

## DOGMATIC CONSTITUTION ON DIVINE REVELATION

*During the recent past much exploratory work has been done on the possibility of collaboration between Roman Catholics and members of other Christian Churches in translation and revision. We believe that many of our readers will be glad to read and keep for reference this English translation of a part of the Constitution on Divine Revelation approved at the last session of the Second Vatican Council in 1965. The full document consists of six chapters and a preface in which the purpose of the Constitution is stated to be 'to set forth authentic doctrine on divine revelation and how it is handed on'. Chapter I affirms that God chose to reveal Himself to men and that Jesus Christ is the perfect revelation of God. Chapter II deals with the place occupied respectively by 'sacred tradition, sacred Scripture and the teaching authority of the Church' in handing on divine revelation. In the following excerpts chapters III, IV, V, and VI are reproduced in full. The possibility of collaboration with other Christians is specifically mentioned in the last sentence in chapter VI. 22. In view of its special significance for readers of this journal we give the sentence in its official Latin form:—*

*Quae si, data opportunitate et annuente Ecclesiae auctoritate conficiantur (versiones) communi etiam cum fratribus seiunctis nisu, ab omnibus christianis adhiberi poterunt.*

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### CHAPTER III

#### SACRED SCRIPTURE, ITS INSPIRATION, AND DIVINE INTERPRETATION

11. Those divinely revealed realities which are contained and presented in sacred Scripture have been committed to writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. For Holy Mother Church, relying on the belief of the Apostles (see John 20: 31; 2 Tim. 3: 16; 2 Peter 1: 19–21, 3: 15–16), holds that the books of both the Old and New Testaments in their entirety, with all their parts, are sacred and canonical because written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they have God as their author and have been handed on as such to the Church herself. In composing the sacred books, God chose men and while employed by Him they made use of their powers and abilities, so that with Him acting in them and through them, they, as true authors, consigned to writing everything and only those things which He wanted.

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 that truth which God wanted put into the sacred writings for the sake of our salvation. 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, Greek text).

12. However, since God speaks in sacred Scripture through men in human fashion, the interpreter of sacred Scripture, in order to see clearly what God wanted to communicate to us, should carefully investigate what meaning the sacred writers really intended, and what God wanted to manifest by means of their words.

To search out the intention of the sacred writers, attention should be given, among other things, to 'literary forms.' For truth is set forth and expressed differently in texts which are variously historical, prophetic, poetic, or of other forms of discourse. The interpreter must investigate what meaning the sacred writer intended to express and actually expressed in particular circumstances by using contemporary literary forms in accordance with the situation of his own time and culture. For the correct understanding of what the sacred author wanted to assert, due attention must be paid to the customary and characteristic styles of feeling, speaking and narrating which prevailed at the time of the sacred writer, and to the patterns men normally employed at that period in their everyday dealings with one another.

But, since holy Scripture must be read and interpreted in the same spirit in which it was written, no less serious attention must be given to the content and unity of the whole of Scripture if the meaning of the sacred texts is to be correctly worked out. The living tradition of the whole Church must be taken into account along with the harmony which exists between elements of the faith. It is the task of exegetes to work according to these rules toward a better understanding and explanation of the meaning of sacred Scripture, so that through preparatory study the judgment of the Church may mature. For all of what has been said about the way of interpreting Scripture is subject finally to the judgment of the Church, which carries out the divine commission and ministry of guarding and interpreting the word of God.

13. In sacred Scripture, therefore, while the truth and holiness of God always remains intact, the marvelous 'condescension' of eternal wisdom is clearly shown, 'that we may learn the gentle kindness of God, which words cannot express, and how far He has gone in adapting His language with thoughtful concern for our weak human nature.'<sup>1</sup> For the words of God, expressed in human language, have been made like human discourse, just as the word of the eternal Father, when He took to Himself the flesh of human weakness, was in every way made like men.

<sup>1</sup> St John Chrysostom, 'In Genesis' 3.8 (Homily 17.1): PG 53.134: 'Attemperatio' (in English 'Suitable Adjustment': in Greek 'synkatabasis').

## CHAPTER IV

## THE OLD TESTAMENT

14. In carefully planning and preparing the salvation of the whole human race the God of infinite love, by a special dispensation, chose for Himself a people to whom He would entrust His promises. First He entered into a covenant with Abraham (see Gen. 15: 18) and, through Moses, with the people of Israel (see Ex. 24: 8). To this people which He had acquired for Himself, He so manifested Himself through words and deeds as the one true and living God that Israel came to know by experience the ways of God with men. Then, too, when God Himself spoke to them through the mouth of the prophets, Israel daily gained a deeper and clearer understanding of His ways and made them more widely known among the nations (see Ps. 21: 28-29; 95: 1-3; Is. 2: 1-5; Jer. 3: 17). The plan of salvation foretold by the sacred authors, recounted and explained by them, is found as the true word of God in the books of the Old Testament: these books, therefore, written under divine inspiration, remain permanently valuable. 'For all that was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope' (Rom. 15: 4).

15. The principal purpose to which the plan of the old covenant was directed was to prepare for the coming of Christ, the redeemer of all and of the messianic kingdom, to announce this coming by prophecy (see Luke 24: 44, John 5: 39; 1 Peter 1: 10), and to indicate its meaning through various types (see I Cor. 10: 12). Now the books of the Old Testament, in accordance with the state of mankind before the time of salvation established by Christ, reveal to all men the knowledge of God and of man and the ways in which God, just and merciful, deals with men. These books, though they also contain some things which are incomplete and temporary, nevertheless show us true divine pedagogy. These same books, then, give expression to a lively sense of God, contain a store of sublime teachings about God, sound wisdom about human life, and a wonderful treasury of prayers, and in them the mystery of our salvation is present in a hidden way. Christians should receive them with reverence.

16. God, the inspirer and author of both Testaments, wisely arranged that the New Testament be hidden in the Old and the Old be made manifest in the New. For, though Christ established the new covenant in His blood (see Luke 22: 20; 1 Cor. 11: 25), still the books of the Old Testament with all their parts, caught up into the proclamation of the Gospel, acquire and show forth their full meaning in the New Testament (see Matt. 5: 17; Luke 24: 27; Rom. 16: 25-26; 2 Cor. 3: 14-16) and in turn shed light on it and explain it.

## CHAPTER V

## THE NEW TESTAMENT

17. The word of God, which is the power of God for the salvation of all who believe (see Rom. 1: 16), is set forth and shows its power in a most excellent way in the writings of the New Testament. For when the fulness of

time arrived (see Gal. 4: 4), the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us in His fulness of grace and truth (see John 1: 14). Christ established the kingdom of God on earth, manifested His Father and Himself by deeds and words, and completed His work by His death, resurrection and glorious ascension and by the sending of the Holy Spirit. Having been lifted up from the earth, He draws all men to Himself (see John 12: 32, Greek text), He who alone has the words of eternal life (see John 6: 68). This mystery had not been manifested to other generations as it was now revealed to His holy Apostles and prophets in the Holy Spirit (see Eph. 3: 4–6, Greek text), so that they might preach the Gospel, stir up faith in Jesus, Christ and Lord, and gather together the Church. Now the writings of the New Testament stand as a perpetual and divine witness to these realities.

18. It is common knowledge that among all the Scriptures, even those of the New Testament, the Gospels have a special preeminence and rightly so, for they are the principal witness for the life and teaching of the incarnate Word, our Savior.

The Church has always and everywhere held and continues to hold that the four Gospels are of apostolic origin. For what the Apostles preached in fulfillment of the commission of Christ, afterwards they themselves and apostolic men, under the inspiration of the divine Spirit, handed on to us in writing: the foundation of faith, namely, the fourfold Gospel, according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

19. Holy Mother Church has firmly and with absolute constancy held, and continues to hold, that the four Gospels just named, whose historical character the Church unhesitatingly asserts, faithfully hand on what Jesus Christ, while living among men, really did and taught for their eternal salvation until the day He was taken up into heaven (see Acts 1: 1–2). Indeed, after the ascension of the Lord the Apostles handed on to their hearers what He had said and done. This they did with that clearer understanding which they enjoyed after they had been instructed by the glorious events of Christ's life and taught by the light of the Spirit of truth. The sacred authors wrote the four Gospels, selecting some things from the many which had been handed on by word of mouth or in writing, reducing some of them to a synthesis, explaining 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. For their intention in writing was that either from their own memory and recollections, or from the witness of those who 'themselves from the beginning were eye-witnesses and ministers of the Word' we might know the 'the truth' concerning those matters about which we have been instructed (see Luke 1: 2–4).

20. Besides the four Gospels, the canon of the New Testament also contains the epistles of St Paul and other apostolic writings, composed under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, by which according to the wise plan of God, those matters which concern Christ the Lord are confirmed, His true teaching is more and more fully stated, the saving power of the divine work of Christ is preached, the story is told of the beginnings of the Church and its marvelous growth, and its glorious fulfillment is foretold.

For the Lord Jesus was with His Apostles as He had promised (see Matt.

28: 20) and sent them the advocate Spirit who would lead them into the fulness of truth (see John 16: 13).

## CHAPTER VI

### SACRED SCRIPTURE IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

21. The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord, since, especially in the sacred liturgy, she unceasingly receives and offers to the faithful the bread of life from the table both of God's word and of Christ's body. She has always maintained them, and continues to do so, together with sacred tradition, as the supreme rule of faith, since, as inspired by God and committed once and for all to writing, they impart the word of God Himself without change, and make the voice of the Holy Spirit resound in the words of the prophets and Apostles. Therefore, like the Christian religion itself, all the preaching of the Church must be nourished and regulated by sacred Scripture. For in the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven meets His children with great love and speaks with them; and the force and power in the word of God is so great that it stands as the support and energy of the Church, the strength of faith for her sons, the food of the soul, the pure and everlasting source of spiritual life. Consequently these words are perfectly applicable to sacred Scripture: 'For the word of God is living and active' (Heb. 4: 12) and 'it has power to build you up and give you your heritage among all those who are sanctified' (Acts 20: 32; see 1 Thess. 2: 13).

22. Easy access to sacred Scripture should be provided for all the Christian faithful. That is why the Church from the very beginning accepted as her own that very ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament which is called the Septuagint: and she has always given a place of honor to other Eastern translations and Latin ones, especially the Latin translation known as the Vulgate. But since the word of God should be accessible at all times, the Church by her authority and 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 should the opportunity arise and the Church authorities approve, if these translations are produced in cooperation with the separated brethren as well, all Christians will be able to use them.

23. The bride of the incarnate Word, the Church taught by the Holy Spirit, is concerned to move ahead toward a deeper understanding of the sacred Scriptures so that she may increasingly feed her sons with the divine words. Therefore, she also encourages the study of the holy Fathers of both East and West and of sacred liturgies. Catholic exegetes then and other students of sacred theology, working diligently together and using appropriate means, should devote their energies, under the watchful care of the sacred teaching office of the Church, to an exploration and exposition of the divine writings. This should be so done that as many ministers of the divine word as possible will be able effectively to provide the nourishment of the Scriptures for the people of God, to enlighten their minds, strengthen their wills, and set men's hearts on fire with the love of God. The sacred synod encourages the

sons of the Church and Biblical scholars to continue energetically, following the mind of the Church, with the work they have so well begun, with a constant renewal of vigor.

24. Sacred theology rests on the written word of God, together with sacred tradition, as its primary and perpetual foundation. By scrutinizing in the light of faith all truth stored up in the mystery of Christ, theology is most powerfully strengthened and constantly rejuvenated by that word. For the sacred Scriptures contain the word of God and since they are inspired really are the word of God; and so the study of the sacred page is, as it were, the soul of sacred theology. By the same word of Scripture the ministry of the word also, that is, pastoral preaching, catechetics and all Christian instruction, in which the liturgical homily must hold the foremost place, is nourished in a healthy way and flourishes in a holy way.

25. Therefore, all the clergy must hold fast to the sacred Scriptures through diligent sacred reading and careful study, especially the priests of Christ and others, such as deacons and catechists who are legitimately active in the ministry of the word. This is to be done so that none of them will become 'an empty preacher of the word of God outwardly, who is not a listener to it inwardly'<sup>1</sup> since they must share the abundant wealth of the divine word with the faithful committed to them, especially in the sacred liturgy. The sacred synod also earnestly and especially urges all the Christian faithful, especially Religious, to learn by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures the 'excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ' (Phil. 3: 8). 'For ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ.'<sup>2</sup> Therefore, they should gladly put themselves in touch with the sacred text itself, whether it be through the liturgy, rich in the divine word, or through devotional reading, or through instructions suitable for the purpose and other aids which, in our time, with approval and active support of the shepherds of the Church, are commendably spread everywhere. And let them remember that 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 saying.'<sup>3</sup>

It devolves on sacred bishops 'who have the apostolic teaching'<sup>4</sup> to give the faithful entrusted to them suitable instruction in the right use of the divine books, especially the New Testament and above all the Gospels. This can be done through translations of the sacred texts, which are to be provided with the necessary and really adequate explanations so that the children of the Church may safely and profitably become conversant with the sacred Scriptures and be penetrated with their spirit.

Furthermore, editions of the sacred Scriptures, provided with suitable footnotes, should be prepared also for the use of non-Christians and adapted to their situation. Both pastors of souls and Christians generally should see to the wise distribution of these in one way or another.

26. In this way, therefore, through the reading and study of the sacred

<sup>1</sup> St Augustine, *Sermons*, 179.1: PL 38.966.

<sup>2</sup> St Jerome, *Commentary on Isaiah*, Prol.: PL 24.17. Cf. Benedict XV encyclical 'Spiritus paraclitus': EB 475-80: Pius XII, encyclical 'Divino Afflante Spiritu': EB 544.

<sup>3</sup> St Ambrose, *On the Duties of Ministers* I. 20.88: PL 16.50.

<sup>4</sup> St Irenaeus, *Against Heretics* IV. 32.1: PG 7. 1071 (same as 49.2): Harvey, 2, p.255.

books 'the word of God may spread rapidly and be glorified' (2 Thess. 3: 1) and the treasure of revelation, entrusted to the Church, may more and more fill the hearts of men. Just as the life of the Church is strengthened through more frequent celebration of the Eucharistic mystery, similarly we may hope for a new stimulus for the life of the Spirit from a growing reverence for the word of God, which 'lasts forever' (Is. 40: 8; see 1 Peter 1: 23-25).

## CORRESPONDENCE

*We are glad to print a letter received from the Rev. T. H. Lyle on which we invited the Rev. H. K. Moulton to comment. Mr Moulton needs no introduction to readers of this journal and he is probably known personally to the majority of its readers. We hope the publication of this correspondence will encourage others to write to the Editor. Ed.*

Dear Mr Editor,

1. The translation of *ho huios mou ho eklelegmenos* in Luke 9: 35.

Professor Kilpatrick, in his article in Vol. 16, No. 3 (July 1965) argued, on grounds of Hebrew and LXX antecedents, that phrases in the New Testament, in which a noun having the article and qualified by a noun or pronoun in the genitive, is followed by an adjective having the article, should be translated in English by a noun with an attributive adjective. He specifically says, on page 118, 'The R.S.V. is to be congratulated on its treatment of Mark 1: 11 ("my beloved Son"); 9: 7 ("my beloved Son") and their parallels. Renderings like "My Son, the Beloved One" do not comprehend the idiom. It is all the more surprising that the Revisers did not produce the right rendering at Luke 23: 35 (where the R.S.V. has "the Christ of God, his Chosen One").' He goes on to say, 'Probably the reason why *the Beloved/only* and *the chosen* are separated from the rest of their phrase in the mistranslations just noted is that much play has been made with the few occasions on which these words serve as titles.'

All this leads me to infer that Professor Kilpatrick would translate 'My chosen Son' in Luke 9: 35. The R.S.V., however, has 'my Son, my Chosen'; so, as this is the Lucan parallel to Mark 9: 7, it was presumably through oversight that Professor Kilpatrick congratulated the R.S.V. on its treatment of 'Mark 1: 11; 9: 7 and their parallels.' I was pleased to read his views because my own wish, in drafting the new Gujarati translation, was to say '*maaro pasand karelo putra*' (my chosen Son), and I am glad to say the Gujarati Revision Committee agreed. But what puzzled me, and still gives me some misgivings, is that, of all the dozen or so versions, which we consulted in other Indian languages and in English (both old versions and new revisions) the solitary one which adopts this translation is the B.F.B.S. Diglot, which