

The First Draft of Vatican II's Constitution on Divine Revelation

De Fontibus Revelationis (On the Sources of Revelation)

Chapter 1—The Twin Sources of Revelation

1. The revelation of the Old and New Covenants

Revelation, which God in his wisdom and goodness deigned to impart to humanity, comes to us by the economy of the Old and New Covenants. In the Old Covenant, God indeed spoke at various times and in various ways to our ancestors through the prophets; in the New Covenant, however, he poured forth the riches of his wisdom and knowledge to all of humanity through his Son and the apostles.

2. The first diffusion of the revelation of the New Covenant

This revelation of the New Covenant, which transcends by far the revelation of the Old Covenant and fulfills it, is, by God's disposition, spread forth principally by preaching and received by hearing, as the apostle says: "So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes from the preaching of Christ (Rom 10:17)." Christ proclaimed the Good News by his preaching and commissioned his apostles to continue this proclamation, saying: "All power is given me in heaven and on earth; go therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you." (Mt 28:18-20). Since, therefore, the apostles preached the doctrine of Christ and, indeed, in his name, for that reason they are said, in Holy Scripture, to speak the "Word of God" or the "Word of the Lord;" their preaching itself is indeed called the Word of God since that which is truly the speaking of God is transmitted to humanity by them. As the apostle says to the Thessalonians: "We constantly give thanks to God for you because when you heard the Word of God that you received from us, you accepted it not as the word of men and women but, as it truly is, the Word of God which works in you who believed." (1 Th 2:13). And Clement of Rome says: "The apostles preached to us the Gospel received from Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ was God's ambassador. Christ, in other words, comes with a message from God and the apostles with a message from Christ." Both these orderly arrangements, therefore, originate from the will of God. So, after receiving their instructions and being fully assured through the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ as well as being confirmed in faith by the Word of God, they went forth, equipped with the fullness of the Holy Spirit, to preach the Good News that the kingdom of God was close at hand.

3. The transmission of the revelation of the New Covenant

The ministry of the Word, however, that Christ and the apostles began, has always been preserved in the Church throughout the succeeding centuries. For as the apostles handed over what they received from Christ and

committed it to their successors to be kept, so the bishops, who hold the place of the apostles in the Church by succession, always transmitted their doctrine by preaching and interpreted it with authority. Some of the apostles and men from that apostolic time have committed the revelation to writing through the inspiration of the divine Spirit. With these writings, the living proclamation of the apostles is neither annulled nor diminished, but is rather strengthened, more securely preserved and is authentically explained.

4. The twofold source of revelation

Taught by the mission and example of Christ and the apostles, the Church has always believed and continues to believe today (*semper credidit et credit*) that the complete revelation is contained not in Scripture alone but in Scripture and Tradition—as in a twofold source, as it were, but each in a different manner. Scripture, besides containing what is revealed, is inspired and has God himself as author. Tradition, however, preserved in a continuous succession in the Church by the Holy Spirit, contains all those things in matters of faith and morals which the apostles received either from the mouth of Christ or by the urgings of the Holy Spirit, and handed down to the Church, so that all of it may be further transmitted in her by ecclesiastical preaching. For this reason, those things, which divine Tradition contains, are drawn, not from books, but from the living proclamation in the Church, from the faith of believers and the practice of the Church.

5. The relationship of one source to the other

No one, therefore, may dare make Tradition less than that or deny faith in it. For although Sacred Scripture, on the basis of its inspiration, is a divine instrument, given by God himself for disclosing and illustrating the truths of faith, its meaning, nonetheless, cannot be clearly and fully understood or even set forth apart from apostolic Tradition. Indeed, Tradition and it alone is the way by which certain truths become revealed and known to the Church, that is, those (truths) which concern the inspiration, canonicity, and completeness of each and every one of the sacred books.

6. The relationship of each source to the Magisterium

So that both sources of revelation, however, may work together in harmony and more efficiently for the salvation of all, the provident Lord handed them over as one deposit of faith to be preserved, protected and authentically interpreted, not to individual believers—however erudite they may be—but to the living Magisterium of the Church alone. It is the task of the Magisterium of the Church, therefore, as the proximate and universal norm of faith, not only to judge, by using the help which divine providence provides, those things which directly or indirectly concern the teaching on faith and morals, the meaning and interpretation of Sacred Scripture, and the documents and monuments by which in the course of time Tradition was consigned and manifested, but also to illustrate and make clear that which is contained obscurely or implicitly in either source.