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## PAUL VI ON THE TRUTH AND INERRANCY OF SACRED SCRIPTURE

by *Brian W. Harrison*

### PART A

In the last issue of *Living Tradition*<sup>1</sup> we completed our survey of Pope Paul VI's interventions on the more philosophical aspects of biblical interpretation. We will now continue our study of this pontiff's biblical teachings by considering his general approach to interpretative principles based on faith rather than reason: those principles, that is, which flow from two truths of divine revelation. The first of these truths is the Catholic dogma that all Scripture is divinely inspired, and the second is the inseparable nexus between Sacred Scripture, Sacred Tradition and the Church's Magisterium. This present essay will cover Pope Paul's teaching on the first of these truths: that integral truth, or freedom from error, of Scripture which our faith has always recognized as a necessary consequence of its inspiration by the Holy Spirit. By far the most important contribution of Paul VI in this area, as we shall see, took place during Vatican II, when he intervened personally in the redaction of article 11 of the Council's Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, by asking for the removal of an ambiguity from the text that might be interpreted so as to place undue restrictions on the inerrancy of Scripture.

### 1. A Generally 'Indirect' Approach to Biblical Inerrancy

Perhaps surprisingly, Paul VI said very little *ex professo* about the nature of biblical inspiration and inerrancy in the post-conciliar years of his pontificate. The seriousness with which (as we shall see) he treated this topic during the redaction of *Dei Verbum* 11 suggests that this post-conciliar reticence was not due to any wish to minimize the importance of such a grave matter; but rather, it seems, he took for granted the integral truth of Scripture as the essential presupposition of everything he said about it, and of the way in which he quoted and argued from the Bible in dealing with particular aspects of Christian truth. This should become clearer in subsequent articles, when we come to consider the Pope's concrete application of the general principles which we are discussing at present. Another reason for the scarcity of allusions to biblical inspiration and inerrancy as such in the Pope's teaching may well be the fact that in spite of the difficult and contentious problems arising from modern biblical studies, few Catholic Scripture scholars were openly and explicitly calling in question the integral truth of Scripture.

The words "openly and explicitly" above need to be stressed, because Pope Paul was very conscious that, substantially and in effect, the Catholic faith in the divine authorship and veracity of Scripture was indeed being endangered by certain influential tendencies in exegesis. For instance, his Apostolic Exhortation *Quinque iam anni* (8 December 1970), marking the first five years after the Council, included the lament that "Even the divine authority of

<sup>1</sup> "Paul VI on Modern Biblical Hermeneutics", *Living Tradition* no. 164, May, 2013.

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Scripture itself is called in question by a radical application of what is commonly called ‘demythologization’;<sup>2</sup> and other similar statements by Pope Paul passages could be adduced to much the same effect. However, as we have seen, this attack upon the integral truth of Scripture usually took the form of “reinterpreting,” not overtly denying, the biblical affirmations in question; and it was for this reason that the Pope was so insistent in stressing the permanence of meaning in the Church’s sources of faith.<sup>3</sup>

In short, the most pressing issue facing Paul VI was not the formal or abstract question of truth or error in Scripture, but rather, that of the correct *interpretation* of Scripture; and that is probably why, when it was a question of reproof errors about the Bible, the Pope devoted by far the greater part of his attention to “hermeneutical distortions,” “demythologization,” and so on. Nevertheless, the Pope did on one occasion refer directly to the Bible’s exemption from error, and indeed, used that word for it which had been sanctioned by centuries of use in the standard theological vocabulary. It has often been said in recent decades that by deciding not to speak of the “inerrancy” of Sacred Scripture, Vatican Council II in effect rendered this term obsolete. This was evidently not Paul VI’s understanding of the matter, for in the Wednesday audience allocution of 1 July 1970, dedicated to Sacred Scripture, and in particular, to the Council’s teaching on this theme, he affirmed: “For the Church, Sacred Scripture is the Word of God, inspired by Him and therefore guaranteed by divine inerrancy in its own authentic meaning.”<sup>4</sup>

In noting above that Paul VI said very little about the inspiration and truth of Scripture as such, we added “in the post-conciliar years of his pontificate.” This is because, during the Council itself, Pope Paul made an important personal intervention on this matter, and on two other questions regarding Sacred Scripture. Even though our study is not for the most part an examination of the Constitution *Dei Verbum* itself,<sup>5</sup> it falls within the scope of our present enquiry to consider the particular texts in question, precisely because their final wording in treating of certain points of crucial importance was due to personal interventions on the part of the Pope. Their textual history makes it clear that, over and above his endorsement and promulgation of all the documents of Vatican II, Paul VI was especially exercised over these particular points.<sup>6</sup>

It is worth noting first of all the relative infrequency of these direct interventions by the Pope in the redaction of the conciliar schemas. True to his constant and firm belief in the necessity of dialogue, both within the Church herself and with those of other faiths, Pope Paul was very conscious of the value of free debate among the Council Fathers, and was very prudent and cautious about exercising his supreme prerogative in order to intervene directly in the wording of the conciliar texts. Sometimes, indeed, he was criticized for not intervening when some Fathers felt he should have done so. A considerable group of Fathers, for instance, were disappointed with the Pope’s decision not to overrule the Council Presidency’s decision to postpone the voting on the schema on Religious Liberty for another year, until the fourth session. Some were also disappointed by his refusal to introduce certain last-minute amendments to the schema on Ecumenism which would have significantly altered its content.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>2</sup> “*Quin immo ipsa divina auctoritas Sacrae Scripturae in controversiam vocatur nimia illa rei mythicae amotione, quam ‘demythizationem’ vulgo appellant*” (AAS 63 [1971] 99).

<sup>3</sup> The perceptive comment of Michael Dummett, professor of Logic at Oxford, on this facet of the current malaise in scriptural scholarship is worth quoting in this context: “The appeal to literary genres in interpreting Scripture was in origin well based; but in my view, it has degenerated by imperceptible steps into an unconscious mechanism for allowing the exegete to adopt what opinions he chooses while formally professing to acknowledge the truthfulness and inspiration of the New Testament writings” (“Unsafe Premises: a Reply to Nicholas Lash,” *New Blackfriars* 68 [1987] 560).

<sup>4</sup> “*La Sacra Scrittura per la Chiesa è Parola di Dio, da Lui ispirata e perciò, nel significato autentico suo proprio, garantita da divina inerranza*” (Ins. 1970, 691). To draw from the non-occurrence of the word “inerrancy” in the text of *Dei Verbum* the conclusion that the Council considers it “obsolete” seems to this writer a tendentious *non sequitur*. The Council, after all, insisted on reaffirming that the Bible teaches the truth “without error,” which is an adverbial phrase identical in meaning to the noun “inerrancy.” The same meaning is not adequately expressed by speaking of “the truth” of Scripture rather than its inerrancy, because in common speech we say that many human utterances, written or spoken, are “true” in overall or general terms, without thereby meaning that they are exempt from every error.

<sup>5</sup> There is already a considerable bibliography commenting on *Dei Verbum*. Useful reading, particularly as regards Chapter III, on the truth of Scripture, could include the following titles: L. Alonso Schökel (ed.), *Concilio Vaticano II. Comentarios a la Constitución Dei Verbum sobre la divina Revelación* (Madrid: B.A.C., 1969) – a volume of 797 pages containing 31 essays by Alonso Schökel and others; U. Betti *et al*, *Commento alla Costituzione Dogmatica sulla Divina Rivelazione* (Milan: Massimo, 1966); P. Grelot, “La Constitution sur la Révélation, I: la préparation d’un schema conciliaire” (*Études*, 324 [January 1966] 99-113; ); Id., “La Constitution sur la Révélation, II: Contenu et portée du texte conciliaire” (*Études*, 324 [February 1966] 233-246); A. Ibañez Irana, *Inspiración, Inerrancia e Interpretación de la S. Escritura en el Concilio Vaticano II* (Vitoria: Edit. Eset, 1987); I. de la Potterie, “Il Concilio Vaticano II e la Bibbia” (in I. de la Potterie, (ed.), *L’esegesi cristiana oggi* [Casale Monferrato: Edizioni Piemme, 1991] 19-42); G. O’Collins, “*Dei Verbum* and Biblical Scholarship” (*Scripture Bulletin* 21 [1991] 2-7); M. Zerwick, “De S. Scriptura in Constitutione dogmatica ‘Dei Verbum’” (*Verbum Domini* 44 [1966] 17-42).

<sup>6</sup> The other points on which Paul VI intervened personally in the Council’s deliberations on Sacred Scripture were the relation between Scripture and Tradition and the historicity of the Gospels.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. R.M. Wiltgen, S.V.D., *The Rhine Flows Into the Tiber* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1967, 235-239). Wiltgen records how many bishops

This generally cautious approach serves to underline the importance Pope Paul attached to those issues on which he did feel the need to intervene. His contribution to the final text of article 11 of the Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, was related precisely to that freedom from error which is a consequence of the divine inspiration of Scripture. In this essay we shall seek to understand this intervention in its context by considering the textual history of the sentence stating the Church's doctrine on this matter, both before and after the Pope's intervention. Then in the following chapter we shall deal with questions arising from its translation and concrete interpretation.

## 2. The Textual History of *Dei Verbum* 11 Before Paul VI's Intervention

### (a) The Early Drafts: *Schemas I to III*

In order to contextualize Paul VI's intervention, it will be useful to understand how the unfolding of the conciliar discussions on the effects of divine inspiration reached the point of requiring a papal intervention. The truth is that, right from the beginning of the discussion, serious divergences of opinion among the Fathers came to light over the extent of biblical inerrancy. The original schema presented to the conciliar Fathers had contained an emphatic restatement of the doctrine of *Providentissimus Deus*, *Spiritus Paraclitus* and *Divino Afflante Spiritu*. It affirmed:

From this extension of divine inspiration to everything [in Scripture], it follows directly and necessarily that the whole Bible is absolutely immune from error. We are taught by the ancient and constant faith of the Church that it is altogether forbidden to concede that a sacred writer has himself erred; for by the same necessity which renders it impossible for God, the supreme Truth, to be the author of any error whatsoever, divine Inspiration, by its very nature, necessarily prevents and excludes every error in any subject-matter whatever, religious or profane.<sup>8</sup>

As we noted in an earlier article,<sup>9</sup> this entire schema proved to be controversial. Sharp differences of opinion were registered about the above passage regarding inspiration and its effects, as about other specific parts of the schema. A brief review of the differing representative viewpoints will serve to highlight the extent to which the conciliar Fathers found themselves at odds over this complex issue.

Those who defended the passage stressed its origin in the teaching of the papal encyclicals. The *relator* for the original schema, Msgr. Salvatore Garofalo, presented it to the Fathers with these remarks: "The content of Chapter II regarding the divine inspiration, inerrancy and literary composition of Sacred Scripture is taken from the more recent statements of the pontifical Magisterium and adapted to modern scholarship. It thereby constitutes a declaration of safe and fruitful doctrine."<sup>10</sup>

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reacted to the announcement of Paul VI's decision on 19 November 1964 to delay voting on a completely revised schema on Religious Liberty until the final session in 1965. A group of American Fathers led by Cardinal Albert Meyer of Chicago "decided upon the wording of a special petition to be circulated immediately. It was the famous '*Instantier, instantius, instantissime*' petition to the Holy Father consisting of only one sentence: 'Reverently but insistently, more insistently, most insistently, we request that the vote on the declaration on religious freedom be allowed to take place before the end of this Council session, lest the confidence of the Christian and non-Christian world be lost.' . . . Copies of the petition passed rapidly from hand to hand. Never had there been such a furious signing of names, such confusion, such agitation" (*ibid.*, 237). Later on, in the light of calm reflection, some of these Americans, including John Courtney Murray, S.J., the leading *peritus* on the religious liberty schema, recognized that the Pope's decision had in fact been "wise" and "correct" (cf. *ibid.*, 242-243).

<sup>8</sup> "*Ex hac divinae Inspirationis extensione ad omnia, directe et necessario sequitur immunitas absoluta ab errore totius Sacrae Scripturae. Antiqua enim et constanti Ecclesiae fide edocemur nefas omnino esse concedere sacrum ipsum errasse scriptorem, cum divina Inspiratio per se ipsam tam necessario excludat, et respuat errorem omnem in qualibet re religiosa vel profana, quam necessarium est Deum, summam Veritatem, nullius omnino erroris auctorem esse*" (AS I, III, 18).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Living Tradition*, no. 156, January 2012, section 1b, pp. 4-5.

<sup>10</sup> (AS I, III, 30). This is reproduced in F. Gil Hellin, *Concillii Vaticani II Synopsis: Constitutio Dogmatica de Divina Revelatione Dei Verbum*. (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993, 194). (This and the other conciliar interventions regarding *Dei Verbum* are conveniently reproduced in this single volume, which is abbreviated hereafter GH.) Cardinal Fernando Quiroga of Compostella gave his *placet* to the schema, but remarked that in dealing with inerrancy the text should state more clearly the importance of seeking out the human author's intention in his use of words (cf. AS I, III, 40; GH 202). A group of forty-nine Hispanic Fathers whose spokesman was Archbishop Casimir Morcillo also gave their *placet* but felt that this passage was one-sided: it had selected those papal statements which favoured the stricter school of exegesis and this should be balanced, they felt, by citing other pontifical interventions which open up "broader paths." ("*Schema, ex pontificibus locutionibus, ea potissimum adducit quae strictioribus favent; omissa mentione de his quae, cum sint quoque pontificia, ampliores viam protendunt. Si haec vera sunt, corrigenda venient; et documenta utriusque generis proponuntur*" [AS I, III, 61; GH 220].) The most enthusiastic supporter of the schema's treatment of biblical studies was Bishop Geraldo de Proença Sigaud of Diamantina, Brazil, who found its severity both relevant and timely, since "the extremely grave errors denounced and condemned by Pius XII in the Encyclical *Humani Generis* are not dead. They continue to creep stealthily through the Church, which now lies stricken with the full strength of their venom." ("*. . . errores gravissimi, quos Pius XII in Encyclica Humani Generis denuntiavit et condemnavit, non sunt mortui. Adhuc serpunt, cum maximo vigore venenum suum propagant et Ecclesiam iam inficiunt*" [AS I, III, 224; GH 323].) "In the field of Sacred Scripture," he asserted, "we are facing a situation in which many Catholics are denying, in practice, the historical value of almost the entire

Among the Fathers from Northern Europe, however, a very different attitude prevailed. Cardinal Frings of Cologne asserted that the above passage regarding inspiration and inerrancy “seems too rigid, too restrictive of scientific freedom, and approaching the doctrine of verbal inspiration.”<sup>11</sup> Cardinal Franz König of Vienna felt that, in the light of problems faced by modern exegetes in this matter, the schema “seems to say more than what should be defined by the Council’s supreme authority.” He also thought it neglected the fact that, even within the general category of genuinely historical writings, there existed a variety of literary forms; and that it attempted to settle prematurely the still-disputed question of the inerrancy of “obiter dicta” in Scripture.<sup>12</sup>

Cardinal Augustin Bea, S.J., who was able to speak with more authority than probably any other conciliar Father on biblical matters, was also critical of this passage, though for somewhat different reasons. He did not question the intrinsic validity of what was said, so much as its appropriateness for the present Council, voicing his opinion that in the schema “many things are treated which are relevant only to the theological schools and so cannot be defined by the Council – especially the explanation given here of the doctrine of inspiration, which can be found in any good theological treatise on inspiration.”<sup>13</sup> In general, Cardinal Bea found the language of the schema too defensive and negative:

Only once does it say something which can be taken as a word of praise for the achievements of modern exegetes. But those achievements, as Pius XII of holy memory said in the Encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, have been immense during the last fifty years, as non-Catholic authors too have acknowledged. This schema, however, carries a certain tone of suspicion, a certain fear of errors, etc., although without really coming to grips with the problems involved.<sup>14</sup>

Eventually, when the question of whether to continue with this initial schema as a basis for discussion was raised, it was rejected by no less than 62% of the valid votes cast by the Fathers.<sup>15</sup> In the light of these and other similar criticisms, the emphatic and apologetic language of the original draft was very much moderated and abbreviated in the first revision of the text. This revised version (*Schema II*) now simply stated that, in consequence of the whole Bible’s divine inspiration, it is “completely immune from all error.”<sup>16</sup>

As can be seen in comparing this with the original draft, the most significant omission is that of the qualifying clause which had explicitly stated that the inerrancy of Scripture extends to “any subject-matter whatever, religious or profane.” This question was now touched upon only in the footnote, which was also shortened in the new draft. References to a number of earlier magisterial statements on biblical inspiration and inerrancy were dropped from the footnote,<sup>17</sup> leaving only the passage of *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (*EB* 539) in which Pius XII had summed up and reaffirmed the teaching of *Providentissimus Deus* on the Bible’s absolute freedom from error.<sup>18</sup>

Bible.” (“*Re vera, in campo biblico, agitur, apud multos catholicos, e practica negatione valoris historicae fere totius Sacrae Scripturae*” [*ibid.*].) Sigaud went on to illustrate his thesis with copious examples of books and passages in both Old and New Testaments whose historicity, he claimed, was widely rejected by modern Catholic exegetes (cf. *AS* I, III, 225-226; *GH* 323-324).

<sup>11</sup> “. . . mihi videtur nimis rigida, nimis coarctans libertatem scientiae, et appropinquans ad doctrinam inspirationis verbalis” (*AS* I, III, 35; *GH* 198).

<sup>12</sup> *AS* I, III, 42-43. Cf. *Living Tradition*, no. 156, January 2012, section 1a, nn. 3-6 (pp. 2-3) for König’s observations and this writer’s critical comments on them. Unlike the Brazilian bishop de Proença Sigaud, (already quoted in n. 10 above), who saw the Church as infested with modernist errors, the head of the English Benedictines, Abbot Christopher Butler, felt that “scarcely any modernists can be found among Catholics today,” and for that reason criticized the schema for “returning to an antimodernist mentality.” (“*Iamvero, schema, in aliquibus partibus, videtur mihi reddere mentem antimodernisticam. Sed modernistae inter catholicos vix hodie inveniuntur*” [*AS* I, III, 109; *GH* 254].) In regard to the particular passage we are considering, Abbott Butler commented: “Similarly, the schema treats the inspiration and inerrancy of Sacred Scripture with words which go beyond what has already been defined; indeed, such words could almost be taken to signify a kind of scriptural “Docetism.” What the world needs to hear from us, however, is that Scripture is the Word of God written by men in human language – a true and inspired Word. If we say anything more than that on this subject, it would serve not for the ‘building up’ of the people, but for the ‘battering down’ of Catholic scholars. And this would be a scandal to the more intelligent laity in every future age of the world that is now dawning.” (*AS loc. cit.*; *GH* 253-254).

<sup>13</sup> *AS* I, III, 50.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 50-51), present writer’s translation.

<sup>15</sup> Of 2209 votes cast on whether to interrupt the discussion on the initial schema, *De fontibus revelationis*, 1368 (62%) were *placet*, 822 (37%) were *non placet*, while 19 votes (1%) were invalid. (Cf. *GH* 345).

<sup>16</sup> “. . . ab omni prorsus errore immune” (*ibid.*, 785).

<sup>17</sup> The footnote to the original schema read as follows: “*EB* 539, cum verbis relatis Leonis XIII, *Litt. Encycl. Providentissimus Deus*, *Denz.* 1950, *EB* 124. Cf. quoque *EB* 44, 46, 125, 420, 463, etc” (*AS* I, III, 19; *GH* 184). Of those passages, *EB* 125 (also from *Providentissimus Deus*) was finally included as footnote 4 to *Dei Verbum* 11.

<sup>18</sup> “The first and greatest care of Leo XIII was to set forth the teaching on the truth of the Sacred Books and to defend it from attack. Hence with grave words did he proclaim that there is no error whatsoever if the sacred writer, speaking of things of the physical order, ‘went by what sensibly appeared’ as the Angelic Doctor says, speaking either ‘in figurative language, or in terms which were commonly used at the time, and which in many instances are in daily use at this day, even among the most eminent men of science’. For ‘the sacred writers, or to speak more accurately – the words are St. Augustine’s – the Holy Spirit, Who spoke by them, did not intend to teach men these things – that is, the intimate constitution of visible things – which are in no way profitable to salvation’; which principle ‘will apply to cognate sciences, and especially to history,’ that is, by refuting, ‘in a

When reactions to this new version were sought from the Fathers, many of them felt that the reduction had been excessive, and that something more explicit should be restored to make it clear that this freedom from error is not restricted to “religious” affirmations (matters of “faith and morals”). Thus, in the subsequent draft (*Schema III*), we find in the footnote that as well as the reference to *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (*EB* 539), the entire paragraph *EB* 124 from *Providentissimus Deus* is now listed fully and in its own right.<sup>19</sup> This substantially restored the above doctrinal point about which *Schema II* had been silent, for in the central sentence of *EB* 124, speaking of the difficulties arising from apparent errors in Scripture, Leo XIII states:

Equally intolerable is the theory of those who, in order to unburden themselves of these difficulties, have no hesitation in maintaining that divine inspiration pertains to nothing more than matters of faith and morals. This error arises from the false opinion that when it is a question of the truth of biblical affirmations, one should not so much inquire into what God has said, but rather, into why He has said it.<sup>20</sup>

Since the dichotomy between “matters of faith and morals” and other matters would be virtually the same as that between “religious” and “profane” matters, the reference to this passage inserted into the footnote effectively restored to the document, in a less severe tone and with less apologetic emphasis, the teaching of the original schema. The other principal teaching regarding biblical inerrancy in *EB* 124 is that cited by Pius XII in *EB* 539 – the reference which had been included in the footnote in all three drafts up till this point, and was to remain there in the finally-approved text. As we noted above, this teaching constitutes in itself a very strong declaration of the plenary inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture:

It is absolutely wrong either to limit inspiration to certain parts only of Sacred Scripture, or to concede that the sacred writer himself has erred. . . . indeed, far from being compatible with any kind of error, divine inspiration by its very nature not only excludes every error, but necessarily prevents and excludes it by the same necessity which renders it impossible for God, the supreme Truth, to be the author of any error whatsoever.<sup>21</sup>

While the footnote to *Schema III* thus restored greater emphasis to traditional aspects of the doctrine of biblical inspiration and inerrancy, the main text of this third draft introduced terminology that would have been less familiar to some conciliar Fathers: the notion that inerrancy is guaranteed only to what is “affirmed” (or “asserted,” or “taught”) by the sacred writers, as distinct from what may be merely “expressed,” “said,” or “written” by them. The new text read as follows: “Therefore, since everything affirmed by the inspired authors, or sacred writers, must be held as affirmed by the Holy Spirit, we must accordingly acknowledge that the books of Scripture – entire and with all their parts – teach the truth without any error.”<sup>22</sup> This modification to the text was based on a submission by Cardinal Raúl Silva Henríquez, commenting on *Schema II*’s brief and simple expression “completely immune from all error” (*ab omni prorsus errore immune*), which had avoided any verb specifying the activity of the biblical authors. Henríquez said:

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somewhat similar way the fallacies of the adversaries and defending the historical truth of Sacred Scripture from their attacks.’ Nor is the sacred writer to be taxed with error, if ‘copyists have made mistakes in the text of the Bible,’ or, ‘if the real meaning of a passage remains ambiguous.’ Finally, it is absolutely wrong and forbidden ‘either to narrow inspiration to certain passages of Holy Scripture, or to admit that the sacred writer has erred,’ since divine inspiration ‘not only is essentially incompatible with error but excludes and rejects it as absolutely and necessarily as it is impossible that God Himself, the supreme Truth, can utter that which is not true. This is the ancient and constant faith of the Church’” (*EB* 539, emphasis added). This is no. 3 of the English translation used here, which is found in *Rome and the Study of Scripture* (Grail Publications, 1953, pp. 79-107), which is reproduced in Claudia Carlen (ed.), *The Papal Encyclicals 1939–1958* (McGrath Publishing Co., 1981) 65-79. I have altered this translation in one expression, rendering *intimam adspectabilium rerum constitutionem* more literally as ‘the intimate constitution of visible things.’ As can be seen from the words we have emphasized, the above passage does clearly imply that the Bible’s immunity from formal error extends to its affirmations about physical and historical matters, which, broadly speaking, would be the same areas which the original schema alluded to as “profane” rather than “religious.” (Whereas the first schema presented to the Council Fathers had also explicitly noted that Pius XII was here citing a passage from *EB* 124, this nuance was omitted in *Schema II*.)

<sup>19</sup> Cf. above, nn. 17 and 18. In *EB* 539 Pius XII had cited only the last three lines of the twenty which make up *EB* 124.

<sup>20</sup> *DS* 3291 [*EB* 124], present writer’s translation.

<sup>21</sup> “. . . nefas omnino fuerit aut inspirationem ad aliquas tantum sacras Scripturæ partes coangustare aut concedere sacrum ipsum errasse auctorem. . . . tantum vero abest, ut divinæ inspirationi error ullus subesse possit, ut ea per se ipsa non modo errorem excludat omnem, sed tam necessario excludat et respuat, quam necessarium est, Deum, summam Veritatem, nullius omnino erroris auctorem esse” (*DS* 3292 [*EB* 124]). It is true that Leo XIII here condemns explicitly only the idea that **inspiration** is restricted to matters of faith and morals, not the idea that **inerrancy** is restricted to those matters. However, it is clear from this whole section of the encyclical that Pope Leo teaches inspiration to be absolutely inseparable from inerrancy as its necessary consequence.

<sup>22</sup> “Cum ergo omne id, quod auctor inspiratus seu hagiographus asserit, retineri debeat assertum a Spiritu Sancto, inde Scripture libri integri cum omnibus suis partibus veritatem sine ullo errore docere profitendi sunt” (*AS*, III, III, 89).

My proposal is to replace the words “therefore . . . it follows” by “therefore the divinely inspired Scripture must be said to teach no error whatsoever.” **Reason:** the doctrine of biblical inerrancy is better expressed by speaking of the formal criterion of **teaching**, since it is according to that criterion that no error can be found. For in another sense, i.e., the material sense, it is possible for expressions to be used by the sacred writer which are erroneous in themselves, but which, however, he does not wish to teach.<sup>23</sup>

The Theological Commission, in presenting *Schema III* to the conciliar Fathers, stated that this suggestion had been incorporated “substantially,”<sup>24</sup> which implied that the Chilean Cardinal’s reason for using the verb “teach” (*docere*) had been accepted. The question might be asked, however, as to what exactly was meant by the verb “to be used” (*adhiberi*) in his submission. Since Henríquez referred to the “formal/material” distinction, it would seem that what he had in mind was the need to avoid an excessively literalist or ‘fundamentalist’ reading of Scripture. “Materially,” for instance, the book of Ecclesiastes begins (1:1) with an identification of the author as “the Preacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem” (i.e., Solomon) and the Book of Judith starts out depicting Nebuchadnezzar as king of Assyria, living at Nineveh (1:1), when he was in fact King of Babylon – and at a time when Nineveh had already been destroyed (in 612 B.C.) by his father Nabopolassar. However, taking into account the ancient Near Eastern literary conventions, modern scholars are agreed that the authors would not have been formally teaching what their words “materially” expressed: they were “using” these names as symbols or archetypes. Likewise, the individual propositions within parables or other passages wherein the sacred author uses an imaginative literary genre are not asserted as true in isolation by the author himself; they are only used “materially” in order to teach some truth which emerges only from the story as a whole. It would seem to be in this sense that we should take the Council’s use of the verbs *docere* and *asserere*, which from this point onward in the redaction were left untouched and are part of the final text.

#### (b) Schema IV: The Expression “*veritatem salutarem*”

When the next draft of the document (*Schema IV*) was distributed at the Council, it included several further amendments to the passage we are discussing. One of these, by its apparent ambiguity, still left a significant number of Fathers concerned that the document might be taken as attempting to limit the inerrancy of Scripture in ways which had already been condemned, in effect, by the above-mentioned teachings of previous Popes. The main change this time was the introduction of language pointing to the purpose of biblical inspiration. A submission by Cardinal Albert Meyer of Chicago had given an important impetus to this approach. He suggested that the Council should not limit the discussion of divine inspiration to its ‘negative’ effect of inerrancy, but should also bring out its positive salvific purpose. This could be done, he said, by adding to the text Saint Paul’s words to Timothy on the value and usefulness of Scripture (II Tim. 3:16-17). Also, said Cardinal Meyer, “The specific truth of Scripture will be rightly understood to consist not so much in the disconnected truths of the different propositions, as in their relation to the central revelation of the Heart of God.”<sup>25</sup>

As a result, the passage from II Timothy was included in *Schema IV*. This addition aroused no objections, but the addition of the word “salvific” (*salutarem*) to qualify “truth” (*veritatem*), proved to be controversial, as we shall see shortly. Moreover, the word “any” (*ullo*) was omitted from the phrase “without any error” (*sine ullo errore*) in the previous draft.<sup>26</sup> These changes, the *relator* explained to the Fathers, had been introduced both “in order to express the effect of inspiration in a positive manner,” and also “so that the object of inerrancy may be clearly circumscribed.”<sup>27</sup> As part of this more “positive” expression, the word “inerrancy” (*inerrantia*) was replaced by “truth” (*veritate*) in the title of article 11.<sup>28</sup> The footnote references, however, were identical with those in *Schema III*. Some Fathers had asked that

<sup>23</sup> “*Loco verborum ‘inde . . . consequitur’ proponitur: ‘inde tota Scriptura divinitus inspirata nullum prorsus docere errorem dicenda est’. Ratio: doctrina de inerrantia Scripturarum melius exprimitur si de formali ratione docendi, secundum quam nullus error inveniri potest, loquitur, quia alio sensu, i.e. materiali, possunt locutiones de se erroneae ab hagiographo adhiberi, quas tamen docere non vult’* (ibid., 799, emphasis in original).

<sup>24</sup> “. . . quoad substantiam” (ibid. 92).

<sup>25</sup> “*Recte intelligemus veritatem specificam Sacrae Scripturae consistere non tantum in disiunctis veritatibus variarum propositionum, quantum in earum relatione ad centram revelationem Cordis Dei*” (AS III, III, 283).

<sup>26</sup> Cf. quotation of the previous draft over n. 22 above.

<sup>27</sup> “. . . ut effectus inspirationis positive exprimat . . . [ut] obiectum inerrantiae clare circumscribatur” (AS IV, I, 358).

<sup>28</sup> Some commentators have perhaps attached undue importance to this change in the heading of the article which, unlike the chapter headings, was not an official part of the text. In fact, Paul VI made a point of using that very word after the Council in an address dedicated to Sacred Scripture. Cf. above, section 1 of this essay, n. 4.

*veritatem* be replaced by *revelationem*, since they were mindful that Vatican I had spoken of the Scriptures as containing “revelation without error.”<sup>29</sup>

Such Fathers, continued the *relatio*, maintain that there is a parallel “between the object of the Magisterium’s infallibility and that of the Bible’s inerrancy.”<sup>30</sup> Now, since the object of magisterial infallibility is precisely the area of “faith and morals” and nothing more, this thesis of a “parallel” would appear to restrict the inerrancy of Scripture to that same area, in opposition to the insistent teaching of all the papal encyclicals on Scripture, including the paragraph *EB* 124 from *Providentissimus Deus* which was now cited in the footnote to this part of the schema. However, the *relator* did not comment further on this question, and went on to inform the Fathers that the Commission had thought it appropriate to qualify “truth” (*veritatem*) by inserting the word “salvific” (*salutarem*), adding that “by this word one is to understand also [i.e., as well as matters of ‘faith and morals’ in the narrower sense] **the facts** which are linked to the history of salvation in Scripture.”<sup>31</sup>

Many Fathers, however, found this explanation lacking in clarity. Some evidently wondered whether the Theological Commission meant to imply that some factual material reported in Scripture is not “linked to the history of salvation” in any way, and so may contain errors. The full doctrine of the papal encyclicals, as we have seen, is quite straightforward: they teach that inerrancy extends to everything in the original texts of Scripture simply by virtue of their divine authorship – and, therefore, irrespective of their very diversified themes or subject-matter. The preoccupations of those Fathers who were dissatisfied with the new wording in *Schema IV* were perhaps best expressed by Archbishop Paul Philippe, a consultor to the Holy Office:

If it is said that the sacred books teach “saving truth . . . without error,” this appears to restrict inerrancy to matters of faith and morals; all the more so because, according to the *relator* himself, this formula has been chosen in order to satisfy the requests of those Fathers who were asking that the effects of inspiration be expressed positively, and that the object of inerrancy be clearly circumscribed. The *relator* explains the mind of the Commission by saying that by the word *salutarem* we are also to understand the facts which in Scripture are linked to the history of salvation. But with that explanation, such a circumscription of the object of inerrancy is inadmissible, for it seems to me that such expressions cannot be reconciled with the firm doctrine of the Church’s Magisterium. Therefore it should not be said that the sacred books “**teach**” salvific truth without error, because this insinuates a distinction among the scriptural affirmations themselves, as if some of them taught without error truths pertaining to salvation, while others had no such content and were thus not necessarily immune from error. . . . I request that we restore the expression “without **any** error,” as in the previous draft, since the documents of the Magisterium . . . always express themselves in such a way as to exclude completely from the sacred Scriptures error **of every kind** (cf. *EB* 124, 452, 538, 539, 560, 564).<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup> “. . . *revelationem sine errore*” (*DS* 3006). Some Fathers, e.g. Abbot Christopher Butler, apparently favoured this phrase of Vatican I on the grounds that it left room (supposedly) for errors in Scripture, in cases where the sacred writers do **not** present us with revealed material (cf. *AS* III, III, 431). This interpretation, which would set Vatican I against the unanimous teaching of the ancient Fathers and of the subsequent papal encyclicals, was surely not intended by the Fathers of that Council. In fact, the context shows that they did not wish to imply that the notion of “containing revelation without error” was an adequate description of biblical inerrancy; for in the conciliar text that notion is treated with almost the same reserve as another one which is not merely inadequate, but false, namely, the notion that the books of Scripture are merely human productions which in due course received the Church’s stamp of approval. Vatican I says: “It is not on the grounds of their having been approved by ecclesial authority (after being composed by merely human effort) that the Church holds [the books of the Bible] as sacred and canonical; **indeed, not even their containing revelation without error sufficiently explains this status which she accords them.** Rather, the reason is that, being written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they have God for their author, and as such have been handed on to the Church. (*Eos vero Ecclesia pro sacris et canonicis habet, non ideo, quod sola humana industria concinnati, sua deinde auctoritate sint approbati; nec ideo dumtaxat, quod revelationem sine errore contineant; sed propterea, quod Spiritu Sancto inspirante conscripti Deum habent auctorem, atque ut talem ipsi Ecclesiae traditi sunt*)” (*DS* 3006, emphasis added in translation). Note the contrast between the subjunctive verbs used in mentioning the two false or inadequate reasons (*sint* and *contineant*) and the indicative used for the true reason (*habent*). This nuance is not easy to convey concisely in translation, but it means not only that the Council denies the adequacy or sufficiency of the first two notions **as grounds** for the Church’s veneration of these books as “sacred and canonical,” but also that it **prescinds** from whether or not those notions are adequate expressions of truth **in themselves**. Thus, while it is of course true to affirm that Scripture “contains revelation without error,” Vatican I does not go so far as to suggest (as some theologians and exegetes have done since Vatican II) that such an affirmation can be approved as a **full and unambiguous** expression of the object of biblical inerrancy. If such approval were granted to it, some Catholics would quickly draw the conclusion not only that Scripture contains “non-revealed” material as well as revelation; but also that this “non-revealed” component may well contain errors.

<sup>30</sup> “*Parallelismum esse inter obiectum infallibilitatis Magisterii et inerrantiae S. Scripturae efferunt*” (*AS* IV, I, 359).

<sup>31</sup> “. . . *quo verbo co-intelligitur facta quae in Scriptura cum historia salutis iunguntur*” (*ibid.*).

<sup>32</sup> “*Si dicatur libros sacros ‘veritatem salutarem . . . sine errore docere’, videtur inerrantia restringi ad res fidei et morum, eo vel magis quod, fatente Relatore, haec formula electa est ut postulatis satisfaceret Patrum qui petebant ut effectus inspirationis positive exprimeretur atque obiectum inerrantiae clare circumscriberetur. Relator Commissionis mentem explicat dicendo quod verbo ‘salutarem’ cointelliguntur facta quae in Scriptura cum historia salutis iunguntur. At, enim, cum illa explicatione, talis circumscriptio obiecti inerrantiae admitti non potest. Censeo enim haec dicta cum firma doctrina Magisterii Ecclesiae componi non posse.*” *Igitur, non est dicendum libros sacros veritatem salutarem sine errore ‘docere’, quia tunc*

The Theological Commission replied to this and other similar objections with the following strong denial that the insertion of *salutarem* implied the kind of unorthodox restriction on inerrancy that Philippe and others were concerned about:

By the term “salvific” (*salutarem*) it is in no way being suggested that Sacred Scripture is not integrally inspired and the Word of God: cf. what is said in the text in lines 16-21, following the Encyclical *Providentissimus* in EB 127: “God himself, when he spoke through the sacred authors, could not have handed down anything at all that departed from the truth”. It cannot happen that “the Word of Truth, the gospel of your salvation” (Eph. 1: 13, cf. 2 Cor. 4: 2, etc.) should not teach “saving truth”. The expression *salutaris* does **not** bring in any **material limitation** to the truth of Scripture, rather, it indicates Scripture’s **formal specification**, the nature of which must be kept in mind in deciding in what sense **all those things** that are **affirmed** in Scripture are true – not only matters of faith and morals and facts bound up with the history of salvation (as was said in the *Relatio*, p. 25, letter F). For this reason the Commission has decided that the expression should be retained, while completing footnote 5 in the following way: . . .<sup>33</sup>

This second official explanation of *Schema IV* and its additional word *salutarem* certainly showed its continuity with the doctrine of the papal encyclicals more clearly than the previous *relatio* – and even corrected the latter, as we see in the above parenthetical clause. And the additional footnote references mentioned here (all of which remained in the finally promulgated text) make the same points emphasized by the *relator* in this new explanation and defense of the proposed amendment: 1) Sacred Scripture is given by God to teach us the way of salvation, not to instruct us in technical scientific details that are irrelevant for that purpose (reference to St. Augustine); 2), nevertheless, some treatment of scientific matters can indeed be relevant for salvation and so can be the subject-matter of divine inspiration (reference to St. Thomas Aquinas), and 3) all things asserted by the sacred writers are true, not just those within a restricted range of topics (references to EB 127 and other newly-cited passages from *Providentissimus*).<sup>34</sup>

In spite of these new reassurances from the Commission, however, some Fathers still felt that the addition of *salutarem* was open to abusive interpretations, and so approaches were made to Pope Paul during the week following 8 October 1965, asking that he intervene to have the controversial word *salutarem* removed from the text. Other groups and individuals also made known their contrasting views to the Pontiff, who thus was able to hear all sides of the question.<sup>35</sup>

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*discrimen insinuat inter ipsas Scripturae assertiones, quasi aliae veritates ad salutem pertinentes sine errore docerent, dum aliae tale contentum non haberent ac proinde inerrantiae non subessent. . . . peto ut reassumatur verbum ‘sine ullo errore’ prioris textus, cum documenta Magisterii . . . semper ita se expriment, ut omnimodum errorem a Scripturis sacris penitus excludant (cf. EB 124, 452, 538, 539, 560, 564)” (AS IV, II, 979-980, emphasis in original). The fact that Archbishop Philippe’s fears regarding the word *salutarem* were well grounded was unwittingly borne out by the Archbishop of Saigon, Paul Nguyen van Binh. This Father openly admitted his view that Scripture was not immune from error in matters of “profane science,” and requested that the conciliar text reflect this admission by affirming the Bible to be “immune from all error in regard to those things pertaining to salvation.” Archbishop Nguyen asked: “Ne serait-il pas bon de préciser ‘ab omni errore esse immunem’ par ‘quoad ea quae pertinent ad salutem’?” He explained this suggestion by reasoning which was plainly irreconcilable with the teaching of all the papal encyclicals on Scripture: “Il faut distinguer les affirmations proprement religieuses en lesquelles l’Ecriture est totalement exempte d’erreur, sinon elle ne serait plus la règle de la foi, et les autres qui sont dépendantes des habitudes littéraires de l’auteur en son temps ou de l’état de sa science profane” (AS III, III, 858-859; GH 424-425).*

<sup>33</sup> “Voce ‘salutaris’ nullo modo suggeritur S. Scripturam non esse integraliter inspiratam et verbum Dei: cf ea quae dicuntur in textu, linn. 16-21, ad mentem Enc. Prov: EB 127: «Deum ipsum per sacros auctores elocutum nihil admodum a veritate alienum ponere potuisse.» Non potest fieri ut « Verbum Veritatis, evangelium salutis vestrae » (Eph. 1, 13 ; cf. 2 Cor. 4, 2 etc.) non doceat « veritatem salutarem ». Expressio ‘salutaris’ **nullam** inducit **materialem limitationem** veritatis Scripturae, sed indicat eius **specificationem formalem**, cuius ratio habeatur in diiudicando quo sensu non tantum res fidei et morum atque facta cum historia salutis coniuncta (ut dicebatur in relatione, p. 25, sub litt. F), sed **omnia** quae in Scriptura **asseruntur** sunt vera. Unde statuit Commissio expressionem esse servandam, Notam 5 sequenti modo complendo: . . . ” (AS V, III, 467-468, emphasis in original). This *relatio* is also reproduced and discussed in G. Caprile, S.J., “Tre emendamenti allo schema sulla rivelazione” (*La Civiltà Cattolica* [1966/I] 224).

<sup>34</sup> We shall consider these footnotes and their importance in more detail below: cf. Part B, section 3 (c), “The Final Redaction: Additional Footnote References”.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Caprile, *op. cit.*, 225.