


HOLY CHURCH OR HOLY WRIT?

**The Meaning of the *Sola Scriptura*
of the Reformation.**

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THE AUTHOR

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I

HOLY WRIT or Holy Church. The Crisis of the Protestant Reformation is the title of an important book which the well-known French-American Catholic theologian George H. Tavard published in 1959¹. Father Tavard belongs to a school of theological thought in the Roman Church which had given up the traditional view that Scripture and Tradition are two different sources of revelation and tried to replace it by the assumption that there is only one source of revelation, namely Holy Scripture, while tradition is the interpretation of Scripture by the authoritative teaching office of the Church. Tavard's book, well written and based on a new study of the sources, mainly those of the Middle Ages and of the English Reformation, helped to pave the way for the sweeping victory which this new school of thought won right at the beginning of the Council when the 'schema' on the 'Sources of Revelation' (*De fontibus revelationis*) was rejected by the majority of the bishops. Carefully prepared by a number of conservative theologians this draft of a dogmatic constitution dealt elaborately in five chapters with the following problems:

1. The Double Source of Revelation. 2. The Inspiration, Inerrancy and Literary Form of Scripture. 3. The Old Testament. 4. The New Testament.

5. The Holy Scripture in the Church.

The document was presented by Cardinal Ottaviani, the head of the Preparatory Theological Commission.

In the ensuing debate which began on 14 November, 1962, one Cardinal after another arose to reject the scheme. Said Cardinal Liénart (Lille):

This schema is not adequate to the matter it purports to deal with, namely Scripture and Tradition. There are not and never have been two sources of revelation. There is only one source of revelation—the Word of God, the good news announced by the prophets and revealed by Christ. The Word of God is the unique source of revelation. This schema is a cold and scholastic formula, while revelation is a supreme gift of God—God speaking directly to us. We should be thinking more along the lines of our separated brothers who have such a love and veneration for the Word of God. Our duty now is to cultivate the faith of our people and cease to condemn.²

Liénart was followed by Frings (Cologne):

The primary purpose of a Council is to provide for the pastoral needs of the day, to teach the truth, to stimulate its preaching in such wise that it will be received.

Comparing the schema with texts presented to the First Vatican Council of 1870 which had been criticized for their scholastic approach, the Cardinal continued:

What is even worse than the manner of presentation is the doctrine itself. Why speak of two sources of revelation? This is not traditional and only in recent centuries, as a result of false historicism, have certain theologians tried to explain the matter thus.

Frings continued:

What is said here of inspiration and inerrancy is at once offensive to our separated brothers in Christ and harmful to the proper liberty required in any scientific procedure.

While Cardinal Ruffini supported the schema and Ottaviani's defence of it, and while others, like the Archbishop of Genoa and the Cardinal Archbishop of Compostella, declared it to be a sufficient basis for the

1. London: Burns and Oates.

2. Quoted from Xavier Rynne, *Letters from Vatican City, First Session*, New York, 1963, p. 143.

discussion of the great problem, quite a number of outstanding bishops and members of the College of Cardinals took the side of Liénart and Frings. Cardinal Bea recognized in a fair and balanced verdict the merits of the great work put into the schema but found that the whole direction of this work had been wrong. It did not correspond to the purpose of the Council. 'What then did the Pope have in mind?' when he summoned the Council. He desired

that the faith of the Church be presented in all its integrity and purity, but in such manner that it will be received today with benevolence. For we are shepherds.³

The debate went on for almost a week. Then came one of the most dramatic moments of the Council and perhaps in the history of the Roman Catholic Church. A vote was taken on the question whether the schema should be retained as the basis of the discussion. Out of the 2209 fathers present 1368 voted for the interruption of the discussion of the schema, while 822 wanted the discussion to be continued. However, as the standing rules required for a decision of this nature a two-thirds majority (which would have been a majority of 1473), the conservative minority had won. This might have led to a deadlock of the whole work of the Council had not Pope John intervened. Making use of the power of the Pope over the Council he ordered the schema to be withdrawn. A special committee under the joint chairmanship of Cardinals Ottaviani and Bea was to be appointed to prepare another document. The result of their work is the 'Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation' (*Dei verbum*). The first draft of the new document was ready in 1963 for the Second Session. It underwent further improvements before it was discussed by the Council briefly at the Third and finally at the Fourth Session. The definitive vote was not taken until November, 1965, shortly before the end of the Council. It was adopted almost unanimously and promulgated by Pope Paul on 18 November.

II

THE DRAMATIC story of this document shows how important the problem it tries to solve was and is to the Roman Church, and not only to this church. The question of the nature and the authority of the Word of God is today, along with the question of the Church, its nature, its authority, its unity, foremost in the mind of all Christians on earth. It is one of the great discoveries of Christendom in this century of revolutionary changes that in spite of all divisions and separations the Christians and the churches of whatever denomination are bound together by the strange solidarity of a common history. They experience the same joys and disappointments, successes and failures, opportunities and frustrations. Great spiritual movements, healthy or unhealthy, spread through the whole of Christendom irrespective of denominational borders. It is by no means so as it was believed forty years ago that the fall of one church means the rise of another. They are all confronted with the same enemies, the same emergencies. Together they rise, together they fall.

It was the Eastern Orthodox Church which had to learn this in the Russian Revolution of 1917 and in the extinction of the earliest Christian churches by the Turks in Asia Minor a few years later. In vain the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople issued, in January, 1920, its touching encyclical, 'Unto all the Churches of Christ wherever they be'.⁴

3. Rynne, p 148.

4. G. K. A. Bell, *Documents on Christian Unity, 1920-1930*, pp 17-21.

trying to bring home to the churches of the West this truth and to persuade them to form a 'League of Churches'. Today we all know of this common destiny that binds us together. Even the great theological issues are everywhere the same. To many it was a great surprise that the Second Vatican Council had to deal with exactly the same problems, ecclesiastical and theological, that are on the agendas of our synods and conferences. This is no surprise to the church historian. For he knows that this has always been so. What is new is that the churches have begun to draw their conclusions from these facts; unfortunately, as the sad history of the Ecumenical Movement shows, often wrong conclusions.

If we look at the reasons given by the majority of the bishops for their rejection of the schema proposed by Ottaviani's Commission, three recur all the time. First, the document did not correspond to the purpose of the Council, which was meant to be a pastoral Council rather than a Council summoned to define theological doctrines. Secondly, it would not serve the ecumenical aim of the Council to bring about a rapprochement with the separated brethren on either side. Thirdly, it was said to contain a false doctrine in the unquestioned assumption, expressed already in the title, that there are two sources of revelation, namely Scripture and Tradition. In these three reasons, which are closely interconnected, the great change which has taken place in Roman Catholicism during the last decades finds expression. This change had become noticeable in the 'new theology' which in Western and Central Europe arose during the pontificates of Pius XI (1922-39) and Pius XII (1939-58) and which slowly gained ground, especially in the years after the Second World War, in Rome also. Under Pius XII, who was fully aware of the situation, Rome stood at the cross-roads.

The accession of John XXIII marks the turning point. The Roman Church as we knew it, the Church of the Syllabus, of the First Vatican Council, the Church which was always at loggerheads with the modern world, had come to its end. A new era began of which no one can know where it will end. The exciting debates, the passionate controversies, the obvious breakdown of a centuries-old discipline within Roman Catholicism, the revolutionary excesses in the Catholic Churches in America and the Netherlands, are indicative of a deep spiritual crisis within the largest church of Christendom which may well end in the breakdown of its organization, in the disintegration of the vast body of the Roman Church. Even the Roman Catholic Christian who firmly believes in the divine institution of the papacy can not completely rule out the possibility that in future centuries the Pope, the Patriarch of the West, may share the destiny of the patriarchs of Alexandria, Antioch, or Constantinople, without, of course, ceasing to be for the faithful remnant of the Roman Church the successor of Peter and the Vicar of Christ with all the prerogatives of the primacy.

We modern Protestants, who are used to getting our information about the history of the church in our time either from the sensational reports of *Time* magazine or, what is still worse, from our official church papers which are always inclined to glorify their own denomination, should refrain from all malicious self-complacency, as if our poor and weak church bodies obviously had the power to survive such a catastrophe. It could be a catastrophe for all Christendom. Nor should we think that this crisis of the Roman Church will lead to a wonderful ecumenical church in which every Christian and every community which calls itself church could find a proper place after the terrible dogmatic attitudes of former centuries had finally been overcome. Such a 'church', as certain

ecumenical enthusiasts envisage it, the great future Re-united Church, based on a minimum of Christian faith and on a maximum of ecclesiastical and secular politics, would most certainly not be the Church of Christ, but the kingdom of Antichrist, while the true Church of Christ, as the little flock to which our Lord has promised the Kingdom (Luke 12:32), would pray in its catacombs the 'Marana tha' (I Cor. 16:22) of the first Church, 'Amen, Come, Lord Jesus', in firm belief in his promise: 'Surely, I am coming soon' (Rev. 22:21).

III

ONE MUST keep in mind the situation of the Roman Church at the beginning of the Council in 1962 if one wants to understand the reception which the schema *De fontibus revelationis* found and the document which was finally accepted in 1965. One of the great tasks of the Council was to finalize the unfinished business of the First Vaticanum and to settle certain problems that had arisen from the decisions of this Council which had never finished its work. It had to be adjourned *sine die* after the Italian army had conquered Rome in September, 1870, and the Papal State had ceased to exist. Since it had never been formally closed it was an open question whether a new council, as it had already been envisaged by the predecessors of Pope John, would have to be regarded as a new session of Vatican I. John XXIII decided that the Council of 1869/70 had to be regarded as closed since none of its members was still alive.

That Council had finalized two dogmatic constitutions, the 'Constitutio Dogmatica de Fide Catholica' and the 'Constitutio Prima de Ecclesia Christi'. The former dealt with the problems of the divine revelation, the acceptance of this revelation, the nature of faith, faith and reason. In dealing with the divine revelation it affirms the doctrines of Trent on Scripture and Tradition and the sole right of the magisterium of the Church to interpret the Scriptures authoritatively. It goes beyond Trent by defining the dogma of the inspiration of Scripture. Immediately after the Council the great debate in the Roman Church on the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture and its consequences began. The Modernist controversies gave to these problems a great urgency. The great Bible encyclicals from 1893 to 1943 tried to develop the doctrine. It was unavoidable that the new Council had to make a solemn declaration on this issue which had become one of the most vital questions of the Roman Church and of all Christendom.

Not less urgent was another legacy of Vatican I, the unfinished dogma of the Church. The elaborate schema of a dogmatic constitution 'De Ecclesia Christi' which was put before the Council could not be debated. Only one chapter of it, the dogma of the papacy, was finalized as the famous 'Constitutio Prima de Ecclesia Christi'. Everyone knew that a coming council would have to take up the matter. A great amount of theological work was done by Catholic scholars to prepare a later solution of this problem. The encyclical *Mystici Corporis* issued by Pius XII in 1943, was generally regarded as a forerunner of a 'Constitutio Secunda de Ecclesia Christi' to be expected from another council.

It is beyond the scope of this essay to discuss what has been proclaimed by the Second Vaticanum as a 'Dogmatic Constitution on the Church'. It gives a most important doctrine on the Church and tries to overcome the one-sidedness of the constitution of 1870 by adding the doctrine of the College of Bishops as the successor of the College of the

Apostles, while it re-affirms the doctrine of the bishop of Rome as successor of Peter and Vicar of Christ. Through it is *de facto* the supplement to the constitution of 1870, it is not called 'Constitutio Dogmatica Secunda de Ecclesia Christi'. *Lumen mundi*, as it is called after the first words, is a dogmatic constitution, as *Pastor aeternus* of 1870 was and as also the new document on Revelation (*Dei verbum*) is a dogmatic constitution. Its doctrinal content must be accepted by all Catholics. However, we find in the dogmatic constitutions of the Second Vaticanum a new way of proclaiming doctrine.

What this new way is becomes clear from the objections raised against the schema proposed by the Theological Commission in the historic discussion of 1962. We remember especially the words we have quoted from the speech made by Cardinal Bea. The Pope's intention in summoning the Council was

that the faith of the Church be presented in all its integrity and purity, but in such manner that it will be received today with benevolence. *For we are shepherds.*

This council was to be a pastoral council. How it was meant to deal with doctrinal matters and the question of truth and error had been stated in the famous words spoken by Pope John when he opened the Council on 11 October, 1962:

At the outset of the Second Vatican Council, it is evident, as always, that the truth of the Lord will remain forever. We see, in fact, as one age succeeds another, that the opinions of men follow one another and exclude each other. And often errors vanish as quickly as they arise, like fog before the sun. The Church has always opposed these errors. Frequently she has condemned them with the greatest severity. Nowadays, however, the Spouse of Christ prefers to make use of the medicine of mercy rather than that of severity. She considers that she meets the needs of the present day by demonstrating the validity of her teaching rather than by condemnations.

This is certainly a healthy reaction to the excessive use of *canones* in former councils where everyone who had doubts concerning a newly proclaimed doctrine was liberally threatened with eternal hell-fire. But such leniency may sometimes be exaggerated. Neither the prophets, nor the apostles, nor even our Lord himself could do without some very strict censures. The Bride of Christ seems already to be having serious trouble with some naughty children who capitalize on her good heart. We do not doubt that some day the right balance will be restored. There are errors which do not vanish like fog before the sun because behind them is the superhuman power of God's adversary. In his opening address John XXIII said: 'The substance of the ancient doctrine of the deposit of faith is one thing, and the way in which it is presented is another.' It is just this in itself lawful distinction which the old evil foe has used to destroy the doctrinal substance in many Protestant churches. Every heretic has claimed that his false doctrine is only 'a new way to teach the old truth.' We can only ask our Catholic brethren to learn from our experience and to be on their guard.

The pastoral character of the two dogmatic constitutions proclaimed by Vatican II on the Church and on Revelation (besides these there are a 'Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy' and a 'Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World'; the rest of the documents comprises nine 'Decrees' and three 'Declarations') finds its expression in their language. They do not speak the language of former constitutions, the language of theological definitions and legal documents, but the language of a Pastoral Letter, of spiritual admonition and even, especially in the doctrine on the Church, of Biblical theology. This corresponds to the

change in the image of the Church which is symbolized by the fact that the Pope no longer wears the tiara of the Supreme Pontiff, with its medieval-imperialistic implications, but the mitre of a bishop, and that he signs the documents: 'I, Paul, Bishop of the Catholic Church.' The new form of presenting doctrine might indicate that the era of the Roman Church in which one dogma after another has been proclaimed has come to an end. The Catholic Church of the future will make dogmatic decisions more sparingly. None of the dogmas once proclaimed can be retracted, but they will be interpreted more in their practical and liturgical meaning, as is done in the last chapter of the 'Constitution on the Church', 'The role of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, in the Mystery of Christ and the Church.'

IV

THIS CHANGE in the formulation of doctrine is of greatest importance for the relationship of Rome with the 'separated brethren'; for nothing has contributed more to the estrangement between the Christian churches than the constant proclamation of new dogmas which are unacceptable to non-Roman Christians. Between Rome and Eastern Orthodoxy there stand no longer only the issues which were at stake at the Councils of Lyons in 1274 and Florence in 1439, but also the dogmas proclaimed at Trent and at the First Vatican Council and the Mariological dogmas of 1854 and 1950. The Eastern Church also celebrates the feasts of the 8th of December and the 15th of August, but it can never accept the *dogmas* of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption of Mary. What in the Roman Church has been defined as an irreformable doctrine to be accepted by all members of the Church Catholic has remained in the East in the sphere of the liturgy and of pious opinions and mystical speculations. Hence the connection between the 'pastoral' and the 'ecumenical' character of Vatican II, as is also emphasized by the critics of the schema on the 'Sources of Revelation'. The Roman Church has at the recent Council fully accepted, without giving up any of its claims, the idea of a 're-union' of all Christians, individuals as well as communities, in one visible, truly Catholic Church on earth.

This entry of Rome into the Ecumenical Movement of our time has completely changed the ecumenical situation. We are all now no longer confronted only with the Anglican concept of a future Re-united Church, based on that minimum of doctrine which East and West, Catholicism and Protestantism have in common, and with the concept of church unity that underlies the World Council of Churches. These concepts presuppose that Rome would eventually give up her claims and cease to be Roman. We are now confronted with a plan for reunion in an ecumenical church in which all churches, without giving up any of the treasures each of them possesses, but spiritually and theologically renewed and enriched by what they can mutually accept, would come together under the renewed office of the supreme shepherd of all Christians who would rule the Church Universal together with the universal college of bishops.

The advantage of the Roman plan over those of Canterbury-Lambeth and Geneva is its feasibility. It would include Rome in the process of reunion which could never reach its goal as long as the largest church of Christendom remained outside. If it were really God's will that all Christians should be united in one visible ecclesiastical organization, if

this were the meaning of Christ's 'ut omnes unum sint', then Rome's ecumenical programme would be the only realistic one, and it could hardly be understood why it should not be adopted by the non-Roman churches within the Ecumenical Movement. It could be that with the Second Vatican Council Rome has taken over the leadership of this movement. At any rate this church is determined to do all in its power to carry out its great plan, not from lust for ecclesiastical power, but from its deepest convictions concerning the Church, its catholicity and unity. It will mobilize all its man-power, all its resources, material, spiritual, theological, ecclesiastical, in the interest of the great ecumenical idea of a Re-united Church. It will shrink back from no work, nor from any sacrifice which it can possibly make without abandoning what it must regard as the irreformable truth of the Gospel. It will proceed on the road of ecumenism trod at the Second Vaticanum wherever this road may lead. There is no way back to the church as we knew it even at the time of Pius XII.

In this context the third of the objections raised against the original draft must be understood. The traditional understanding of Scripture and Tradition as two sources of revelation of equal rank must make any union with Protestant churches, including the Anglicans, impossible. Just as Rome can never accept the *Sola Scriptura*, so the churches of the Reformation can never accept Holy Tradition as a second source of Christian doctrine beside Holy Scripture. This is the result of the great theological 'dialogue' which has been going on since the sixteenth century between the major branches of Western Christendom, both in polemical controversies and in the irenic attempts at union or at least at peaceful co-existence. For all great theology in the Western world has been a constant dialogue between Catholics, Lutherans, Anglicans and the various Reformed groups, as their learned theological works show.

To overcome the deadlock the 'new theology' in the Roman Church, encouraged and supported by the discussions within the ecumenical organizations of our time, has proposed a new theory which was taken for granted by the bishops who rejected the original draft; there is only one source of revelation, Holy Scripture. Tradition is the authoritative interpretation of Scripture by the Church. Since the doctrine of two sources had its basis in the decree of the Fourth Session of Trent (April, 1546) on the Holy Scriptures and the Traditions of the Apostles, a new interpretation of this decree was necessary. Trent does not speak expressly of two sources or of one source of revelation. The word *fons* ('source'), appears only in the statement that the Gospel is the source of all saving truth and of discipline of conduct. This truth and this discipline, it continues, 'are contained in written books and in unwritten traditions' ('in libris scriptis et sine scripto traditionibus'). Both the Scriptures and the Traditions must be accepted 'with equal pious affection and reverence' ('pari pietatis affectu ac reverentia'). It is quite clear that the dogma of the Church, the content of the divine revelation, is to be found neither in Scripture alone nor in the Traditions alone. If the meaning of such a text is to be found in the text itself and not elsewhere, it is quite clear that the two-sources theory is the doctrine of Trent, and it is quite astonishing that the defenders of the one-source theory could read their view into that clear text, maintaining that the doctrine of the two equally authoritative sources was an arbitrary interpretation by the theologians of the counter-Reformation period.

That 'systematic' theologians like Hans Küng could commit such a blunder might be understandable, but that they were supported by

historians of the rank of Geiselmann and even Jedin, the historian who is writing the standard work on the Council of Trent, can be understood only from the fact that Catholic historians have learnt to interpret history from a dogmatic point of view. One is reminded of Archbishop (later Cardinal) Manning's word addressed to the historians who, like Doellinger, could not accept certain historical statements of Vatican I on the papacy: 'one must overcome history with the dogma'. These historians have tried to find a basis for their interpretation by asking not so much what the fathers of Trent actually said, but what they intended to say.

* They have indeed rejected the statement of the first draft that the Gospel is contained *partly* ('partim') in written books, and *partly* ('partim') in unwritten traditions. But this had to be done because it would have provoked the unanswerable question, Which part belongs to the Scripture and which to the Traditions? Even the present text has not prevented this question from becoming a testing ground for the acumen of the professors of Fundamental Theology. Still the present constitution gives one answer in which all theological schools had agreed: 'Through the same Tradition the Church's full canon of the sacred books is known' (Article 8). The real issue was the statement that Scriptures and Traditions must be received 'with equal pious affection and reverence'. It was against this phrase that a minority of the Council of Trent fought a losing battle, recommending that something like 'similar' be said instead of 'equal'.

It is to be expected that the new constitution will put an end to the attempts of the 'new theology' to interpret Trent in the sense of the one-source theory. It repeats expressly the decision of Trent with the characteristic inversion: 'Therefore both the sacred Tradition and sacred Scripture are to be accepted with the same sense of devotion and reverence' (Art. 9). This sentence is preceded by another which, according to Karl Rahner, was inserted in the text of the constitution at a later stage at the special request of Pope Paul VI: 'It is not from Scripture alone that the Church draws her certainty about everything which has been revealed'. This sentence is a rejection

* of the *Sola Scriptura* of the Reformation even if it speaks only of the *certainty* about the content of revelation and not of the *content* itself. For the certainty can in this context not be separated from the content. It is not only in this sentence that the document breathes a spirit of compromise and ambiguity which seems to be inseparable from modern ecumenism. Is Rome going to become a second Geneva?

V

BUT IT is time to turn to the constitution itself. Its title is the 'Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation'. The first words, by which it will also be known, are 'Dei verbum' ('Hearing the Word of God'). It is a short document, comprising 26 articles, divided into the Preface (art. 1) and six chapters:

- I. Revelation itself (2-6). II. The transmission of the divine Revelation (7-10). III. The divine Inspiration and the Interpretation of Sacred Scripture (11-13). IV. The Old Testament (14-16). V. The New Testament (17-20). VI. Sacred Scripture in the Life of the Church (21-26).

The Preface defines the object. Starting from John 1:2f, the Council announces its intention to set forth, following in the footsteps of the Councils of Trent and of Vatican I,

authentic teaching about divine revelation and about how it is handed on, so that by hearing the message of salvation the whole world may believe, by believing it may hope, and by hoping it may love.

Chapter I states the fact of Revelation.

In His goodness and wisdom, God chose to reveal Himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of His will. The invisible God speaks through Christ, the Word made flesh, to men calling them into fellowship with Himself.

This revelation is realized by deeds and words, Christ being the mediator and the fullness of it. After a short reference to the natural revelation of God in the works of creation the chapter speaks of the supernatural revelation in which God acts and speaks to men from the first promise of salvation (Gen. 3:15) through the patriarchs, Moses and the prophets of Jesus Christ.

The Christian dispensation as the new and definitive covenant will never pass away, and we now await no further new public revelation before the glorious manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This revelation is to be accepted by men through 'the obedience of faith'. This obedience is now no longer regarded, as in the 'Constitution of the Catholic Faith' of Vatican I, as mainly intellectual assent, but as a personal commitment in which 'man entrusts his whole self freely to God' (Art. 5). This obedience of faith is a gift of the grace of God. The chapter ends with a re-affirmation of the doctrine of Vatican I that God, the beginning and end of all things, can be known with certainty from created reality by the light of human reason.

Chapter II on the 'Transmission of Divine Revelation' contains the decision of the crucial issue of the source or the sources of Divine Revelation. The question as it had been formulated on either side was not taken up. The new starting point permitted a different way of solving the problem. Art. 7 speaks of God's will that what he had revealed for the salvation of man should be handed on to all generations 'Therefore Christ the Lord, in whom the full revelation . . . is brought to completion, commissioned the apostles to preach the gospel to all men.' The commission was fulfilled in their oral preaching and 'by those apostles and apostolic men who under the inspiration of the . . . Holy Spirit committed the message of salvation to writing.' To keep the gospel whole and alive, the apostles 'left bishops as their successors, handing over their own teaching role' to them.

This sacred tradition, therefore, and sacred Scripture of both the Old and New Testament are like a mirror in which the pilgrim Church on earth looks at God . . . until she is brought finally to see Him as He is, face to face (Art. 7).

One wonders why, in this context, nothing is said about the nature of the Old Testament and its meaning for Jesus, the apostles and the Church of the Apostolic age. We have to come back to this.

In this way Scripture and Tradition belong always together. 'Sacred tradition and sacred Scripture form one sacred deposit of the word of God, which is committed to the Church'. This is the main thesis put forward in the following articles of the chapter from which we have already quoted the sentence about the *Sola Scriptura* and the re-affirmation of the Tridentine sentence on the equal devotion and reverence which we owe to Scripture and Tradition.

The task of authentically interpreting the word of God, whether written or handed on, has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office of the Church (Art. 10).

This office

is not above the word of God, but serves it by explaining it faithfully with the help of the Holy Spirit; it draws from this one deposit of faith everything which it presents for belief as divinely revealed.

So a third factor in the transmission of the revelation comes in:

It is clear therefore, that sacred *tradition*, sacred *Scripture* and the teaching authority of the *Church* . . . are so linked together that one cannot stand without the others, and that all together and each in its own way under the action of the one Holy Spirit contribute effectively to the salvation of souls.

The short Chapter III deals in three articles with 'The divine Inspiration and the Interpretation of Sacred Scripture'. The doctrine of Vatican I on Inspiration is re-affirmed, the doctrine of its inerrancy which was so strongly maintained in the Bible Encyclicals of the modern popes from 1893 to 1943, and therefore regarded as something which could not be denied by any Catholic, is weakened to the vague and non-committal formula that

the books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching . . . without error *that truth which God wanted put into the sacred writings for the sake of our salvation* (Art. 11).

Everyone asks: What is this truth? What does belong to it, what does not? Art. 12 deals with the tasks of the exegete to clarify by scholarly research the meaning of Holy Scripture 'so that through preparatory study the judgment of the Church may mature.' In any case the final judgment on what the Scripture teaches lies with the Church which carries out the ministry of guarding and interpreting the Word of God. The chapter ends with a short art. 13 on Chrysostom's doctrine of the condescension of God when he speaks to us in Holy Scripture and with the comparison of God's speaking in human language to the Incarnation.

Chapter IV deals with 'The Old Testament' in three small articles. Again the history of salvation is alluded to.

The principal purpose to which the plan of the Old Covenant was directed was to prepare both for the coming of the Christ . . . and of the messianic kingdom, to announce its coming by prophecy . . . and to indicate its meaning through various types (Art. 15).

'Now the books of the Old Testament reveal to all men the knowledge of God and of men.' They contain teachings about God, sound wisdom about human life and a wonderful treasury of prayers. In these books 'the mystery of our salvation is present in a hidden way. Christians should receive them with reverence'. The last article speaks briefly about the relationship between the Old and the New Testament. God is 'inspirer and author of both'. The New Testament is 'hidden in the Old, the Old made manifest in the New'. The books of the Old Covenant acquire their full meaning in the New Testament and in turn shed light on it and explain it. In chapter V, 'The New Testament', all emphasis is placed on the four Gospels and their trustworthiness:

Holy Mother Church has firmly . . . held and continues to hold that the four Gospels . . . whose historical character the Church unhesitatingly asserts, hand on what Jesus Christ . . . really did and taught.

The sacred authors wrote the four Gospels, *selecting* some things from the many which had been handed on . . . *reducing* some of them to a synthesis, *explicating* ('*explanantes*') some things in view of the *situation of their churches*, and preserving the *form of proclamation* but always in such fashion that they told us the *honest truth about Jesus* (Art. 19).

One notices a certain anxiety in view of the dangers of a new Modernism which stands at the door of the Roman Church.

The last Chapter, 'Sacred Scripture in the Life of the Church', deals with the need of the Church for the use and the study of the Scriptures.

For, inspired by God . . . they impart the word of God Himself . . . and make the voice of the Holy Spirit resound in the words of the prophets and apostles.

All the *preaching* of the Church must be nourished and ruled by sacred Scripture. For in the sacred books the Father who is in heaven meets His children and speaks with them (Art. 21).

'Easy access to sacred Scripture should be provided for all the Christian faithful.' The Church with maternal concern sees to it that suitable and correct translations are made into different languages, especially from the *original* texts of the sacred books. And even 'co-operation with the separated brethren' might be possible in producing new translations (Art. 22). The Church should further the scholarly exploration and exposition of the sacred books.

This sacred Synod *encourages* the sons of the Church who are *biblical scholars* to continue energetically with the work they have so well begun, with a constant renewal of vigor and with *loyalty to the mind of the Church* (Art. 23).

Art. 24 reminds the faithful and the clergy that 'the study of the sacred page is, as it were, the soul of sacred theology.' The last articles underscore the importance of the Bible for the whole church, the shepherds as well as the flock.

Prayer should accompany the reading of sacred Scripture, so that God and man may talk together; for 'we speak to Him when we pray; we hear Him when we read the divine sayings' (Art. 25, quotation from Ambrose).

An interesting suggestion is made in the recommendation to prepare 'editions of the sacred Scriptures, provided with suitable comments, also for the use of non-Christians and adapted to their situation.' The concluding article expresses the hope of a spiritual revival through the new study of the Bible on all levels of the church:

Just as the life of the Church grows through persistent participation in the Eucharistic mystery, so we may hope for a new surge of spiritual vitality from intensified veneration for God's word, 'which lasts forever' (Is. 40:8; cf. I Peter 1:23-25).

VI

THE EVALUATION of the constitution *Dei verbum* may begin with the last chapter. It reveals a process which is going on in the Roman Catholic Church. In the passionate appeals of this chapter, as well as in its practical proposals, which are based on experiences of the Catholic Bible Movement that has now been going on for more than thirty years, sounds the cry for the Bible which, though preserved and honoured in the liturgy, had been lost to a large extent in the preaching and teaching of the Church. A real hunger and thirst for the Word of God is awakening in the Roman Church on all levels from the Roman curia to the parish and the Catholic home, from the places of highest scholarship to the children in the parish schools.

This happens at a time, let us not forget that, when the Protestant churches of the world seem to have lost or to be losing the Bible. 'We have lost the Word of God and cannot find it again.' With these words the leader of a Protestant Theological College described the overall situation of his own church and the Protestant churches in general, after he had returned from a long overseas trip where he had the opportunity

of investigating the situation in other parts of the world. I heard him saying that in the spirit of sadness and deep humility. He was not passing judgment on others. And we, too, want to refrain from this, when we have to say a critical word about the present situation. Let me repeat what was said before, that Christians of all denominations are going through the same experiences. The shame and glory of one church is the shame and glory of all churches. We are all linked together by the same emergencies, needs, troubles and sins, as we are all linked together by the fact that we all have the same Lord who is the judge and the saviour of us all. So let us rejoice with our separated brethren in the Roman Church at the rediscovery of the Bible as the living and active (Heb. 4:12) Word of God. Let us help them where they need our help. Let them help us where we are in need of what they can teach us. Let everything that has now to be said about the 'Constitution on Divine Revelation' be said and understood in this sense.

There is one thing we can learn from them. This is courage. The bishops assembled for the Second Vatican Council had courage. Think what it must have meant to them to give up the Latin liturgy and to take all the risks connected with such a change. All the great changes in theology, church administration and discipline, of which no one can say where they will lead, have been made by men who had courage. What courage was needed to leave the ivory towers of the past, to face and to challenge the modern world from which the church had been separated for generations. One can well understand the deep concern of Pope Paul when he sees the outgrowth of what is meant to be a renewal and what threatens to become a devastating revolution. But churches that have no courage are doomed.

The Church of the Apostles was a courageous church. Peter and Paul who fearlessly died as martyrs in the capital of the Roman Empire became the Romulus and Remus of a new Rome, as 'the shining army of the martyrs', of which the *Te deum* sings, has at all times conquered the world. The Reformers of the sixteenth century who opened a new era of the Church were men of courage. So were the confessors in England, Catholics and Protestants, who died with the same psalms on their lips because they dared to resist their royal tyrants with their acts of supremacy and conformity and have thus gained for the world that freedom of conscience which is now recognized everywhere as the presupposition of all healthy Christian life. The great founders of Christian missions from the old Irish and Syrian monks in Europe and Asia to the present day, the Pilgrim Fathers of many denominations who opened new chapters in the history of the church in foreign continents, all testify to the truth that courage belongs to the nature of the true Church.

This courage is the fruit of faith; it is so also in the case of the Roman Church of our time which is not afraid to leave the safe fortress in which it had settled down, safe from the dangers of a hostile world, and to go 'to the land that I will show you', the unknown land of the third millenium of Christian history. She knows that her Lord will not let down his Church. She believes firmly in his promises. It is refreshing to see in this age of doubt, uncertainty and despair at least one church which still dares to believe.

Having said this, we have to say something on the doctrine contained in this 'Dogmatic Constitution.' It is, as we have seen, an attempt to overcome one of the crucial issues, the great contrast between, on the one hand, the churches that confess the *Sola Scriptura* of the Reformation and, on the other, Rome, which is bound to the doctrine of Trent and

the two Vatican Councils that the Word of God comes to us in sacred Scripture and sacred tradition, which must both be accepted with equal piety and reverence because they cannot be separated. These—so we are told in the new constitution—and the teaching office of the Church which has to interpret Scripture and tradition authoritatively and infallibly 'are so linked and joined together that one cannot stand without the others.' Can we accept this? This is the question which the constitution addresses to us.

VII

OUR ANSWER begins with a question we have to put to our Catholic friends and brethren. How is it to be explained that the Roman Church has so little understanding of the Old Testament as the Word of God given to the Church? K. Rahner and H. Vorgrimler, in their German edition of the texts of the Council⁵, say concerning the fourth chapter of *Dei verbum*:

One should not silently pass over the shortcomings of this chapter which hardly does justice to the facts that the Old Testament was the Holy Writ of Jesus and the Primitive Church and that it contains a much longer experience of mankind in its relationship with God than does the New Testament.

Similar observations can be made concerning Catholic books on the Bible, even of Karl Rahner's 'Inspiration in the Bible'.⁶ Holy Scripture proper is for the Church the Old Testament, as Luther always maintained. The Church could, according to him, perhaps exist without a written New Testament, as she indeed did in the first generations, but not without the Old. What the Old Testament in the three parts of the Hebrew canon (see Luke 24:27, 32 and 44) meant to Jesus everybody knows. One has only to think of the answer he gave to the tempter (Matt. 4:4), 'It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.' The most frequently quoted Bible passage in the church of the first centuries is, as far as I can see, Isaiah 53. The proclamation of the apostles and of the entire first church is the glad tidings that Is. 53 and certain psalms which were understood to prophesy the resurrection of the Messiah have been fulfilled, 'whereof we are all witnesses' (Acts 2:32). 'According to the Scriptures' (I Cor. 15:3 and 4) means even in the Nicene Creed 'according to the Old Testament', though the clause of the same Creed on the Holy Spirit, 'Who spake by the prophets' was soon understood as referring to the whole Bible, including the New Testament (see Epiphanius and the Armenian form of the Creed).

We understand what it means to us all if our Catholic brethren have now learnt that not only some Messianic prophecies, but the whole Old Testament in the history of salvation points to the coming of the Messiah and the Messianic Kingdom, even the chapters and passages that deal with creation. But the mutual interdependence of creation and salvation, so important to the Old and the New Testament and to the early church, must be fully evaluated. The creator is certainly the redeemer, but the redeemer is also the creator. Hence it must be seen that the Old Testament looks not only into the depths of history, but also into the depths of the universe. With its traditions which go back into the oldest

5. *Kleines Konzilkompendium*, 1966, p. 364.

6. *Quaestiones Disputatae* I.

history of mankind and look even beyond that into 'the beginning' it is indeed, as it were, as the Greek synagogue understood it, 'the oldest book in the world'. At the same time it looks into the depths of nature (certain psalms, Job, Proverbs 8:22ff., and other passages on the divine 'Wisdom'), as also does the New Testament (e.g. Rom. 8:19ff.; Hebrews 1).

The meaning of the statement that the entire Bible is God's Word (and therefore God's revelation, for we should never forget that both Church and Bible know the equation 'revelatio sive locutio Dei', and that it is most dangerous to try to separate these two) and that the Old Testament is God's Word in no lesser degree than the New Testament, we all, Catholics and Protestants, would understand better if we had a better understanding of the Inspiration of Holy Scripture. The doctrine that the Scriptures are sacred and canonical, 'because they, having been written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, have God for their author and are as such given to the Church', as the First Vaticanum puts it⁷, is not a theory of certain theological schools, but is a dogma of the entire Church, expressed already in the clause of the Nicene Creed on the Holy Spirit, 'Who spake by the prophets' ('qui locutus est per prophetas'), and based on numerous passages of the New Testament. However, how inspiration must be understood, how the equation of the human words of the Bible with the Word of God is to be understood, on this the Church has never spoken.

It belongs to the tragedy of the Church in the centuries of the dissolution of the Roman Empire and the disintegration of the ancient civilization in West and East that the doctrine of the Holy Spirit was never finalized. Certain questions remained open and have been differently answered by the theologians of the East and the West. The most famous case, though by no means the only one, is the question of the *Filioque*, the question whether the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father or from the Father and the Son, one of the great differences between the Eastern and the Western Church.

The history of the liturgy also shows that the problem of the Holy Spirit has never been fully solved. The liturgy knows no solemn oration addressed to the Holy Spirit who with the Father and the Son lives and reigns forever one God world without end, the only exception being the *Adsumus* at an ecumenical council. Even at Pentecost the oration is addressed to the Father. In the old Latin liturgies we find invocations of the Holy Spirit, especially the 'Veni Sancte Spiritus' of Pentecost, but even Pentecost is liturgically speaking not a feast of the Holy Spirit, but the last day of Paschaltide. Often one has the impression that in the Catholic Churches Eastern and Western the Mother of God has taken the place which properly belongs to the Holy Spirit, at least in popular piety. In this context it must be realized that Inspiration also as the work of the Holy Spirit has not been properly understood.

When in the Sistine Chapel in Rome the Nicene Creed is sung with its 'Qui locutus est per prophetas' many eyes may look to the ceiling with Michelangelo's overwhelming paintings of the prophets and sibyls. What have the pagan sibyls to do with Isaiah and Jeremiah? They have also prophesied. They have even prophesied the coming of a saviour. Vergil, who describes in the sixth book of the *Aeneid* the holy ecstasis of the Sibyl of Cumae when the spirit of her god fills her, in the fourth eclogue gives the prophecy by the same sibyl of a child who will soon be born

7. *Const. De fide Catholica*, Denzinger 1787, new edition 3006.

and who, when he has grown up, will bring back the golden age of peace to a war-torn world. Constantine made use of this poem in his famous speech at the Council of Nicea. The medieval juxtaposition of prophets and sibyls which still resounds in the 'teste David cum Sibylla' of the *Dies irae* in the Requiem Mass goes back to St. Augustine. But what has Vergil's and his sibyl's political saviour to do with the Immanuel of the First and the Servant and Lamb of God of the Second Isaiah?

This confusion shows what is bound to happen if the inspiration of Scripture is understood in terms of a psychological process. This is what happened in the ancient church when the Latin Fathers Augustine and Jerome in the dying Roman Empire around A.D. 400 and Gregory the Great in the dark ages around 600 tried to describe with the means of ancient psychology the process that goes on in the soul of a man who is writing with paper and ink a divine book, every word of which must be regarded as God's Word. The result of these efforts was that theory which was handed on throughout the Middle Ages, survived even the Reformation and celebrated its triumph in the orthodox theology of Roman Catholicism, Anglicanism, Calvinism and even Lutheranism in the seventeenth century until it broke down in the era of Enlightenment and historical scholarship.

God gives the 'impulse to write'. He provides ('suggests' or 'dictates', which can, but must not, be understood in the sense in which we speak of 'dictation') the content and the fitting words. The result is a flawless, perfect book without error or contradiction. The personality of the individual writer is supposed to have been preserved. This should explain certain differences in the style and manner of presentation. In this way the absence of any mistake or 'error' is safeguarded. If contradictions, inaccuracies or mistakes should be found, they must be explained by way of harmonization or by the assumption that a copyist may have made an error. For the original copies have been lost. What a pity, one can only say.

So we have a Bible of which, in spite of this theory of inspiration, we can never say with absolute certainty: This is most certainly the unadulterated Word of God. For we never can know whether or not perhaps very early copyists' errors have crept into this or that text. One has only to think of what it means that for the Church of the first centuries the Septuagint was its Bible—it took some time until Augustine was reconciled with Jerome's venture of a Latin Bible translated from the Hebrew—and that this is still the case in the entire Eastern Church. The problem begins already with the Old Testament quotations in the New Testament.

Modern Protestantism has tried to solve the problem of an antiquated, untenable theory of the inspiration of the Bible by ignoring not only this theory, but also the dogma of Inspiration itself. The result is that the Word of God has been lost altogether. Is the Roman Catholic Church now going the same way? Sometimes it looks like that. The constitution under discussion also seems to point in that direction. But we cannot believe that. Rome can never abandon the dogma, so clearly reaffirmed at the First Vaticanum. So we ask our Catholic brethren why they do not try to reinterpret the dogma of Inspiration, following the example set by the encyclical *Divino afflante Spiritu* of 1943 in which the life-work of the great Bible scholar Augustine Bea has found a wonderful climax. The shortcomings of *Dei verbum* are largely due to the neglect of this task.

ONE SHOULD have expected that at the time of the Reformation the question would have been raised whether the old form of the doctrine had to be abandoned. But the time for that had not yet come, mainly because the historical problems involved were not yet understood by the Reformers and by their adversaries. Thus Christendom had to carry the burden of a tradition which was taken for granted. This was pathetic in the case of the Protestant churches. Despite their serious appeal to the Scriptures in all matters of faith and despite the amazing progress which the exegesis of Scripture was making they failed to ask whether the doctrinal formulations of the dogma of inspiration were really biblical. It is perhaps the greatest tragedy of the churches of the Reformation, the churches of the *Sola Scriptura*, that the doctrine 'De sacra Scriptura' with which their great works on dogmatics began was not the doctrine of Scripture itself, but a venerable Patristic tradition. Our churches had to pay heavily for that. Some have died of this error and others are today dying of it.

Rome, on the other hand, was not much better off. It developed in contrast to the *Sola Scriptura* the Tridentine doctrine of Scripture and Tradition, both of which have the same authority. This is not only the doctrine of the post-Tridentine theology. It is the doctrine of Trent itself, as we have seen. It is a myth that the 'two sources' theory has replaced an older doctrine which regarded the Scriptures as the only source of doctrine and tradition as the authoritative interpretation of the Bible by the teaching office of the Church. There had never been in the Church a unified doctrine in this matter, as there had also never been, in spite of all more or less authoritative lists of the biblical books, any unanimity concerning the borders of the canon. There were always men who treated our 'apocrypha' as Jerome and Luther have treated them. Luther's view that the epistle of James is no apostolic book and should, therefore, not be regarded as canonical was shared by his great adversary, the learned Thomist Cardinal Cajetan. It was the decree of Trent which put an end to the centuries-old discussions.

How fluid the borders between the Bible and the Fathers were appears from the enumeration of the sacred Scriptures by schoolmen like Hugo of St. Victor. The 'Apostolic Canons', the old church rules attributed to the apostles, are still today in the canon of certain Oriental churches. Even at Trent it could happen that their inclusion in the canon was suggested⁸. It is strange to see the very arbitrary and opportunistic reasons for the acceptance of a certain book, e.g. II Maccabees, with its support of the prayer and sacrifice for the dead (12:43ff.). A strict doctrine of traditions (the plural is still used in the decree of Trent) seems to have been developed in reaction to the Reformation by the new theology that grew mainly in Louvain and which wanted a reform of the Church⁹.

Since medieval theology always considered Holy Writ as the proper source of doctrine, the master or doctor of theology was doctor of sacred Scripture. His duty was to interpret the Scriptures according to the sense held by the Church whose task it was to interpret the Bible with authority. Where the borders of the Scriptures were and whether there was a second source of doctrine remained, in the Middle Ages, an open question. The authority of the Fathers was respected and identified with the authority of the Church. But during the centuries after the breakdown of the

8. H. Jedin, *A History of the Council of Trent*, Vol II, 1961, p. 57.

9. John L. Murphy, *The Notion of Tradition in John Driedo*, 1959.

unquestioned authority of the papacy around A.D. 1300, the trend towards a *Sola Scriptura* is noticeable. It is not yet the *Sola Scriptura* of the Reformation, but that of Wyclif, Hus, the medieval sects and of late scholasticism. If at Wittenberg, under the leadership of Luther, a new centre of biblical studies arose nothing could be said against the *Sola Scriptura* as at least a possibility within Catholic theology. The same is true of the *Sola Fide*. Both 'solas' were only declared heresies at the Council of Trent.

IX

THIS BRINGS US to the final and decisive question: Is the new constitution acceptable to the churches of the Reformation today, or can it at least be regarded as a step in the direction towards a solution of the old controversy? Our answer must be: It presents a good starting point for a serious dialogue between Rome and the evangelical churches, but not more. It helps to clarify the issues, to formulate the real *status controversiae*. What is the point at issue? We do not deny the existence of a living tradition in the church. The doctrine is not simply passed on by passing on a book. As the prophetic and apostolic writings have grown out of the oral proclamation of the prophets and apostles, so they are passed on not only as written or printed books, but as the basis of the preaching and teaching of the Church. Such tradition must have existed already in the time of the Old Testament. When the people fled to Egypt or were deported to Babylonia they did not have in their pockets a Bible or parts of the Bible. The content of the sacred writings lived on in their memory, the books, as far as they existed, were kept in their synagogues and restored and copied, read aloud—even private reading was done aloud (Acts 8:3)—and meditated on, taught by the fathers and memorized by the children in the house, constantly meditated on by pious people (Deut. 6:6ff.).

When we speak of tradition we should not only think of the apostolic tradition in the New Testament, but also of this tradition which kept the written Word of God alive in the centuries before Christ. There are, of course, traditions of various natures. There were in Jerusalem the traditions of the Sadducees who regarded only the *Torah* as God's word and had very strong liturgical interests. There was the tradition of the Pharisees, and again among them several schools of thought. There was the tradition kept in the Rabbinic schools. There were the simple people in whom the faith and the hope of the fathers lived. Mary and Joseph, Zacharias and Elisabeth, Simeon and Hannah may be found among them. In these circles the *Benedictus*, the *Magnificat* and the *Nunc dimittis* were sung. They were the first to recognize the Messiah while the guardians of Jewish orthodoxy put him to death.

Tradition stood against tradition. The psalms, the prophets were interpreted differently by the different traditions, just as later the Petrine texts of the Gospels were differently interpreted by the traditions of the East and the West. It is the same with the oral preaching of the prophets. Jeremiah proclaimed the destruction of Jerusalem. He was denounced as a false prophet. Had not Isaiah prophesied just the opposite and been vindicated by the events? Jeremiah regarded the prophets of a happy end at his time as false prophets. The people at Jerusalem were confused. Where was the divinely appointed infallible teaching office to decide this issue with authority? Who was to decide in the earthly days of our Lord whether his claim was right or wrong? If a clear decision might have been

expected anywhere, then it was in the Sanhedrin where the learned doctors of Scripture and the most eminent religious leaders of God's people constituted the highest spiritual authority which existed in the world at that time. Their decision was wrong.

But there must be, we are told, an infallible teaching office to explain the Scriptures. If God wanted to reveal himself to men he would not give them only a book which can be and is being interpreted in various ways. It is a logical conclusion that he must have provided a living teaching authority, whatever it may be, a council or a pope or a theological faculty or some church committee. What is the use of a revelation which every individual can understand at his pleasure? This was the argument of Erasmus also in his great contention with Luther. Why did this great leader of European culture and scholarship, this master-mind of his time, refuse to accept the Reformation? The encounter between the Reformer and the great Humanist was an event of the first magnitude in the history of European culture. For it foreshadowed what was going to happen in the subsequent centuries until the present time.

In his *De libero arbitrio diatribe* Erasmus defended in the free will of man what was to him the dignity of man. This was threatened by Luther's doctrine that man is a poor miserable sinner who can do nothing for his salvation. That man is weak, imperfect and inclined to all sorts of sin, Erasmus would admit. He was very realistic in his view of man after all his experience as the son of a priest. But it was the '*sola gratia*', by grace only, which he rejected. And he defended God against Luther, God who is good and not a tyrant who condemns people who can do nothing but sin. God is light and not darkness, as his disciple Zwingli a few years later maintained against the Reformer of Wittenberg. And he attacked Luther's treatment of Scripture. The *Sola Scriptura* is closely linked with the *Sola Gratia*. To understand Scripture we need scholarship, the knowledge of the interpretation by the Fathers and the guidance of the Church. We should be careful with our own judgment. Luther, he feels, is too dogmatic. Scripture is full of mysteries. We should abstain from those 'firm assertions' in which Luther indulges. Over against Luther's dogmatism he confesses that he would rather side with the sceptics. In all these points Erasmus speaks on behalf of modern man who, though knowing of man's weakness, has not given up his belief in man; who believes in grace, though not in grace alone; who wants the Bible, but not the Bible only; who wants to retain Christianity, but an undogmatic Christianity; who believes in God, in Christ, but whose faith is always intermingled with a certain amount of scepticism.

What is Luther's answer? There is no Christian faith which is not based on the Word of God, and the Word of God we find in the Scriptures, and in Scripture only. The Fathers can err. Traditions are human. Whether they convey to me the truth, I cannot know unless I see that their content is confirmed by the Scriptures. To the objection that the Scriptures are sometimes dark, contradicting each other and therefore in need of an authoritative interpretation, Luther replies with his doctrine of the *claritas sacrae Scripturae*, the clarity of the Scriptures. As a biblical scholar, Luther knew of course of the problems of exegesis. During his whole life he remained the humble student of the Bible, constantly improving not only his translation, but also his exegesis. The clarity of the Scriptures is not the clarity of a text-book on mathematics or of a historical work written according to the rules of modern historiography. Their clarity lies rather in their content. This content, the content of the entire Bible (Luke 24:44, cf. Acts 10:43: 'To him give all the prophets

witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins') is Christ. 'Tolle Christum e scripturis, quid amplius invenies?' ('Take away Christ from the Scriptures, what else will you find?')¹⁰

Christ is the content of the Scriptures not in the sense that he would be the object of a theological work on Christology. He is the content of the Bible because he is present in the Bible. It is not the human author who reminds us of him by speaking of him. It is God the Holy Spirit who makes him present through his divine witness. For this is the work of the Paraclete who brings to the remembrance of the disciples what Jesus has taught them (John 14:26), who bears witness to him and supplements the testimony of the eyewitnesses (15:26; 16:12f.) and glorifies him. For the Spirit and Christ belong always together, our two 'Paracletes' (cf. John 14:16 with I John 2:1) whose mutual relationship belongs to the mystery of the Blessed Trinity (see also what St. Paul says about the understanding of the Old Testament by the Jews, II Cor. 3:14-18). This real presence of the Triune God in the Scriptures distinguishes the Bible from all other books in the world and makes it divine revelation.

This revelation of the Triune God is accepted by faith. By that faith which the Holy Spirit creates 'where and when it pleases God'¹¹ in those who hear the Gospel. According to Luther and Calvin it is this 'testimonium Spiritus Sancti internum' which makes us understand the testimony which the Holy Spirit gives in the Scriptures to Christ. The great truths about Christ which the Church confesses in the Creeds are not human opinions, they are divine truth: the true humanity of Christ in which he is 'of one substance with us', as the Chalcedonian formula puts it, our brother as the New Testament says (Heb. 2:17; Rom. 8:29); his true divinity in which he is 'of one substance with the Father', i.e. 'God from God, light from light, very God from very God' (cf. Heb. 1:3); the unity of his divine-human person; his incarnation, suffering, and death 'for us', 'for us men and for our salvation'; his resurrection and ascension, his sitting on the right hand of the Father; his coming again with glory to judge both the living and the dead.

All these dogmatic statements are not human opinions and theories. They are the objective content of the divine revelation in Scripture, just as the content of the confession which Simon Peter made on behalf of the Twelve, 'Thou art the Christ', was more than a subjective opinion: 'Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona; for flesh and blood has not revealed it to you, but my father who is in heaven' (Matt. 16:16f.). This is the origin of the dogma of the Church. It has not been invented by men. It is given in the divine revelation. This is the reason why Luther in *De servo arbitrio* takes exception to Erasmus' scepticism. 'The Holy Spirit is no sceptic', he says. 'Tolle assertiones et tulisti Christianismum'.¹² 'Take away the dogmatic statements and you have taken away Christianity.' Christianity is *per definitionem* a dogmatic, perhaps better, *the* dogmatic religion, based on the dogma 'Jesus is the Christ', which no man has invented. With the refutation of Erasmus Luther refutes the entire religious scepticism of the modern world whose spokesman Erasmus was. This includes the Christian scepticism which does not want a dogma, but only pious opinions and religious sentiments.

10. *De Servo Arbitrio*, Weimar edition of Luther's Works, Vol 18, p 606.

11. *Augsburg Confession*, V.

12. Weimar edition, Vol 18, p 603.

If this is the meaning of the *Sola Scriptura*, then it will be understandable why we cannot give it up. We have, like our fathers in the Reformation, the highest respect for the great heritage of the Church of all ages. The ancient creeds are our creeds. The Fathers of the ancient Church are our Fathers. We are in one Church with Ambrose and Augustine, with Athanasius and Chrysostom, with Anselm and Bernard. We make use of all the treasures of the Church in liturgy, church order and pastoral wisdom of all centuries, in so far as we value the tradition of the Church very highly and preserve everything we can preserve. But not everything which comes to us from the past can be accepted. There are good and bad, true and false traditions. No church would deny that. Every church must have a rule and norm by which life and work, faith and order are measured. This is to us the Bible and nothing else. As far as the foundation of the faith is concerned and the preservation of the purity of the Gospel which was the concern of our fathers, even as it was of the Fathers of Trent, we can only say: 'Verbum solum habemus', 'we hold the Word alone'.

X

IF WE acted against this rule, what would be the consequence? We want our Catholic brethren to understand that we do not want to hurt them if we express our deep concern that the acceptance of anything else as the Word of God except the Bible and the proclamation of its content, means *de facto* the acceptance of a human authority as equal to that of God. Even the *Constitutio*, as we have seen, makes it clear that sacred tradition, sacred Scripture and the teaching authority of the Church are so linked and joined together that one cannot stand without the others. If this is so, then we are confronted with the alternative: 'Holy Church or Holy Writ?' Father Tavard in his book *Holy Writ or Holy Church* tries to show that both belong together, because Holy Writ cannot be understood without Holy Church. This is also the thesis of the constitution we have been considering. But in the very moment in which we *de facto* subordinate the Scriptures to the authority of the Church, the Church becomes not only the judge, but also the source of doctrine.

What is the source of the doctrine of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of 1854? Certainly not Holy Scripture. Nor is it an apostolic tradition. It is the Church, 'das Glaubensbewusstsein der Kirche' ('the Church's consciousness of belief'). What is the source of the dogma of the Assumption of 1950? It is not based on Scripture in spite of the attempt to show by way of logical conclusions that it has a remote basis in the Bible. Nor does it belong to the apostolic tradition. From where does the modern Catholic Church know that the apostles knew what no one knew before certain legends of the fifth century were known? From where did the popes, who proclaimed these doctrines as 'revealed dogma' which must be believed by all Christians, obtain knowledge of such revelations? The Church has here become the source of the dogma.

It is not accidental that in the handbooks on dogmatics of the last generation in the Roman Church ecclesiology is not dealt with in connection with the doctrine of Christ or the doctrine of the Holy Spirit—where the article on the Church appears in the Creeds—but rather with the 'Fundamental Theology' which deals with the foundations of theology, and first of all with Revelation and the sources of the doctrine

of the Church. In L. Lercher's *Institutiones Theologiae Dogmaticae*¹³, the sequence is: Book I, On the True Religion; Book II, On the Church of Christ; Book III, On Tradition and Holy Scripture. In the *Sacrae Theologiae Summa* of the Spanish Jesuits, the first volume¹⁴ deals, in a similar way, with Tradition in the Treatise on the Church which is followed by the Treatise on Holy Scripture. The actual subordination of the Scriptures to the Church and the fact that the Church has become a source of doctrine cannot find a clearer expression.

The consequences are obvious. Who gives me the guarantee that a dogma, whose only source is the Church, is divinely revealed by God? To point at some Scripture passages which may mystically hint at the doctrine and from whose mystical interpretation logical conclusions are drawn, is no substitute for a Scriptural proof. Whether the often beautiful, but also fantastic typological interpretation of Holy Writ by the Greek Fathers is legitimate exegesis is more than doubtful. To develop out of the biblical doctrine of the first and the second Adam a doctrine of the first and the second Eve is not sound theology, as Fathers Tavard and de Lubac think. It is religious poetry, like the speculation on the tree of the cross and the tree in paradise. One should not forget that most of the exegetical works of the church Fathers are sermons preached and taken down in shorthand. To make them the pattern of a truly theological, churchly exegesis for all times is impossible if we want to keep God's Word in its purity.

What happens if the Church becomes the source of revelation is shown by the development of the modern Catholic doctrine and cult of Mary. Man becomes the source of revelation. Four years after the dogma of the Immaculate Conception was proclaimed in 1854 the apparitions at Lourdes took place. Who was the Lady that Bernadette Soubirous saw and heard in a state of trance? 'I am the Immaculate Conception'. According to the Catholic doctrine this was a private revelation which cannot be the basis of dogma, since the public revelation on which the doctrine of the Church is built came to an end with the death of the last of the Apostles. No Catholic is compelled to believe the authenticity of the apparition of the Blessed Virgin at Lourdes. Nor is he entitled to deny it publicly. For the Church has recognized it by the canonization of Bernadette.

The same is to be said of the apparitions at Fatima which began on 13 May, 1917; on the very day when Eugenio Pacelli, the later Pope Pius XII, was consecrated in Rome Titular Archbishop of Sardes to take up his office as Nuncio at Munich. When during the coming months the 50th anniversary of the apparitions is celebrated in Portugal and in the entire Catholic world, we may ask the question as to what actually happened. I for one do not doubt that these children, Bernadette and the three little visionaries in Portugal, had strange experiences. One should not doubt that strange phenomena occurred in places which obviously had a very old religious significance in past ages of paganism. But what we must doubt is that the lady (or ladies) of Lourdes and Fatima who spoke through a medium or several mediums in a state of trance was the Blessed Virgin.

I am not a Catholic, but a simple Lutheran who reads and meditates daily on the Bible and Luther's Catechism. As such I have so much love and respect for the mother of my Lord that I cannot believe that

13. Vol I, fifth edition by Schlaginhausen, 1951.

14. Madrid, 1958.

she, the humble handmaiden of the Lord who became the 'Theotokos', the Mother of God, could ever give such messages. The mouth who spoke the *Magnificat* could not say: 'I am the Immaculate Conception', to confirm the dogma of Pius IX. Still less could she say what the Madonna of Fatima said, referring to the punishments of God in World War I:

In order to stop that I shall come to ask for the consecration of the world to my Immaculate Heart. . . . The outlook is gloomy. But there is a ray of hope: My immaculate heart will finally triumph.

One is reminded of the messages from beyond allegedly given through a spiritistic medium by great men of history whose mind seems to have deteriorated in the world of the spirits. Whatever that holy occultism of Lourdes and Fatima may mean—in both cases politics were involved, the politics of the Second Empire in France, and the politics of Portugal and the Pyrenaean Peninsula and even of European Catholicism as a whole since 1917¹⁵—in any case these revelations were not divine. Not the true and living God has spoken in these events, but human beings or, what is still worse, superhuman minds through the mouths of weak children.

Why do we mention this? Not to hurt in any way our Catholic brethren who seem not to have the freedom to discuss these things. Or may we except from the busy pen of Hans Küng a little book about Fatima? What we want is to show what happens if the Church becomes a source of revelation. We owe this testimony to our separated brethren, as we are gladly prepared to listen to their warning voice when they see us going astray in our theological thought and our spiritual life. In an age where we all have begun to realize that the Christians and the churches of Christendom are rising and falling together we regard it as our ecumenical duty to confess again with the Church of the Reformation the 'articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae', the article with which the Church stands and falls:

Sola fide, sola gratia, sola scriptura, solus Christus.

By grace alone, by faith alone, Scripture alone, Christ alone.

15. V. Montes de Oca, *More about Fatima*, Dublin, 1960, pp 57f; T. T. Delaney, *A Woman Clothed with the Sun. Eight freak appearances of Our Lady*, Image Book, New York, 1961, p 194.

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