

The Modern Roman Catholic View of Scripture

By Mark Herzer

INTRODUCTION

The title of this essay should raise a question in our minds. Why don't we say, "The Roman Catholic view of Scripture"? In fact, don't we already know what they believe? They believe in the Bible but they also believe in Tradition. We say Scripture alone and they say Scripture and tradition. What more is there to say?

If we listen to one leading Catholic theologian, Avery (Cardinal) Dulles, then we might just step back and wonder what has happened. Avery Dulles (1918-2008) was one of the finest American Catholic theologians and his extensive studies and penetrating analyses have always merited attention and have often garnered much respect. About the Roman Catholic view of Scripture Dulles said: "Vatican II... recovered the primacy of Scripture as the word of God consigned to writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (Dei Verbum [DV] §9). The teaching office of the church, according to the

Constitution, 'is not above the word of God but serves it, listening to it devoutly, guarding it scrupulously, and explaining it faithfully...'" (DV §10).¹

So you see, their position is more nuanced, if not more complicated, than our conventional understanding. We can easily appeal to Trent, the two Vatican Councils and other official RC documents, but that will not be sufficient. The reason has to do with trying to figure out what all these documents mean. How are they to be interpreted? Whose interpretation represents Catholicism? Who speaks for her today?

TWO MAJOR GROUPS

Two major groups continue to represent Catholicism. Robert Strimple, in his brilliant essay "Roman Catholic Theology Today," noted that while some traditionalists or Tridentine Catholics still exist, he, along with David Wells, believes that progressive Roman Catholics tend to speak more for Catholicism than the traditionalists.² The progressives represent the Roman Catholic mind and future. It is they who hold the majority of professional theological posts and it is they who wield power in Catholicism.

I am not saying that the "orthodox minority" of the RC group ought to be discounted. They cannot because they are the very vocal and zealous in Catholicism—they seek to convert many to their sect. James White has done a fantastic job in critiquing them and one should consult his writings and audio debates. But I will predominantly focus on the progressives because their interpretations influence the academy as well as Catholicism as a whole.

Within modern Catholicism, there are those who emphasize the continuity of the councils and those who maintain what Dulles calls "the hermeneutics of discontinuity."³ Some interpret Trent, Vatican I and II to

THE AUTHOR: Mark Herzer (Ph.D.) has been the pastor of Christ Covenant Presbyterian Church (P.C.A.) in Warminster, PA since 1997, and is also an adjunct professor at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. Mark and his wife, Martha, live in Glenside, PA with their three children Grace, Karis, and Calvin.

1. Sections from Dei Verbum (hereafter DV) cited from Walter M. Abbott, ed., *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966), 111–132; see also Avery Dulles, *The Reshaping of Catholicism: Current Challenges in the Theology of Church* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 23.

2. Robert B. Strimple, "Roman Catholic Theology Today," in *Roman Catholicism: Evangelical Protestants Analyze What Divides and Unites Us*, ed. John Armstrong (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 88–89; David F. Wells, *Revolution in Rome* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1972), 9–11.

3. Dulles, "Vatican II: The Myth and the Reality," *America*, 24 Feb 2003, accessed March 2010 from http://www.americamagazine.org/content/article.cfm?article_id=2810. Weigel distinguishes the two groups as those who embrace *aggiornamento* with *ressourcement* and those who desire *aggiornamento* "detached" from *ressourcement*,

be in continuity with each other. That is, “each passage and document of the council must be interpreted in the context of all the others, so that the integral teaching of the council may be rightly grasped... The council must be interpreted in continuity with the great tradition of the church, including earlier councils” (Dulles, “Vatican II: The Myth and the Reality”). Others see the Second Vatican as possessing revolutionary implications.

The reason this observation is so important lies in the simple fact that the present Pope, Benedict XVI (Joseph Ratzinger), represents the movement that underscores continuity. Ratzinger served as one of the theological advisers at the Second Vatican Council (hereafter, SVC). He belonged to “the inner circle of theologians whose thinking prevailed at Vatican II” and “the progressive wing at the council.”⁴ Yet, he is viewed by most to be very conservative. Ratzinger believes he did not change but remained true to himself.⁵ Whether he changed or not does not change the fact that he believes the church has not changed on account of Vatican II. Ratzinger said, “I should like to say that Vatican II surely did not want ‘to change’ the faith, but to represent it in a more effective way.”⁶ There is for him, no pre- or post-Vatican II—there is simply the church keeping the tradition alive. “The only viable course, he contended, was to interpret Vatican II in strictest continuity with previous councils such as Trent and Vatican I, since all three councils are upheld by the same authority: that of the Pope and the college of bishops in communion with him” (Dulles, “Pope Benedict XVI: Interpreter of Vatican II,” 471).

It is with that continuity in mind that I probe the modern RC view of Scripture. At the outset, I want to say that this method of interpreting all the councils in continuity with each other creates incredible tension, and I am convinced Roman Catholicism swallowed a pill that will eventually destroy her. Remember, there are traditionalists who have broken away from Catholicism and spawned a movement called *sede vacantism* (*sede vacante*, the seat being empty)—the Papal See has been empty since the death of Pope Pius XII (1958) or Pope John XXIII (1963). The Second Vatican was so radical that some traditionalists could not accept it as being a genuine church council. If that deep concern and suspicion exists in the faithful, then there might be something quite radical or different about the SVC. The older, traditional Catholics believe that Vatican II was a major departure from the faith. A decade after the SVC, one could easily have identified the two extreme spokesmen. The hardcore traditionalists were represented by Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre (eventually excommunicated

on June 30, 1988) and the progressive radicals by men like Hans Küng. Ratzinger believed in a post-conciliar Catholicism which went back to all the sources of Catholicism (*ressourcement*). Archbishop Lefebvre did not accept the teaching of the SVC, while men like Küng believed the SVC opened the gateway to something broader. Both groups have been sorely disappointed by what has emerged since the SVC. One thinks it went too liberal (modern) while the other thinks Catholicism is reverting back to her pre-conciliar days.

TWO SOURCES OF REVELATION: TRENT AND VATICAN II

Getting at their position requires interpretation of their major documents. The ones that really concern us center on the Council of Trent and the Second Vatican. Some attention must also be given to Vatican I and their 1992 Catechism of the Catholic Church but most of the issues will be focused on the Tridentine and the Second Vatican Councils.⁷

*Trent Interpreted—Partim... Partim*⁸

The traditional understanding of the Roman Catholic teaching on Scripture comes from Trent (1545–63, 25 sessions). Historically, both Catholics and Protestants interpreted Trent in the same way. Protestants, of course, did not agree with Trent but they were in agreement as to what the council actually taught.

Traditional Catholic theologians like Bellarmine, Ott, Denzinger, Sheeben, Tanqueray, Pohle & Preuss, Hunter,

see George Weigel, *God's Choice: Pope Benedict XVI and the Future of the Catholic Church* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2005), 171–172. Some find this distinction too simplistic, if not manipulative, see <http://ncronline.org/news/faith-parish/hermeneutic-dysfunction>.

4. Avery Dulles, “Pope Benedict XVI: Interpreter of Vatican II,” in *Church and Society* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 470–471. John Allen called him “the progressive firebrand” in *Cardinal Ratzinger: The Vatican's Enforcer of the Faith* (New York: Continuum, 2000), 46. Giuseppe Alberigo criticized this book for being too negative against Ratzinger. Allen has softened some of the views in his later book on the Pope.

5. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Salt of the Earth: The Church at the End of the Millennium: An Interview With Peter Seewald*, trans. Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997), 115–116.

6. Joseph Ratzinger and Vittorio Messori, *The Ratzinger Report: An Exclusive Interview on the State of the Church*, trans. Salvator Attanasio and Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 35.

7. Articles 2 & 3 of their Catechism (1992) essentially reproduced large portions of *Dei Verbum* (the document from the SVC). No. 83 is one of the rare sections in the Catechism that adds to the DV.

8. On this, I am depending on G. C. Berkouwer, *The Second Vatican*

Van Noort, and others, all espoused a two-sources theory of revelation on account of their understanding of Trent. That is, they believed that God revealed himself through Scripture and through tradition—two sources of revelation. One of them said, “Tradition is a source of revelation distinct from Scripture and goes beyond the data of Scripture. This is a *dogma of faith* from the Council of Trent . . .”⁹ All Evangelical Protestants believed that Van Noort gave a faithful dogmatic exposition of the Catholic position (a position taught right up to the SVC). This is a position with which most of us are accustomed. In fact, many of the traditional Catholics at Vatican II believed this was their position because the first draft proposal dealing with the nature of revelation was entitled “On the Two Sources of Divine Revelation.”¹⁰

That traditional understanding came under serious scrutiny at Vatican II. This long established teaching was rooted in their interpretation of the Council of Trent. In its Fourth Session, Trent declared how the gospel was brought to us: “clearly perceiving that this truth and instruction are contained in the written books and the unwritten traditions, which have been received by the apostles from the mouth of Christ himself, or from the

Council and the New Catholicism, trans. Lewis B. Smedes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 89–111; Robert B. Strimple, “Roman Catholic Theology Today,” 85–117. Also helpful is the Roman Catholic theologian Michael Schmaus, *Dogma 1: God in Revelation*, trans. William McKenna, Ann Laeuchli, and T. Patrick Burke (New York: Sheed and Ward, Inc., 1984), 215–226; J. P. Mackey, *The Modern Theology of Tradition* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1962) and the massive work by Yves Congar, *Tradition and Traditions: An Historical and a Theological Essay*, trans. Michael Naseby and Thomas Rainborough (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1967), 156ff.

9. G. Van Noort, *The Sources of Revelation: Divine Faith*, translated and revised by J. J. Castelot and W. R. Murphy, vol. II of *Dogmatic Theology* (Westminster: Newman, 1961), 139, cited in Gabriel Moran, *Scripture and Tradition: A Survey of the Controversy* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1963), 18.

10. Xavier Rynne, *Vatican Council II* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1968), 18.

11. Hendricus Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma*, 30th ed., trans. Roy J. Deferrari (Fitzwilliam, NH: Loreto Publications, 1955), p. 244 (§783). Hereafter, I will cite the sections in Denzinger and not the page numbers (which is the standard method).

12. Cf. Rynne, *Vatican Council II*, 85. George Tavard also argued that the *partim partim* theory “was explicitly excluded” at Trent, see Tavard, *Holy Writ or Holy Church: The Crisis of the Protestant Reformation* (London: Burns & Oates, 1959), 205, 208.

13. Just prior to Vatican II, Karl Rahner noticed that most worked within the framework of “two material sources” for their theology. He also emphatically noted that “the Two Sources Theory” is only a “possible interpretation of the Council.” See *Inspiration in the Bible*, trans. Charles H. Henkey (New York: Herder and Herder, 1962), 35–36.

14. That Vatican II rejected the theory of “two sources of revelation”

apostles themselves, at the dictation of the Holy Spirit, have come down even to us, transmitted as it were from hand to hand. . . .” That, to most people, seemed clear cut and straight forward—God’s revelation is “contained in the written books and the unwritten traditions. . . .”¹¹ However, that interpretation of Trent was considered incorrect.

Josef Rupert Geiselmann significantly influenced many Vatican II thinkers in his understanding of the relationship between Scripture and tradition as taught in Trent. He believed that the phrase “contained in the written books, and the unwritten traditions” did not mean what we think it means because of the history behind the phrase. What he showed was that the Tridentine divines originally argued *partim . . . partim* (partly . . . partly) but ended up with the conjunction “et” (and). There were two drafts and the first one stated *partim in libris scriptis, partim in sine scripto traditionibus* (partly in the books of Scripture, partly in unwritten traditions). The second text which became the official dogma simply deleted *partim . . . partim* and replaced the two with *et* (and)—*contineri in libris scriptis et sine scripto traditionibus* (contained in written books [of Scripture] and in unwritten traditions). From that historical incident, he argued that the Tridentine divines did not really believe in a two-sources theory of revelation, partly from Scripture and partly from tradition. That is, “Two Sources theory does not correspond to the intention of the Council of Trent.” This argument “met with widespread agreement” says one Roman Catholic scholar (Schmaus, *Dogma 1: God in Revelation*, 218).¹²

Berkouwer argued that Gieselmann’s reading of Trent’s rejection of *partim . . . partim* “allows at least the possibility of putting an accent on the sufficiency of Scripture.” It is “nothing less than amazing” because it “would have been out of the question had the ‘partly’ phraseology been maintained by Trent.” As a result, Berkouwer believed that the relationship between “Scripture and tradition is a completely open matter” (Berkouwer, *The Second Vatican Council and the New Catholicism*, 96–97). This does not mean that Gieselmann’s interpretation prevailed, but it did shut the door on the two sources theory of revelation in Vatican II.¹³

Traditional catholic theologians continued to argue vigorously that this was not an accurate interpretation of Trent. In fact, they argued that the onus was on these new interpreters to prove that the traditional and widely accepted interpretation was incorrect (Berkouwer, *The Second Vatican Council and the New Catholicism*, 95). Nevertheless, the two sources of revelation theory had fallen out of favor in Catholicism.¹⁴

But Ratzinger believed Gieselmann's view of tradition was too narrow (static). Ratzinger argued that a pneumatological concept of tradition had an impact on Trent—that is, the Spirit was alive and active in the church revealing the gospel.¹⁵ The gospel was written *in charta* (on paper) as well as *in corde* (in the hearts of the faithful).¹⁶ A “pneumatic surplus” of the gospel existed—the gospel that was written on the heart was in addition to what was written in Scripture. That is to say, the gospel is so big that it “can only partly be written” and rest is fleshed out in the church or in the hearts of the faithful (more on this below).

What does this have to do with the Roman Catholic view of Scripture? Before becoming Pope, Ratzinger was arguing that a living tradition existed alongside of Scripture. He wasn't arguing for a *partim partim* view but wanted only to revitalize the role of tradition as being dynamic and pneumatological. Such an interpretation prepared the way for Vatican II. More importantly, Ratzinger had a hand in constructing *Dei Verbum* (as Cardinal Fring's theological advisor).¹⁷

So, the *partim partim* view does not officially exist in Catholicism though its meaning had been traditionally utilized.¹⁸ However, even though the doctrine per se did not achieve dogma status, the *partim partim* interpretation still seems to persist in the minds of many (especially among Protestants). What Gieselmann and other progressive Catholic writers ended up doing was simply “demonstrating” that the church never officially taught two sources of revelation and therefore Vatican II was not obligated to perpetuate it. It officially no longer teaches it!

Vatican II Interpreted¹⁹

Before looking into Vatican II, a brief comment should be made concerning Vatican I. The first Vatican merely reiterated the very words of Trent (Denzinger, 1787). In addition, the first Vatican anathematizes those who do not accept the RC canon (the apocrypha)—the same condemnation is found in Trent (Denzinger, 1809; 784). WCF 1.3 says, “The books commonly called Apocrypha, not being of divine inspiration, are no part of the Canon of Scripture; and therefore are of no authority in the Church of God, nor to be any otherwise approved, or made use of, than other human writings.”

When we come to the Second Vatican Council, we need to consider some of their expectations. Most of them thought the church was too insular and defensive. In regard to God's revelation, they believed the church had been too “anti-Modernist” and the first draft on

the sources of revelation was in the same vein. In the words of Ratzinger, “The text was, if one may use the label, utterly a product of the ‘anti-Modernist’ mentality that had taken shape about the turn of the century. The text was written in a spirit of condemnation and negation...”²⁰ The first draft of this constitution was entitled “The Sources of Revelation” (*De fontibus revelationis*)²¹ but the settled and received title was simply “Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation” (*Constitutio Dogmatica de Divina Revelatione, or Dei Verbum*). It appears that several drafts were offered.²²

What became clear was their resistance to publishing a “two-sources” theory of revelation (Schmaus, *Dogma* 1, 218; Rynne, *Vatican Council II*, 77ff.). The final version avoided that language, though it did not necessarily rule it out absolutely. Scripture and tradition are not

is well recognized by interpreters, e.g. Enzo Bianchi, “The Centrality of the Word of God,” in *The Reception of Vatican II*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo, Jean-Pierre Jossua and Joseph A. Komonchak (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1987), 118–119; Avery Dulles, *The Catholicity of the Church* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 161; Robert Murray, “Revelation (*Dei Verbum*),” in *Modern Catholicism: Vatican II and After*, ed. Adrian Hastings (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 75–76.

15. Karl Rahner and Joseph Ratzinger, *Revelation and Tradition*, trans. W. J. O'Hara (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966), 50–53.

16. A similar distinction can be found in the *Catechism*, no. 113 (“Sacred Scripture is written principally in the Church's heart rather than in documents and records...”), in *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1994).

17. For a very enjoyable and somewhat dramatized account of the role played by Ratzinger at the SVC, see ch. 2, “An Erstwhile Liberal” in John L. Allen, *Cardinal Ratzinger: The Vatican's Enforcer of the Faith*. To get something of the flavor of this chapter, let me offer the following: “In the imagination of some liberal critics, Ratzinger's life story would make a script worthy of George Lucas: the young Jedi Knight who went over to the Dark Side of the Force” (47).

18. One traditional Irish Cardinal at the SVC argued that the doctrine of two sources “formed part of the Church's doctrinal patrimony” (Rynne, *Vatican Council II*, 83).

19. Citations from Vatican II are taken from Walter M. Abbott, ed., *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966).

20. Joseph Ratzinger, *Theological Insights of Vatican II* (New York: Paulist Press, 1966), 20; cf. Giuseppe Alberigo, ed., *History of Vatican II*, 5 vols. (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1995–2006), 1:306–308.

21. The original draft debated and turned down had these words: “Sacred Scripture is not the only source of the revelation which is found in the Deposit of Faith. For besides the divine Tradition which is set out in Sacred Scripture, there is also the divine Tradition of truth which are not contained in Sacred Scripture” (Alberigo, ed., *History*, 1:275; emphasis is found in the source cited). The text voted on was a “formal repudiation of the spirit and of the positions of the TC's schema *De fontibus*” (1:277; cf. 1:412–413).

22. Alberigo, ed., *History*, 4:202 (perhaps over three); the final version is the “Form G” (the seventh version), cf. Herbert Vorgrimler, ed., *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, 5 vols. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967–1969), 3:166.

two “sources” one writer explains, but “ways [emphasis added] of transmitting the message about the mystery of salvation, a message that remains alive in the Church” (Alberigo, ed., *History*, 4:199). They abandoned the *two sources* view of revelation, but they left undecided the exact relationship between the two. The conservative-traditional position of the two-sources theory is actually a minority position in Catholicism (Strimple, “The Relationship,” 27). Even if these traditionalists were correct in their understanding of tradition and Scripture prior to Vatican II, that view is no longer the church’s position because the progressives dominated the Council.²³ If the official teaching is no longer two-sources, then what was the Vatican II doctrine of Scripture? This is where it becomes tricky. Let me give a brief overview of its contents before drawing some conclusions and making some critical comments.

The *Dei Verbum* consists of a prologue and 6 chapters (26 articles). Ratzinger believes that this is one of the “outstanding texts of the council” and that it has “yet to be truly received” (Dulles, “Pope Benedict XVI: Interpreter of Vatican II,” 474). The prologue states, “Hearing the word of God with reverence and proclaiming it with faith, the sacred synod takes its direction from these words of St. John...” and then quotes 1Jn. 1:2–3. Ratzinger believes this is “one of the happiest formulations in the text” because of the dominance of the Word and because it describes the church as listening and proclaiming (Vorgrimler, ed., *Commentary*, 3:167). This is where they believe prominence is given to God’s Word and the church as a listening agent.

Chapter 1 explains what revelation is (“Revelation Itself,” §2–6). Ratzinger believes that this is where Vatican II differed from Vatican I in its emphasis. Rather than focusing on sources, it focuses on God who reveals. It is a minor Biblical Theology on God’s revelation, and by focusing on the historical character of God’s revelation as Word and Deed, the Constitution sought to show that God is the source of revelation. We could quibble over several things in this chapter (its strong affirmation of natural reason, §6; semi-pelagianism in §5) but overall, it is a decent chapter.

Chapter 2 (articles §7–10) is where the difficulty lies. Up to this time, an emphasis on the personal and historical character of God revealing himself had been conveyed. Now they explain how God’s revelation is transmitted (“The Transmission of Divine Revelation”).

23. Cardinal Frings, one of the participants, reported the following in 1963: “The majority of bishops share a moderate progressive tendency, and it appears that they will have the two-thirds majority against the more conservative minority” (Rynne, *Vatican Council II*, 91 n.).

We are told that God’s will for salvation was committed to writing “under the inspiration of the ... holy Spirit.” (§7) To preserve this “full and living Gospel,” the apostles “left bishops as their successors” and “they gave them ‘their own position of teaching authority’”. This is called “sacred tradition”. The church contemplates God in the mirror of “sacred tradition” and “sacred Scripture.”

Vatican II states that “the apostolic preaching” is “expressed in a special way in the inspired books” but the apostles also handed to the church their tradition which progresses in the church. Here, tradition is not static but dynamic (“the life-giving presence of this tradition”) and it enables the church to recognize and interpret the Holy Scripture (§8). Ratzinger, we have noted above, clearly taught a dynamic view of tradition. That view has been codified in DV. In the words of Dulles, “tradition is seen as progressive and dynamic rather than simply conservative and static.” Tradition is “vital, realistic, and forward-looking” in DV 8 (Dulles, “Vatican II and the Recovery of Tradition,” in *The Reshaping of Catholicism*, 91). Robert Murray believed this emphasis in the DV “invited Catholics to see God’s revelation and human response to it less in merely propositional terms, but more as dynamic operations guided by the Holy Spirit” (Robert Murray, “Revelation (*Dei Verbum*),” 77).

After this, they focus on the relationship between Scripture and tradition. What is important here is their premise. The God who reveals is the one who unifies what is found in sacred tradition and sacred Scripture. Sacred Scripture is the utterance of God (*locutio Dei*) as written and sacred tradition takes the word of God (*verbum Dei*) as entrusted. “Consequently it is not from sacred Scripture alone that the Church draws her certainty about everything which has been revealed. Therefore both sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture are to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of loyalty and reverence.” (§9)

God is speaking and is behind both Scripture and tradition because the framers of the conciliar documents made a subtle distinction between the Word of God and Scripture. DV says, “Sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture form one sacred deposit of the word of God, committed to the Church.” (§10) This synthetic formed word of God cannot be interpreted without the help of the teaching office. “But 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, whose authority is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ.” (§10) The phrase “word of God” is larger than Scripture and tradition; the phrase

“word of God” in this context is equivalent to “revelation” which is not identical with Scripture.²⁴

You cannot read this as a reformed evangelical. You must read this as a modern progressive Catholic. What are they saying? Ratzinger had argued that the Word of God, or revelation, is a living reality and is “incapable of being enclosed in a text.”²⁵ Furthermore, tradition is “that part of revelation that goes above and beyond Scripture and cannot be comprehended within a code of formulas” (Ratzinger, *Milestones*, 127). One of the criticisms he had with the older interpretation of Trent was it made divine revelation “mechanical” and a “collection of propositions that can be divided up at will and sheered out between two different compilations...” (Vorgrimler, ed., *Commentary*, 3:191).

Now, they have an organic and living unity of the two. He talks of the “interpenetration” of Scripture and tradition (Ibid.). God’s Word comes to us via Scripture and tradition combined. It is like a water faucet with one handle that controls both the hot and cold—there is only one faucet. God’s One Word comes to us in the faucet of tradition-Scripture. That is their answer; not two faucets but one! That is why they speak of a “divine wellspring” (*scaturigo*) and not sources (*fons*). Dulles notes that the Vatican documents linked tradition directly to the Holy Spirit as the transcendent subject (Dulles, *The Craft of Theology*, 99–100). The Spirit is the source of this faucet.

PRELIMINARY CRITICISMS

1. They avoided the language of two-sources of revelation, but did they avoid the concept? The document was a compromise document that tilted toward the progressives. The text “rejected the attempt to reach a definitive decision on the relationship between Scripture and tradition” (Alberigo, ed., *History*, 4:207). There is only functional unity (§9).

It is hard to believe that they made that much progress. The Council fathers dressed up a mechanical theory of two sources of revelation to an organic unified theory of revelation that flows into Scripture and tradition. They revitalized tradition as living and organically united it to Scripture. This reformulation in fact equalized and denigrated the two in one fell swoop. The Word of God or Revelation is found in both Scripture and tradition. They are both “sacred” (§10) and both are to be “accepted and venerated with the same sense of devotion and reverence.” (§9)²⁶ So, it is one source of revelation with two equal ways of transmitting that revelation: “Consequently, it is not from sacred Scripture

alone that the Church draws her certainty about everything which has been revealed.” (§9) They equalized the two as transmitters of revelation. They also denigrated the two by not allowing either one of them to be the Revelation of God: “Sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture form one sacred deposit of the word of God...” (§10) Dulles’s exposition on DV reveals this point quite clearly. “Scripture is an inspired and privileged sedimentation of tradition but not an independent or separable norm. Scripture and tradition together constitute a single indivisible channel of revealed truth, in which neither element could stand without the other (DV § 9)” (Dulles, “Vatican II: The Myth and the Reality”).

2. Ratzinger’s own criticism needs to be considered. One of the goals behind Vatican II was to be more ecumenical and when they penned DV, they were trying to be sensitive to some of the protestant concerns. They wanted to acknowledge the importance of *sola scriptura*, but chapter 2 dealing with the transmission of God’s revelation failed miserably to make that point.

Cardinal Ratzinger noted that “there is, in fact, no explicit mention of the possibility of a distorting tradition and of the place of Scripture as an element within the Church that is *also* critical of tradition...” This principle has been “overlooked,” he says. “That this opportunity has been missed can only be regarded as an unfortunate omission” (*Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, 3:193).²⁷ This omission was inevitable. If Scripture and tradition were two equal ways of transmitting the Revelation of God, then how could one stand against the other? If Scripture can criticize tradition, could not tradition also criticize Scripture? Their new formulation does not in any way allow Scripture to criticize tradition because Scripture can never really speak authoritatively and clearly without the magisterium.

THE MATERIAL SUFFICIENCY OF SCRIPTURE

Having looked at the SVC documents, we now focus on the role or place of Scripture in their theology. Many

24. Hans Urs von Balthasar says, “Scripture is not identical with revelation” in “The Word, Scripture, and Tradition,” in *Letter and Spirit: A Journal of Catholic Biblical Theology* 2 (2006): 189, n.1. This is an essay reproduced from Balthasar’s earlier writings (d. 1988).

25. These are the words of Dulles summarizing Ratzinger’s view in “Pope Benedict XVI: Interpreter of Vatican II,” 474.

26. “She has always maintained them [Scriptures], and continues to do so, together with sacred tradition, as the supreme rule of faith...” (§21).

27. Cf. Aidan Nichols, *The Thought of Pope Benedict XVI: An Introduction to the Theology of Joseph Ratzinger* (New York: Burns & Oates, 2007), 60.

of their more conservative apologists have argued that Roman Catholics do not believe in *sola scriptura* but instead in the *material sufficiency* of Scripture.²⁸ What this means is that all Catholics believe in the *formal insufficiency* of Scripture.²⁹ Gabriel Moran said that those who hold to the material sufficiency of Scripture believe “that Scripture is materially complete or sufficient, that Scripture contains all of the revelation the Church teaches. He is denying the existence of a constitutive tradition but he is not denying tradition. He is asserting that the contents of Scripture and tradition are identical.”³⁰ This sounds more appealing to Protestants than simply the two-sources of revelation we had believed they espoused.

Robert Strimple gives this definition of what “the material sufficiency of Scripture” means: “There is no doctrinal tradition, no doctrinal revelation, which is not found in the Scriptures. There is none that has come to us *de novo* in tradition. All our dogma can be found in the Bible. Karl Rahner, Joseph Ratzinger, Michael Schmaus, Hans Küng, Yves Congar, George Tavard, Gabriel Moran, Gregory Baum—all are agreed on this point.”³¹ These men held to the “material sufficiency” of Scripture but this position did not necessarily prevail in Vatican II. It seems that the theory of the “material sufficiency of Scripture” was debated vigorously but they did not make any firm decisions on this matter. The newest work on the SVC states that the “material sufficiency of Scripture was left open.” The author also noted that the two sides (conservatives and progressives) “most readily

agreed . . . on deferring a decision on the material sufficiency of Scripture” (Alberigo, ed., *History*, 4:208–209). We should make the following observations from this.

1. *It is not absolutely certain that the “material sufficiency of Scripture” is really the Roman Catholic position.* Vatican II documents do not explicitly affirm it. The problem with the “material sufficiency” of Scripture is that the traditionalists believed and insisted there were things the church taught that were not in the Bible—tradition was constitutive. Some had defined it as “objective, constitutive tradition” because it was difficult (if not impossible) to prove all the received truths from Scripture. One Council father even argued for the title *De divina traditione* in one of the sections, (Alberigo, ed., *History*, 4:216).³² In fact, the debates in the Council carefully avoided the question of the material sufficiency of Scripture.³³

It is therefore simply a ploy on the part of Catholic apologists to defend their position as being materially sufficient. That is not the church’s official position because some of their theologians truly believe in constitutive tradition (truths derived from tradition that is authoritative irrespective of Scriptural teaching).

2. *If the theory of the material sufficiency of Scripture was true, then what practical value is there?* If every dogma is by definition infallible, then it really does not matter if this theory is true or not because it will remain dogma even if it wasn’t materially present in Scripture. Papal and conciliar authorities guarantee their infallible character because the Holy Spirit will keep them from error (so they argue). Let me illustrate. How would this line of reasoning go if one was pulled over by a policeman, “Officer, everything we do is based upon obedience to the law. You pulled us over for something. But remember, what we just did is in conformity to the law because everything we do is based upon obedience to the law.” At the outset, you cannot be criticized (and the officer might want you to get your head examined). This is circular reasoning and they insulate themselves from criticism.

3. *Vatican II did not elevate Scripture.* Early on, Vatican II was positively assessed. Berkouwer’s mature judgment on the two-sources theory of revelation is worth noting. He says, “Within Catholicism, a new and strong accent is being placed on the unique and normative function of Holy Scripture and the notion of two independent sources of revelation is in growing disrepute.” He says that the older Catholic understanding of viewing tradition as a “complement” to Scripture has given way to insisting that “Scripture is sufficient for all truth, and that tradition only interprets the truth of

28. Mark P. Shea, “What is the Relationship Between Scripture and Tradition,” in *Not By Scripture Alone: A Catholic Critique of the Protestant Doctrine of Sola Scriptura*, ed. Robert A. Sungen (Santa Barbara, CA: Queenship Publishing Company, 1997), 181ff.

29. Dulles says the following, “Scripture is formally insufficient. In other words, tradition is needed for a sufficient grasp of the word of God, even though it be assumed that all revelation is somehow contained in Scripture” (*The Craft of Theology*, 97).

30. Gabriel Moran, *Scripture and Tradition: A Survey of the Controversy* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1963), 25.

31. Robert B. Strimple, “The Relationship between Scripture and Tradition in Contemporary Roman Catholic Theology,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 40 (Fall 1977): 24.

32. Near the end, one of them asked his theological advisor “to keep an eye on the maneuvers of those who wanted to undermine the compromise that had been reached and to bring the schema up for new discussion so that they might include a formula on the constitutive role of tradition” (483).

33. “. . .for the sake of harmony, it had been agreed to avoid anything that would decide the question of the ‘material sufficiency of Scripture’ in a positive or negative sense. . .” (Vorgrimler, ed., *Commentary*, 3:202). “. . .the council sedulously endeavored to avoid deciding the question whether tradition contained any revealed truth not present somehow in Scripture” (Dulles, *The Craft of Theology*, 97).

Scripture.” Tradition, therefore, is “the authentic interpreter of Scripture,” (*The Second Vatican Council and the New Catholicism*, 107–108). This was wishful thinking on Berkouwer’s part. Most Vatican II interpreters argue that tradition is given priority over Scripture. Dulles says, “Thus tradition has a certain priority, in view of which *Dei Verbum* found it advisable to treat tradition before turning to Scripture” (*The Craft of Theology*, 96–7). What Berkouwer had wanted did not materialize because he did not interpret the *Dei Verbum* correctly. Dulles in another essay specifically argued that such an interpretation was a great misunderstanding. He lists twelve areas where he believed “the council has been rather generally misunderstood.”

Regarding the means by which revelation is transmitted, many theologians have argued that the council gave priority to Scripture as the written word of God, and demoted tradition to the status of a secondary norm, to be tested against the higher norm of Scripture.

An impartial reading of Vatican II’s *Dei Verbum*, the “Dogmatic Constitution on Revelation” (1965) indicates on the contrary that the council gave a certain priority to tradition. It asserts that the Apostles and their successors, the bishops, by their preaching and teaching have faithfully preserved the word of God. Scripture is an inspired and privileged sedimentation of tradition but not an independent or separable norm. Scripture and tradition together constitute a single indivisible channel of revealed truth, in which neither element could stand without the other (DV § 9), (“Vatican II: The Myth and the Reality”).

Berkouwer’s mistake existed in the 1960s. Many were hopeful that interpretations such as his would fully develop in Roman Catholicism. It never materialized because of the way the Vatican II documents were interpreted by each succeeding Pope.

SOME MAJOR CONCERNS

1. *Their theory of Revelation is problematic.* Notwithstanding SVC’s adherence to the Bible as inspired, there are suggestions of a neo-orthodox understanding of revelation. Listen to what Ratzinger says, “If one compares the text of Article 2 with what was said at Vatican I (DS 3004f.), it becomes clear how much Catholic theology has benefited in the last fifty years from the theology of Karl Barth, which itself was influenced by the personalistic thinking of Ebner, Buber and others”

(Vorgrimler, ed., *Commentary*, 3:170). Ratzinger expressed his sympathies for the neo-orthodox understanding of revelation. Unfortunately, his sympathies never fully disappeared.

Ratzinger also suggested that they would probably change the language of inspiration and inerrancy because of “the critical historical methods” (158). He spoke negatively of the older “verbalistic conception ... of inspiration” (159). One writer summarized Ratzinger’s view in this manner: “God reveals *himself*, and that revelation is to be understood as the act in which God encounters human beings, rather than as merely propositions about God” (Weigel, *God’s Choice*, 169).

Ratzinger said, “It might also be said that Scripture is the material principle of revelation...but that it is not revelation itself...For revelation always and only becomes a reality where there is faith...Consequently revelation to some degree includes its recipient, without whom it does not exist. Revelation cannot be pocketed like a book one carries around...Scripture *is* not revelation but at most only a part of the latter’s great reality” (Karl Rahner and Joseph Ratzinger, *Revelation and Tradition*, 35–37). Admittedly, these were the earlier statements of Ratzinger; he was younger and greatly influenced by the spirit of the age. But his “maturer” view, published sometime around 1997, did not differ. In reflecting on the SVC and Geiselman’s view of tradition, he penned the following words in regard to his view of revelation.

Revelation, which is to say, God’s approach to man, is always greater than what can be contained in human words, greater even than the words of Scripture.... it would have been impossible to refer to Scripture simply as ‘revelation’, as is the normal linguistic usage today. Scripture is the essential witness of revelation, but revelation is something alive, something greater and *more*: proper to it is the fact that it *arrives* and is *perceived*—otherwise it could not have become revelation (*Milestones*, 127).³⁴

His view of revelation has not changed over thirty years and Dulles argues that Cardinal Prefect’s view (before he was elevated) is virtually the same (“Pope Benedict XVI: Interpreter of Vatican II,” 474). Avery Dulles himself disparages the conservative evangelical position and the older Catholic neo-Scholastic writings because they emphasized the propositional and rational character of God’s revelation. He believes it is too objectivistic! He says that traditional Catholics and

34. This book was originally published in Italian in 1997 and in German and English in 1998.

Conservative Evangelicals agree on their view of verbal revelation. But on the contrary, the modern critical scholarship has made “propositional inerrancy of Scripture” untenable.³⁵

Schmaus suggests that Vatican II left the door open to errors in the Bible (more on this below; *Dogma I*, 192ff.). Most interesting was Schmaus’s earlier suspicion and criticism of Ratzinger as his student (and Ratzinger’s contemporaries). Schmaus rejected Ratzinger’s *habilitation* thesis because of Ratzinger’s modernist tendencies in subjectivizing the concept of revelation in his work on Bonaventure (*Milestones*, 107–109). It appears Schmaus’s suspicions were well founded. Ratzinger did and does hold to a subjectivistic view of revelation (*similar* to the neo-orthodox view which we referenced earlier in his commentary on *Dei Verbum*). He uses this pejorative analogy: “Revelation is not a meteor fallen to earth that now lies around somewhere as a rock mass from which rock samples can be taken and submitted to laboratory analysis. . . . the living organism of the faith of all ages is then an intrinsic part of revelation” (127). This echoes what he said in the 1960s—“revelation to some degree includes its recipient, without whom it does not exist.”³⁶ These statements are eerily similar to Karl Barth’s understanding. The Pope’s view has not changed from his earlier view, which he espoused in the book he co-authored with Karl Rahner.³⁷ Even as late as 1989, Ratzinger said the following, “Revelation is a dynamic process between God and man, which consistently becomes reality only in an encounter.”³⁸

Strimple’s assessment is that many of these men were working with a modernistic post-Kantian view of revelation (Strimple, “Roman Catholic Theology Today” 102ff.). He says, “it seems to me that in contemporary Roman Catholic theology we are, if anything, farther removed than ever from a Reformed understanding of the Bible; and therefore it is incumbent upon us in presenting the gospel to those influenced by such a theology

to present with clarity and conviction the Scriptures as the word of God written, necessary, clear, sufficient, and absolutely authoritative” (Strimple, “The Relationship between Scripture and Tradition in Contemporary Roman Catholic Theology,” 38). Strimple is correct. The Catholic view is not what many of us thought it was. Therefore, we should not be surprised to read of their more modernistic and dynamic view of Scripture.

Their dynamic view of revelation, however, is not exactly the same as the neo-orthodox though it is similar. Revelation for the Catholics is intertwined with tradition, history, Church, Scripture and the Holy Spirit. This is a very complex topic and one which has engaged some of the best Catholic minds (Congar, Moran, Tavad, Latourelle, Dulles, etc.). Since revelation is so much larger than tradition, Scripture, Magisterium, Church, Liturgy, etc., it cannot be contained by them—it is expressed through them in a dynamic way. Tradition and Scripture are not sources, says Moran, but the “mirror” in which the believing Church beholds God revealing” (*Theology of Revelation*, 110). The Pope fully affirms the fact that the Christian faith is not a “religion of the book.” Christian faith focuses on Christ and not the book. Only a vital community (the church) can rightly understand the Bible. “Outside of this vital context, the Bible is only a more or less heterogeneous literary collection, not the signpost of a journey for our lives. Scripture and tradition cannot be separated.”³⁹ Scripture can become the revelation when we hear it, when revelation speaks to us, when it encounters us—it is a witness of revelation through which we encounter Christ. Tradition functions in the same way. The church herself is a revelatory sign. Revelation continues through these mirrors. “Revelation is not a thing, an object that can be placed somewhere and kept intact. Revelation is what happens between persons and exists only as a personal reality. If there is revelation anywhere in the Church today, it can only be in the conscious experience of people,” (Moran, *Theology of Revelation*, 120).

In summary, this dynamic view of revelation incorporates most of the elements that make up Catholicism. Tradition, the Magisterium, Scripture, etc., are all vehicles of that Revelation and the living tradition in the Church hears it and lives by it. The two key elements of the dynamic (living) and the subjective (hearing, believing, etc.) are needed for a proper view of their theology of revelation. Revelation is not a “thing” “not a meteor fallen to earth that now lies around somewhere as a rock mass,” “cannot be pocketed like a book,” and not propositional. Revelation requires “a recipient.” In a sense, the new Roman Catholic theology of revelation

35. Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1983), 41–49.

36. Similar words are found in Gabriel Moran, *The Theology of Revelation* (New York: Seabury, 1966), 112: “Revelation cannot be confined to any text; revelation happens in the living experience of men.”

37. *Revelation and Tradition* (1966).

38. Joseph Ratzinger, *God’s Word: Scripture—Tradition—Office*, trans. Henry Taylor, ed. Peter Hünermann and Thomas Söding (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 122. This book is a compilation of essays Ratzinger wrote in 1961 to 1989. Essays written together with Rahner are included (from which I quoted above yet from the earlier edition) as well as the new ones he published alone.

39. A lecture delivered by Ratzinger, “Current Doctrinal Relevance of the Catechism of the Catholic Church,” (11 Oct. 1992); see all his sermons, lectures, etc. at the Vatican site, <http://www.vatican.va>.

is the Roman Catholic version of neo-orthodoxy (actually neo-orthodoxy fits better in Roman Catholicism than in liberal Protestantism).⁴⁰ Though it is far more complicated than that, the similarities should alarm conservative Bible believing Presbyterians.

Frederick Grant, who wrote the “Response” section of the Abbott translation of the Vatican II documents on Revelation, stated the following: “...there are not two sources of Revelation, but only one, namely God, who reveals Himself and His purposes. This has always been the Church’s teaching, beginning with the New Testament, and is not an echo of modern biblical theology... the discovery is the other way around. In this respect, Neo-Orthodoxy is really *Vetusta Orthodoxia*” (*The Documents of Vatican II*, 129). This Roman Catholic theologian is stating that the neo-orthodox view of revelation is not a new doctrine but is actually a matter of ancient orthodoxy! The Roman Catholic church has indeed changed!

2. *Their view of Inerrancy is in doubt.* If their theory of revelation is problematic, then it should not surprise us to find that their view of inerrancy is in doubt. Some catholic scholars did and do hold to the theory of limited inerrancy. We see this from the various interpretations over DV §11. We cite the latter part of §11 fully so you can see it in context.

Therefore, since everything asserted by the inspired authors or sacred writers must be held to be asserted by the Holy Spirit, it follows that the books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching solidly, faithfully and without error (*sine errore*) that truth which God wanted put into sacred writings for the sake of salvation (*nostrae salutis causa*). Therefore ‘all Scripture is divinely inspired and has its use for teaching the truth and refuting error, for reformation of manners and discipline in right living, so that the man who belongs to God may be efficient and equipped for good work of every kind’ (2 Tim. 3:16–17).

This text has been the subject of some interesting debates. Both conservatives and liberals in post-conciliar Catholicism use this text to defend their view of full or limited inerrancy. Does the clause “without error” refer only to the parts in Scripture that deal with our salvation? That is, is inerrancy limited to doctrines that deal with our salvation (“for the sake of salvation”) or is the whole Bible without error?

Schmaus argues that the clause “without error” goes with the subsequent relative clause “for the sake of our salvation” (Schmaus, *Dogma* 1, 192). Abbott’s

translation, from which we have just cited above, makes the clause restrictive (restricts it to the area of salvation)—that is, those truths that pertain to salvation are without error (and not necessarily everything else). The Abbott translation provides the following interpretation in the footnote: “The Bible was not written in order to teach the natural sciences, nor to give information on merely political history. It treats of these (and all other subjects) only insofar as they are involved in matters concerning salvation. It is only in this respect that the veracity of God and the inerrancy of the inspired writers are engaged...,” (119). This is quite troubling but it is a position held by many RC scholars.⁴¹ This is not plenary inerrancy but limited inerrancy.

Austin Flannery’s translation reads: “we must acknowledge that the books of Scripture firmly, faithfully and without error (*sine errore*), teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the sacred Scriptures.” In this translation, it is explanatory—God had it put into writing for the sake of our salvation.⁴² Even §10 highlights the fact that sacred Tradition, sacred Scripture and the Magisterium “all contribute effectively to the salvation of souls” (cf. Alberigo, ed., *History*, 5:346 n.312).

What makes the issue more troubling is the history behind SVC’s final text. The earlier draft they rejected stated that the entire Bible (*totius Sacrae Scripturae*) was “absolutely immune from error” (*immunitas absoluta ab errore totius Sacrae Scripturae*). In fact, the statement is something with which all conservative evangelicals would agree. It further stated that the inspiration excludes error in every field “religious or profane” (*re religiosa vel profana*; Vorgrimler, ed., *Commentary*, 3:200). The historical records reveal that the majority of the participants turned back those who attempted

40. Cf. Moran, *Theology of Revelation*, 35. He admits Barth has influenced many Catholic thinkers. Dulles shows how the dialectical model is at points very similar to the Roman Catholic view (the symbolic model), see *Models of Revelation*, 225–227. The RC structure serves as a perfect viable host to keep aspects of neo-orthodoxy alive.

41. For example, see Karl-Heinz Weger, “Tradition,” in *Sacramentum Mundi*, ed. Karl Rahner, 6 vols. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), 6:271; Richard McBrien, *Catholicism*, 2 vols. (Minneapolis: Winston, 1980), 1: 64; Oswald Loretz, *The Truth of the Bible* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1968), 92–95. David Wells develops this same point in *Revolution in Rome*, 30–33. He uses the following author as an example of limited inerrancy in Catholicism — B. C. Butler, *The Theology of Vatican II* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1967).

42. Austin Flannery, ed., *Vatican Council II: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations* (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Company, 1996), 105; see also Norman Geisler and Ralph E. MacKenzie, *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals: Agreements and Differences* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1995), 468–9.

to introduce “absolute inerrancy” (Alberigo, ed., *History*, 4:231; Vorgrimler, ed., *Commentary*, 3:200). They deliberately altered the language to tone down if not outright deny plenary inspiration. Remember, it is not the entire Bible that is without error but it is what the final approved version states: “we must acknowledge that the books of Scripture firmly, faithfully and without error (*sine errore*), teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the sacred Scriptures.” Scripture faithfully and without error “teach that truth...” It is what the Scriptures teach that is without error, its “truth” is without error. The commentator on this portion of DV says, “This gives a positive expression to the doctrine of inerrancy: it is a question of truth, namely the truth of salvation [emphasis added]. This is the content and the motif of inerrancy.” The RC Bishops carefully crafted the language to allow for a limited and dynamic view of inspiration. When the Scriptures teach the truth of our salvation, they are inerrant. Inerrancy “is not a static quality, communicated in a unique fact once and for all. Rather it is now seen as a continual act of God, who stands by the revelation, saving truth and promise of salvation set out in Scripture...” (Vorgrimler, ed., *Commentary*, 3:210).

Not a few theologians have utilized DV §11 to argue for this liberal view of Scripture. Unfortunately, Schmaus’s interpretation represents many other RC scholars.⁴³ They believe that inspiration and inerrancy are limited to “salvation.” Various theologians have attempted to close this loophole in DV §11, but this only suggests that the matter is still open.⁴⁴ Most telling is their admission of the following: “From the standpoint of Church teaching, there has never been a solemn

43. Cf. Scott Hahn, ed., “Inspiration,” in *Catholic Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 2009), 388. Hahn notes that many Catholic theologians have argued for limited inerrancy from DV, but does not give any examples (which is one of the weaknesses of this dictionary).

44. Attempts to interpret DV §11 along conservative lines (full inerrancy) include Scott Hahn, ed., “Inspiration,” in *Catholic Bible Dictionary*, 388–9; Augustin Cardinal Bea, “Vatican II and the Truth of Sacred Scripture,” *Letter and Spirit: A Journal of Catholic Biblical Theology* 1 (2005): 173–178.

45. The author seeks to argue that plenary verbal inspiration is in keeping with Catholic teaching, see Scott Hahn, ed., “Inspiration,” in *Catholic Bible Dictionary*, 386.

46. Avery Cardinal Dulles, “Revelation, Scripture, and Tradition,” in *Your Word is Truth: A Project of Evangelicals and Catholics Together*, ed. Charles Colson and Richard John Neuhaus (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 48–49. Aidan Nichols believes that the church implicitly closed the notion of limited inerrancy, but admits that total inerrancy was not affirmed, see *The Shape of Catholic Theology* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1991), 137–138.

47. These references are taken from J. Neuner and J. Dupuis, eds., *The Christian Faith*, 7th rev. ed. (New York: Alba House, 2001).

definition to specify that God inspired every individual word of the Bible.”⁴⁵ Dulles argues that the SVC fathers did not intend to argue for limited inerrancy, though he admits they compromised by “omitting any sweeping claim of inerrancy in all respects...”⁴⁶

There are additional matters that make this a more difficult issue. The issue of inerrancy was addressed in the nineteenth century. Pope Leo XIII stated in the Encyclical *Providentissimus Deus* (1893) that the Bible “by its very nature excludes all error” and states emphatically that the inspiration is not limited to “matters of faith and morals” (§226). Benedict XV’s Encyclical *Spiritus Paraclitus* (1920) affirmed Leo XIII’s statements and stated “that the divine inspiration extends to all parts of Scripture without distinction, and that no error could occur in the inspired text” (§230).⁴⁷

SVC scholars were well aware of those pronouncements when they crafted the final version of *Dei Verbum*. The final version was carefully adjusted so that it could be interpreted to fit in with the previous papal pronouncements but also broad enough to favor the progressive understanding (Vorgrimler, ed., *Commentary*, 3:212–5). Curious, if not completely confounding, is the Roman Catholic insistence that the Pope is infallible while all are not convinced that the entire Bible is inerrant and infallible. To have to defend inerrancy in their Catholicism suggests that their group is not as unified on this issue as we were led to believe. Again, Scott Hahn’s conservative interpretation of DV §11 is simply one of the interpretations—it is certainly not the only position and it is not the official one. The majority of the bishops and cardinals of the SVC definitely rejected plenary inerrancy. What kind of inerrancy they believe in is subject to numerous interpretations.

3. *Who has the primacy in their triad (Scripture, Tradition, and the Magisterium)?* We come now to our final criticism. In DV §10, they state “It is clear, therefore, that sacred tradition, Sacred Scripture and the teaching authority of the Church, in accord with God’s most wise design, are so linked and joined 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 triad (Scripture, Tradition, and the Magisterium) is so linked “that one cannot stand without the others.” Even Scripture cannot stand alone. For Protestants, Scripture gives birth to the church and it gives her the content for her teaching. It can exist without her though she cannot live without God’s Word. Yet, they have so interlaced the three and elevated them all to the same level that Scripture ceases to have priority.

In the same section (DV §10), they emphatically teach that the “teaching office is not above the word of God, but serves it...” This is promising. Yet the statement goes on to say that the “teaching office,” which serves the word teaches “only what has been handed on, listening to it devoutly, guarding it scrupulously and explaining it faithfully...” That is, the teaching office by definition always teaches faithfully the word of God! As we argued above, the Word of God cannot criticize the teaching office because the teaching office always faithfully teaches the Word.⁴⁸ For that reason, the “one cannot stand without the others.” “Sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture form one sacred deposit of the word of God, to the Church.” (DV §10) Both are vehicles or ways of conveying the word of God (see above). This word of God channeled by sacred Scripture and sacred tradition, however, cannot be authentically interpreted because this true interpretation “has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office of the Church” (DV §10).

The elaborate effort to develop their one source of revelation with two channels to form “one sacred deposit of the word of God” is nothing to celebrate. The two sacred channels cannot be understood without the teaching office. The Magisterium is always faithful to the Word of God that comes to the Magisterium through the two channels of revelation. There is no way to criticize the church, tradition, or the Magisterium. The teaching office alone can authentically interpret the Word and she can only teach what is faithful. While the whole Triad is insulated, we learn that the Magisterium alone determines the meaning of the other two. The Magisterium, therefore has the first place. Who then has the second place? Dulles argues that tradition has the priority over the Word. He notes that DV treats tradition before turning to Scripture. Furthermore, he says that “tradition is needed for a sufficient grasp of the word of God ... Tradition is the means by which the full canon of the sacred books becomes known, and by which the meaning of the biblical text is more profoundly understood and more deeply penetrated (DV 8).” The Magisterium therefore has the first place and tradition the second—this gives the last place to Scripture. Though Scripture alone is the key in moderating and regulating the other two, Roman Catholicism has reversed the order. The idealized notion of the primacy of Scripture in Catholicism, therefore, is non-existent. Though their statements are not as harsh and pronounced as in the earlier days, they still elevate tradition over Scripture. Scripture simply is insufficient. Scripture needs the Pope to be understood; Scripture needs tradition to be fully known as God’s revelation. Once again, Dulles brings

this out quite clearly. “Today as in the past, the Catholic Church views tradition as an indispensable vehicle for the transmission of revelation. While revering Scripture as containing the word of God in unalterable form, she denies that Scripture is sufficient in the sense that the whole of revelation could be known without tradition” (“Revelation, Scripture, and Tradition,” 57). Scripture is handicapped in Catholicism. It is always dependent on the Pope and Tradition. These two can speak on Scripture but Scripture can never speak to the two (and were it to speak, the Church will have to tell us what it said). Whatever Scripture teaches can only be filtered through the Pope (Church) and Tradition.⁴⁹

In the end, they are arguing that we cannot rightly know Scripture without the Pope and Tradition. This is amazing! We can rightly understand the Pope’s teaching but can never rightly understand Scripture without the Pope. The Pope and Tradition are perspicuous; Scripture is not. The creature alone can speak clearly about what God said; God cannot speak clearly about Himself. God’s Word cannot be known without the Church; the Church must be known so you can know God’s Word. God’s Word always has the back seat.

Conclusion: It all depends on the Pope

There is some interesting tension within Catholicism. When Vatican II finished, many believed the more liberal wing of the church had shifted Catholicism. But

48. “The Holy Spirit prevents a Pope from officially teaching error, and this charism follows, necessarily, from the existence of the Church itself. If the Church is to do what Christ said it would — and not do what he said it would not do, such as have the gates of hell prevail against it — then it must be able to teach infallibly” (Karl Keating, *Catholicism and Fundamentalism: The Attack on “Romanism” by “Bible Christians”* [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988], 230).

49. Men like Karl Rahner are well aware of the kinds of arguments we just offered. In fact, he pushes the argument further and says, given their theology, the Bible could be technically unnecessary, since Catholicism has the infallible teaching office, see Karl Rahner, *Inspiration in the Bible*, 31–33. He believes that arguments (like the one we offered above) actually hold if the church labored under the old formulation of two sources of revelation (which he admits they did hold to that view). He offers a solution that makes the Scriptures a constitutive element in the church. That is, the New Testament is her very *paradosis* — the Scriptures are “her faith and self-realization” which are “actualized in writing” (49). There is no separate Scripture; there is the church and Scripture together: “By thus forming the Scriptures herself, she addresses herself as the norm-giving Apostolic Church towards her own future and, conversely, by establishing herself as the law for all times to come, she forms the Scriptures” (49–50). On p. 49, his one sentence attempts to counter the argument of men like Herman Ridderbos (e.g., *Redemptive History and the New Testament Scriptures*, trans. H. De Jongste (Philipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1963). In a nutshell, Rahner is saying that there is no “chicken and the egg” question — they are both symbiotically related (50–51).

John Paul II and Benedict XVI (the present Pope)⁵⁰ are considered by many to be ultra conservatives (which they are not) who have stopped the shift. In truth, they represent Catholicism that embraced Vatican II along with her previous history (aggiornamento linked to resourcement). As a result, the liberalizing tendency in Vatican II along with SVC'S universalistic tendencies will be either muffled or unleashed in Catholicism. It all depends on how the Pope interprets the SVC documents.⁵¹ The Pope will arrest the liberalizing tendencies (in some measure) in Catholicism if he interprets Vatican II to be in perfect continuity with the past. He also hastens her demise and death if he interprets the SVC documents in a more progressive sense.

Their view of Scripture and its role in Catholicism are not Protestant. They do not espouse sola scriptura. The Pope is the final authority and no matter what kind of verbal gymnastics they offer, in the absence of sola scriptura, they are left with an arbiter and authority other than Scripture. They may argue that the Spirit guides the church and the Pope to ensure fidelity but where did they get that idea? It is not from Scripture! Where Catholicism goes and what doctrines are finally taught

and embraced all depend on the Pope. He is a mere man and no man has ever been promised infallibility. Many Catholics bemoan what they believe to be the encroaching power of the Pope (which they thought was countered in the SVC) and are appalled by their inability to dissent.⁵² Such trends are inevitable (though I believe they were necessary because of the SVC's liberalizing tendencies) when Scripture does not have the primacy. No one can complain by an appeal to Scripture! After all has been said, Roman Catholicism and Protestants are fundamentally different. We depend on the Scripture and believe the Church exists because of the Word of God. They depend on the Pope who tells them what constitutes the Word of God (Scripture and Tradition) and what they are to believe about the Scriptures and what parts of Tradition are revelatory. We cannot live without the Word; they cannot live without the Pope. What animates the two is different and the two are fundamentally different religions at their core. Though the two currently remain under the umbrella of "Christendom," history will further develop their essential differences, either in the near future or in the end when our blessed Lord returns. ■

50. Remember, he was dubbed the *Panzerkardinal*. *Panzer* is a military term, thus Ratzinger was sometimes referred to as the enforcer cardinal.

51. It was quite surprising to see that Hans Küng is arguing that the future of Catholicism (that she be progressive) depends on the kind of Pope she will have in the future. He still hopes for the spirit of Vatican II to take over Catholicism, see "Is the Second Vatican Council Forgotten?" in *Concilium*, ed. Alberto Melloni and Christoph Theobald (London: SCM Press, 2005), 108–117, esp. 116–117.

52. We cannot develop this interesting debate in Catholicism. In 1998, their *Code of Canon Law* was changed by the Pope's *Motu Proprio*

Ad tuendam fidem (a *Motu Proprio* is the Pope's personal ruling on specific items) in which he introduced a new category of teaching as "definitive." The net effect is, a true Catholic must believe not just the *ex cathedra* doctrines but also all the definitive teachings of the Magisterium. For this, see Ladislav Orsy, *Receiving the Council: Theological and Canonical Insights and Debates* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2009), 105ff.; the exchange between Orsy and Ratzinger on this matter can be found on pp. 115–142. Also, cf. Christoph Theobald, "A 'Definitive' Discourse of the Magisterium: Why be Afraid of a Creative Reception?," in *Concilium*, ed. Christoph Theobald and Dietmar Mieth (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999), 60–69.