

## Chapter 2 – Divine Revelation

### The Sources of Revelation

*On November 14, 1962, the 19th General Session undertook the study of the dogmatic schema "On the Sources of Revelation." A strong opposition to this schema, and, more generally, to all the dogmatic schemas, had already been apparent for several weeks. It was felt that there was too docile an attitude towards the ideas of certain Roman groups, an unjustified hostility to the great theologians of the hour, a too scholarly mentality, anxious to hunt out heresies everywhere, and making the dialogue with non-Catholics more inflexible. The patriarch took the floor to reject this schema in its entirety.*

May I be permitted to express, on the subject of the schema of the dogmatic constitution "De Fontibus Revelationis," a general opinion, inspired above all by pastoral and ecumenical considerations.

The criterion for choosing the subjects to be submitted to the deliberations of the Fathers in council is not that of their objective importance, but their relationship with the life of the Church. Thus, as the Holy Father has stressed more than once and even in his speech opening the council, he wished to see all questions dealt with from the pastoral angle. Now, I ask, what present and pastoral interest is there for the council to discuss the question of the sources of Revelation from the narrow, negative, and polemical angle with which it is being presented to us? I shall explain:

1) First of all, we may well wonder in what measure this schema "De Fontibus Revelationis" truly responds to the desires and wishes of the bishops and Catholic universities. The suspicion comes spontaneously to mind that this text was written rather to put an end to quarrels between theological schools. It seems to me that the council should keep its distance from these quarrels.

2) As for the specific matter of the doctrine of the Church on the sources of Revelation, no danger is truly menacing the Church. There is no need to proceed to new definitions of faith or to dogmatic declarations, which would risk stiffening traditional positions or arresting the harmonious development of dogma. In fact, certain ideas, such as those that concern the relationship between Scripture and Tradition, or the interpretation of certain passages of the books of the Old and of the New Testament, have been for some years the objects of research and in depth discussions among specialists both in the empirical sciences and in sacred studies. Do we today have all the necessary knowledge which would permit us to settle definitively the current debates? These discussions, in our opinion, have not yet reached a sufficiently mature stage to justify imposing definitive solutions.

3) Certain parts of the schema, it is true, repeat the traditional teaching of the Church on points that are certain, but this certain teaching is presented in a rather negative form, of condemnations and polemics. Now, that is not acceding to the wishes of the pope or the expectations of the faithful who await from us a statement that is serene, constructive, and rich in the history of our salvation, to nourish their Christian life.

4) On the ecumenical level, one must regret that the schema does not strive to prepare the way for further dialogue with other Christians, but is content to repeat the dated formulas of the “Counter Reformation” and of “Anti-Modernism.”

For all these reasons, and without wishing to go into detail, I propose that the council reject purely and simply the examination and the adoption of this schema.

The teaching of the Church on this point should be explained in a positive and pastoral manner, and the way should remain open to the research of specialists, among whom are Catholic scholars and theologians of great renown, in whom the Church normally would place its trust.

### **The Absence of Eastern Theology**

*On November 17, 1962, during the 21st General Session, Archbishop George Hakim of St. John of Acre and of all Galilee, returned to the charge and rejected the schema “Concerning the Sources of Revelation,” but for a more general reason, namely: this schema, like all the dogmatic schemas presented to the council, took into account only one theological tradition: that of the West. Eastern theology was not recognized.*

If I intervene now, it is not to repeat what numerous and eminent prelates have already said perfectly on these doctrinal schemas. I am only expressing my explicit adherence to the criticism that they have formulated, and which lead them to think that these schemas should be not only amended but rewritten, if we wish to remain faithful to the apostolic goals of this council.

I only wish to let the council hear a voice of the East and of its patristic tradition, and to say that the doctrinal schemas presently being studied are foreign to that venerable and authentic tradition, in their wording, in their structure, in their perspective, and in their conceptualization.

These schemas certainly contain riches and values of Latin theology, and we are pleased to pay fervent homage to the magnificent *intellectus fidei* that this theology has provided for the Church. Nevertheless, we regret that, completely ignoring Eastern catechesis and theology, that of Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, Maximos the Confessor, John of Damascus, and so many others, the drafters have apparently monopolized the universal faith for the benefit of their particular theology, and seem to wish to erect as exclusive conciliar truth what is a valid expression, but a local and partial one, of God’s Revelation.

In Eastern theology, where the liturgy is the efficacious place for the transmission of the faith, where initiation occurs within the sacramental mystery, and not in an abstract instruction without any symbolic links, the mystery of Christ is set forth directly as an *economia*. It unrolls in the history of the preparation in the Old Covenant, the accomplishment in Christ, and the realization in the time of the Church. Theoretical explanations, however legitimate and necessary they may be, are never separated from the warp and woof of Scripture and the testimony of the Fathers.

This concrete character of the Word of God manifests its presence in the world. The Church, the Body of Christ, is precisely the authentic site and the living *magisterium* of its transmission. Any separation, or even the appearance of separation, between Scripture and Tradition, as occurs in the draft of “De Fontibus” now being submitted to this Council, will be judged by many as doing violence to the authentic unity of the paths of transmission, which are never separated in Eastern theology, and which we cannot conceive of as being separated.

The schemas that have been presented are exclusively the fruit of scholasticism — good and true fruit, certainly — but produced by only certain elements of the Tradition of the Church. The character of this council invites us to avoid confining the word of God within particular categories, and to avoid eliminating another *intellectus fidei* by disregarding it.

Here are some examples that illustrate what I am saying:

Eastern theology gives full emphasis to the definition of man as image of God, which leads it to conceive in a manner different from that of the Latins the abstract distinction between nature and grace, and thus the relationship of God and men, as it is presented in Revelation.

Another example: Eastern theology considers the Paschal mystery in its unique totality—death and resurrection—while Latin theology dwells more on the aspect and the theory of satisfaction.

I enumerate quickly these examples to demonstrate the Catholic presence of Eastern theology, whose truth and orthodoxy are clearly indisputable.

That is why I, nourished by this authentic tradition, feel myself a stranger to the terminology and the structure of the proposed schemas, and I understand still more clearly the criticisms that have been made from the evangelical and pastoral perspectives, and with which I am in complete agreement.

### **Growth and Progress of the Living Tradition in the Church**

*Under this title, the Melkite Greek Patriarchate published at Rome, on October 3, 1964, as a supplement to the sessions of the council, a note stressing the notion of living Tradition, referred to in the new schema, and explaining in what sense it can grow and develop.*

In its new form, the schema on Revelation shows not only an improvement, not only a substantial change, but a complete reversal of the earlier schema “De Fontibus Revelationis.” Its primary merit consists in the affirmation of the unity of the revealed object. This object is God himself, intervening in the lives of men and manifesting himself to them through Jesus Christ, in Jesus Christ. The mystery of Christ is the whole of revelation. As the author and perfecter of our faith, Jesus Christ, in the indissoluble unity of his being, is at once the one who reveals and who is revealed. The overwhelming majority of the Fathers seem to be very much pleased with themselves for making such an affirmation. Several of them even ask that it be stressed still more, such as Bishop Zoughaie of Upper Volta, who cites on this subject the beautiful chapter of Saint John of the Cross in *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*.

Another datum of the Catholic faith is that the revelation of Christ is definitive; it is a truth ordinarily expressed by saying that revelation “ended with the death of the last of the Apostles,” witnesses of Christ. When revelation is seen as only the communication of a series of pronouncements, one can adhere to this truth of faith; however, it is not so understood. One does not see, in fact, that which would render impossible the communication of new pronouncements in the future. On the other hand, if one holds that all revelation is summed up in the mystery of Christ, one understands immediately that God, having spoken his one and only Word to us, having spoken it to us (insofar as it is possible for us in our earthly condition to hear it) in its totality, has henceforth nothing more to say to us, in the same way that having given us his only Son, He has nothing more to give to us. It then becomes impossible to imagine any new revelation in the future, that of the incarnation of a new Son of God. The New Testament is truly, in the strictest sense, the “last” and the “eternal” one (“*novissimum et aeternum*”).

For this very reason, we can understand at the same time that a limitless field is open to Christian reflection, which can and should be unremittingly pursued, with the view of exploring and cultivating what Saint Paul calls the “unfathomable riches of Christ.” This is in fact not a question of dead formulas to be preserved in the intellect, like precious stones in a jewel box, although the irreformable formulas have an essential role to play. The Word of God resounds perpetually in the bosom of the Church, as the perpetual truth of life. Now, the conditions of human life (historical, intellectual, social, and cultural) are subject to change. In each generation, in each place, in the face of each new situation, we must draw from this Word the light to illuminate our journey to God. It is to this task that the Church applies itself, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of Jesus Christ. The Spirit does not provide a new object, but introduces us “into all truth,” that is to say, into all the truth of Christ.

However, we must really understand that this ever-new fruitfulness of the revealed “object” is in no way comparable to a continuation. Revelation, as we have already said, is unique and final. The *magisterium* of the Church, which has the responsibility for safeguarding it, cannot add anything to it. The conceptual clarifications and the developments, even the doctrinal ones, which have appeared in the course of the ages in response to the needs of the times, through the influence of various factors, and in conformity with the laws of the human intellect, are only a means of better preserving and analytically encompassing an object, who, in himself, does not have to grow and indeed cannot grow. Thus they never constitute more than an advance “*secundum quid*.”

The Church preserves and transmits the preaching of the Apostles in the two forms in which it has been embodied: Scripture and Tradition, without ever claiming to make additions, under one of these forms or under the other. Scripture and Tradition, whatever may be our method of visualizing their relationship (in any case their intimate connection must be recognized, since one and the other both express the single Mystery), contain divine revelation and constitute the absolute and indispensable norm of our faith. Just as there is nothing to add to Scripture, there is likewise nothing more to add to apostolic tradition. Just as the effort to “examine the Scriptures,” which is pursued from age to age, does not claim to enrich the treasures of the Scriptures, so, too, the living Tradition of the Church, which is expressed from age to age in various forms, does not claim to enrich the treasure of the Tradition received from the Apostles. It discloses and develops their inexhaustible resources, to bring their light to bear on the successive aspects of human life and to provide for the salvation of successive generations. For Christ is the universal Savior: “Jesus Christ yesterday, today and forever.”

It is perhaps this that paragraph 8 of Chapter II, devoted to the description of Tradition, does not stress sufficiently. This was a particularly difficult task because the idea of apostolic tradition does not offer to the intellect the same readily evident consistency as does the idea of Scripture. While it is easy for us to distinguish, through the words themselves, Scripture and its interpretation, the same word serves as a matter of course to designate (apostolic) tradition and its subsequent transmission. These last two ideas seem to converge to form the idea of “living tradition,” as set forth in this paragraph 8. Thus by saying that this living tradition “grows” and “develops,” we seem to imply more or less that the apostolic tradition—that is to say, in fact, divine Revelation itself, the Word of God—“grows” and “develops.”

A few slight editorial modifications would undoubtedly suffice to prevent such an interpretation, which certainly does not represent the thinking of the drafters.

Yet these corrections seem to be all the more imperative because there is confusion today in the minds of many. It is not entirely absent from one or another intervention that is otherwise excellent. It threatens to gain ground. There is a tendency in certain theories of progress to interpret various phases of development as a sort of continuous revelation. Thus the uniqueness of the Revelation of God in Jesus Christ would be compromised, drowned in a universal flood. We therefore have reason to rejoice that a number of Fathers, coming from the most antithetical points of the theological spectrum, have agreed on the same request, that the language of paragraph 8 be made more precise. It was Cardinal Leger who in our opinion requested this with the loftiest thoughts, greatest doctrinal rigor, and most compelling power in his speech of October 1, in defense of the transcendence of the deposit of Revelation.

## Scripture and Tradition in the Eastern Perspective

*On October 5, 1964, at the 94th General Session, during the debate on the second part of the schema on Divine Revelation, Kyr Neophytos Edelby, Archbishop of Edessa and Patriarchal Counselor, spoke to the Council about the relationship between Scripture and Tradition according to the theological perspective of the East.*

Number 12, which deals with the interpretation of Holy Scripture, contains excellent elements concerning the contribution of sciences to exegesis, particularly literary criticism. It seems, however, that the second paragraph (i.e. lines 21 to 32, page 28) is too weak compared with the first, and requires a few developments in conformity with the principles contained in Chapter II. It is on the subject of the specifically theological principles for the interpretation of Scripture that we would like to offer the testimony of the Eastern Churches. Our Orthodox brethren will recognize in it our common faith in its purest form.

The timidity of this paragraph is without doubt explained by the difficulty of the Latin Church has had in freeing itself from the post-Tridentine frame of mind. Now, the age of the controversy with the Reformation has passed; it was always extraneous to the Eastern Churches, as it is to the new Churches of Asia and Africa. We must definitively overcome this obsession and enter into the totality of the mystery of the Church, for this schema concerns the whole Church, and not subtle and sterile scholarly debates.

Certainly the Reformers set up Scripture in opposition to the Church, but the reason for that is that the Latin Church, in which they were born, had allowed the authentic Tradition, in which the East and the West had lived together during the first millennium, to atrophy. In separating itself from its Eastern sources, the Latin Church had ended up in the sterility of the 16th Century, and in the pseudo-problems which trouble us, in particular with regard to the interpretation of Scripture.

The best remedy is for us to return once more to the heart of the Mystery of the Church. We must break away from the mentality that is too juridical, even nominalist, in which the Reformed Churches and the Latins have imprisoned themselves. Already in the Middle Ages this mentality had opposed the combination of the consecration and the epiclesis; it is this that recently thought of the primacy and collegiality as separate realities. It is always this, which here reappears in juxtaposing Scripture and Tradition. The question is badly posed. We must return to the mystery of the Church, which is the heart of the council. We cannot separate the mission of the Holy Spirit from that of the incarnate Word. It is there that the foremost theological principle of all interpretation of Holy Scripture is found.

We need to recall that, beyond all the auxiliary sciences, the goal of Christian exegesis is the spiritual understanding of Scripture in the light of the risen Christ, as the Lord himself instructed his Apostles according to Chapter 24 of Saint Luke.

Here is another principle: Scripture is a liturgical and prophetic reality, a proclamation before being a book, the testimony of the Holy Spirit on the event of Christ, whose privileged moment is the Eucharistic Liturgy. It is through this testimony of the Spirit

that the whole “*economia*” of the Word reveals the Father. The post-Tridentine controversy has above all seen in Scripture a written norm; the Eastern Churches see there the consecration of the history of salvation in the form of human words but inseparable from the Eucharistic consecration, in which all history is recapitulated in the Body of Christ.

Still another principle: this consecration needs an epiclesis, and it is the Holy Tradition. Tradition is the epiclesis of the history of salvation, the theophany of the Holy Spirit without which this history remains incomprehensible and Scripture a dead letter. This is what should be developed under the term “*In viva Ecclesiae traditione*” (I. 23). Our schema is at the heart of the mystery of the Church, that is to say of the People of God assembled by the Holy Spirit to become the Body of Christ in its full stature.

From this follows another principle: Scripture must be interpreted within the totality of the history of salvation. In an earlier time the Spirit of God raised up saving events and a community that was the witness of and the performer of these events, and the writings of the Old Testament are as it were the first epiphany of God to his people. In a second era, the saving event and the community were realized one time for all in Christ: it is the *economia* of the incarnate Word, of whom the writings of the New Testament are as it were the one and only epiphany. In yet a third era, the final days in which we live, the Holy Spirit is poured out personally in order to make present for all history the *economia* of the incarnate Word and the power of his Resurrection. This is the *economia* of the Spirit, or Tradition in the age of the Church.

We see thus that Tradition, that is to say the Church in transmitting the outpouring of the *economia* of the Word, is essentially liturgical. “*Lex orandi, lex credendi.*” We opened this council with the mystery of the Liturgy; we have deepened it in the sacramentality of collegial episcopate. It remains for us to draw conclusions on the total mystery of Tradition.

One of the applications of the interpretation of Scripture concerns the living criterion of this interpretation, for the Spirit is not disincarnate, but truly the Spirit of the Body of Christ. Tradition must be seen and lived first of all in the light of the sacrament of apostolicity, that is to say of the episcopate. This liturgical and prophetic sign is also an epiclesis of the unity of the infallible faith of the People of God. And how desirable it would be, let us say in passing, that the infallibility of the successor of St. Peter be more clearly explained according to this mystery of epiclesis! Authority, as a juridical reality, derives from authority as liturgical and prophetic reality; it is not the source, any more than the canonical mission is the source of the episcopal order.

Finally, let us mention one last principle, which is not the least important: the sense of mystery. The God who reveals himself is the “hidden God.” Revelation must not let us lose sight of the unfathomable depths of the life of God the Trinity, lived by his people but always inexhaustible. The East declares that Revelation is first of all “apophatic,” that is to say, lived in mystery before being uttered in words. This apophatic aspect of Revelation is for the Church the basis of the always-living richness of Tradition. One of the causes of theological deadlocks in recent centuries has been the effort to imprison the mystery within the framework of formulas. Indeed, the mystery in its plenitude exceeds,

not only theological formulation, but even the limits of the letter of Scripture. Thus, although the council does not have to take sides on the question of the “full” sense of Scripture, it should affirm the necessity of reading Holy Scripture “spiritually,” that is, in the Spirit. There is a question here of far more than the analogy of the faith, there is a question of the meaning of the totality of the risen Christ, whose testimony and *parousia* the Holy Spirit is progressively actualizing in the Church.