

adherence, which has nevertheless always already been offered to us. Between the Word made flesh and man as image of God there lies not only the relationship of openness and the response built by man's reason and his will. There is in every man a capacity to receive this Word as it comes to him—in the humanity of his Incarnation and its prefiguration—and to allow this Word to unfold its fecundity even in his intellect and his will. The Word of God becoming flesh has revealed in man's spirit a desire to know God that no effort of intellect would be able to fulfill and a thirst for communion that no work of the will can quench. Nevertheless, every acquisition of the intellect is the promise of this knowledge, and every progress in unity between men is the pledge of this communion. The Church, in celebrating the Word of God, continually deepens her hope, and in bringing Scripture before men, she invites each of us to ask about the desire of our heart.

Taking note of the global context in which the Church celebrates and nourishes herself on the Word of God, we become attentive to the true profundity of man. God speaks to man to open him up to communion with him in the unity of the Body of Christ. The man to whom God speaks is not first and foremost the product of his faculties, who is condemned to struggle constantly against the eroding of time that keeps him from laying hold of anything, and against the diversity of cultures that keeps him from uniting with other men otherwise than by the abstract universalization of a concept. Man is, more fundamentally, he who "*est à l'image de Dieu incompréhensible par le fond incompréhensible de lui-même*" [is in the image of the incomprehensible God by the incomprehensible foundation of his own self]. The Word of God touches this profundity in man and acts within it to gather men together into the unique "new Man." The Church, through her labor, eats of the Word of God in order to bring it to each and every man as life-giving food. The Word of God is living and penetrating: it enables men to live in accordance with the full truth of their being. It puts in their hands the capacity to love in accordance with God's nature: The glory of the eternal Word is to lead everyone to the Father who begets them. — *Translated by Sarah E. Donahue.* □

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# DEI VERBUM AUDIENS ET PROCLAMANS: ON SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION AS SOURCE OF THE WORD OF GOD

• Rino Fisichella •

“The Word of God is a living reality  
that preserves its integrity only to the extent  
that it grows and spreads in the  
life of believers.”

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“Therefore, Christ the Lord, in whom the entire revelation of the most high God is summed up (cf. 2 Cor 1:20; 3:16–4:6), commanded the apostles to preach the Gospel, which had been promised beforehand by the prophets, and which he fulfilled in his own person and promulgated with his own lips. In preaching the Gospel they were to communicate the gifts of God to all men” (*Dei Verbum* [= DV], 7). I would like to take this passage from *Dei Verbum* as a foundation on which to build the following reflections on the deeper meaning of the Second Vatican Council's teaching concerning the transmission and communication of the Word of God.

### Some Historical Facts

There is general agreement that the rediscovery of the constitutive unity of the Word of God was a step forward in theology's understanding of the transmission of revelation. By setting forth the Word of God as the single source of revelation, the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council hit upon an original way of overcoming the centuries-old custom of speaking of "two sources" of revelation—*Scriptura* and *Traditio*—that had been born in the attempt to come to grips with a controverted passage from the Council of Trent. Before Vatican II, theology had inclined to divide Scripture and Tradition, thus presuming a rift in the event of revelation that only served to obscure its intelligibility. Seen in the light of this situation, *Dei Verbum* was indeed a great stride forward. Offering a balanced synthesis based on the recovery of the patristic and medieval tradition, the document lays out the unicity of revelation, of the source of revelation, and of the Word of God, as this Word is handed on through Scripture and Tradition in the faithful ministry of the Church's "living" Magisterium (DV, 10).

It is crucial not to lose sight of this basic approach if we wish to grasp the originality of the Second Vatican Council and, in particular, of *Dei Verbum*. There is a constant temptation to read the document one-dimensionally—a temptation to which many have, unfortunately, given in. What gets cited most often from *Dei Verbum* are the first chapter on revelation and the last chapters (III–V) on Scripture. This selective citation overlooks the fact that the document's main objective was actually to deal with the problem of Tradition.<sup>1</sup>

The redactional history of *Dei Verbum* makes it abundantly clear that the document was not undertaken to treat either revelation—Vatican I's *Dei Filius*, which plays a significant role in the text of *Dei Verbum*, had already dealt with the problem of revelation—or Scripture—the Council of Trent had already clarified dogmatic teaching on the Bible. The core of the problem was not revelation or Scripture, but Tradition. To be sure, Trent played a decisive role in shaping the concept of Tradition, but it could not yet respond to the questions that would arise in later centuries. Pope Pius XII's definition of the dogma of the Assumption provided a

more immediate occasion for doing so.<sup>2</sup> Pius' action impelled the theologians to begin asking the basic questions again: How are Scripture and Tradition related? What is their role in the community of believers? What is the distinctive content of each in terms of revelation? Is this content the same, different, or complementary? Various solutions were proposed to these questions. The three theories that were especially influential in the preconciliar debate—the theories, respectively, of the "two sources," of the "sufficiency of Scripture," and of the "relative sufficiency of Scripture"—were all clearly present in the composition of the first draft and successive redactions of *Dei Verbum*.<sup>3</sup>

By formulating the concept of the unity of the Word of God, the Council Fathers rendered obsolete the clashing interpretive proposals that had dominated theology and divided illustrious scholars ever since the Council of Trent.<sup>4</sup> Admittedly, neither the conciliar discussion nor the promulgation of the dogmatic constitution resolved the debate over the interpretation of Trent in favor of any one of the theories then in circulation. It merely went beyond them and settled the discussion in terms of the unity of the source of revelation. This approach enabled *Dei Verbum* to deal with, and resolve, the problem from a different point of view. What remained an open question was the interpretation of the expression "Word of God."<sup>5</sup> At a distance of thirty-five years from the approbation of the dogmatic constitution, we are in a position to say that this expression has in fact been interpreted in a partial manner.<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately,

<sup>2</sup>The thesis of A. Aiello is suggestive in this regard: *Sviluppo del dogma e Tradizione: A proposito della definizione dell'Assunzione di Maria* (Rome, 1979), esp. 179–202.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. U. Betti, "Storia della costituzione dogmatica Dei Verbum," in *La costituzione dogmatica sulla divina rivelazione* (Turin, 1968), 13–69.

<sup>4</sup>See the brief but illuminating discussion in H. de Lubac, *La rivelazione divina e il senso dell'uomo* (Milan, 1979), 181–185.

<sup>5</sup>The question also arose on account of translation. Whereas the original Latin uses "locutio" to define the Word of God in Scripture and "verbum" to speak of the process of Tradition in its unity, the [Italian] translations render both as "Word of God"—thus creating an identification that the Fathers rightly refrained from making.

<sup>6</sup>This was clearly demonstrated by A. Vanhoye at a recent conference on the implementation of the Council. Cf. A. Vanhoye, "La parola di Dio nella vita della Chiesa. La ricezione della Dei Verbum," in R. Fisichella, ed. *Il Concilio Vaticano II*.

<sup>1</sup>It is important to bear in mind that the title of the first redaction of *Dei Verbum* was *De fontibus revelationis* [on the sources of revelation].

this one-sided reading has led to a failure to grasp the originality introduced by *Dei Verbum* and has impeded the retrieval of Tradition as a constitutive element of the Word of God from enriching the life of the Church.

#### *Elements for a Rereading*

A brief analysis of *Dei Verbum*, 7, with which we began these reflections, is a helpful guide for revisiting the problem. It enables us to catch certain nuances that are crucial for a more faithful interpretation of the original meaning of the document—and for keeping our eyes fixed on the novelty introduced by the Council. Number 7 opens the second chapter of *Dei Verbum*, which is dedicated to the “transmission of divine revelation.” The importance of this fact must not be underestimated, for it gives us the key to the logic guiding the unfolding of the Council’s teaching.

The document has just dealt with *ipsa revelatio* [revelation itself]; it now begins to examine how the integrity of revelation is preserved according to God’s original plan and how it reaches us today as a Word that still speaks to us and calls us to choose salvation in faith. A number of aspects deserve special emphasis.

In the first place, the document insists that revelation reaches its completion in Jesus Christ. Two earlier passages, *Dei Verbum* 2 and 4, already affirm the plenitude of the revelation of Jesus Christ. The importance of stressing the *completeness* of this fullness is by no means universally acknowledged in inter-religious discussion today. The distinction between a “qualitative” and a “quantitative” completeness, aside from being arbitrary, only serves to downgrade the event of revelation itself.<sup>7</sup> The Council Fathers see this revelation in the light of an “economy” that develops historically until reaching its apex, “when the time had fully come” (Gal 4:4), in the person of Jesus Christ, who is simultaneously revelation and revealer. For the Fathers, then, the content of revelation is necessarily definitive—both qualitatively and quantitatively. As a matter of fact, the distinction itself is not only theologically unhelpful, but actually diminishes the power of the Council’s approach to revelation in

light of the history of salvation. Because of the plenitude and definitiveness of revelation in Jesus Christ, we can say that the presence of the incarnate Logos is the culmination of the process of revelation. It is in this process that the Father has inscribed, once and for all, the truth that leads to him.

A second point: The same number (7) affirms that Christ commanded his disciples to hand on his Gospel to all peoples. The Church’s mission comes into being with a categorical imperative intimately bound up with the nature of the Gospel that is Christ himself. The mystery of personal existence, which seeks a meaning as yet unattained, is finally illuminated in the person of Christ. The reference to the person of Jesus as a “Gospel” to be proclaimed suggests both the mystery of his person, which, over the centuries, becomes progressively clearer until finally attaining its fullness in the contemplation of his countenance, and the deep unity that expresses this person. In a word, the Gospel that is Jesus Christ is the synthesis of the composite unity that *Dei Verbum* wished to formulate in terms of *gestis verisque intrinsicis inter se connexis* [deeds and words which are intrinsically bound up with one another] (DV, 2). Neither gestures nor words are sufficient by themselves to capture the fullness of the mystery. *Mutatis mutandis*, neither the written text nor oral transmission is sufficient by itself for an adequate understanding that does justice to the unity and unicity of this mystery. From this point of view, the document’s reference to the preaching of the apostles affords an opportunity to underscore further the living character of the transmission of revelation, which could not be guaranteed merely by its being written down.

Finally, *Dei Verbum*, 7 underscores that the Gospel is true. The idea of truth furnishes another occasion to ascertain how revelation is transmitted. By its very nature, the Biblical concept of truth is undergirded by *eschatology*. This implies a progress through the centuries, a progress that is the fruit of a *dynamic* preservation of the content of revelation. This content is faithfully preserved, but it doesn’t harden with the passage of time. On the contrary, it opens up and allows the truth—whose content is always the same—to put forth fresh shoots. In a word: The truth of the Gospel is not a metaphysical theory, but the mystery of a person who becomes present to another person in search of meaning and the truth of his own existence. As such, it remains a perennial challenge that knows no barriers, but reaches everyone.

*Ricezione e attualità alla luce del Gimbileo* (Cimiseo Balsamo, 2000), 29–45.

<sup>7</sup> On this point, see *Dominus Iesus*, 5–6.

This undying novelty is corroborated by the fact that the truth of the Gospel also becomes, in the words of *Dei Verbum*, a "moral rule." If everything were limited to Scripture, fundamentalism would have a field day. Fortunately, this is not the case. Keen attention to the various conditions in which the believer finds himself enables the content of Scripture to come alive and take effect thanks to an enactment whose consistency with that content is confirmed by the truth of Tradition. If there were no Tradition to gather the daily novelties that history presents, the moral action of believers would be bereft of concrete guidance in the situations in which their cultures oblige them to live.

There is an important text from Saint Bernard that helps to understand the living transmission of the Word of God:

"If anyone loves me," says the Lord, "he will keep my word. And my Father will love him and we will come to him." But what is meant by "if anyone loves me, he will keep my word"? For I have read in another passage: "He who fears God will act well." But of one who loves something more is said: He will keep the word of God. Where must the word of God be kept? Obviously in the heart, as the prophet tells us: "I keep in my heart your words so as not to offend you by sinning." Since those who keep the word of God are blessed, keep the word of God so that it descends into the uttermost depths of your soul and is poured out into your affections and behavior." If you will keep the word of God in this way, there is no doubt that you, in turn, will be kept by it.<sup>8</sup>

In other words: The Word of God is a living reality that preserves its integrity only to the extent that it grows and spreads in the life of believers.

Christ, then, is above all the words that announce him, because all of these words depend on, and refer to, him. The words of Scripture and Tradition are not really many, but one, insofar as they find their unity and their ultimate meaning in him. In the words of Origen, Christ is *autologos*, in other words, he shines through Scripture and Tradition as their ultimate and true referent.

### *The Word of God is Living*

At this point, it will be helpful to prolong our retrieval of the meaning of Tradition and its unity with Scripture in the process of transmitting the Logos. A text from Hebrews gives us a key to further important aspects:

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. (Heb 4:12)

A first exegetical observation: The verse just cited opens with a "for" (*gar*). The author's intention is to explain a prior point to which he is referring. He relates the old and new peoples in terms of how they stand before God's Word: "Today, when you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the day of testing in the wilderness. . . . Therefore . . . I swore in my wrath, 'They shall never enter my rest'" (Heb 3:7-11, citing Ps 95:7-11). The underlying argument continues to take shape: Whoever does not listen to God's voice cannot have rest. If someone wants to enter into "God's rest" he must therefore listen to his word *now* ("today"). The verse immediately preceding the one cited confirms this: "Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, that no one fall by the same disobedience" (Heb 4:11).

As these considerations suggest, the life of believers looks permanently to the Word of God. It places every believer in the attitude of listening and obedience. In Paul's theology, then, the God who speaks must be answered with faith. But the primary reason for this listening is not the believer's attention, but the living and active character of the Word of God itself. It will be obvious that the sacred author thereby intends to underscore the primacy of God's initiative, of his graciousness, and his transcendence. Everyone is confronted with the urgent invitation: "Today hear his voice!"

With this background in place, we can turn to a passage of *Dei Verbum* that, in our judgment, is one of the most important of Vatican II: The *Proemium*, where the Council Fathers weave together a marvelous synthesis of the document as a whole:

Hearing the Word of God with reverence, and proclaiming it with faith, the sacred Synod assents to the words of St. John,

<sup>8</sup> Saint Bernard, "Discourse 5 on Advent," *Opera omnia*, IV, 189.

who says: "We proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ (1 John 1:2-3). Following, then, in the steps of the Councils of Trent and Vatican I, this Synod wishes to set forth the true doctrine on divine Revelation and its transmission. For it wants the whole world to hear the summons to salvation, so that through hearing it may believe, through belief it may hope, through hope it may come to love.

Our first reaction to this text is that it corroborates the foregoing affirmation of the primacy of the Word of God. This is borne out by the structure of the first sentence itself: In Latin, the sentence opens with *Dei Verbum*, which thus precedes the words "*religiose audiens*."<sup>9</sup> More directly pertinent to our theme, however, is the possibility the text affords for ascertaining how the Fathers understand the *transmission* of the Word of God. The citation from the First Letter of John suggests that the act of transmission occurs through proclamation of what the disciples have seen and heard. The profession of continuity with the two previous Councils underscores the uninterrupted faith that unites believers in Christ. One could say, in sum, that all believers become "ambassadors of Christ" (2 Cor 5:20) who are sent "to the ends of the earth." No barrier, whether of space or of time, can limit the work of proclamation and transmission. The sense of urgency that moves Christ's disciples to bring the Good News to everyone knows no rest.

The transmission of revelation brings us inevitably to the ways in which this transmission occurs. It also sets the horizon within which to ascertain the relationship between Scripture and Tradition. Given the particular scope of these brief observations, I will focus chiefly on the role of Tradition, taking for granted an awareness of the nature and function of Scripture.

Paradoxical as it might seem, Tradition appears to have become a kind of stranger in the life of the Church, while

<sup>9</sup>Unfortunately, the translation renders the Latin *obsequitur* with "the sacred Synod assents to the words of St. John." The Latin term clearly says much more, inasmuch as it connotes *obedience, faithful following, and service*—all nuances that are not captured as clearly by the verb "assent." In any case, any good translation ought to express what the document will go on to say concerning the relationship between the Word of God and the Magisterium that *serves* the Word (DV, 10).

Scripture alone has taken over as "lady of the house." This is a rather embarrassing situation, especially for Scripture itself, which is in fact deprived of the appropriate *humus* it needs in order to express itself as a living word that nourishes Christian existence from generation to generation. Tradition is not an addition to Scripture, nor can Scripture be regarded as a sort of appendix of, or corollary to, Tradition. What links them together is the unity and unicity of the one source whose most powerful expression is the Word of God.

The Council Fathers thus give clear expression to the *nature* of Tradition. Tradition consists of everything that the Apostles received from Jesus' words and deeds, from their communion of life with him, and from what the Spirit prompted the sacred authors to put in writing. Noteworthy, however, is that the Council uses two Latin terms to speak of Scripture and Tradition: *Locutio* and *Verbum*:

Sacred Tradition and sacred Scripture, then, are bound closely together, and communicate one with the other. For both of them, flowing out from the *same divine well-spring*, come together in some fashion to *form one thing*, and move towards the same goal. *Sacred Scripture is the speech of God (locutio Dei)* as it is put down in writing under the breath of the Holy Spirit. And *Tradition transmits in its entirety the Word of God (Verbum Dei)* which has been entrusted to the apostles by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit. It transmits it to the successors of the apostles so that, enlightened by the Spirit of truth, they may faithfully preserve, expound, and spread it abroad by their preaching. Thus it comes about that the Church does not draw her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone. Hence, both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal feelings of devotion and reverence.<sup>10</sup>

As we can see, while the terms *locutio* and *Verbum* bear witness to a living reality that can never become rigid, even when it is written down, because it always remains God's word, they nonetheless leave open, at least in certain respects, the definition of Scripture and Tradition. The fact that the Fathers "define" Scripture as the word of God as it has been written down under

<sup>10</sup>DV, 9; emphasis added. See also number 10.

the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is evidence that they are referring to the canonical Scriptures. Yet their use of the term *locutio* is surprising, because, strictly speaking, it cannot be applied to a written text, seeing that it denotes the act of speaking. Clearly, the Fathers are trying to avoid an absolute identification of Scripture with the Word of God, while, at the same time, bringing out more fully the "living" quality of the sacred text. The same can be said of Tradition. *Dei Verbum*, 9 does not offer a "definition" of Tradition in the proper sense of the term, but rather explains its three-fold function: in the formation, interpretation, and actualization of Scripture down to our own days. As in the previous case, *Verbum*, while certainly used more definitely and consistently, cannot simply be identified with the Word of God. Here, too, the Fathers emphasize its dynamic and living character.

#### *The Relationship Between Scripture and Tradition*

The Word of God, then, cannot be confined to Scripture alone. Such a confinement would unduly impoverish revelation and thereby have dangerous consequences for theology and pastoral care. Thomas Aquinas makes an important contribution towards a balanced vision of the two poles of revelation. In the *Summa*, the Angelic Doctor reflects on the fact that Jesus left no writings. Thomas even adds that Jesus could not leave any writings.

Aquinas cites three reasons for this statement, which exhibit an interesting logic. Jesus, he asserts, addresses his word to the heart, where this word is understood and welcomed as the highest form of the meaning of existence. For it is in the heart that the Creator speaks with his creature. He does not speak in the heart through writing, but through his quasi "natural" presence that enables the believer to grasp the hidden meaning and the profound truth of the Gospel. A second reason has to do with the fact that Jesus' teaching could never be expressed with complete fidelity in written form. His word cannot be fixed exclusively in writing as if writing captured, in the literal text, the meaning and truth that are placed in it. Otherwise fundamentalism would have had an easy time of it. Third, and finally, Jesus Christ intended to entrust to his disciples the mission and task of handing on the Gospel in two forms, namely, in writing and orally. This living transmission, which

includes everything handed on either in writing or *viva voce*, was meant to be the visible dimension of ministry.<sup>11</sup>

Following this logic, we could say that, if the Word of God were available only in written form, it could not remain "living." It would be confined to a text, without any relation to the Church that draws its life from this Word. Tradition, then, must be seen as something essential and constitutive. It is not merely a horizon within which to read the history of revelation.<sup>12</sup> It is, above all, a moment of revelation itself. A historical observation may be useful here. If we look at the movement that traverses the whole Middle Ages, we notice something extremely interesting: The Bible was never called "revelation," nor was it ever denominated "source." Not, to be sure, because the Church didn't believe this to be the case. The point was that there was such a harmony between Scripture and the life, the Tradition of the Church that they were thought to be inseparable. There was a living awareness of a perennial osmosis through which the Church contained, handed on, and transmitted Scripture, while Scripture, in its turn, gathered the community around the table of the Word. In this period, the term "revelation" was applied exclusively to that gracious, humanly inexpressible act in which God makes himself known and to the act of reception through which man perceives God's condescension as revelation. Therefore, only revelation is called a "source," a source from which even Scripture draws. To detach Scripture from the Church's Tradition, from the "we" of the Church that keeps it alive by transmitting it ever anew in its substantial identity from generation to generation, would be to uproot it from its natural context.

Scripture's relation to the Church enables it to be understood as the text to which the People of God turns in order to hear its Lord. This text is kept intact by a perennial transmission that hands it on in a living way and that imposes acceptance of its entire content as a *norm and rule* for Christian life. The upshot of this is a de-privatization of Scripture and Tradition that frees them from any interpretation focused on subjective experience or limited to a bare analysis with no room for the meaning of the whole that has in fact guided the life of the entire People of God.

<sup>11</sup>S.Th., III, 42, 4 c.

<sup>12</sup>See Gadamer's rediscovery of the role of revelation in the understanding of history in *Verità e metodo* (Milan, 1983), 325-34.



The transmission of Scripture is inscribed, then, in a broader movement that carries an intrinsic relation to Tradition, understood in turn as a perennial handing over of an ever-living memory that includes the sacred text, the reality that generated it, and the conditions of the possibility of its suitable interpretation and understanding. In this horizon, the specific responsibility of the magisterium takes shape. The magisterium, in fact, is called to be an authentic interpreter of the word itself. It is able to do this because it is a "living" magisterium. A living magisterium—one, then, that is able to serve the Word by faithfully actualizing its content with respect to the various needs of the community (DV, 10).

### *The Role of the Spirit*

It would be difficult to give a global vision of the problem we are studying without a brief mention of the role of the Holy Spirit. It is no accident that *Dei Verbum* mentions the Holy Spirit more than thirty times! The inspiration of Scripture occurs in the Holy Spirit. The exposition of life and doctrine happens in the same Spirit. It is his action that enables true worship of the Father and the work of missionary action among peoples and cultures. Indeed, "apostolic Tradition progresses with the aid of the Holy Spirit"—a progress produced by ever deeper understanding of the mystery, "spiritual experience," and by the "sure charism of truth in the episcopal ministry." Thanks to the help of the Holy Spirit, the magisterium "listens with reverence, perseveres in holiness, and faithfully expounds the word of God."<sup>13</sup> In short, the Spirit is ubiquitous, and with good reason. He is at the origin of the ecclesial function of transmission and he perennially nourishes it throughout history until the eschatological fulfillment of truth.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Cf. H.U. von Balthasar, *Teologica III: Lo Spirito della verità* (Milan, 1992), 250.

<sup>14</sup> We are inevitably reminded of the classic text of Vincent of Lérins: "Someone might ask 'Will there never be any progress of religion in Christ's Church? There will indeed, and it will be very great. For who could be such an enemy of men and of God that he would try to impede it? Nevertheless, we must be very careful that it be in fact a true progress of faith, and not a change in it. True progress happens by means of internal development. Change, by contrast, occurs when one doctrine mutates into another. It is therefore necessary that, as the times progress, there be also the greatest possible growth and progress in the understanding, science, and

The Holy Spirit is therefore the agent principle of the Church's mediation and the interpreter in the work of understanding. He inspires both the sacred text and its transmission in that uninterrupted work that enables the *traditio* of revelation. John's understanding of this fact is important here: "He will take what is mine and declare it to you" (Jn 16:14). As this text shows, the Spirit does not have a content of his own to transmit. Yet his work is not simply a matter of repeating Jesus' history and preaching as something belonging to the past. His proclamation is a *true* explanation. Given to the Church as revelation—it being not an alternative to what Christ reveals, but already present in Christ's revelation and forming, together with it, a single, coherent whole. Consequently, the Spirit's action brings about the contemporaneity of what Christ's revelation already contained in itself and the Church's life and understanding in history. This is true Tradition, a true living word that remains in history as a normative reference-point for the revelation of Christ. If the Spirit were not present in this way, the Church would be unable to attain the full meaning of revelation as a whole, which remains in the Church as the living principle of all understanding of the Gospel. But for all of this to happen, there must be a constant reception of the revelatory dialectic between what is manifested and its reference to a deeper meaning.

Paul affirms that no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor 12:3). Without the Spirit, then, no one can perform, not just the act of faith in Jesus' divinity, but also the act of understanding that interprets the event of the past today. The transmission of revelation thus entails the presence of a Tradition that embeds the revealed content of Scripture in a framework of understanding and of life that is internal to revelation itself. The Spirit remains in the Church as the true source of revelation, of its truth, of its transmission and conservation, of its present meaning for the life of the Church, and of its ultimate meaning in definitive truth. As Balthasar rightly says, "if Tradition is not the Creator

wisdom, both of individuals and of all together, of every single member and of the Church as a whole. But the type of doctrine, doctrine itself, its meaning, and its content must always remain the same. . . . Even the dogma of the Christian religion progresses, gaining strength from year to year, developing over time, and growing ever deeper with age. But it must remain absolutely intact and unaltered" (PL 50, 667–68).

Spirit, it is nothing"—and his first "creative" act is precisely to receive what belongs to Christ in order to give it to his Church as an ever new teaching, as a Word perennially resonating in faithfulness to the origin.

This action first becomes visible in the oral *transmission* of the "word of Jesus" that the community acknowledges as the work of inspired prophets.<sup>15</sup> It then spills over into the sacred authors' work of putting the same word into writing. The process of Tradition thus opens dynamically to the apostolic ministry of the Magisterium. It is this ministry that, in the course of history, interprets correctly the one revealed word, making explicit, in each time, the saving truth that it contains. Without the Spirit, then, Scripture would be a dead letter and Tradition a mere story about past events that have little, or no, bearing on our life today.

As this suggests, the first task incumbent upon the process of transmission is *diakonia* of the Word (cf. Acts 6:4). This *diakonia* combines service and the Church's distinctive form of creativity, which is specific to the one *diakonia* of revelation. The process of relating Scripture and Tradition is not extrinsic to the Church. On the contrary, it is a service of *communio*. The recovery of the authentic sense of the *Proemium* to *Dei Verbum* confirms this and, at the same time, indicates the most faithful direction to take for the future.—*Translated by Adrian Walker.* □

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# THE UNITY OF LIFE AND DEATH IN THE WORD OF LIFE

• Ferdinand Ulrich •

"But the Word does not remain extrinsic to its hearer. It diés into him. It becomes the center of his life and being . . . and so is more intimate to him than he can be to himself."

## 1. *The Trinity in Itself: Love Eternally Given Away*

### a. *Father*

The God whom in faith we call "Father" is a God who speaks. The God who speaks is, as such, the unoriginate origin of the Son, the Word in whom he utters forth his whole being without remainder. In giving the Son the whole wealth, the undiminished plenitude, of the divine life, the Father goes out of himself in his living Word. In himself, God is love eternally given away: the absolute unity of wealth and poverty.

Using an image that, like all images, is unequal to expressing the mystery, one could "say" that the Father communicates himself to the Son in the unity of "life and death." For when he speaks the Word, he holds nothing back for himself, but empties himself in absolute *poverty* into the Son. He bears to the very end the absolute *separation* of the gift (which is nothing other than the divine nature itself) from the Giver. *Everything*, therefore, has been given over into the Son's hands by the Father; the Father is present *in* the Son; the

<sup>15</sup>Cf. 1 Cor 14:2-5; 1 Pt 1:19-21. On the "prophetic dimension," see R. Fisichella, *Cesù di Nazareth profetia del Padre* (Milan, 2000), 202-08.