature of Sacred Scripture, understood incarnationally, is apparently that it is simultaneously divine and human word.

In Sacred Scripture . . . while the truth and holiness of God always remain intact, the marvelous condescension of eternal wisdom is clearly shown. . . . how far He has gone in adapting His language with thoughtful concern for our weak human nature. For the words of God, expressed in human language, have been made like human discourse.⁶

But how was this statement of the nature of Holy Scripture and its participation in the revelation of God as "Word of God" developed after Vatican II?⁷ The following analyses set forth a variety of interpretations of *Dei Verbum* by prominent moderate and progressive Roman Catholic scholars. Each reflects the fact that despite seemingly strong statements on inspiration and Scripture as Word of God, *Dei Verbum* is a compromise document containing subtle elements reflecting the background council debates and containing broadly moderated conclusions.

³Ibid., ch. 3, sect. 11, p. 381.

⁴Ibid., 381-82.

⁵Ibid., ch. 3, sect. 12, p. 382.

⁶Ibid., ch. 3, sect. 13, p. 383.

⁷Ibid.

II. KARL RAHNER ON SCRIPTURE AND WORD

Karl Rahner, regarded by many as the most significant Roman Catholic theologian of the twentieth century, exercised much influence at Vatican II where he helped shape the documents on Salvation and Revelation (*Dei Verbum*). According to Rahner, the modern loss of the transcendence of God arose from thinking which affirmed radical immanence. Rahner worked against such tides and the supposed conflict between divine immanence and transcendence, divine glory and human freedom, holding the two together.⁸ Central to his task and his understanding of the revelation of God was his "transcendental method." Since Kant, the "transcendental method" has been used to uncover the necessary conditions for facts. Given something undeniable, what must be true for that fact to be?

As influenced by Kant, Hegel, Maréchal, and Heidegger, Rahner's transcendental reflection is a philosophical means to show that human experience is not intelligible apart from the "holy mystery" we call "God." Holy ineffable mystery is encountered and known un-thematically and non-conceptually in the ordinariness of life.⁹ By transcendental reflection, Rahner also wanted to show that the human being is "spirit," "transcendent," inclined to God, "open to receive revelation" of the infinite mysterious horizon of being, i.e., "God" in Christian tradition.¹⁰ Rahner finds that "transcendental experiences" in ordinary human experience show humans to be naturally oriented to holy mystery, that God is not separate from human nature but is intrinsic to (and co-extensive with) human nature as the "necessary condition" of human subjectivity, as freedom, and as the capacity to "transcend."¹¹ Such immanent holy mystery remains transcendent and knowable only as it makes itself known—in "transcendental revelation" and "categorical revelation."

In affirming the inclination of human subjectivity to divine revelation, Rahner distinguishes the reality and potentiality of human nature for hearing and doing the Word of God. The "transcendental knowledge (revelation)" or experience of God results from the grounding of all human nature and history in the self-giving of God. That is the condition of "transcendental knowledge." So Rahner speaks of the "divinized transcendentalizing of man" who freely actualizes his essence in history.¹² But this occurs *a posteriori* as the transcendental experience of one's own free subjectivity by encounter with the world and other persons. We are

⁸Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith* (trans. William V. Dych; New York: Seabury, 1978), 87.

⁹*Ibid.*, 51 ff. Cf. developments of such lines of thinking in more recent Roman Catholic theologians and philosophers of religion, e.g., Nicholas Lash, *Easter in Ordinary* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1987).

¹⁰Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 51 ff.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 57 ff.

¹²*Ibid.*, 138.

oriented to God, and this experience, this "transcendental revelation," is *always* present as un-thematic experience which, as "knowledge" of God, we have implicitly when we are thinking of and concerned with *anything*. This *un-thematic*, non-conceptual knowledge or experience of God is foundational to all thought, and hence it is that from which *thematic* knowledge of God emerges (i.e., religion). Therefore, Rahner rejects the "purely extrinsic concept of revelation" which he conceives as divine intervention in human history. Instead, revelation is "the transcendental experience of the absolute and merciful closeness of God, even if this cannot be conceptually expressed . . . by everyone."¹³ But as experience of God, this revelation is not an encounter with a "particular object alongside others." Even as a condition of human transcendental, God remains absolutely beyond.¹⁴

Still, human transcendental is immanently borne and fulfilled by this divinizing "self-communication of God" in history as the history of salvation and revelation for every person. Divine revelation exists always and everywhere *as* the communication of holy mystery, *as* the innermost center of all existing persons and of all human history (the "supernatural existential"). This "history on God's part" and the "transcendental" structures of all persons are truly historical as they are

grounded in God's free and personal self-communication. This history is also free on God's part. . . . [Reflecting] the basic relation between creator and creature, the beginning of this history . . . [is] an event of God's freedom [as well as the human being's] which can give itself or refuse to give itself. . . . [It is] a history which really is the one true history of God himself . . . [which] manifests his power to enter into time. . . . [The] history of salvation and revelation is always the already existing synthesis of God's historical activity and man's at the same time.¹⁵

Again, this universal, transcendental revelation, as basis of human supernatural transcendental and co-extensive (but not identical) with human history, can become explicit, thematic, and conceptual. Rahner is emphatic that this "categorical" (or "real") revelation is not to be narrowly identified only with "revelation in Old and New Testament history (i.e., Scripture)," but is manifested in many religious contexts. The implicit knowledge is the condition of reflexive and thematic knowledge of God. Categorical revelation is revelation in history through events, symbols, and words.

[Categorical revelation] is not simply given with the spiritual being of man as transcendence, but rather has the character of an event. It

¹³Karl Rahner, "Revelation," *Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum Mundi* (ed. Karl Rahner; New York: Seabury, 1975), 1461.

¹⁴Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 53-54.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 142.

is dialogical, and in it God speaks to man, and makes known to him something which cannot be known always and everywhere in the world through the necessary relation of all reality in the world to God.¹⁶

By categorical revelation God communicates his inner reality, his personal character, his free relation to human subjectivity as spirit.¹⁷ The history of God's transcendental revelation shows itself directed toward a "highest and comprehensive self-interpretation of man" and so to "ever more intensely and explicitly religious self-interpretation" of the experience of God.¹⁸ Yet it must be remembered that, for Rahner, this explicit religious and categorical history of revelation is but a "species" or "segment" of the transcendental revelation. It is a "successful" instance or full realization of the single history of revelation.¹⁹

Clearly, then, there must be categorical revelation "outside" of "Old and New Testament history." These are "brief and partial histories within this categorical history of revelation in which a part of this self-reflection and reflexive self-presence of universal revelation is found in its purity."²⁰ Like Paul Tillich, Rahner says that Jesus Christ is the criterion for distinguishing misunderstanding of the transcendental experience of God and legitimate interpretation. He is "the full and unsurpassable event of the historical self-objectification of God's self-communication to the world."²¹ Of note in Rahner's formulation of "categorical revelation" is an outcome of his consistent concern to emphasize both divine and human freedom in revelation. There is a sense in which free human responsiveness to the un-thematic revelation of ineffable mystery "creates" the "categorical" disclosure, *makes it* reflexive, successful, and thematic. It occurs *wherever* persons, by God's grace, actualize their own transcendentality.²² Thus categorical revelation "depends" on "graced" human activity. Still, "only when God is the subjective principle of the speaking and of man's hearing in faith can God in his own self express himself."²³ The boundary between God and creatures is firm.

For Rahner, Holy Scripture arises within the context of categorical revelation as a *further* stage of the successful objectification of the original transcendental self-communication of God. This falls within "special official history" of revelation—revelation in "the usual sense." It is "really identical with the Old and New Testament history . . . the valid self-interpretation of God's

¹⁶Ibid., 171.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid., 154.

¹⁹Ibid., 155.

²⁰Ibid., 156.

²¹Ibid., 157 ff.

²²Ibid., 150.

²³Ibid., 157 ff.

transcendental self-communication to man."²⁴ As the further thematization of the emergent, universal, categorical history it *does not have to be made thematic* in a religious or sacral way.²⁵ Yet "prophets," persons who were "original bearers" of such (thematized) revealed "communication" from God "are to be understood as unique persons" in whom the self-interpretation of this original, transcendental experience and its history occurs "in word and in deed." In this way something comes to *particular* expression which is un-thematically present *everywhere* and in *all* persons. While the "prophet" is regarded as free and creative in this objectification of the universal communication of holy mystery, Rahner's concern to integrate human and divine freedom requires that this self-interpretation and historical objectification of a supernatural transcendental not be explained as only a human and natural process. The "prophet" is constituted by the personal self-communication of God. "If it interprets itself historically, then God (thereby) interprets himself in history, and the concrete human bearers of such self-interpretation are (thus) authorized by God in a real sense."²⁶

What distinguishes the "prophet" from all others who have precisely the same un-thematic self-communication of absolute mystery constituting their historical being? Here Rahner echoes Hegel, Heidegger, Tillich, and William James. The "light of faith" given to all is grasped and declared by the "prophet" out of the center of his/her human existence. This "light" is the divinized subjectivity of humanity, but it is the "prophet" who correctly mediates this light. The prophet is the "believer who *can express* his transcendental experience of God correctly." It is the prophet who then "becomes *for others* the correct and pure objectification of their own transcendental experience of God." Such prophetic self-interpretation, which "really succeeds" and takes on a living form for the community and its multiple experiences of self-interpretation, becomes a "productive model, an animating power and a norm for others."²⁷

What is the relation of transcendental and categorical revelation of God to Holy Scripture? It is understood within the historical, categorical, and mediational role of the church. Again, Christ is the ultimate and final locus of divine revelation.²⁸ The OT gains significance only as proximate to and as the pre-history of Christ.²⁹ From the incarnation, that definitive, final, divine revelation is passed on through the church, especially the apostolic community. That apostolic community, as proximate to Christ, is the locus of

²⁴Ibid., 158.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Ibid., 159-60.

²⁸Ibid., 175.

²⁹Ibid., 157.

normative teaching about the Christian faith.³⁰ Herein Scripture emerges as the "objectification" of the apostolic consciousness of faith.

Everything which belongs to the original apostolic *kerygma* has been written down in Scripture. . . . For Catholic Christians too, tradition and the teaching office's understanding have their material source and *norma non normata* only in Holy Scripture.³¹

Rahner finds, then, that Scripture as canon is a "moment" within the formative early life of the church as the normative bearer of revelation. More broadly it is a "successful" moment of categorical objectification of the original transcendental self-communication of the divine everywhere.

Can this objectifying "moment" be regarded as, in some real, participative sense, the Word of God? Rahner responds ironically to classical Protestant emphases (*sola gratia, sola fide, sola scriptura*) to enter constructive discussion of "Scripture as the Church's Book." Within grace and revelation, Scripture can only be reckoned as a product of the church, which is itself a product of categorical revelation. The Reformation's *sola scriptura* is dependent on the idea of *verbal* inspiration, whereby Scripture is regarded as the one and only product which comes immediately from God independently of . . . the living testimony of the church.³² This "is untenable from a historical point of view. . . . Rather, scripture is a literary concretization of apostolic church testimony, and *as such* it can be called 'the written word of God'" which remains the norm for the church's understanding of the faith.³³

Rahner's problem, given his understanding of revelation, is how to unify "transcendental" and "historical" (categorical) revelation. The answer is found in terms of mediation of the original and primary through the many emergent, historical vehicles of original, universal grace. The "history" through which grace is mediated, or through which "God's turning to man in revelation" is channeled, is not essentially *as* concept or word, let alone *as* Scripture, but as salvation history. But when this becomes thematic, explicitly religious, it becomes revelatory. As a "moment" within this process, Scripture is understood as "word of God" only as connected to grace and so to God's transcendental (un-thematic) self-communication.³⁴

³⁰Ibid., 328-30. On p. 330, Rahner says of the apostolic community as connected to Jesus Christ and, thus, as the locus of normative teaching about the Christian faith, that "wherever ecclesial Christianity is found, it is convinced that it had its origins in Christ. . . . If continuity and identity are to be maintained within an entity which exists historically, then it is inevitable that in an earlier phase of this historical entity free decisions are made which form an irreversible norm for future epochs."

³¹Ibid., 364.

³²Ibid., 362.

³³Ibid., 363. Cf. clarifying discussion on pp. 362-65.

³⁴Ibid., 370. One ought to note the marked influence of Hegel's thought here, as throughout Rahner's theology.

As in Rahner's view of the "prophets," revelation has become concrete in an authentic and pure way in the special *history* of the OT and NT. The new covenant especially is the objectification of the apostolic church which is always normative for the post-apostolic church. Scripture then has the character and characteristics belonging to *this* church, as proximate to Jesus.

But how does this make God, as the authoritative documents of Catholicism state repeatedly, "the *auctor* [author] of Holy Scripture"? Answering the question in what sense God can be regarded as the "literary author" of Scripture, the historical position of the church, Rahner distinguishes his formulation from the "psychological theories" of "school theology." So to unify transcendental revelation and the historical, apostolic objectification in writing, Rahner explains "inspiration" by denying God as "*literary author*" of Scripture, pointing to other options whereby the metaphor "author" may be approximated and Scripture still be called "word of God."³⁵ Scripture *can*, he says, be called "word of God" because it is not merely caused by God but is the objectification of God's salvific self-expression which is "effected by God and is borne by grace, and which comes to us without being reduced to our level."³⁶ In terms of "historical revelation," if God has founded the church by his Spirit and in Jesus Christ, and if that apostolic church as norm for the future church is a special object of God's action in a qualitatively unique way, and if Scripture is a constitutive element (objectification) of the apostolic church as ongoing norm, then, in that very indirect sense "God is the author of Scripture and . . . he inspired it."³⁷ It is thus the "word of God."

In this creatively ambiguous way, Rahner can affirm the documents of the church, which speak of God as "author" of the text of Scripture, portraying God's relation to the writers and writings as essentially one of primordial "impulse" toward creative-responsive literary effulgence, while affirming, too, the results of historical criticism, i.e., the very human, culture-bound nature of these "normative" writings.

III. RAYMOND BROWN ON SCRIPTURE AND WORD

In an important study, the late Roman Catholic NT scholar Raymond Brown examines the meaning of "word of God" in the light of biblical criticism. He clarifies his approach and basic assumption when he says, first, that he is coming to the issue not as a philosopher nor as a historical or systematic theologian but as a

³⁵Ibid., 374.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Ibid.

biblical critic, and, second, that he fully accepts "the Roman Catholic doctrine of the Bible as the Word of God."³⁸

The phrase "the word of God" has a prominent place in all Judeo-Christian thought and is, in reference to Holy Scripture, found throughout Roman Catholic liturgy and theology. Thus Brown asks

Are the Scriptures themselves the word of God or do they contain the Word of God? In either case do we literally mean word of God? Does God speak? And if one smilingly replies, "Not in the physical sense of emitting sound waves," there is still the question of whether God internally supplies words to the recipient of revelation and/or inspiration.³⁹

Brown seeks to clarify doctrine too often left vague by theologians in their theories of inspiration as if they were reflecting only "on books like Genesis, the Gospels and Romans," while in fact "they might do better by trying their theories out on the first nine chapters of I Chronicles . . . or Qoheleth."⁴⁰

Two distinctions are basic for Brown's analysis as a Roman Catholic exegete. First, he distances himself from "adoptionistic" approaches to the nature of Scripture, as linked to left wing Catholic theologians.⁴¹ Rather, with both the "centrist" and "right wing" Catholic theologians he prefers an "incarnational" model. Second, as distinct from "right wing" positions, Brown intends to develop what he calls "the traditional Catholic distinction between revelation and inspiration."⁴² He uses these terms to distinguish his approach to Scripture from that of some Protestants (e.g., Carl Henry) for whom he believes the distinction is almost lost, and who have influenced many modern Catholics. This distinction structures Brown's whole argument.

Brown's argument is cast in the theological context of post-Vatican II Catholic-Protestant debates regarding biblical inerrancy. Reflecting the question of God speaking words and the revelation-inspiration distinction, Brown begins by examining varied rabbinic interpretations of the biblical materials wherein God is said to speak. He initially affirms the view of G. Scholem who concludes that "every statement on which authority is grounded would become a human interpretation, however valid and exalted, of something that transcends it." This Brown applies, following Heb 1:1, 2, to the words of Jesus recorded in the NT, concluding that "in the words of Jesus it is obvious that one encounters an unconditioned timeless

³⁸Raymond E. Brown, "And the Lord Said? Biblical Reflections on Scripture as the Word of God," *TS* 42 (1981): 4.

³⁹*Ibid.*

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 8.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 5.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 7.

word spoken by God."⁴³ This is because the Jesus of the Synoptic Gospels spoke and thought as a Jew of the first third of the first century. Yet the Jesus of the Fourth Gospel is different in this respect. After having included the "words" of the risen Jesus, i.e., that in referring to such "words" in the category of "speaking" there is actually an "approximation of this revelation to ordinary experience," Brown presents an initial thesis on the larger question: human beings speaking words and revelation by the word of God really "only means divine revelation to which human beings have given expression in words."⁴⁴ So it seems Brown denies the claim that Holy Scripture is "word(s) of God."

This is not so, though, as in the previous statements about the words of Jesus, Brown does find fault with *a priori* views of the nature of Scripture and biblical inerrancy which tend to claim the "unconditioned and timeless" quality of scriptural statements. While emphasizing more than necessary the humanity and the culture-/time-conditioned "incarnationality" of Scripture (e.g., claiming even "religious errors"), Brown's purpose is to put the affirmations of Vatican II regarding Scripture as word of God in true biblical context. Roman Catholic methodology, having moved from *a priori* to *a posteriori* approaches to the question of revelation and Scripture, allows one to recognize:

Every clearly discernable action of (God) has been a surprise, how can we be so sure what He must do? This means that we shift to an *a posteriori* approach to inerrancy. Using the best biblical methods available, scholars seek to determine what the human author meant ("literal meaning") with all his limitations. Combining this with a belief in inspiration, they recognize that there is a *kenosis* involved in God's committing His message to human words.⁴⁵

The compromise nature of *Dei Verbum* focuses on the truth of Scripture as word of God *as related to* the salvific purpose for which God intended the Scriptures.⁴⁶

So what does this mean with regard to the propriety of any *direct* reference to Holy Scripture as word of God? Brown is as opposed to simplistic conceptions of this formula as he is to liberal denials of it. He notes, returning to the Christological comparison, that Jesus' full combined divinity and humanity are rejected consciously by

⁴³Ibid., 11. One should note, in this context, the comments of Scholem regarding the view of Rabbi Mendel on the very mystical nature of revelation from God and the role of human writing in relation to it. Cf. G. Scholem, *On the Kabbala and Its Symbolism* (London: Routledge, Kegan Paul, 1965), 29-31.

⁴⁴Brown, "And the Lord Said?" 13.

⁴⁵Ibid., 15. Note Brown's point on the compromise nature of Vatican II's statement in *Dei Verbum* and how the final form of the statement sets side-by-side the older, stronger statements about Scripture as Word of God and newer formulations. The resulting ambiguity leaves room for both "minimalist" and strong (maximalist) readings (note p. 16 and n. 41).

⁴⁶Ibid., 16-17.

nonbelievers and unconsciously by believers, who often regard the *full* humanity of Jesus to be incompatible with the full divinity, balking at Jesus' ignorance, temptations, and limitations. In the same way believers in revelation and inspiration can problematically insist that the biblical word is not really human and has no time-conditioning or limitation. They may accuse one who recognizes these qualities of Scripture of denying that it is the word of God.⁴⁷

Rather, says Brown, like the limitations of the Word made flesh, the words of Scripture remain very much human words, reflecting both "partial" divine insight and time-conditioned vision. But, since only human beings use words (a questionable point), then whenever one has called divine communication "word(s) of God" one has in fact "indicated that the divine communication is *in human words*, and therefore that the communication (of God) is in a time-conditioned and limited form."⁴⁸ So, for Brown, the very human and limited words of Scripture are also, in some actual, even historical sense, no less the expression or words of God. This is the extraordinary reality of God's "kenotic," historical, and human communication to us for our salvation.⁴⁹

IV. AVERY DULLES ON SCRIPTURE AND WORD

For many years Avery Dulles has been one of the most prominent and prolific Roman Catholic theologians in the English-speaking world. He was recently named a cardinal by John Paul II. Both revelation and ecclesiology have been central concerns for Dulles. Two of his significant works on revelation will be examined below.

Dulles's interests in the nature of divine revelation are both constructive and ecumenical. It is his firm belief that the early Christological controversies, the split between Churches East and West, the Reformation struggles, and today's splintered theological scenarios, are tied to the question of revelation. "The great theological disputes turn out, upon reflection, to rest on different

⁴⁷Ibid., 19.

⁴⁸Ibid., 18. Note that in regard to the question about the sense of the notion "word of God" and the objection that "word of God" is also a title for the second person of the Trinity, Brown replies (n. 47) that it is a title given to that person alone who took to himself the human, the time-conditioned, and the limited.

⁴⁹Ibid. Brown points to the comments of J. Ratzinger on the document *Dei Verbum* 9 where he says that "It is important to note that only Scripture is defined in terms of what it is: it is stated that Scripture is the word of God consigned to writing. Tradition, however, is described only functionally, in terms of what it does: it hands on the Word of God, but is not the word of God." This point by Ratzinger clarifies the truly unique status of Scripture in relation to tradition when understanding the statement in *Dei Verbum* 10 which states that "the task of authentically interpreting the word of God, whether written or handed on, has been entrusted exclusively to the teaching office of the Church. . . . This teaching office is not above the word of God but serves it."

understandings of revelation, often simply taken for granted."⁵⁰ How does Dulles relate revelation and Holy Scripture?

In *Models of Revelation*, Dulles follows Michael Polanyi's distinction between tacit and explicit knowing by the use of models in order to examine and identify the basic questions of revelation in our time. To this end, he sets forth five broad models of revelation representing the most significant Christian approaches in the twentieth century. Then, gleaned the truth of each, Dulles draws these together under his integrating theme of "symbolic mediation," a view intended to reflect the Catholic tradition of symbol in relation to revelation. Regarding the model "Revelation as History," he finds emphasis not on divine words or statements but on decisive divine deeds, what God does.⁵¹ The "Revelation as Inner Experience" model, represented by Schleiermacher, G. Tyrrell, W. Herrmann, and Tillich understands God's revelation to come through an experience of "God-consciousness" characterized as numinous, holy, ultimate concern, an experience reflected in all religions. Here the contribution is the recognition of the mystical and personal dimensions of revelation.⁵² Barth and Bultmann are classified under "Revelation as Dialectical Presence." This model emphasizes revelation as the Word of God which *confronts* us *through* Scripture, "an over againstness" that overturns our agendas and expectations.⁵³ In "Revelation as New Awareness," a model found to include process theology, G. Baum, J. Hick, and G. Moran, God is immanent in nature and history and therein is moving the world toward an intended goal. Revelation is the sensitizing of persons to/toward the divine activity with the invitation to participate in that purposive world. The useful insight here is focus on the affective nature of revelation through performative symbols rather than *merely* cerebral and propositional.⁵⁴

The fifth view, especially as compared to Dulles's "symbolic mediation," is of special significance. Dulles calls this "Revelation as Doctrine," a model he links to Roman Catholic neo-scholasticism and to "conservative evangelicalism" represented by C. Henry, J. I. Packer, and G. Clark. This view emphasizes God's disclosive work providing information about God and God's purposes which is "cast in clear cut and abiding propositions," "timeless truths" found in Scripture and, for the Catholic viewpoint, in the dogmatic formulas of the church. On the "evangelical view" of revelation, Dulles borrows from Warfield in saying that

For effective knowledge of the salvific truth, supernatural (or "special") revelation is necessary. This supernatural revelation was imparted in early biblical times by theophanic phenomena and

⁵⁰Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation* (Mary Knoll: Orbis, 1983), xix.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, ch. 4.

⁵²*Ibid.*, ch. 5.

⁵³*Ibid.*, ch. 6.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, ch. 7.

prophetic visions, but as the revelation progressed it took on to an increasing degree the form of doctrine. In the final period, revelation characteristically occurred through a "consecutive operation" whereby the Holy Spirit inspires and controls human powers as they are exercised in historical research, logical reasoning, and literary composition.⁵⁵

The "evangelical" view of Scripture is, first, one which distinguishes revelation from inspiration, while keeping them closely connected (i.e., initial communication of information and effective consignment of it to writing). Scripture as a whole and all of its parts are regarded as so inspired that, in the original manuscripts, it is free from error and is God's written word, objectified revelation.⁵⁶

Dulles assesses the models by seven criteria: faithfulness to the Bible and Christian tradition, internal coherence, plausibility, adequacy to experience, practical fruitfulness, theoretical fruitfulness, and value for dialogue. The "propositional model" holds up well at several points. First, it has "a certain foundation in the Bible" if one takes references to God's communication as literal. "While there is no cogent proof that every passage from Scripture is regarded as God's word, many biblical passages are quoted as if God said what the Bible said."⁵⁷ He acknowledges that most church fathers and doctors of the church to the nineteenth century, Catholic and Protestant, tended "to treat individual biblical statements without reservation as the Word of God."⁵⁸ Also, the "propositional" model has strong internal coherence. If the premises are granted, the whole follows. This engenders theoretical fruitfulness with a firm basis for doctrinal standards. Especially strong is its practical fruitfulness. It encourages faithfulness to the church's foundational doctrines, and a clear sense of identity for the maintenance of orthodoxy, a strong sense of mission and growth. These strengths of the propositional model of revelation Dulles wants to incorporate into his own model.

But based on his *a priori* criteria, Dulles sees problems. First, the propositional view is in decline in many circles. Second, the Bible does not seem to claim propositional infallibility for itself, nor was it so considered by ancient or medieval exegetes. This conclusion he defends by equating "propositional" with literalistic, then by pointing to patristic tendencies toward allegorical exegesis. Third, the claim of revealed truth in every declarative sentence of Scripture is not plausible in an age of critical thinking, and the theory rests on an objectifying theory of knowledge now widely questioned. The propositional model is also inadequate to experience in that it is

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 37-38. Cf. Benjamin B. Warfield, *Revelation and Inspiration* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1948), 15-25.

⁵⁶Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 38. Cf. Benjamin B. Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1948), 442.

⁵⁷Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 46.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*

authoritarian, requiring submission to concepts from ancient situations very different from those now experienced, and so missing the evocative power of the biblical images and the immanent "signs of God's presence in one's own life and experience."⁵⁹ Finally, the propositional theory is not conducive to dialogue with other religions, a stipulative conclusion given this criterion.⁶⁰ This does not mean that God's revelation is devoid of cognitive value or that the clear teachings of Scripture are without connection to revelation. There are elements here Dulles intends to incorporate. But the adequacy of all elements taken together and the problem of disjunctive thinking will be questions to pose.

In terms of Dulles's own "symbolic mediation" model of revelation, incorporating the strengths and avoiding the weaknesses of the models analyzed, revelation is symbolic communication. This he sets within the context of "participatory indwelling." Revelation as symbolic mediation occurs within the formative, directive, and interpretive parameters of the community of faith, and this "within the realities to which the symbols refer."⁶¹ Therein one can "dwell" confidently "in the clues that point to Christian revelation."⁶² Scripture, along with church tradition and revelatory events/encounters, serves as a clue or "lens" by which God's revelation can be apprehended. The revealing God can disclose his reality *through* such created media.

But what is meant by "symbol," and why is this approach both necessary and a way to unify the five models? With guidance from Tillich, Eliade, Niebuhr, Polanyi, and Norman Perrin, Dulles asserts that revelation never occurs as a purely interior experience or as an unmediated encounter with God. Revelation is always mediated through symbol, i.e., by an externally perceived sign which works mysteriously on human consciousness, suggesting more than it can clearly describe or define. "Revelatory symbols" express and mediate God's self-communication.⁶³ This reflects Dulles's emphasis on the inability of discursive language to disclose the transcendent mystery of God. A symbol is a "sign pregnant with a plenitude of meaning." But this is evocative meaning which cannot be adequately stated, though it does create a "vast potential of semantic energy" in those affected. Language is but an indicative sign, a "clue" by which one integrates a wider range of feelings, impressions, and affections.⁶⁴

Thus revelation is not contentful, not informative. Rather revelation mediated via symbols is evocative and its "truth" is its capacity to create "a new vision of the world and new possibilities."

⁵⁹Ibid., 51.

⁶⁰Ibid., 48-52.

⁶¹Ibid., 144.

⁶²Ibid., 128.

⁶³Ibid., 131.

⁶⁴Ibid., 132.

To justify this, Dulles draws attention to "revelatory symbolism in Scripture." There are revelations found in Scripture which are constituted by symbolic ingredients. These Dulles divides into events (e.g., miracles, theophanies, life of Jesus), all possessing numinous phenomena and themes (e.g., kingdom of God). In terms of genre, there is much metaphor in Scripture and prominent elements of symbol (e.g., ritual). But are these non-informative "disclosure situations" creating awareness of a non-discursive nameless Other? It is significant that Dulles, wanting a biblical basis for his understanding of revelation as transformative, illuminative mystery, fails to mention Scripture's perspective on God's self-revelation. To pick but one omission, Dulles passes by the OT prophetic formula denoting divine disclosure, "Thus says Yahweh." He sunders the simultaneity of the transcendent glory and fearful mystery of the Living God from God's condescending coming to and for human redemption by content-ful self-disclosure.

How can Dulles recover "truth" in the "propositional" theory while reckoning revelation to be only transcendent, evocative mystery and affirming the incapacity of human language to do justice to the unlimited multi-dimensional, creative, transforming revelation of God? Dulles is sensitive to the charge that his rejection of any of direct divine speech and truth content for amorphous mystery leaves Christianity doctrinally void. By equivocating on the term "meaning," he says

Symbol achieves the joint meaning of diverse and seemingly incompatible particulars *by an effort of imagination*, whereby our tacit powers of integration are aroused to an exceptional degree. By eliciting participation, a symbol can convey a richer and more personal apprehension of reality in its deeper dimensions than propositional language [which he also disparages as "mere measurements and numbers, statistics and bloodless abstractions"!] can do. Its distinctive mark is not the absence of meaning but the surplus of meaning. . . . Symbols frequently require explication so as to clear up their ambiguity. . . . Because of the *cognitive content implicit in the originative symbols*, revelatory symbolism is able to not only "give rise to thought" but also to *shape* the thought it arouses.⁶⁵

In the faith community, by "vitaly indwelling" the revelational reality to which the symbols refer, one is opened to transformative mystery and so enabled to give conceptual expression and interpretation to mediated revelation. This is the faithful awareness and responsiveness to the divine which gave rise to the imaginative, integrating images of Scripture and tradition. Yet somehow creative response to such mystery is "not indefinitely pliable." Christian symbols create a network which forms a context. And, as interpreted

⁶⁵Ibid., 142-44.

within the living faith community, they give directives for thinking and conduct.⁶⁶

Dulles's need for symbolic mediation, his rejection of content-ful, objective divine disclosure, and his transcendentalizing of God are rooted in disjunctive thinking grounded in Kant's noumenal-phenomenal split. As a result, Dulles cannot say what revelation is. The *Ding an sich* of God's self-revelation is unknowable. Yet he must fend off the agnostic implications of his vision of nameless, mute Otherness by enlisting culturally positive terms from popular, personalistic rhetoric, falsely claiming (à la Bultmann and Brunner) the relational-personalistic high ground for non-discursive mystery, while disparaging "propositionalism" as the reduction of divine richness to impersonal calculations.

Clearly Dulles will not allow any level of identity between Scripture and revelation. Yet he seeks some significance for Scripture within God's revelatory processes and purposes. Revelation as it works affectively in human lives leads to *human* literary objectification. Very indirectly, divine causality is in view. God's people, by symbolically mediated revelation, are moved to bring written objectivity to their experience. God, who first "authors" the faith community, is indirectly "author" of the responsive writings of that community.⁶⁷

More recently, Dulles has expressed himself in *more* classical Roman Catholic fashion, saying that the Bible is called "the written word of God" because "God's grace impelled the human authors to write and directed them to give a pure and reliable expression of the faith of the people of God at their particular stage of salvation history."⁶⁸ The Catholic view of inspiration is then said to be the whole complex of internal graces and external helps which "enabled the writers and editors of the biblical books to produce normative texts for the Church's guidance."⁶⁹ Constrained by the more official setting, Dulles says that the Bible, as basis of church belief and teaching, is a "*reliable witness to God's revelation as communicated in its formative period. The inspiration given . . . prevented (the sacred writers) from falsifying what God had revealed.*"⁷⁰ This rather Barthian statement reflects a somewhat more traditional view than previously found in Dulles. Yet Scripture's distinction from Word of

⁶⁶Ibid., 144. In a context where Dulles extolls the "richness" of meaning of symbolic mediation compared to the "propositional" view, which he disparages as the reduction of divine qualities to abstractions, numbers, and measurements, he says: "Even more is this true if we would achieve awareness of the transcendent, which is the proper theme of revelation. God, though utterly beyond description and definition, is eminently real. Symbolic events and language can mediate, albeit deficiently, something of God's reality" (p. 142).

⁶⁷Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 201-92 ff.

⁶⁸Avery Dulles, "Faith and Revelation," in *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, vol. 1 (Minneapolis: Augsburg-Fortress, 1991), 118-19.

⁶⁹Ibid., 119.

⁷⁰Ibid.

God is clear. One wonders how falsification can occur in relation to a contentless revelation.

V. RICHARD SWINBURNE ON SCRIPTURE AND WORD OF GOD

Richard Swinburne, professor of Christian philosophy at Oxford University, has long been engaged in giving philosophical expression and justification to classical theological themes from a Roman Catholic perspective. In *Revelation: From Metaphor to Analogy*, Swinburne presents a stimulating reflection on yet another foundational Christian issue: the deeds and truth of God. His direction is clear. Some religions (e.g., Judaism, Christianity, Islam) claim that God has revealed truths which are crucial for persons to know or believe. What are the bases for believing that some act, book, or creed conveys divinely revealed truth?

After examining linguistic elements related to the role of truth statements or propositions, analogy, metaphor, and genre, and why we might expect revelation of divine truth, Swinburne unfolds his argument for the probability of the Christian revelation claim and its relation to the church, creeds, and Scripture.⁷¹ Contrary to many post-Kantian notions of revelation, Swinburne asserts that revelation may be either *of* God (or God's acts), and so non-propositional, or *by* God, and convey propositional truth. His focus is upon revelation of propositional truth. But with his argument for "propositional" revelation he argues more basically that there are reasons for believing there is a God from what is observed in nature, and that further reason for belief in revelation would be provided by the fact (if it is a fact) "that there are creeds and books of purported revelation of a kind which is to be expected if there is a God."⁷² Given such method and affirmation, Swinburne's view of Holy Scripture as related to the Word of God would seem to be sure.

Yet while Swinburne rails against modern historical-critical views which assert that revelation, whatever that might be, cannot be propositional or have truth content, pointing out how such denials diverge from historic Christian teaching, he turns around and praises the historical-critical method for its capacity to get behind Scripture to the real event of revelation. How does Swinburne bring this together and how is this formative to his understanding of Holy Scripture and the Word of God? First, he differentiates what he terms "the original revelation" and any documents or institutions by which the truth or teaching of that revelation is conveyed. He states that

⁷¹Richard Swinburne, *Revelation: From Metaphor to Analogy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 2. Swinburne refers to these as the documents and institutions of the purported revelation.

⁷²*Ibid.*, 3.

The original propositional revelation was the teaching of God to the Israelites . . . about himself and his dealings with them and other nations, culminating in the teachings of Jesus Christ, including his teaching about the significance of his actions and the teaching of the first apostles about the significance of those actions.⁷³

Again, this would seem to refer, at some level, to Scripture as a consequent aspect of this contentful revelatory process. But this is not the case. For Swinburne, references to divinely revealed truth, teaching, message, and the like, are *not textual*. Such "original revelation" is not, at any level, manifested as a written document, though it may somehow be found through and expressed in written language form.⁷⁴ In this way he can argue against Protestant reverence for Scripture and its claim that Holy Scripture itself is to be understood as an aspect of "original revelation," that Scripture is a direct product of God's action. This, he claims, fits badly with the fact that there were Christians in the first four centuries A.D. without a complete text of Scripture.⁷⁵

Throughout his formulation of divine revelation, Swinburne reflects an anti-verbal bias ("acts rather than mere words"). Interestingly, his understanding of propositional revelation is of that which is verbal and true (e.g., the teaching of Jesus) and yet non-textual. This means that he must argue along the following lines. First, God gave the original propositional revelation. Second, God intended that this revelation be available for ongoing generations of people, so he founded a church to interpret that revelation correctly.⁷⁶ Thus, no matter what the gospels might assert about Jesus, in fact Jesus taught what the church says he taught, including the fact that the NT is basically correct. While Swinburne believes that historical-critical methods can uncover much of the original teaching behind Scripture, and so penetrate even to the original act of God beyond the text of Scripture, still such methods cannot grant certainty about that teaching.⁷⁷ Only the authorized church interpretation can furnish that. According to Swinburne, then, propositional revelation from God is truth or teaching and is to be found beyond Holy Scripture.⁷⁸ Why, then, is there a Scripture at all? And what then of the creeds in relation to Scripture?

Swinburne responds to such issues in his tenth chapter, "Bible." Through discussion of hermeneutical issues, Swinburne's intent to give strong affirmation to the various historical-critical methods and

⁷³Ibid., 101. Cf. p. 118.

⁷⁴Ibid., 96, 101 ff.

⁷⁵Ibid., 103.

⁷⁶Cf. Swinburne's crucial discussion (for undergirding his Roman Catholic view of the role of church and tradition in relation to revelation) of the criteria for knowing/recognizing the true church and the church's true interpretation of Scripture. Ibid., 122ff., 130ff.

⁷⁷Ibid., 112-13.

⁷⁸Ibid., 103.

presuppositions (e.g., source criticism and the documentary hypothesis) becomes clear. Thereby he can underscore the formative authority of the Roman Catholic Church while humanizing the text of Scripture but without impugning God. When Swinburne comes to the question of "inspiration" (a term Swinburne never examines), he begins by claiming a "strong sense" of God's authorship of the biblical text, even quoting Gregory the Great that "Holy Scripture is a letter of God almighty to his creature."⁷⁹ Despite this apparent connection between the Word of God and the text of Scripture, Swinburne is claiming that God was the author of insights and traditions which the human writers often misunderstood or falsely expressed and so can only be understood by what comes later. His illustration from Joshua is instructive. God's revelatory insight to Israel was that it is not good to worship lesser gods and that such false worship deserves punishment. Swinburne says that the writer of Joshua *correctly* grasped these insights but *failed* to realize differences in regard to such punishment (e.g., ignorance, children with parents) and the role of divine mercy. Thus Swinburne says

God is the author of the Bible only in the sense that he "inspired" the human authors to write and compilers to compile the books they did; yet not merely did those human authors have their own style and presuppositions and God sought only to *breathe his message through* those . . . but also the human authors and compilers were less than fully pliable. They were not fully open to divine truth.⁸⁰

How are we to discern the difference? We must recognize their divergence from God's main message. We must accept nothing "at odds" with Scripture's central message, i.e., the church's creeds ("and other known scientific and historical truth").⁸¹ Thus the OT is to be understood in light of the New, and the New in light of the church creeds. How the early church arrived at the truth contained in the great creeds from a soteriological interpretation of Scripture apart from the creeds is never dealt with, though "tradition," like "insight," is apparently an *a priori* revelatory (non-textual, non-verbal) reality.

Thus, for Swinburne, Holy Scripture is indirectly "inspired" and is "the paramount vehicle of revelation,"⁸² but it is not Word of God, not itself revelation. The "propositional" truth of God, found *through* Scripture by the church is embodied in the church's creeds. In all, Swinburne has, in fact, made numerous un-traditional, un-Catholic claims regarding Holy Scripture and divine revelation in order to undergird his (often circular) apologetic for church authority within the revelatory acts of God.

⁷⁹Ibid., 196.

⁸⁰Ibid., 198.

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²Ibid., 199-201.

VI. THE NATURE OF HOLY SCRIPTURE IN THE NEW
CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

In his opening statement for the new *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, John Paul II explains the connection of this new document to Vatican II. He had participated in drafting Vatican II, and so, seeking to "implement its (apostolic and pastoral) directives concretely and faithfully," he called an "extraordinary assembly" of the Synod of Bishops on the twentieth anniversary of its close (1985). One purpose was that "all the Christian faithful might better adhere to it and to promote knowledge and application of it."⁸³ There many bishops expressed desire for a new "compendium of all catholic doctrine" regarding faith and morals. Such a biblical, liturgical document must become a reference for the whole church and for formation of regional/cultural catechisms which represent local concerns.⁸⁴ John Paul II commissioned its preparation in 1986, under the leadership of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, seven diocesan Bishops, and a group of "experts in theology and catechesis" who, assisting the commission, did the real work of drafting the new *Catechism* which was officially given to the church on the thirtieth anniversary of the opening of Vatican II by John Paul II (1992).⁸⁵

The opening sections speak repeatedly of the *Catechism* as an "organic synthesis" of the essential and basic contents of Catholic doctrine, not only in light of Vatican II but "the whole of the Church's tradition." Thus, as our concern here is with the document's understanding of the nature of Scripture, it is important to note principal authoritative sources: "the Sacred Scriptures, the Fathers of the Church, the liturgy and the Church's Magisterium."⁸⁶ Footnotes make clear the wide range of sources used beyond Vatican II, which does not provide a majority of references. It is Holy Scripture which often provides a majority of references. The *Catechism's* primary discussion of "Sacred Scripture" is set within the second chapter, "God Comes to Meet Man," and its three articles: "The Revelation of God," "The Transmission of Divine Revelation," and "Sacred Scripture." Yet this is to be assessed in light of the prior section, "Man's Capacity for God." This affirms that the fallen human being

stands in need of being enlightened by God's revelation, not only about those things which exceed his understanding, but also about those religious and moral truths which of themselves are not beyond the grasp of human reason.⁸⁷

⁸³*The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (ET: United States Catholic Conference; New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell, 1994), 2.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*, 3.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, 15.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 11.

⁸⁷*Ibid.*, sect. 38, p. 21.

Beyond "natural reason" and our "capacity" for God as "made to live in communion with God," there lies *another* order of knowledge which humans cannot arrive at by their own powers, "divine Revelation." God has freely chosen to reveal himself and to give himself to humanity. This he does by "revealing the mystery, his plan of loving goodness, formed from all eternity in Christ, for the benefit of all men." Central to the *Catechism's* presentation of revelation is Jesus Christ. By sending God the Son at the Incarnation God has fully revealed his plan.⁸⁸

Yet contrary to many modern theologians for whom God has his one Word, Christ, but no words, the *Catechism* seems clear that by "stages" and "by deeds and words" God has been making known and realizing the mystery of his will through the whole history of his covenantal relationships, as with fallen Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, and Israel through his acts *and words* at the Exodus and giving the law "through Moses."⁸⁹ But in Christ, "the Mediator and fullness of all revelation," the Father has given his "one, perfect and unsurpassable Word. In him he has said everything; there will be no other word than this one."⁹⁰ But what of Holy Scripture? Or the NT, given that "no other word than this one" and "no new public revelation is to be expected" because of the definitive coming of the incarnate Word? Is the OT passé? Is the NT just human witness to the Word but not an aspect of revelation, according to the *Catechism*?

The articles on the transmission of divine revelation and sacred Scripture clarify the issue but, like Vatican II (*Dei Verbum*), do so dialectically. Given God's desire that "knowledge of the truth," as it is above all in Jesus Christ, should come to all persons, and so his revelation "to the ends of the earth," it is certain that the *Catechism* regards divine revelation as contentful, something which can be "handed on" to others. Quoting *Dei Verbum* it is stated that "God graciously arranged that the things he had once revealed for the salvation of all peoples should remain in their entirety, throughout the ages, and be *transmitted* to all generations."⁹¹ This "transmission" of revelation through history, including the apostles, took multiple forms, including oral and *written*. "Under the inspiration of the same Holy Spirit [the apostles] committed the message of salvation to writing."⁹² Yet ambiguity, and so the possibility of final disjunction of Scripture from Word of God/divine revelation, remains in the article "Sacred Scripture." *Both* Christ *the* Word of God and sacred Scripture as Word of God are emphasized. On the one hand, it is asserted that God, purposing to reveal himself to persons, "speaks to them in human words . . . the words of God expressed in words of men." While one might wonder what "words of God" denotes apart

⁸⁸Ibid., introduction to ch. 2, p. 23.

⁸⁹Ibid., sects. 54-64, pp. 24-27.

⁹⁰Ibid., sect. 65, p. 27.

⁹¹Ibid., sect. 74, p. 29.

⁹²Ibid., sect. 76, p. 30.

from human expressions, the point is that this use of human language is analogous to his taking "the flesh of human weakness." *Through* the words of Sacred Scripture, God speaks only one Word, "i.e., Jesus Christ, the center, focus and final content of all revelation."⁹³ While one would want to agree with this Christocentric thrust regarding revelation, the connection to Scripture could be taken as similar to existentialist, dialectical, or "Barthian" conceptions.

But this alone is not the intent of the *Catechism*. There are repeated "classical" statements to the effect that "God is the author of Sacred Scripture," that Scripture simply *is* "Word of God," and that Scripture reveals "the mystery of the divine will" and "divine realities" *because* of the action of God in the power of the Holy Spirit upon, in, and through the writers of Scripture. For example,

The divinely revealed realities which are contained and presented in the text of Sacred Scripture, have been written down under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.⁹⁴

The Old and New Testaments, whole and entire, with all their parts, on the grounds that written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they have God as their author.⁹⁵

And throughout this article, Scripture and Word of God are used interchangeably with clear intent.⁹⁶ It is noteworthy, too, that "Sacred Scripture" is repeatedly said to be truthful in all its affirmations; e.g.:

The inspired books teach the truth. Since therefore all that the inspired authors . . . affirm should be regarded as affirmed by the Holy Spirit, we must acknowledge that the books of Scripture firmly, faithfully and without error teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the Sacred Scriptures.⁹⁷

Therefore the *Catechism* affirms that sacred (sometimes "divine") Scripture *is* Word of God, *is* a crucial aspect of divine revelation which, like all divine revelation, is rooted, centered, and focused on the Incarnate Word.

Yet, again, there are elements which modify interpretation of this affirmation, as set within contemporary theological discussions. Church tradition is at least equal with Scripture, with which it makes up a "single deposit of the Word of God."⁹⁸ The inspired text of

⁹³Ibid., sects. 105-6, p. 36.

⁹⁴Ibid.

⁹⁵Ibid., cf. sect. 85.

⁹⁶Ibid., note examples from sects. 136-40, pp. 43-44.

⁹⁷Ibid., sect. 107, p. 37.

⁹⁸Ibid., sects. 80-85, 113, pp. 31-32, 38. Some statements by Karl Barth about the Roman Catholic view of tradition in Vatican II, even with the new weight it gave to

divine Scripture, said to be "the speech of God put down in writing under the breath of the Holy Spirit," obviously includes the Apocrypha.⁹⁹ "Veneration" for Scripture is likened to veneration of the body of Jesus, a comparison which could lend force to separating Scripture from Word of God.¹⁰⁰ Also, occasional expressions describing Scripture's role in God's purpose, e.g., "The Word *through* Scripture" and "Word of God *contained in* Scripture," are used in modern and contemporary discussions to *deny* Scripture as Word of God or a participative aspect and result of divine revelation. Yet in the contexts, that does not seem to be the *Catechism's* intent.¹⁰¹ Finally, on occasion when Scripture has just been strongly extolled as Word of God, there will follow disclaimers about Christianity *not* being a religion of *the book*, not written and mute, but "incarnate and living." Surely this reflects differences among the framers of the *Catechism*. Yes, the role of the Holy Spirit is a crucial element, but such seeming reversals are used to re-affirm church tradition and the Magisterium.¹⁰² Still the affirmation of Scripture as revealed, inspired Word of God, in and under Christ the Word, must be taken as the basic affirmation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* regarding the nature of Sacred Scripture.

VII. CONCLUSION

Since Trent, and especially since the Enlightenment, Roman Catholic views of authority, revelation/Word of God, and the relation of Holy Scripture to divine revelation have been anything but stable, ebbing and flowing in ways that followed or paralleled trends in Protestantism and culture. On the question of Holy Scripture, one theologian has rightly pointed out that "The traditional Roman Catholic position is that God is the primary author of Scripture and the human beings the secondary authors."¹⁰³ But after Trent, the diverse perspectives regarding inspiration in relation to perceived phenomena of the text led to ever more creative and oblique ways to affirm the dogma regarding Scripture as Word of God. Many effects of Catholic liberalism were overcome, and the "incarnational model" of Scripture as Word of God became useful for a time, as reflected in Vatican II. But the "incarnational model" is

Scripture, are noteworthy. In response, Barth still found it necessary to stress "the Scripture principle" in contrast to Roman Catholic teaching. In distinguishing "Evangelical" from Roman Catholic confessions, Barth asserts that the first emphasizes the Bible as strictly the first word over against church tradition, while the second tends "to understand the Bible in the light of tradition" (in Karl Barth, *Karl Barth Letters, 1961-1968* [trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981], 137).

⁹⁹Ibid., sect. 120, p. 40.

¹⁰⁰E.g., *ibid.*, sects. 103, 127, 138, 140, pp. 36, 41-42, 44.

¹⁰¹E.g., *ibid.*, sects. 79, 102, 135, 137, pp. 30, 35-36, 43, 44.

¹⁰²E.g., *ibid.*, sects. 82, 108, pp. 31, 37.

¹⁰³Donald G. Bloesch, *Holy Scripture: Revelation, Inspiration and Interpretation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1994), 86.

ambiguous, and since Vatican II this has been exploited to reflect divergent and radical views of Scripture and "Word of God."

The Vatican II document, *Dei Verbum*, owed much to Karl Rahner and contains built-in ambiguities regarding the nature of Scripture so that, while apparently reaffirming Scripture as Word of God, it creates great allowance for wide-ranging views on revelation/Word of God and, consequently, regarding the relation of Word of God to Scripture. Earlier dogmatic statements, which affirmed Holy Scripture to be *directly* the inspired Word of God in a strong sense, are re-interpreted (usually anachronistically) and understood in light of the current situation. In this way, Rahner, Dulles, and even Swinburne can reformulate the nature of revelation and its relation to Holy Scripture. Moderate Raymond Brown is, to an extent, an exception.

Thus the classical Roman Catholic recognition of Scripture as Word of God in a direct sense has at times shifted to Scripture as an existential point or place of "revelatory" mediation, thereby following Protestant neo-liberalism (e.g., Tillich) under the formative influence of Hegelian immanentism. This relativizes official Roman Catholic dogma as a whole and its specific statements regarding the nature of Scripture as Word of God in order to conform to radical historical-critical conclusions of the total humanity and culture-boundedness of Scripture. *Present context* becomes the formative content of dogma on the nature of Scripture, and dogma itself becomes a "wax nose" whose actual shape depends on contemporary theological creativity. It is, then, historically and theologically noteworthy that, under the firmer hand of John Paul II, the recent *Catechism of the Catholic Church* has taken steps to solidify the classic Roman Catholic affirmation of Scripture as written Word of God while leaving "room" for a "bounded" diversity.

Still, the larger situation parallels the postmodern death of the author (intent) and of the external text in order to give preeminence to the horizon of present creative interpretation brought to the text by the reader/subject. Yet the fact that Rahner, Dulles, and Swinburne continue to respond to Roman Catholic dogma means they each reflect the continuing need to somehow, however indirectly, "connect" revelation/Word of God and Scripture. But to this writer, it is Raymond Brown's work, in relation to the textual phenomena, whose particular "incarnational" conclusions seem to have the most potential fruitfulness for understanding the relation of Holy Scripture *to and as* Word of God.