

REVELATION, SACRED SCRIPTURE AND THE CHURCH AS TRADITION

A Dynamic Understanding of Tradition in *Dei Verbum*

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The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation is one of the most important documents of Vatican II, precisely because of its significance for the life of the Church insofar as all its sixteen documents depend on the faith commitment of the Church to the word of God to the humankind, and it is this truth which the Council has clearly spelled out in this Constitution. At the same time, it is to be remembered that this is the one document which had a dramatic history behind it from the time it was introduced in the Council in 1962 till it was finally voted on in November 1965. The original schema was largely rewritten. The original first chapter, "Two Sources of Revelation," meaning thereby Scripture and Tradition, was replaced by two chapters, on revelation itself and on its transmission, through which Scripture and Tradition were not understood as separate sources. The entire approach to the subject was from a biblical and historical perspective. The first two chapters

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deal with the reality of revelation in which a personal God enters into a dialogue with the humankind, which is transmitted to the following generations through a historical process. The response to this dialogue is known as faith which is much more than an intellectual assent to some divine propositions. It is a commitment to a personal God who in manifold ways reveals himself and his plans to the humankind. The following chapters are devoted to the understanding of divine inspiration and interpretation of the Bible as well as the analysis of the Old and New Testaments and the role of the Sacred Scripture in the life of the Church.

Revelation and Its Transmission

“Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds.” It is in these words that the author of the Letter to the Hebrews spoke about the revelation of God from the beginning through his various prophets. What is important to take note of is the concept of revelation as an ongoing speaking. The traditional definition of revelation as *locutio Dei attestans*, meaning thereby that revelation is a divine speech confirmed by signs also refers to the inner nature of the communication between God and the humankind. One of the noblest human capacities is the ability people have to relate themselves to others through their words and deeds. In fact, words and deeds are means of self-revelation. In fact, words and deeds are means of self-revelation and communication. Words can create; they can re-create; they can edify and they can also build relationships. At the same, words can also destroy relationships. There are spoken words, acted words, and also silent words. We all need to recapture the meaning and beauty of word as a medium of self-revelation. This we can do only after we realize the power and meaning of God speaking to us. God created the world through his word: “Let there be light: and there was light” (Gen 1:3). Every action of God in human history is at the same time a word of God, an external manifestation of God’s saving power.

The Hebrew word *dabar*, translated as ‘word’ into English, includes the meaning of both word and deed. God calling Abraham (Gen 12:1-3) and God taking the initiative through Moses to liberate Israel from Egypt (Ex 3:1-10) are both articulations of the word of God. God continued to speak to the people of Israel through the many events,

which all resulted in the emergence of Israel as a covenant community. He chose the leaders for the people, and they communicated God's word to them. Later on God called the prophets and through them he spoke to Israel and guided them. Each prophet was different from the other. Each of them had his own specific role to play; each one had his own specific message to give. But all of them spoke in the name of Yahweh. It was Yahweh who gave power and authority to what they said. The last prophet through whom God spoke was John the Baptist. He came with a challenging message, demanding that all people have to be converted. To add credibility to his message, he baptized those who were ready to listen to him, thus sealing their conversion. He spoke about someone who would come after him, who is greater than himself (Mt 3:11). He introduced him as an eschatological judge who would separate the good from the bad and establish a new society. But John the Baptist may have had only a very vague idea of what was to happen. All the same, it was God who was speaking through him and making him a messenger of his word and his plans for the future.

Then the fulfilment of time, the *pleroma* of the *kairos* came. God's planned time drew near; the course of history reached a new stage of realization. Jesus of Nazareth came to Galilee and preached the Good News from God: "The time is fulfilled; the kingdom of God is near. Be converted and believe in the Good News" (Mk 1:14-15). The meaning and the urgency of the message was clear. There was no ambiguity about what Jesus wanted. It was not the proposal of an idea; it was not an appeal. It was a divine command; an imperative from God. This command is related to something which God had planned to realize in history. He made his kingdom come near. It is based on this divine action that Jesus demanded a radical conversion and a profound commitment. The importance of the reality of the kingdom of God in the preaching of Jesus is clear to anyone looking at the Gospels.

Sacred Scripture

The words "Sacred Scripture" and "Bible" are two conventional expressions used for the collection of the sacred books of Judaism and of the Christian movement. The former is derived from the third division of the Hebrew (Jewish) canon of the Bible: Torah, Prophets and Writings (Scriptures) (*Torah, Nebiim and Kethubim*), to which the qualification "Sacred" was added in course of time in order to show

their inner sacredness. The plural form was later made into singular as "Scripture". The word "Bible" is derived from the ancient story about the writing material papyrus from Egypt being exported to the harbour *Byblos* in Phoenicia, where the material itself got the name *byblos*, here understood as a writing material and later on as something written on this material. Although every writing material was called *byblos*, in the long process of history, the word *byblos* was reserved for the holy book of the Jews and the Christians. So we have *byblos*, and its diminutive *byblion* and its plural *byblia*, from which the French *La Bible* arose and later on the English, *The Bible*.

Since the Bible is related to the Covenants of Sinai and the Covenant concluded in Jesus Christ, the two divisions of the Bible were known as two *diatheke* (Greek), with its English translation as "Testaments," the meaning of which is different from covenant. Based on the writings of Paul these two divisions are now known as "Old Testament" and "New Testament" (2 Cor 3:6 and 3:14). Of late there is a more ecumenical approach to name these divisions as "First" and "Second" Testaments, allowing for their uniqueness for both Jews and Christians. In official documents the term "Sacred Scripture" is used rather than the "Bible", which is used more as a convenient expression.

Tradition

The English word "tradition" is derived from the Latin 'traditio' which again is derived from the Latin verb "tradere" which means "to hand down". Basically it refers to a process, but it also means what has been thus handed down. In Greek it is known as *paradosis* (derived from the Greek verb *paradidomi*). The corresponding verb "to receive" is *paralambano*. As a religion rooted in history and committed to history, Israel and later on Judaism were very much committed to this process of receiving (*qibbel men*) and handing over (*masar le*). In later Judaism among the scholars and leaders of Judaism, known as the Scribes and the Rabbis, holding on to the tradition was a mark of authenticity. Doctrines were to be received and handed down without any change in the process of their transmission. Added to them there were also what was known as the "Traditions of the Elders" which were sometimes having no meaning and no relevance for a meaningful life. Hence Jesus had to sometimes criticize such traditions of the Elders and their meaninglessness (Mk 7:1-23). The entire religion of Israel recorded in the Old Testament and its

continuation in history through the ages is an ongoing tradition, and the written books of the Old Testament and the unwritten and living traditions among the followers of this religion constitute the basis of its authenticity. The same can be said about the Christian movement, which is based on the Jesus Tradition and its continuation in history as an all-embracing movement is something that cannot be explained merely on the basis of a historical process.

Tradition is the framework and *élan vital* of the continuance of a society and a nation. In a pre-theological sense tradition means the sum of all the processes whereby insights and skills that have been acquired, and institutions that have been established are handed down from one generation to another. Each nation, each society, and each family has its own tradition, and each person has his and her own tradition. It is what we are today that is carried on to the tomorrow. Tradition ensures the continuance of what has been once begun, and through the wisdom and experience of one's ancestors it gives to others a perspective in which to classify and evaluate new experiences. Tradition is also a framework in which we can classify and evaluate new experiences. Tradition consists less of factual knowledge and technical skills than of matters, which have a special meaning for the society concerned: important political events, art, customs, language, religious beliefs and activities, community experience, a way of life, are all expressed in tradition and tend to constitute a society. When new experiences are encountered, there are two possible attitudes towards them: Readiness to accept them or outright rejection, depending on how the group will benefit from them. Implied in tradition are *reverence* for the past and *discernment* towards the present. Tradition ensures the continuance of what has been once begun.

We can make tradition our own without necessarily doing so critically. It is part of human nature to succeed his predecessors naively. In periods of transition when the power of tradition is less effective, the younger generation frequently demands that a conscious selection be made from the tradition of what should be preserved for an indefinite future. Tradition may at times recede into the background because people are more receptive to change and progress, but it always provides the foundation for the new beginning which must be made in every age. There is a *blind* way of relating to tradition, and there is also an *irresponsible* way of rejecting everything that is related to tradition and there is also a *responsible*

way of discerning what is good and what is not good. In the context of eagerness for change and progress, tradition may recede into the background. When tradition is not ready to respond to the demands of the times, there arises revolution. Likewise, there is also a process of rediscovering tradition and make it guide the process of growth in such a way that the society has its growth related to the past and to the future. A characteristic feature of the present generation is a tendency among the people to forgetting the past and rejecting everything that belongs to tradition and a crazy looking for the new and the latest. Here the trend is to forget the roots even as they are reaping the fruits. A sense of history and an awareness of the past are very much needed for the march of the human society in its movement towards the future.

Tradition in the Catholic Church

The basic meaning of tradition in the Catholic Church refers to the transmission in the Church of beliefs, doctrines, rituals, and entities. The word 'tradition' refers to what is transmitted or to how it is transmitted. As to its source, it can be apostolic or post-apostolic, having its origin during the time of the apostles or later. As to its form, it is said to be either written or unwritten. As to its function in the Church, tradition can act both as memory of the past and as anticipation of the future. As to its time, tradition is scriptural or post-scriptural, referring to Sacred Scripture as an embodiment of the earliest transmission of revelation or to the transmission of Christian doctrine after the canon of the Bible was finalized.

Tradition for Catholic Theology is the process whereby revealed truth, ultimately derived from the oral preaching and from the original bearers of the Christian revelation (Jesus Christ and the Apostles), is transmitted by the Church with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, and thereby they are developed, and also the truth is thus transmitted. Even when the original tradition had been committed to writing in the Sacred Scripture during the first Christian generation, the mind of the believing Church is passed on through its tradition and it is authoritatively taught by the Magisterium. As to the scope and meaning of Sacred Scripture, Magisterium still remains the formal norm for the interpretation of the Sacred Scripture. Here the Magisterium has the task of taking on the meaning of a living Tradition. The further history of the Church as a believing community may see considerable developments and constant new

articulations of the Scriptural truth. The Magisterium is expected to take stock of such developments, thus preserving the truth of Christ and the truth of the gospel in history, developing and making it ever present. The ultimate guarantee of the soundness of this development is again the assistance of the Holy Spirit who is promised to the Church (Jn 16:13).

Tradition and the Fathers of the Church

The period of the Fathers, known as the Patristic Age, is from the end of the first century to the middle of the eighth century. The letter of Clement (ca CE 96) and the Didache of the 12 Apostles (ca CE 105) are the earliest. Tradition in Catholic theology is closely related to the Fathers of the Church, who were preachers, writers and theologians of the post-canonical period, immediately after the New Testament period, who contributed very much towards shaping Christian faith, and they had a reputation of their own for their sanctity. Hence their opinion carried much weight. So the documents of Vatican II cite them very frequently. Many of them were bishops, having pastoral responsibility. Clement of Alexandria (CE 150-215) and Tertullian (CE 160-220) were lay persons and Origen (CE 185-254) was a deacon.

The writings of the Fathers were mainly sermons, letters, treatises on various topics, biographies, hagiographies, autobiographies, histories, chronicles, apologies, scriptural exegesis, accounts of martyrdom, text of liturgies, maxims and apothegms, songs and poems, journals, apocryphal literature. The Fathers of the Church are divided into Apostolic Fathers, Apologetic Fathers (from the middle of the 2nd century), and Golden Age of the Fathers (CE 360-444). The Fathers of the Church are divided into Greek Fathers (John Damascene is the last), Latin Fathers (Gregory the Great, Isidore of Seville, Augustine) and Syriac Fathers (St Ephrem CE 306-373), together with Coptic, Armenian and Arabic Fathers. The school of Alexandria and the school of Antioch holding different views were opposed to each other. Whereas in the West the emphasis was on the corrupt and weak human nature, in the East it was an optimistic picture of the human nature which was tending towards divinization.

The Church

The English word "Church" has its own unique story of origin, which is very different from its Latin formulation "ecclesia". The LXX had translated the Hebrew *qahal Yahweh* in Deut 23:2-3 as *ekklesia tou*

kyriou (assembly of the Lord). The Greek word *ekklesia* is derived from *ek+kaleo* which mean "to call out" and "call together", "to gather together". Hence *ekklesia* means the community of those who are called and gathered together. Israel was a community of those who were called and gathered together through the exodus event and through the making of the covenant. There existed also another Hebrew word for assembly, and it was *edah* and it was translated into Greek as *synagoge*. In course of time, when the Jews took over *edah* and its Greek translation for their gathering on the Sabbath, the Christians reserved for themselves the word *qahal* and its Greek translation *ekklesia*. The Latin Fathers tried to have a corresponding Latin translation for *ekklesia*. But they could arrive at a consensus. Augustine proposed *civitas Dei* and it was not accepted. At last the Greek *ekklesia* was transliterated into the Latin as *ecclesia*. Many European languages, which developed from Latin, continued to translate *ekklesia* into their own languages, such as *chiesa*, and *eglise*. Some other languages, such as English, German and Dutch developed their words from *kyrios* and *kyriake*, meaning thereby "Lord" and "what belongs to the Lord". Thus *hemera kyriake* is the Day of the Lord, namely, Sunday, when they met together to break the bread and to remember the Lord. So we have the English "Church" and the German "Kirche".

When we speak about the Church, our first thoughts are about the universal Church, the Church in Rome, presided over by the Pope and administered by the college of bishops. The Church is primarily the local Church, the community in a particular place, the community that gathers around the Eucharistic table. In this sense the family is known as the foundational unit of the Church. Then come the parish, the diocese, and the national Church. It is the communion of all these local Churches that we may conceive of as the universal Church, which does not as such exist in one place. Moreover, there is a cosmic church, a church that transcends all its historical articulations and is the gathering of all human realities.

Moreover, the Church here on earth as such is a communion of many Churches. This is true of the Roman Catholic Church and also of the worldwide reality of the Churches. The Roman Catholic Church is a communion of 22 Churches, each having its own liturgical and theological traditions and discipline. The federation of the Churches besides the Roman Catholic Church is known as the World Council of Churches (WCC). But only after Vatican II were the

other Churches recognized as Churches by the Roman Catholic Church. Otherwise they were all called "separated brethren". Later on they were called "ecclesial communities". And now they are called Churches. Pius XII in his Encyclical *Mystici Corporis Christi* identified the Church with the Roman Catholic Church. But Vatican II reviewed this statement and worded it differently. The wise and vague reference to the Roman Catholic Church in *Lumen Gentium* that "Church subsists in the Roman Catholic Church" needs to guide all our theological discussions.

As a matter of fact, the Church transcends all Churches. All existing Churches are the imperfect and feeble historical articulations of that Church which transcends all historical manifestations. Ignatius of Antioch first used "Catholic" together with the *ekklesia* in CE 109 whereby he meant it as "universal". But now it has a restricted meaning insofar as it denotes the communion of those churches which acknowledge the Roman Pontiff as the universal head of the church, as the vicar of Christ and also as the successor of Peter.

An important aspect of understanding the reality of the Church is that there are two distinct ecclesial traditions prevailing in the Church, the Eastern and the Western. The Western is a pyramidal one, which is the continuation of the imperial tradition of the Roman Empire, and the Eastern is one of understanding the Church as a communion of many Churches joined together in the Spirit and in love. According to the Eastern tradition, the Pope is the First among the Equals (meaning thereby the Patriarchs), who presides over the charity of the Churches and not the top of a pyramid. According to the Western tradition, it is all a hierarchy from top to bottom. Through historical developments the Western model prevailed over the Eastern and the still prevailing concept of the Church is the pyramidal one. Though Vatican II has tried to give a new image of the Church, it was not easy to change the tradition that got established through the centuries, especially after Vatican I.

The Founding of the Church in the New Testament according to Mathew and John

For a meaningful study of the Sacred Scripture and Tradition it is important to analyze the inner reality of the Church as such, which is the first and the most important point of contact for the members of the Christian community in their practical life. In other words,

revelation, Sacred Scripture and Tradition become a living reality for them only within the reality of the Church, whether it is at the local or at the universal level. Hence we have to analyze the founding of the Church in the New Testament and also see how this Church is related to the Kingdom of God, which was the central theme of the preaching of Jesus Christ during his earthly ministry. Any discussion on the Church apart from its basic relation to the kingdom of God makes the Church an esoteric reality. The Church is right in the midst of the world.

Though the references to the Church are numerous in the Acts of the Apostles and in the Letters of the New Testament, in the Gospels it is mentioned only two times in the Gospel of Mathew, once in the context of its foundation in Caesarea Philippi (Mt 16:17-19) and the other in the context of the directives given to the leaders of the Church in the community discourse (Mt 18:17). It is to be further noted that, being an ecclesial Gospel, Mathew wanted to see the readers of his Gospel as an officially constituted community by Jesus Christ, which he tried to guarantee through the story of the founding of the Church on Peter. In fact, in the corresponding stories in Mark and Luke, also taking place in Caesarea Philippi, there is no such story of the founding of the Church. It is the considered view of several exegetes that this primacy passage, as it is called, historically does not belong to this stage of the public ministry of Jesus. This is all the more true, when we consider the fact that in the same story Jesus addresses Peter as "Satan" (Mt 16:21) who had become a stumbling block for Jesus' ministry by being on the side of human things and not on the side of divine things! In all likelihood the founding of the community and the designation of Peter as the leader of this community is a post-resurrection event and not a pre-resurrection one. The reference to the place of this story as a non-Jewish territory confirms the view that the Church is not to be identified with any Jewish institution. The Church is something of its own kind.

It is further to be noted that the imagery of the rock, that is the strong faith of Peter, as the foundation of the Church in Matthew gave rise to the concept of the Church as an institution rather than a community. In fact, the concept of the rock in this context is to be related to the parable of the two builders in the Sermon on the Mount, where the strong and weak foundations of discipleship are contrasted (Mt 7:24-27). Moreover, here the entire focus is on the person of Peter, although he made the confession of faith as the

representative of the Twelve. The transition from the representative role to the unique role is not to be attributed to the biblical tradition, but rather to historical factors down through the centuries. For example, the Petrine privilege of “binding and loosing” in Matthew 16:17-19 is presented in Matthew 18:18 as a privilege of the entire group of the disciples of Jesus.

This fact becomes all the more clear from the unique story found in the Gospel of John (Jn 21:15-17), where the same Peter is entrusted with the task of taking care of the sheep and lambs of the Risen Lord on the basis of the rehabilitated love relationship that existed between Jesus and Peter. Here there is no question of the Church as an institution. The entire scene is one of a community, which is characterized by love and care. It is unfortunate that no sufficient attention was paid to this passage as an ecclesial narrative. Rather it was understood as a personal narrative related to Jesus and Peter. In fact, taking the entire tradition of the Bible starting with Abraham, the present passage agrees more with the biblical imagery of leadership, whether it is of the Patriarchs or Moses or the kings of Israel. In fact, this Johannine passage is a parallel narrative to Matthew, and perhaps also a corrective one.

There is a further observation to be made about the Church as founded by Jesus of Nazareth. This is about how we have to understand the relative roles played by Peter and Paul in defining the inner nature of the Church according to the mind of Jesus of Nazareth. Though the Pentecost took place in Jerusalem and thereby the inauguration of the Church also has its basis in Jerusalem, it is not correct to see the entire reality of the Church as centred on Jerusalem and the community of the apostles under the leadership of Peter. Luke, the author of Acts, has taken special care to establish that there were two *foci* in the growth process of the Church, namely, Jerusalem and Antioch, one presided over by Peter and the apostles and the other presided over by prophetic teachers and preachers, of whom Paul was the leader. The legitimacy of these two *foci* is presented as guaranteed by the Holy Spirit and this is the inner message of the story of the conversion of Cornelius in Acts 10:1-18, after which the story of the founding of the Church of Antioch is presented. It is precisely this image of the Church that we get according to Ephesians 2: 19-20: “You are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon

the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone”.

A specific achievement of Vatican II was its success in establishing the inner nature of the Church as a community of its own kind, completely different from all other human institutions, although it consists of several human elements. The basic framework on which this uniqueness of the Church rests is its anchoring in history and its dynamic movement towards the future. This unique nature of the Church consists of three inter-related and unitary concepts, namely, Tradition, Sacred Scripture and the Church, which together form one dynamic reality.

Dynamic Understanding of Tradition in *Dei Verbum* and Its importance for Catholic Theology

The most crucial topic on which the Council had to come to some clear understanding was the concept of Tradition, as it existed through history of the Church. It is related to the controversy over the meaning of tradition ever since the time of the Reformation. One of the tenets of the Reformation was the following: “The Fathers of the Church constitute a negative norm of biblical interpretation. The tradition of the Church, that is, her creeds, dogma, and liturgy embody the global meaning of Scripture in a manner that makes her able to pass judgment on the interpretation of the Bible’s meaning for faith and life”. So there is no need of any teaching of the Fathers of the Church to support it. Out of this position arose the saying “Sola Scriptura”. The Reformers maintained that many medieval traditions do not derive from the apostles and theologically only scriptural traditions are normative.

The teaching of Christ and the Apostles, especially of Paul, and others are recorded in the various books of the New Testament, and it is preserved in a continuous succession of the preachers and teachers of the Word throughout the world. This living tradition, which comes from Christ and from the apostles, unfolds and develops in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit. This happens not only through the scientific study of the Bible by the exegetes and theologians, but also through the contemplative study made by the believers, who treasure the divine message of these writings in their hearts and ponder over them (Lk 2:19, 51), through the intimate understanding of the spiritual realities they experience and through the preaching and teaching of those who have received through

Episcopal succession the sure gift of truth. Hence the Church constantly moves forward towards the fullness of the divine truth. In this process the Fathers of the Church, both in the East and in the West, have also played their respective and important roles. Hence there exist a close connection and communication between the sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture, and they merge into a unity and tend toward the same end. Consequently, sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture form one sacred deposit of the Word of God, which is committed to the Church.

The task of authentically interpreting the Word of God, whether written or handed on, has been entrusted to the living teaching office of the Church, namely, the Magisterium, whose authority is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ. However, the teaching office is not above the Word of God, but it *serves it*, teaching only what has been handed on, listening to it devoutly, guarding it scrupulously, and explaining it faithfully by divine commission and with the help of the Holy Spirit. This new understanding of Tradition, Sacred Scripture and the Church in *Verbum Dei* is very significant.

By God's most wise design, Sacred Tradition, Sacred Scripture and the Church's Teaching authority are so linked and so associated together that one cannot stand without the others, and that all together and each one in its own way contribute effectively to the salvation of souls under the action of the Holy Spirit (*Dei Verbum* art.10).

The Sacred Scripture as the Recorded, Inspired and Inspiring Tradition of the Church

An equally important development in the understanding of tradition is that the Bible is also seen as the articulation and end product of a living and dynamic tradition both in the history of Israel and of the early Church. Again, it is not a question of the Church *having* the Bible and the Tradition as a source of its self-understanding, but rather of the Bible *being a recorded and inspired* form of the tradition that began to exist with the revealing act of God in the beginning of the creation of the world. God's revelation in history was responded to by the community of Israel and also by the community of the early Church through their living faith. This does not mean that God's revelation in history is exclusively given to these communities. The entire world history is salvation history and other religions also have their understanding of God's revelation recorded in their sacred books. Moreover, God still speaks. The communities of

Israel and the early Church, which responded to the revelation of God through their faith in their past, articulated their faith through their official writings, known as the First Testament and the Second Testament, and this process was a divinely guided event, which we call the inspiration.

The traditional understanding of the collection of the various books of the First Testament and the Second Testament as written by certain individuals, who had received a personal charism of inspiration during their writing, is to be removed in favour of a dynamic understanding of the formation of these books as taking place throughout the entire history of Israel and the early Church, in which certain groups or individuals worked as the representatives of the community. Behind the First Testament we have to recognize a living tradition of remembering and rehearsing and retelling the great events of their salvation, which later on came to be recorded and written down. The "Little Credo" of Israel (Deut 26:5-10) and the "Little Catechism of Israel" (Deut 6:20-25) are typical examples of these narrative traditions. The four major traditions of the Pentateuch, JEDP, with their subdivisions, the recording of the prophetic books in the schools of the various prophets, the writing of the books of wisdom literature in the long history of the wisdom movement, the recording of the psalms, are all events which took place in the living tradition of Israel. The formation of the Gospels in the life of the early Church in its preaching, teaching and other faith activities of the living tradition of the early Christian movement is also given clear formulation in the *Dei Verbum*. Hence the charism of inspiration is also not a personal privilege given to some particular individuals; but rather it was a charism of divine assistance given to the community of Israel and the early Church.

Though *Dei Verbum* has not gone into the details of the formation of the Bible in the dynamic tradition of the history of Israel and of the early Church, there are sufficient indications in this document to emphasize the dynamic process of the formation the Gospels in the life of the early Church over against the traditional understanding of the Gospels as a kind of biographies written by four individual evangelists as a result of their personal efforts and investigations. The Gospels have a three-stage formation in the life of the early Church, namely, *the preached gospel, the lived gospel and the four written Gospels*. The writing of the four Gospels is also explained as taking place through a process of selection, synthesis, explication, and preserving

the form of proclamation character, at the same time giving us the honest truth about Jesus (DV 19). Hence the Gospels are not the biographies of Jesus, rather, they are a kerygmatic history as well as documents of faith, written from the faith of the early Church for the faith of the future Church as a living and dynamic tradition. 1 Cor 11:23-26 and 1 Cor 15:3-8 throw light on how the early Church kept its faith through a process of receiving and handing over in the case of the Eucharistic tradition and also in the transmission of the apostolic kerygma of the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, as the basis and substance of the Christian faith.

Such an understanding of the Sacred Scripture as related to the life of the covenanted community of Israel and the community of the early Church also explains the need of the Church and her members having a close contact with the Sacred Scripture in their personal and community life. *Dei Verbum* in its final chapter (chapter VI) dwells on this point. In the Eucharistic celebration both the Word of God in the Bible and the Word become Flesh in the Eucharist are made available to the people of God. Hence the Sacred Scripture should become a rich source of nourishment for the people of God as a whole. It is through the ongoing contact with the Bible as the Word of God that the Bible continues to inspire and guide the people of God in their day-to-day life. In fact, according to Karl Rahner the Sacred Scripture is a *constituent part* of the Church, meaning thereby that the Church without the Bible would be lesser Church, a Church, which does not have a mirror to look at and understand herself. But this happens not by keeping the Bible as a closed book, but rather by making it a vibrant reality in the life of the Church, of the families, and of the individual members of the Church. Biblical scholars have a responsible task to interpret the Bible and make it a reality forming and transforming the life of the people of God. The Sacred Scripture *is a living tradition* ever operative in the life of the Church.

The Church as a Living Tradition through the Centuries

The Church is basically a community, not an institution. As such, it is the servant of the kingdom of God in the world. Hence the Church is *in the world, for the world, but not of the world*, meaning thereby that the Church is not to be guided by the ideals, values and principles of the world, such as power, authority, money, influence and so on. Since the Church is in the world, there is always a tendency to tune itself to the style of the world, and consequently the Church is always

in need of a reformation. This was a heretical statement after the Reformation, but Vatican II has endorsed it as a permanent feature of the Church all over the world.

There are many models of the Church in the New Testament. Whereas the Acts of the Apostles presents the Jerusalem Church as an apostolic Church, controlled by the apostles and centred in Jerusalem, it presents the Church of Antioch as a prophetic Church having its horizons open to the outside world. Paul refers to the Church of Jerusalem initially as the "Church of God", but later on he calls every Church as the Church of God. From the letters of Paul we see that Paul sees a kind of inner and inter-connection between the various Churches he or others had founded. Paul also refers to the "domestic Churches" in his letters, which were the dynamic beginning of the local Churches in the course of history. The Pastoral Letters refer to the Church as the custodian of the true doctrine and enumerates the qualities of the various offices in the Church.

During the second part of the first century of the CE we see the Church of the Catacombs, the Church of the simple and the humble believers. After the conversion of Constantine we have the imperial Church protected by the Emperor. Thereby the supreme authority of the Church assumes the nature of a spiritual Emperor, a phenomenon, which continued to exist and operate for many more centuries, but still having its influence in our times. In the Eastern part of the Roman Empire we have the Patriarchal system of the Churches with their operation of the Patriarchal synods. The fact of the Church of Rome developing itself as a pyramidal Church has its own historical and psychological background.

The traditional approach to the Church of Rome as the place of the successor of Peter for the fact that Peter was in Rome is based on a secondary historical source about the ministry of Peter in Rome. But we have a better evidence of the ministry of Paul in Rome from the Acts of the Apostles, where Paul is said to have spent two years not as a prisoner, but under restricted freedom, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ quite openly and unhindered by the political authorities (Acts 28:30-31). Moreover, it is important to note that the Church is built on the Apostles and the Prophets, whereby Peter is the leader of the Apostles and the representative of the Church of Jerusalem, and Paul is the leader of the prophetic tradition, starting from the Church of Antioch. This

fact, however, is rarely referred to, and it seems to constitute a new dimension in the ongoing study of the reality of the Church.

Looking back into the history of the Church, the Gregorian Reform (CE 1073-1088) by Gregory VII is the climax of the Papal primacy, the outcome of which was the Papal Monarchy. The Canon Law promulgated in the 12th century and Scholastic Theologians of the 13th century defended the monarchical theology of the Church. The Avignon Papacy marked the decadence of papacy. The great division of the Western and Eastern Churches in 1054 and the Reformation in the Western Church during the 16th century constitute the painful stages in the history of the Church as a whole. Vatican I once again revived the monarchical theology of the Church. The imminent Franco-Prussian war making an abrupt closing of the Council made the image of the Church more and more problematic. It was during the time between the two councils that discussions on the inner nature of the Church in some parts of Europe became more profound, and the outcome of these discussions was the promulgation of the Encyclical *Mystici Corporis Christi* which once again reaffirmed the inner nature of the Church as something transcending its hierarchical structure. This Encyclical laid emphasis on the inner relation between Christ and Church on the one hand, and the Church and the Holy Spirit, on the other hand. However, this Encyclical could not have a lasting influence on the understanding of the inner nature of the Church because of the prevailing pyramidal tradition of the Church solemnly defined by the First Vatican Council together with its focus on primacy and infallibility.

Vatican II came as the inauguration of a new era for the understanding of the inner nature of the Church. The original schema on the Church proposed in 1962, modelled on the standard manuals on the Ecclesiology of Vatican I with its focus and emphasis on papacy, primacy, hierarchy and infallibility, underwent many radical changes till it was voted upon in 1964 with its biblical, historical, pastoral and dynamic aspects. It all happened through the intervention of certain progressive bishops who questioned the validity of a triumphant Church as different from the Church, which was founded by Jesus Christ who came to serve and not to be served (Mt 20:28). It was a going back to the sources of Christian tradition on the origin and the meaning of the Church as founded by Jesus of Nazareth.