

In The School of Mary

(Papal documents condensed by Deacon William Wagner)

First Published in the St. Bartholomew Bulletin: July 2012

Pope Paul VI

***Dei Verbum*, Dogmatic Constitution on the Divine Revelation Promulgated by Pope Paul VI - November 18, 1965.**

PREFACE

1. Hearing the word of God with reverence and proclaiming it with faith, the sacred synod takes its direction from these words of St. John: "What we have seen and heard we announce to you, so that you may have fellowship with us and our common fellowship be with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ." (*cf 1 Jn 1:2-3*). Following in the footsteps of the Council of Trent and the First Vatican Council, this council sets forth authentic doctrine on divine revelation and how it is handed on.

Chapter I

REVELATION ITSELF

2. God, in his goodness, chose to reveal Himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of His will by which, through the Word made flesh, man might in the Holy Spirit have access to the Father. Through this revelation the invisible God speaks to men as friends so that He might invite and take them into fellowship with Himself. This plan of revelation is realized by deeds and words. The deeds wrought by God in the history of salvation manifest the teaching and realities signified by the words, while the words proclaim the deeds and clarify the mystery contained in them. By this revelation the deepest truth about God and the salvation of man shines out in Christ, who is both the mediator and the fullness of all revelation.
3. God, who through the Word created all things, gives men an enduring witness to Himself. Planning to make known the way of salvation, He manifested Himself to our first parents. After their fall His promise of redemption aroused in them the hope of being saved. Then, at the appointed time He called Abraham. Through the patriarchs, and after them through Moses and the prophets, He taught this people to acknowledge Himself as the one true God and to await the Savior promised by Him.
4. After speaking in many and varied ways through the prophets, "now in these days God has spoken to us in His Son" (*Heb 1:1-2*). For He sent His Son so that He might dwell among men and tell them of the innermost being of God. (*cf Jn 1:1-8*) Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, was sent as "a man to men." He completes the work of salvation that His Father gave Him to do. To see Jesus is to see His Father (*cf Jn 14:9*). For this reason Jesus perfected revelation by fulfilling it through His whole work of making Himself present and manifesting Himself through His words and deeds. He confirmed with divine testimony that God is with us to free us from the darkness of sin and death, and raise us up to life eternal. The Christian dispensation will never pass away and we now await no further new public revelation.

Chapter II

HANDING ON DIVINE REVELATION

There is growth in the understanding of the realities and the words which have been handed down. This happens through a penetrating understanding of the spiritual realities that believers experience, and through the preaching of those who have received through episcopal succession the sure gift of truth.

The words of the holy fathers witness to the presence of this living tradition. Through the same tradition the Church's full canon of the sacred books is known and the sacred writings themselves are more profoundly understood. Thus God, who spoke of old, uninterruptedly converses with the bride of His beloved Son. The Holy Spirit, the living voice of the Gospel, resounds in the Church, and through her, in the world, leading unto all truth those who believe.

9. There exists a close connection between sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture. Both, flowing from the same divine wellspring, merge into a unity and tend toward the same end. Sacred Scripture is the word of God as it is consigned to writing under the inspiration of the divine Spirit. Sacred tradition takes the word of God, entrusted

by Christ and the Holy Spirit to the Apostles, and hands it on to their successors in its full purity, so that they may in proclaiming it preserve this word of God faithfully, explain it, and make it more widely known. Therefore both sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture are to be accepted and venerated with same sense of loyalty and reverence.

10. Sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture form one sacred deposit of the word of God, committed to the Church. The entire holy people united with their shepherds remain always steadfast in the teaching of the Apostles. Holding to, practicing and professing the heritage of the faith, it becomes on the part of the bishops and faithful a single common effort.

However, 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, exercised in the name of Jesus Christ. This teaching office is not above the word of God, but serves it, teaching only what has been handed on, listening to it devoutly, guarding it scrupulously and explaining it faithfully in accord with a divine commission. With the help of the Holy Spirit it draws from this one deposit of faith everything that it presents for belief as divinely revealed.

Sacred tradition, Sacred Scripture and the teaching authority of the Church are so linked together that one cannot stand without the others. All together and each in its own way under the action of the one Holy Spirit contribute effectively to the salvation of souls.

Chapter III

SACRED SCRIPTURE, ITS INSPIRATION AND DIVINE INTERPRETATION

11. Those divinely revealed realities that are contained in Sacred Scripture have been committed to writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Holy Mother Church, relying on the belief of the Apostles, 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. God chose men, so that with Him acting in them, they, as true authors, consigned to writing everything and only those things which he wanted.

Since everything asserted by the inspired authors must be held to be asserted by the Holy Spirit, it follows that the books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching without error that truth which God wanted for the sake of salvation. Therefore, "all Scripture is divinely inspired and has its use for teaching the truth and refuting error..." (cf 2 Tim 3:16-17)

God speaks in Sacred Scripture through men in human fashion. Therefore, the interpreter of Sacred Scripture should carefully investigate what meaning the sacred writers really intended. To search out the intention of the sacred writers, attention should be given to "literary forms". For truth is set forth differently in texts that are historical, prophetic, poetic, or of other forms of discourse. The interpreter must investigate what the sacred writer intended and actually expressed in particular circumstances by using contemporary literary forms. Attention must be paid to the customary styles of speaking and narrating that prevailed at the time of the sacred writer.

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. The living tradition of the whole Church must be taken into account along with the harmony that exists between elements of the faith. It is the task of exegetes to work according to these rules toward a better understanding of the Scriptures. For all of what has been said about the way of interpreting Scripture is subject finally to the judgment of the Church carrying out its divine commission and ministry of guarding and interpreting the word of God.

13. In sacred Scripture while the truth and holiness of God always remains intact, the marvelous "condescension" of eternal wisdom is clearly shown. 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 human flesh was in every way made like men.

Chapter IV The Old Testament

14. In carefully preparing the salvation of the whole human race, God choose for himself a people to whom he would entrust his promises. First, he entered into a covenant with Abraham and, through Moses, with the people of Israel. To this people he so manifested himself through words and deeds that Israel came to know by experience the ways of God with men. When God himself spoke to them through the mouth of the prophets, Israel daily gained a deeper and clearer understanding of his ways. The plan of salvation foretold by the sacred

authors is found as the true word of God in the Old Testament, written under divine inspiration, remaining permanently valuable.

15. The principal purpose of the old covenant was to prepare for the coming of Christ, the redeemer of all. The Old Testament reveals to all men the knowledge of God and of man and the ways in which God deals with men. These books, though incomplete and temporary, nevertheless show us true divine pedagogy, give expression to a lively sense of God, contain a store of sublime teachings about God, wisdom about human life, and a wonderful treasury of prayers. In them the mystery of our salvation is present in a hidden way.
16. God arranged that the New Testament be hidden in the Old and Old be made manifest in the New. The books of the Old Testament with all their parts acquire and show forth their full meaning in the New Testament and in turn shed light on it and explain it.

Chapter V The New Testament

17. The word of God is set forth and shows its power in a most excellent way in the writings of the New Testament. For when the fullness of time arrived, the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us in his fullness of graces and truth. Christ established the kingdom of God on earth, manifested his Father and himself, and completed his work by his death, resurrection and glorious Ascension, and by the sending of the Holy Spirit. He draws all men to himself, he who alone has the words of eternal life. This mystery was now revealed to his Holy Apostles and prophets in the Holy Spirit so that they might preach the Gospel, stir up faith in Jesus Christ and gather together the Church. The New Testament stands as a perpetual and divine witness to these realities.
18. Among all the Scriptures, even those of the New Testament, the Gospels have a special preeminence, for they are the principal witness for the life and teaching of the Incarnate Word, our savior.

The Church has always and everywhere held that the four Gospels are of apostolic origin. For what the Apostles preached in fulfillment of the commission of Christ under the inspiration of the divine Spirit they handed on to us in writing.
19. Holy Mother Church has firmly and with absolute constancy held that the four Gospels faithfully hand on what Jesus Christ really did and taught for their eternal salvation until the day He was taken up into heaven. After the Ascension of the Lord the Apostles handed on to their hearers what He had said and done. This they did with clearer understanding, 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 and 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 others, we might know "the truth" concerning those matters about which we have been instructed.
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. According to the wise plan of God, his true teaching is more and more fully stated, the divine saving work of Christ is preached, the story of the beginnings of the Church is told, and it's marvelous growth and glorious fulfillment is foretold. For the Lord Jesus was with his apostles and he sent them the advocate Spirit who would lead them into the fullness of truth.

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, 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, together with sacred Tradition, as the supreme rule of faith. They impart the word of God himself without change. 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 in heaven meets his children with great love. The power in the word of God is so great that it stands as the support and energy of the Church. Consequently these words are perfectly applicable to Sacred Scripture: "For the word of God is living and active," and "it has power to build you up and give you your heritage among all those who are sanctified."

Chapter VI Sacred Scripture in the Life of the Church

22. Easy access to Sacred Scripture should be provided for all the faithful. That is why the Church from the beginning accepted that ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, and honored other Eastern translations and Latin ones, especially the Latin Vulgate. Since the word of God should be accessible at all times, the Church sees to it that suitable and correct translations are made into different languages.

23. The bride of the Incarnate Word, the Church is concerned to move ahead toward a deeper understanding of the Sacred Scriptures. She also encourages the study of the holy Fathers of both East and West and of sacred liturgies. Catholic exegetes and other students of sacred theology should devote their energies under the watchful care of the sacred teaching office of the Church to an exploration of the divine writings. This should be done so that as many ministers of the divine word as possible will be able to provide the nourishment of the Scriptures for the people of God.
24. Sacred theology rests on the written word of God, together with sacred tradition, as its primary and perpetual foundation. Theology is most powerfully strengthened and constantly rejuvenated by that word. Since the Sacred Scriptures are inspired, they really are the word of God. Therefore, the study of the sacred page is the soul of sacred theology. In that same word pastoral preaching, catechetics and all Christian instruction, of which the liturgical homily holds the foremost place, is nourished and flourishes.
25. Therefore all the clergy, especially priests and others, such as deacons and catechists must hold fast to the Sacred Scriptures through diligent sacred reading. This is to be done so that none of them will become "an empty preacher of the word of God." The sacred synod also urges all the faithful, especially Religious, to learn by frequent reading of the divine Scripture. St. Jerome said that "ignorance of Scripture was ignorance of Christ. All should gladly put themselves in touch with the sacred text itself. Let them remember that prayer should accompany the reading of Sacred Scripture. Ambrose reminded us, "When we pray we speak to Him and when we read the divine saying we hear Him." It rests on sacred bishops to give the faithful entrusted to them suitable instruction in the right use of the divine books.
26. Just as the life of the Church is strengthened through frequent celebration of the Eucharist, similarly we hope for a new stimulus for the life of the Spirit from a growing reverence for the word of God.