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

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### PART B

#### 3. The Papal Intervention and its Results

##### (a) The Letter of 18 October 1965

The Pope's considered response was given in a letter of 18 October from the Secretary of State, Cardinal Amleto Cicognani, to Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviani, President of the Theological Commission. This letter contained papal interventions on two other points regarding the schema's teaching on Sacred Scripture, and we shall return to these in subsequent chapters.

The point presently under discussion – the word *salutarem* in article 11 – was the second of these three points to be mentioned in the letter; and the first observation to be made is that Paul VI considered this to be a particularly grave question. All three points, indeed, were said to be of the “greatest importance,” since they involved the Pope's responsibility “before the whole Church and before the judgment of his own conscience,” even though he did not regard his own suggested modifications as involving any “thorough-going change” from the existing text.<sup>1</sup> Thus, when the Pope, through Cicognani, makes it known that this notion of *veritas salutaris*, used to define the object of biblical inerrancy, leaves him “more deeply hesitant” (or “perplexed”) than the first point on which he commented,<sup>2</sup> we may justly conclude that he was definitely dissatisfied with the text as it stood at that stage.

The letter goes on to give three reasons why the Pope wishes to see *salutarem* omitted from the text. First, this idea of the scope of inerrancy is “not yet considered common teaching” in the biblical and theological Magisterium of the Church. Now, the expression “common teaching,” of course, has a technical theological meaning. It does not mean simply a widespread opinion, but one which is generally accepted (that is, with only a few exceptions) by theologians, even though it is not insisted upon by the Magisterium. Secondly, the Pope is concerned that this modification to the text had not been sufficiently discussed by the Council Fathers.

Thirdly – and, it would seem, most importantly – it appears to the Pope, who says he has been advised on this matter by “highly competent authority,” that this expression is likely to be a source of controversy in interpretation. Therefore, the letter continues, it would seem “premature” for the Council to declare itself at this stage on “such a doubtful question.” Indeed, the ramifications of this word *salutaris* seem so uncertain that the Pope feels its use would be

<sup>1</sup> Words placed in quotation marks are this writer's translation from the original. Caprile (*op. cit.*, 222, 226 and 229) gives an Italian translation of the same chief points in this very important document.

<sup>2</sup> i.e., the relation between Scripture and Tradition.

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dangerous: “At present,” says the letter, “the Fathers might not perhaps be able to form an adequate judgment as to the gravity of this matter, nor as to the abusive interpretations which may arise from it.”<sup>3</sup>

What conclusions may we draw from this intervention on the part of Paul VI in one of the Council’s key doctrinal statements? First, there are no grounds for supposing that he considered the notion of *veritas salutaris*, as the object of biblical inerrancy, to be unorthodox or wrong in itself. Understood in accordance with the Commission’s second explanation of that phrase – that is, as involving a formal specification of biblical truth, not a material limitation – the expression receives no censure from the Pope. Indeed, by saying that it is “not yet common teaching” he seems to imply that in future it might perhaps arrive at that status; and in fact, this part of the letter concludes with the observation that the omission of the word *salutarem* at this stage will not rule out further study and clarification of the issue in future. Secondly, we must note that the Pope’s suggestion was simply to omit the controversial word, not to replace it by some other expression. This shows us what the Pope’s own conviction was: his preference, in regard to biblical inerrancy, was for a statement which would substantially be that of *Schema III*, wherein the Bible was said simply “to teach the truth, without . . . error.”<sup>4</sup>

At the request of the Supreme Pontiff, therefore, the Theological Commission reconvened to discuss this and the other amendments suggested through the Cardinal Secretary of State in the letter of 18 October. After hearing the Pope’s observations on the problem of *salutarem*, 17 out of 28 members of the Commission voted on the third ballot to follow his advice and simply omit the word without replacing it by anything else.<sup>5</sup>

### (b) The Final Redaction: Main Text

This unqualified acceptance of Pope Paul’s request (it was not a command), while thus receiving the backing of a substantial majority of the Theological Commission, nevertheless failed by just two votes to reach the two-thirds majority required by the rules. Hence, a compromise was suggested. An equivalent formula was put forward which had already been proposed by 73 conciliar Fathers, and which was not so open to false interpretations: *veritatem salutarem*, it was said, should be replaced by *veritatem, quam Deus nostrae salutis causa Litteris Sacris consignari voluit*. (We shall discuss the exact translation of this substitution shortly.) This just managed to gain the required two-thirds majority vote (19 out of 28), and so was accepted and subsequently approved by the Council Fathers and the Supreme Pontiff.<sup>6</sup> In regard to two other debated points in article 11, the Commission decided to maintain the wording of *Schema IV*. As we have noted above,<sup>7</sup> neither of these points received any comment from the Pope in the letter of 18 October.

The first was the word *docere*, which the Commission decided to keep rather than replace it by *exhibere* (“present” or “set forth”), which had been proposed earlier as an alternative. However, the reason given for retaining this word is important. As we saw,<sup>8</sup> its initial adoption at the suggestion of Cardinal Silva Henríquez had led to criticism from some Fathers, such as Archbishop Philippe, on the grounds that it “insinuates a distinction among the scriptural affirmations themselves”<sup>9</sup> in such a way as to imply undue restrictions to the Bible’s immunity from error. The final *relatio*, however, delivered after this meeting of the Theological Commission which we are discussing, made it clear that no such distinction was being implied, and that in fact an equation was being made between what Scripture “teaches” and what it “asserts” (or “affirms”). The Fathers were told: “The word *teach*, which refers to those things which are truly affirmed, is to be retained.”<sup>10</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The lack of sufficient opportunity for the Council Fathers to discuss the addition of *salutarem* before voting on it was also criticized sharply by the exegete Francesco Spadafora: “In Rome it was said concerning this matter that the addition of ‘salutarem’ was mainly the work of His Excellency Jan van Dodewaard, Bishop of Harlem (Holland: died at 52 years of age on 9 March 1966; student at the Pontifical Biblical Institute from 1939 to 1941), put out there by surprise, with no previous discussion, so as to launch this ‘new’ doctrine – opposed to absolute inerrancy – by stealth, and without the knowledge of the voting Fathers themselves.” (*A Roma si diceva al riguardo che l’aggiunto ‘salutarem’ fosse opera principalmente di S.E. Jan van Dodewaard, vescovo di Harlem [Olanda: morto a 52 anni, il 9 marzo 1966; ex-alunno del Pont. Ist. Biblico, negli anni 1939-1941], messa lì senza previa discussione, e di sorpresa, per varare di soppiatto, all’insaputa degli stessi votanti, la ‘nuova’ dottrina, contro l’inerranza assoluta*)” (F. Spadafora, *Leone XIII . . . e gli Studi Biblici* [Rovigo: Istituto Padano Arti Grafiche, 1976], p. 90).

<sup>4</sup> Pope Paul raised no objections to the use of “teach” (*docere*), nor to the omission of “any” (*ullo*) from the phrase “without any error” (*sine ullo errore*) – an omission which lessens the emphasis without really changing the meaning.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Caprile, *op. cit.*, 226.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 227.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. above, n. 4.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. above, Part A, section 2(b) of this essay.

<sup>9</sup> “. . . *discrimen insinuat inter ipsas Scripturae assertiones*” (AS IV, II, 979).

<sup>10</sup> “*Servetur vox docere, quae agit de illis quae proprie asseruntur*” (AS IV, V, 709).

The second disputed decision which was left unchanged in the final text was the omission of *ullo* from the phrase *sine ullo errore*. This omission was not explained in the *relatio* to *Schema IV*, but it had been suggested by Abbot Butler, on the grounds that the word *ullo* was “too equivocal.”<sup>11</sup> Others, notably the Bishops of the German-speaking episcopal conferences, wanted to see all three words omitted, not just *ullo*. Cardinal König, their spokesman, asserted frankly that modern oriental studies, as well as helping us to understand the literary genres of Scripture, “also demonstrate that the Bible’s references to matters of history and natural science sometimes fall short of the truth.”<sup>12</sup> The Cardinal went on to give three examples of what he had in mind, adding that other examples of defective geography and chronology could be adduced.<sup>13</sup> He argued that such alleged deficiencies were evidence of that divine “condescension” (already mentioned by the schema<sup>14</sup>) by which God has deigned to speak within the limitations of human weakness and human language. The German-speaking Bishops, said König, therefore recommended that this be given still more emphasis in the text by adding to the first paragraph of article 11 (which says that God, in the composition of the sacred Books, used men with “their own powers and abilities”) the words “notwithstanding their limitations.”<sup>15</sup> These Fathers wanted to delete all reference to the Bible’s inerrancy, (i.e., to its being “without error”) leaving the text to speak only “positively” of the truth taught by Scripture.<sup>16</sup> According to their spokesman, they believed that “the difficulties are better resolved and the authority of Sacred Scripture is better defended”<sup>17</sup> by admitting in this way the human deficiencies in the biblical text.

On the other hand, 151 Fathers, according to the final *relatio*, had asked for an amendment in quite the opposite sense: they wanted *ullo* to be restored so as to emphasise the Bible’s absolute immunity from error. The Theological Commission had thus been presented with openly contrasting requests on the part of different groups of Fathers. Its response was to keep the words “without error” (*sine errore*), but without restoring *ullo*. Since no middle ground is logically possible between the presence and absence of error, this was sufficient to uphold the traditional doctrine. The *relator* pointed out briefly that the phrase *sine errore*, “which is unconditional, is sufficient.”<sup>18</sup>

<sup>11</sup> AS III, III, 431.

<sup>12</sup> “*Attamen ista scientia rerum orientalium insuper demonstrat in Bibliis Sacris notitias historicas et notitias scientiæ naturalis a veritate quandoque deficere*” (AS III, III 275). The problems involved in this field are not always new ones. For an interesting study of 17th-century attempts to limit biblical truth to ‘non-scientific’ matters in the wake of the Galileo case, cf. M. Pesce, “Il *Consensus veritatis* di Christoph Wittich e la distinzione tra verità scientifica e verità biblica” (*Annali di storia dell’esegesi*, 9/1 [1992] 53-76). Cf. also I. de la Potterie, “Verité I: Écriture sainte” (in E. Rayez *et al.*, *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* Vol. 16 [Paris: Ubalde-Vide, 1992] 413-427).

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 275-276. In fact, the examples chosen by Cardinal König (and presumably they were among the clearest he could think of) by no means “demonstrate” any “falling short of the truth” on the part of the sacred authors. The first is Mark 2: 26, where Jesus speaks of David’s eating the loaves of proposition “in the time of Abiathar the High Priest,” the alleged error being that his father Abimelech was in fact the High Priest at that moment (cf. I Sam. 21: 1ff.). The second is Mat. 27: 9, where the evangelist supposedly errs in attributing to Jeremiah a prophecy of Zechariah (11: 12-13). The final example is the alleged error in Daniel 1:1, where it is said that Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem in the third year of King Jehoiakim’s reign. Cardinal König, relying on a recently published work on ancient history, claimed that this event could not have taken place till three years after that date. As regards the first two difficulties, it is not true that they had arisen because of recent oriental studies: they had been well-known since the patristic age, and various plausible solutions had been suggested which can be found in the classic commentaries (e.g., Cornelius A Lapide, S.J., *Commentaria in Scripturam Sacram* [Paris: L. Vivès, v. XIV, 1874, 495; v. XV, 1877, 675]). In regard to the third difficulty, not all modern experts agree with the chronology which König depends on. Others (e.g. G.L. Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982], 284-285) maintain that, taking into account the differing Jewish and Babylonian methods of counting the years of a king’s reign (used in Jer. 46: 2 and Dn. 1: 1 respectively), the biblical chronology is accurate.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. *Dei Verbum* 13. The approved text, while speaking of this “condescension,” prefaces what it says with the words “without prejudice to the truth and holiness of God” (*salva semper Dei veritate et sanctitate*). That is, God’s adaptation of his Word to human limitations does not imply any error. Pope John Paul II recently emphasised this in his allocution on the occasion of the centenary of *Providentissimus Deus*: “The strict relationship uniting the inspired biblical texts with the mystery of the Incarnation was expressed by the Encyclical *Divino afflante Spiritu* in the following terms: ‘Just as the substantial Word of God became like men in every respect except sin, so too the words of God, expressed in human languages, became like human language **in every respect except error**’ (EB, 559). Repeated almost literally by the conciliar Constitution *Dei Verbum* (13), this statement sheds light on a parallelism rich in meaning” (AAS 86 [1994] 236; EB 1245, emphasis added).

<sup>15</sup> “. . . *limitibus suis non obstantibus*” (AS III, III, 276).

<sup>16</sup> Cardinal König said that the Fathers he represented wanted to see a purely “positive” description of biblical truth (“*res more positivo exprimatur*”), whereby it would be stated simply that the books of Scripture, “with all their parts, are to be professed as teaching the truth faithfully, integrally, and unshakably (*cum omnibus suis partibus veritatem fideliter, integre, inconcusse docere profitendi sunt*)” *ibid.* Archbishop Joseph Cornelius of Elisabethville (Congo) asked that the entire phrase *sine ullo errore* be omitted, giving the extraordinary reason that this expression was “not only merely negative, but also ambiguous (*non . . . tantum mere negative sed etiam ambigua*)” (*ibid.*, 438). Surely the text would have been indeed “ambiguous” if Cornelius’ own proposal had been accepted, since it then would have failed to state **whether or not** Scripture contains errors. Simply avoiding the issue like that would have led to endless doubt and confusion as to what the Council really wanted to teach (if anything) about this vital issue. And assuming that in fact Scripture does **not** contain errors, how could this truth be expressed unambiguously in a way that was more “positive” than the affirmation which the Archbishop was criticizing as “merely negative,” i.e., that Scripture “teaches the truth without any error”?

<sup>17</sup> “*Ita difficultates melius solvuntur et auctoritas Sacrae Scripturae melius defenditur*” (*ibid.*, 276).

<sup>18</sup> “. . . *quae est absoluta, sufficit*” (AS IV, V, 709). In this final version there were also some changes in the adverbs qualifying *docere*; but these amendments have no real bearing on our study.

## (c) The Final Redaction: Additional Footnote References

Finally, to show more clearly the continuity of this teaching with tradition, no less than six more references were added to note 5, which comes at the end of the sentence affirming the Bible's freedom from error. These new references had been agreed upon by the Commission even before the final papal intervention, their purpose being to provide an authoritative interpretation of the expression *veritatem salutarem*, so as to clarify the doubts raised by those Fathers who had objected to it. They are of course equally relevant to the final text, which was altered with the aim of expressing the same idea as *veritatem salutarem* (i.e., the salvific purpose of all Scripture), but in a form of words less open to possible abusive interpretations.

The first new reference is a citation from St. Augustine's work *On the Literal Sense of Genesis (De Genesi ad Litteram)* which criticizes those who try to draw more detailed scientific information from the Scriptures than their authors intended to give us: e.g., by attempting to deduce from the creation account in Genesis whether the heavens completely envelop the earth like a sphere, or merely cover it on one side like an inverted hemispherical bowl.<sup>19</sup> The point being made here by the fourth-century Doctor is the salvific purpose of the whole of Scripture: he wishes to remind us that as regards disputes over the purely technical hypotheses elaborated by those who investigate the secrets of nature, "the Spirit of God who spoke through [the inspired writers] did not wish to teach men such matters – that is, the intimate structure of visible things – since they are not profitable for salvation."<sup>20</sup> Another quotation from Augustine (*Epistola* 82,3) is added to the footnote here, reinforcing the point that Scripture is free from error in whatever the sacred writers affirm. In this classical *locus* for the doctrine of inerrancy, the Bishop of Hippo affirms in a letter to St. Jerome:

For I confess to your charity that I have learnt to regard those books of Scripture now called canonical – and them alone – with such awe and honor that I most firmly believe none of their authors has erred in writing anything. And if I come across anything in those Writings which troubles me because it seems contrary to the truth, I will unhesitatingly lay the blame elsewhere: perhaps the copy is untrue to the original; or the translator may not have rendered the passage faithfully; or perhaps I just do not understand it.<sup>21</sup>

The question might now arise, however, as to whether (and if so, why) there is any place at all in the Scriptures for 'profane' affirmations about history or science, given that the purpose of these books is to lead us to salvation, not to instruct us in mundane knowledge. In order to clarify this point, a citation from St. Thomas Aquinas is added to the footnote. In this passage from *De Veritate*, the question is considered "whether scientific conclusions can be the subject-matter of prophetic inspiration."<sup>22</sup> Aquinas answers that indeed they can. Following Augustine, he recognizes that the charism of prophecy (under which heading he includes biblical inspiration) is given only for the good of the Church, i.e., for the salvation of souls. Nevertheless, the fact is that "Many things proved by science can be useful" for salvation – that is, "for building up our faith or for our moral formation." He specifies, by way of example, "those features in nature which induce us to contemplate with wonder the divine wisdom and power. Thus, we find such things mentioned in Sacred Scripture."<sup>23</sup>

<sup>19</sup> This passage is sometimes cited as supposed evidence that, according to St. Augustine, Scripture may at times be mistaken in its affirmations concerning nature and the cosmos. But that this was by no means Augustine's meaning is evident from what he says elsewhere in *De Genesi ad Litteram*, in another passage quoted by Leo XIII in *EB* 121. This paragraph of *Providentissimus Deus* was also added to note 5 of *Dei Verbum* 11 in the final redaction. The relevant sentence reads: "No real dissension will ever arise between the scientist and the theologian, provided each stays within the proper bounds of his discipline, carefully observing St. Augustine's admonition 'not to assert rashly as known what is in fact unknown'. But if some dispute should arise, the same Doctor sums up the rule to be followed by the theologian: 'If they have been able to demonstrate some truth of natural science with solid proofs, let us show that it is not contrary to our Scriptures; but if they maintain anything in any of their treatises which is contrary to Scripture (that is, to the Catholic faith), let us believe without hesitation that it is completely false, and if possible find a way of refuting it.' (*Nulla quidem theologum inter et physicum vera dissensio intercesserit, dum suis uterque finibus se contineant, id caventes, secundum S. Augustini monitum, 'ne aliquid temere et incognitum pro cognito asserant'. Sin tamen dissenserint, quemadmodum se gerat theologus, summam est regula ab eodem oblata: 'Quidquid, inquit, ipsi de natura rerum veracibus documentis demonstrare potuerint, ostendam nostris Litteris non esse contrarium; quidquid autem de quibuslibet suis voluminibus his nostris Litteris, idest catholicae fidei, contrarium protulerint, aut aliqua etiam facultate ostendamus, aut nulla dubitatione credamus esse falsissimum.'*)"

<sup>20</sup> "... Spiritum Dei, qui per ipsos loquebatur, noluisse ista (videlicet intimam adspectabilium rerum constitutionem) docere homines, nulli salutis profutura" (Augustine, *De Genesi ad Litteram*, 2,9,20, quoted also in *Providentissimus Deus* [*EB* 121]).

<sup>21</sup> "Ego enim fateor caritati tuae, solis eis Scripturarum libris, qui iam canonici appellantur, didici hunc timorem honoremque deferre, ut nullum eorum auctorem scribendo aliquid errasse firmissime credam. Ac si aliquid in eis offendero Litteris, quod videatur contrarium veritati, nihil aliud quam vel mendosum esse codicem, vel interpretem non assecutum esse quod dictum est, vel me minime intellexisse non ambigam" (*PL* 33, 377).

<sup>22</sup> "Utrum prophetia sit de conclusionibus scibilibus" (Q.12, art. 2, c).

<sup>23</sup> "Respondeo. Dicendum quod in omnibus quae sunt propter finem, materia determinatur secundum exigentiam finis, ut patet in II Phys. Donum

Next in the list of new references added to note 5 comes a citation from the Council of Trent's Decree *De canonicis Scripturis* which also highlights the salvific purpose of the Scriptures.<sup>24</sup> Finally, the expanded footnote includes further references to *Providentissimus Deus*. As well as the passage *EB* 124 from that encyclical, which had already been introduced in an earlier draft of the schema, we now have *EB* 121 and *EB* 126-127.

The first of these additional paragraphs from Leo XIII's encyclical is dedicated to the theme of Scripture in relation to the natural sciences. As well as citing St. Augustine's admonition (in *De Genesi ad Litteram*) to those who seek to wrest from Scripture more detailed information about the physical cosmos than its human and divine authors intended to give us,<sup>25</sup> *EB* 121 also quotes another part of the same work in which Augustine lucidly sets out the general hermeneutical principles for recognizing the essential harmony between science and Scripture.<sup>26</sup> These passages referred to in the footnote make clearer than ever the Council's intention to uphold the carefully balanced principles regarding science and Scripture which date back to the wisdom of St. Augustine: on the one hand the Sacred Writings cannot be regarded as open to error when they happen to make affirmations about the physical creation; on the other hand we should not expect to find therein detailed or technical information on that subject, since the Bible was not intended as a scientific textbook.

The final newly-cited passage of *Providentissimus* (*EB* 126-127) reinforces the point made by the Theological Commission when it had previously defended the addition of the word *salutarem*, namely, that this qualification did not imply any "material limitation of the truth of Scripture." In *EB* 126 Pope Leo XIII makes the point, citing both St. Augustine and St. Gregory the Great, that since the sacred writers wrote only what the Holy Spirit wanted them to write, everything which they assert has Him for its author, and is therefore necessarily true.<sup>27</sup> Finally, in *EB* 127, Leo XIII reinforces the rejection of any "material limitation" of biblical truth by praising the exegetical procedure of the great Fathers and Doctors, who "laboured with no less ingenuity than devotion to harmonize and reconcile those many passages which might seem to involve some contradiction or discrepancy."<sup>28</sup>

#### 4. Reading *DV* 11 in the Light of the Papal Intervention

Having examined the redaction of the original text of *Dei Verbum*'s teaching on biblical inerrancy in the light of Paul VI's personal intervention and its results, we shall conclude this chapter with some observations on the light shed by that intervention on the interpretation of this point of the Dogmatic Constitution. It is clearly beyond the scope of our present study to attempt a full commentary on the conciliar doctrine regarding the Bible's freedom from error as set out in the sentence in article 11 which we are studying in this chapter. Apart from anything else, this point cannot be treated

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*autem prophetiae datur ad utilitatem Ecclesiae, ut patet I ad Cor., XII, 10. Unde omnia illa quorum cognitio potest utilis ad salutem sunt materia prophetiae, sive sint praeterita, sive futura, sive aeterna, sive necessaria, sive contingentia. Illa vero quae ad salutem pertinere non possunt, sunt extranea a materia prophetiae; unde Augustinus dicit, II super Genesim ad litteram [cap. IX], quod quamvis auctores nostri sciverint cuius figuræ sit caelum; tamen per eos dicere noluit Spiritus veritatem, nisi quæ prodest saluti; et Ioannis cap. XVI, vers. 13 dicitur Cum venerit ille Spiritus veritatis, docebit vos omnem veritatem; Glossa [interlin.] salutem necessariam. Dico autem necessaria ad salutem, sive sint necessaria ad instructionem fidei, sive ad informationem morum. Multa autem quae sunt in scientiis demonstrata, ad hoc possunt esse utilia; utpote intellectum esse incorruptibilem, et ea quae in creaturis considerata in admirationem divinae sapientiae et potestatis inducunt. Unde et de his invenimus in sacra Scriptura fieri mentionem" (ibid.).* The emphasis here is as given in the 'Marietti' edition of the works of St. Thomas: *Questiones disputatae*, vol. 1 (Turin & Rome: Marietti, 10th edn., 1964) 238.

<sup>24</sup> The Tridentine decree, referring to both Scripture and Tradition, says that their message was preached by the Apostles "as the source of all saving truth (*tamquam fontem omnis et salutaris veritatis*)" (*DS* 1501).

<sup>25</sup> This passage is now included in its own right in the footnote, as we have seen: cf. above, section 3(c) of this article.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. above, n. 19.

<sup>27</sup> The passage quoted from St. Augustine stresses this intimate link between the divine and human authors, depicting the latter as acting obediently as God's instruments, just as the members of a human body obey the head: "Thus, since they wrote what He showed and told them, it cannot be said the He Himself wrote nothing; for what His members did was what they were told to do by dictation from the Head. (*Itaque, cum illi scripserunt, quae ille ostendit et dixit, nequaquam dicendum est, quod ipse non scripserit; quandoquidem membra eius id operata sunt, quod dictante capite cognoverunt.*") (*De Consensu Evangeliorum*, I, 1, c.35 [PL 34, 1070]). The excerpt from St. Gregory if anything places even more emphasis on the divine authorship of Scripture: "It is quite superfluous to inquire who wrote these things when one faithfully believes the Holy Spirit to be the author of the book. Thus, the one who wrote them was the One who ordered them to be written; the one who wrote them was the One present in their composition as their Inspirer. (*Quis haec scripserit, valde supervacante quaeritur, cum tamen auctor libri Spiritus Sanctus fideliter credatur. Ipse igitur haec scripsit, qui scribenda dictavit: ipse scripsit qui et in illius opere inspirator exstitit*)" (*Moral. in Job, praef. 1, 2* [PL 75, 517AB]).

<sup>28</sup> ". . . ut propterea non pauca illa, quae contrarii aliquid vel dissimile viderentur afferre . . . non subtiliter minus quam religiose componere inter se et conciliare studuerint." Many – perhaps most – of these problematical passages involve 'profane' or historical matters. The passage concludes with a citation of that same passage from a letter of Augustine to Jerome which, as we have seen (cf. above, n. 20) was included separately in this final version of footnote 5. Since that letter was now already quoted in its own right, it follows that *EB* 127 was not mentioned merely because it contains this teaching of St. Augustine, but above all to draw attention to what was new in that paragraph, namely, Leo XIII's statement about the importance of seeking the true reconciliation of apparent contradictions in Scripture.

adequately in isolation, since it is evidently linked in an inseparable way with article 12 (dealing with hermeneutical principles, above all, the determination of literary genres), and article 13 (on the divine “condescension” in deigning to speak through limited human instruments). Here we shall be content to point out how, in our opinion, Paul VI’s role in its formulation should be taken into account in any adequate exposition of this sentence in article 11. Since the light shed on this point by the papal intervention can be diminished if the translation of the text is inadequate, some observations will also be offered on how it can be most accurately rendered in English.

### The Hermeneutical Import of the Intervention

There appear to be three main factors which should be taken into account in assessing the hermeneutical significance of Pope Paul’s intervention in the textual history of *Dei Verbum* 11. In the first place we have his initiative itself: his dissatisfaction with the expression *veritatem salutarem* in *Schema IV*, the grave importance he attached to the point at issue, the reasons giving rise to his concern, and the solution he proposed to the Theological Commission. Secondly, there is the fact that he subsequently gave his approval to the Commission’s response to this initiative, namely, the insertion of that parenthetical clause which was substituted for the word *salutare*. Finally, our hermeneutical framework must of course include not only what the Pope did, but also who the Pope is in the context of an ecumenical council: the Successor of Peter is the first and most essential signatory of its decrees, and their primary promulgator.

In regard to the first point, we have seen already<sup>29</sup> that among the various problematical expressions in the schema on Revelation which were discussed in the letter of 18 October 1965, the one in article 11 left Pope Paul “more deeply hesitant” or “perplexed” than the others – important though all of them undoubtedly were. His request, as we saw, was that the Theological Commission delete the word *salutare* without making any substitution, thereby leaving the text to state simply that, as a consequence of divine inspiration, “we must accordingly acknowledge that the books of Scripture – entire and with all their parts – teach the truth without error.”<sup>30</sup> Such a statement, especially in the light of the doctrinal sources referred to in the newly-expanded footnote, would have been a brief and uncomplicated reaffirmation of the traditional teaching that Scripture is free from error in whatever the sacred authors affirm.

It is possible to deduce from this fact (i.e., Paul VI’s wish to omit, but not replace, *salutare*), and from the other observations in the October 18 letter which we have already noted, what the precise danger was which he wished to avoid when he made reference to the possibility of “abusive interpretations” of this new word. The problem foreseen by the Pope was clearly that although the expression “salvific truth” was undoubtedly capable of being given a doctrinally sound and helpful interpretation, some future commentators might nevertheless draw from that expression the erroneous idea which its critics on the Council floor had warned against: the idea, that is, that some biblical affirmations have “salvific” content and are therefore guaranteed to be “without error,” while others were “non-salvific” and hence not covered by any such guarantee.

Keeping in mind that this was the danger which Paul VI wanted to obviate by his intervention, we can turn to consider the second element mentioned above. After the Theological Commission responded to the letter of October 18, not by omitting from this sentence (in accordance with the papal request) all mention of Scripture’s salvific purpose, but by substituting for the single word *salutare* a more precise adjectival clause to qualify *veritatem*, the Pope (along with the other Council Fathers) subsequently accepted as satisfactory this alternative to his own proposed amendment. What significance, if any, does this acceptance have for our interpretation of the definitive text?

In the first place it needs to be pointed out that this finally amended and promulgated version of the sentence continues to require particularly careful and attentive interpretation, because its meaning is still not self-evident. Certainly, the wording of the new and longer expression – *veritatem, quam Deus nostrae salutis causa Litteris Sacris consignari voluit* – is less open to an incorrect reading than the laconic term *veritatem salutarem*, for now the “salvific” idea is not presented in the form of a simple adjective qualifying “truth” (*veritatem*), but rather, in the context of an adverbial phrase – “for the sake of our salvation” (*nostrae salutis causa*) – qualifying the verb “wanted to be recorded” (*consignari voluit*). This indicates more clearly that the “salvific” concept is to be taken here as referring to the purpose or finality which God had in mind in giving us the Bible as a whole. Nevertheless, if this passage from the approved text is taken just as it stands, and from a purely grammatical point of view, it can be seen that the ambiguity of the previous version has not been entirely removed, given that the adverbial phrase itself is part of a clause which is still adjectival, qualifying *veritatem*. Separated, therefore, from its historical and literary context, the last part of this sentence (*Scripturae libri . . .*

<sup>29</sup> Cf. above, section 3(a).

<sup>30</sup> Cf. above, section 3(a).

*profitendi sunt*) could still be taken to imply a distinction between two kinds of biblical truth: one kind (immune from error) which is given “for the sake of our salvation,” and another kind which is not.<sup>31</sup>

It is true that the sentence in its entirety clearly implies the unrestricted inerrancy of Scripture, since the first relative clause, presented precisely as the premise on which the principal clause is based, ascribes *everything* affirmed by the sacred writers to the Holy Spirit. And it goes without saying that the Holy Spirit cannot err. Nevertheless, the remaining element of ambiguity in the latter part of the sentence<sup>32</sup> only renders more necessary than ever the interpreter’s full attention to all the relevant circumstances surrounding the redaction of this sentence. And from our present standpoint the main relevant factor is that Pope Paul VI plainly accepted the clause adopted by the Theological Commission on the understanding that the “salvific” idea it contains is to be taken in the adverbial sense explained in the paragraph above. It is certain that he did not understand that idea as distinguishing adjectivally between two supposed kinds of biblical “truth” (“salvific” and “non-salvific”), because the whole point of his intervention had been to remove the serious possibility of doctrinal confusion which could easily arise from that distinction.

Finally, because of his position as the Successor of Peter and head of the episcopal College, whose approval and signature were necessary in order to make the schema a document of the Church’s supreme Magisterium, Paul VI’s understanding of the text we are studying must be considered **normative** for subsequent interpreters. In the more usual situation in which an authoritative reading of a conciliar text is sought, we turn to see what, if anything, was said in an official *relatio* about the wording which was finally adopted. But in a case such as this, wherein the Supreme Pontiff himself intervened directly in the redaction, we have a still higher authority than that of a *relator*. The precise import of the Pope’s intervention in this passage of *Dei Verbum* can therefore be seen as that of corroborating or reinforcing with the personal charism of Peter that interpretation of the reference to Scripture’s “salvific” value which was explained to the Fathers in the second official *relatio* on this point.<sup>33</sup> That is to say, Paul VI’s personal contribution on this point makes it doubly clear that we must understand the Council’s teaching in the following way: all affirmations of the human authors of Scripture<sup>34</sup> are simultaneously affirmations of the Holy Spirit, and are therefore **both** free from error **and** recorded “for the sake of our salvation.”

This recognition of salvific pertinence or relevance in everything affirmed in Scripture by the inspired writers also renders obsolete, in effect, the rather inadequate formulation found in the original preparatory schema, which posed the question of inerrancy in terms of a supposed dichotomy between the Bible’s “religious” and “profane” elements. This categorization, along with that which used the concept of “faith and morals” as a point of reference, was common in the pre-conciliar treatment of this problem; but both these formulations can now be seen as to some extent misleading. According to *Dei Verbum* 11, understood in the light of Pope Paul’s intervention, **all** the affirmations of the divine and human authors have been given to us in Scripture “for the sake of our salvation,” and so none of them can accurately be described as “profane,” in the sense of “non-religious.” As the footnote references also make clear, even those numerous biblical affirmations regarding “worldly” realities of a physical and historical nature must also be seen in the light of God’s salvific plan.<sup>35</sup> This plan finds its supreme fulfilment in the sacred and yet profoundly “worldly” event of the

<sup>31</sup> Unfortunately, this is precisely the interpretation that many post-conciliar commentators have given to the text. Raymond E. Brown, for instance, writes: “In the last hundred years we have moved from an understanding wherein inspiration guaranteed that the Bible was totally inerrant to an understanding wherein inerrancy is limited to the Bible’s teaching of ‘that truth which God wanted put into the sacred writings for the sake of our salvation.’ In this long journey of thought the concept of inerrancy was not rejected but was seriously modified to fit the evidence of biblical criticism which showed that the Bible was **not inerrant in questions of science, of history, and even of time-conditioned religious beliefs**” (*The Virginal Conception and Bodily Resurrection of Jesus*. New York: Paulist Press, 1973, pp. 8-9, emphasis added). In like manner, P. Grech claims that according to Vatican II, “the truth of Scripture does not include the ‘profane’ assertions of the Bible, but is relative to the history of salvation” (“Ermeneutica”, in P. Rossano, G. Ravasi, & A. Girlanda [eds.], *Nuovo dizionario di teologia biblica* [Milan: Edizioni Paoline, 1988], p. 486). (This exclusion of ‘profane’ or ‘non-religious’ assertions in Scripture from the guarantee of inerrancy is condemned by no less than five papal encyclicals: cf. *EB* 124, 264, 454, 538 and 612.)

<sup>32</sup> It is ambiguous, that is, if one prescind from the historical and literary context of this passage and takes it in isolation. The whole point of studying the textual history of this passage, the accompanying footnotes, the official *relationes*, the intervention of the Supreme Pontiff, and the relation of the principal clause to the first relative cause (“Since . . . Holy Spirit”) is to resolve this ambiguity. When these factors are taken into account, as they must be, we would maintain that the teaching of *Dei Verbum* 11 is not ambiguous at all.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. above, Part A, n. 33.

<sup>34</sup> It goes without saying that one must **understand** these affirmations in the sense truly intended by their authors, taking into account their literary genre and the other hermeneutical norms summarized in the following article (no. 12) of *Dei Verbum*.

<sup>35</sup> Perhaps it might be urged that many of the individual physical and historical affirmations found in some biblical books cannot reasonably be said to have **any** salvific relevance whatever. Even prescind from the **spiritual** sense of Scripture – for such apparently unimportant biblical details may one day prove to contain riches as yet unknown from that standpoint – and supposing for the sake of argument that many or most of the passages under discussion have no true meaning beyond their literal sense, we should remember that the Church’s teaching on the salvific relevance of **all** Scripture does not mean that each biblical affirmation **in isolation** necessarily imparts some religious or moral message. Such a message may well be contained only in the ensemble of many such detailed propositions. The communication of God’s saving message in and through history could

Incarnation – that great and central *mysterion* which, after lying latent and hidden in God’s dealings with his people under the Old Covenant, is finally revealed and preached by the “prophets and apostles” of the New Covenant.<sup>36</sup> The cosmos and human history thus constitute the very theatre in which the drama of God’s action in Christ “for the sake of our salvation” is acted out and brought to fruition.

### (a) Translating the ‘Salvific’ Clause in *Dei Verbum* 11

If the personal contribution of Pope Paul VI in clarifying the true meaning of the passage we have studied is to be adequately communicated to those readers – the vast majority, in fact – who have access to it only in their own vernacular, then the question of how the original Latin is translated becomes a point of great practical importance. Here we hope to show that an accurate English translation does in fact make it easier for speakers of this language to appreciate what the Pope was concerned to make clear: that the whole of Scripture, not just certain parts, themes, or aspects of it, has been given to us “for the sake of our salvation.”

It will be convenient for the reader if we first reproduce here the last paragraph of *Dei Verbum* 11, consisting of two sentences, placing in bold type the passage resulting from Paul VI’s intervention:

*Cum ergo omne id, quod auctores inspirati seu hagiographi asserunt, retineri debeat assertum a Spiritu Sancto, inde Scripturae libri **veritatem, quam Deus nostrae salutis causa Litteris Sacris consignari voluit, firmiter, fideliter et sine errore docere profitendi sunt. Itaque, “omnis Scriptura divinitus inspirata et utilis ad docendum, ad arguendum, ad corripiendum, ad erudiendum in iustitia: ut perfectus sit homo Dei, ad omne opus bonum instructus”** (2 Tim. 3, 16-17, gr.).<sup>37</sup>*

In the first place attention should be given to the expression *Litteris Sacris consignari*. The two most widely circulated English versions render this expression as though the noun were an indirect object in the dative case: “put into the Sacred Writings” and “confided to the Sacred Writings” respectively.<sup>38</sup> The reason seems to be that *consignare* is thought to mean more or less the same as “consign” – or *consegnare, consigner, consignar*, etc. – in modern Latin-derived vernaculars. In these languages the word means much the same as “give,” “deliver” “entrust” or “hand over” (*tradere* or *concedere* in Latin), and requires both a direct and an indirect object: we speak of “consigning” something to someone else who exists independently of what is consigned.

But in fact the basic meaning in Latin of *consignare* is quite different. The *Oxford Latin Dictionary* gives as the second<sup>39</sup> meaning of *consignare* the one which applies in this case: “To record in a sealed document, . . . to place on

perhaps be compared to the cutting power of an axe. Only the sharp blade – a relatively small part of the whole tool – actually does the job of cutting. Yet the blade will cut nothing at all unless it is joined to a larger wooden handle so that the whole implement can be wielded effectively by the axeman. And from this standpoint each of the myriad small splinters which together constitute this wooden handle can be said to play a true role – although not in isolation – in the overall cutting purpose and action of the axe. Even so are the many apparently ‘profane’ points of information affirmed in Scripture relevant to the overall plan of God who has acted in and through human history to call, redeem and save his people.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Eph. 3: 3-9.

<sup>37</sup> An important point overlooked by commentators who claim that the Council has hereby limited biblical inerrancy to “salvific” as opposed to “non-salvific” content is the logical relationship between these two sentences, made clear by the connective *Itaque* (“thus” or “accordingly”) which is used to introduce the second. The use of such a word shows that the passage from II Timothy is included in the text with the intention of explaining or corroborating the statement which immediately preceded it. But how could St. Paul’s insistence on the salvific value of all Scripture in any way explain or corroborate that preceding sentence if the latter had meant to imply (among other things) that **not** all Scripture has salvific value? The use of *Itaque* would then be meaningless. In this context, that word serves to make clearer the sense of the preceding sentence which is corroborated by an examination of Paul VI’s intervention in its redaction.

<sup>38</sup> In W.M. Abbott, S.J., (ed.), *The Documents of Vatican II* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1967), the expression placed in bold type in the Latin text above is rendered “that truth which God wanted put into the sacred writings for the sake of our salvation” (p. 119). In A. Flannery, O.P., (ed.), *Vatican Council II: the Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1975) it is translated: “that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the sacred Scriptures” (p. 757). (The Vatican-approved English version of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which cites this sentence of *Dei Verbum* in §107, uses the latter translation.)

<sup>39</sup> According to P.G.W. Glare (ed.), *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), the first (original) meaning of the word was “to affix a seal to, seal (a document)” (p. 415). In the other standard Latin-English lexicon, C.T. Lewis & C. Short, *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), the basic meaning is given as “To furnish with a seal, to affix, put one’s seal to, to seal, to sign, subscribe” (p. 431). This takes only a direct object. An example given in the most complete Latin dictionary in existence, *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*, Editus Auctoritate et Consilio Academiae quinquae germanicarum (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, vol. IV, 1906-1909), is this passage from Livy cited in col. 436: “. . . *litteris Philippi atque Hannibalis perlectis consignata omnia ad senatum . . . misit*” (“. . . after reading through the letters from Philip and Hannibal, he **sealed** everything and dispatched it to the Senate”).



record in any manner, attest.”<sup>40</sup> It is from this sense of the word, which comes from Cicero’s prose and takes only a direct object, that the expression “*Aliquid litteris consignare*”<sup>41</sup> became a standard expression in all subsequent Latin literature. Clearly, the word *litteris* here is an instrumental ablative, not a dative, since the “letters” do not pre-exist physically as a potential recipient of the writer’s ideas, but come into being as the means by which he expresses those ideas. The strictly literal meaning of the phrase is thus “to record something by means of letters,” that is, “to put (or set down) something in writing.”<sup>42</sup>

In mediæval Latin we find that along with its various classical senses, *consignare* also sometimes bears the meaning of its modern vernacular derivatives, namely, to “grant,” “entrust,” “hand over,” or “deliver” something to a recipient, with a corresponding indirect object in the dative case. However, there appears to be no recorded instance of such a recipient being a thing (such as a book), only a person or institution.<sup>43</sup> In any case, there is no evidence that the Ciceronian phrase *litteris consignare* ever underwent any change or evolution in later Latin usage; and in that phrase, as we have seen, the noun is certainly in the ablative case.<sup>44</sup>

Nor does contemporary ecclesiastical usage afford any reason to suppose that *litteris* in conjunction with *consignare* could be in the dative case.<sup>45</sup> Since, therefore, it appears that no precedents can be found in either classical or ecclesiastical Latin for any such usage, we may conclude that *Litteris Sacris* in *Dei Verbum* 11 is in the ablative case, the idea being that God has used the Sacred Writings as a means, instrument, or form by which he wanted his saving truth to be expressed and recorded. As Paul VI’s intervention has helped us to see more clearly, those writings are to be understood as co-extensive with this saving truth, not as a larger vessel which would contain ‘non-salvific’ material as well.

Another point for the translator to keep in mind is that the Bible’s immunity from error, resulting from its divine inspiration, remains the principal point in this sentence, as it had been throughout the textual evolution of this passage. The opening words “Since, therefore” (*Cum ergo*), followed in due course by *inde* (“accordingly” or “in consequence”),

<sup>40</sup> Glare (ed.), *loc. cit.* Lewis & Short give this derived meaning as “To note, write down, to register, record” (*op. cit.*, 432). Cf. also F. Calonghi, *Dizionario latino italiano* (Turin: Rosenberg & Seller, 13th edn., 1950), which gives this second meaning of *consignare* as “*fissare mediante un contrassegno, deporre, in via documentaria o autentica*” (p.619).

<sup>41</sup> This expression appears to have originated with Cicero himself: the passage “Ac. 2,1,2” is cited in the dictionaries referred to in n. 39 above.

<sup>42</sup> Calonghi translates this expression as “*deporre per iscritto*” (*loc. cit.*). In L. Castelloni & S. Mariotti, *Vocabolario della lingua latina* (Turin: Loescher, 1966), it is given as “*affidare alla scrittura*” (p. 261). In French *aliquid litteris consignare* is rendered as “*Mettre par écrit*” (F. Noël, *Dictionarium Latino-Gallicum* [Brussels, 1857] 182) or simply “*Écrire quelque chose*” (L. Quicherat & A. Daveluy, *Dictionnaire Latin-Français* [Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1872] 263). The *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* (cited in n. 39 above) gives as an example the following passage from the Christian writer Lactantius (late 3rd and early 4th centuries): “. . . *quam commendationem his litteris consignare volui*” (“. . . I wanted to record that commendation by means of this document,” or, “I wanted to set that commendation down in writing in the form of the present document”) (*loc. cit.*).

<sup>43</sup> Cf. C. Du Cange, *Glossarium Mediae et Infimae Latinitatis*, vol. II (Graz: Akademische Druck, 1954) 516. A solitary instance from the patristic age of what is conceivably a dative case after *consignare* is adduced in A. Blaise, *Dictionnaire Latin-Français des Auteurs Chrétiens* (Turnhout [Belgium]: Éditions Brepols, 1954). St Hilary, commenting on Psalm 13, is quoted here in speaking about the learning or teaching of Sacred Scripture: “. . . *consignanda sunt omnia animis*” (p. 206). However, the most appropriate translation of this would appear to be something like “everything is engraved in (or impressed on) souls.” Blaise gives this usage of the word as meaning “*imprimer dans, inculquer, faire comprendre*” (*ibid.*) and its resonance with a metaphorical expression of Cicero himself in which *consignare* is followed by *in* and the ablative is evident: “. . . *insitæ et quasi consignatæ in animis notiones*” (cited in Calonghi, *loc. cit.*). This could be appropriately rendered as “ideas grafted and almost engraved in minds.”

<sup>44</sup> Du Cange’s extensive sampling of the many late and mediæval usages of the word *litteræ* (*op. cit.*, vol. V, 123-126) contains no expression similar to *litteris consignare*, nor any variant thereof. Nor does Blaise’s treatment of the same word (*op. cit.*, 499), which in mediæval times was used as part of the title of a great variety of civil and ecclesiastical documents. This absence of any new developments strongly suggests that the meaning of *litteris consignare* remained unaltered from its original Ciceronian meaning throughout those centuries.

<sup>45</sup> A computer search reveals that *consignare* (in various forms of the verb) occurs just four times in all the sixteen documents of Vatican Council II in connection with something being written, and all of these four instances are in *Dei Verbum* – the most pertinent possible context for making a comparison with the instance under discussion. In addition to its occurrence in the clause inserted after *veritatem*, the verb occurs earlier in the same article (11), as well as in articles 9 and 21. In none of the three cases is there any trace of a ‘recipient’ being mentioned as an indirect object in the dative case. In article 9 it is said that “Sacred Scripture is the word of God . . . set down in writing (*Sacra Scriptura est locutio Dei . . . scripto consignatur*).” The word *scripto* here must be ablative: it could not meaningfully be construed as some kind of already-existing ‘writing’ functioning as a potential ‘recipient’ for God’s Word, for the text expressly **identifies** that Word with the Scripture itself. Next, at the beginning of article 11, we read that “in Sacred Scripture” (*in Sacra Scriptura*) “divinely revealed truths . . . have been recorded (*Divinitus revelata . . . consignata sunt*)”; here there is plainly no indirect object. Finally, in article 21, mention is made of “The divine Scriptures, . . . having been set down in writing once and for all, . . . (*Divina[e] Scriptura[e] . . . semel pro semper litteris consignatæ, . . .*).” This is the straightforward Ciceronian phrase using the instrumental ablative. The word *litteris* here could not possibly mean the Bible as a ‘recipient’ in the dative case, since it would be clearly meaningless to speak of the Scriptures being ‘consigned to’ (or ‘put into’, or ‘confided to’) themselves. In the first sentence of article 11, moreover, we find an unambiguous instance of *litteris* being used in the ablative case, this time without *consignare*. The text there refers to the revealed truths “which are contained and presented in writing in Sacred Scripture (*quæ in Sacra Scriptura litteris continentur et prostant*).” It would be nonsense to speak of truths being “contained” **to** or **for** certain writings, rather than **in** them.

bring out strongly the idea that what is here being ascribed to biblical truth – above all its freedom from any admixture of error – follows necessarily from its divine authorship. The fact that this divine authorship also implies the salvific value of Scripture was added, as we have seen, in order to give a more positive accentuation to the document and to remind us that this is a “formal specification” which needs to be kept in mind in understanding the Bible’s freedom from error. However, this idea of Scripture’s salvific purpose – judging by its location in a parenthetical relative clause and also by the *relator*’s official explanation – remains a secondary point in the final version of this sentence.<sup>46</sup> In most of the published vernacular versions, however, the emphasis tends to be reversed: the relative clause (*quam Deus . . . consignare voluit*) is over-stressed by being presented literally as the ‘bottom line’ of the sentence. Since this clause is much longer in translation than in Latin, such a location naturally suggests itself for stylistic reasons; but the unfortunate result is that the key idea of inerrancy tends to become somewhat submerged in the middle of the sentence.<sup>47</sup>

As alternatives to such translations, we shall now suggest two new ones, in which we have tried to keep all the relevant points in mind: the fact that *Litteris Sacris* is in the ablative case, and so should not be translated as if it were an indirect object of *consignari*; the need to highlight the Bible’s immunity from error, rather than its salvific purpose, as the main point in this sentence; and above all, the fact that the Pope and the Theological Commission intended the passage to mean that **all** affirmations of the biblical writers are “without error.” (This is in any case clearly implied by the first clause of the sentence, which attributes all that the human writers affirm to the Holy Spirit, who cannot err.) In our first new translation along these lines we have closely followed the original syntax,<sup>48</sup> bringing out the emphasis on Scripture’s freedom from error by placing this idea at the end of the sentence:

Since, therefore, everything affirmed by the inspired authors, or sacred writers, must be held as affirmed by the Holy Spirit, we must in consequence acknowledge that the books of Scripture teach the truth, which God wanted recorded by means of the Sacred Writings for the sake of our salvation, firmly, faithfully, and without error.<sup>49</sup>

While in the Latin text the parenthetical clause about salvific purpose has only nine words, English needs several more.<sup>50</sup> This extra length constitutes a result which, while accurately conveying the sense of the original, is not very elegant English. Therefore we also suggest another slightly less literal, but equally accurate translation, in which the “salvific-purpose” clause is relocated in a subsequent part of the sentence. Apart from being a stylistic improvement, this has another advantage from the point of view of clarity: by postponing the mention of salvific purpose, the logical connection between that idea and the following sentence (i.e., the quotation from II Timothy) can now be brought out more clearly.<sup>51</sup> For it is the salvific value of the entire Bible, not its inerrancy, that is stressed by Saint Paul in these verses. The last paragraph of article 11 would thus be rendered as follows:

Since, therefore, everything affirmed by the inspired authors, or sacred writers, must be held as affirmed by the Holy Spirit, we must in consequence acknowledge that the books of Scripture teach the truth firmly, faithfully, and without error, keeping in mind that it was for the sake of our salvation that God wanted this truth recorded in the form of Sacred Writings. Thus, “all Scripture is inspired By God, and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for

<sup>46</sup> Cf. above, Part A, over n. 22, for the original sentence of *Schema III* before the “salvific” idea was introduced, and Part A, n. 33 for the *relator*’s explanation of the subsidiary role of that idea in this context: it is something “to be kept in mind” in considering inerrancy, which remains the principal point of the sentence.

<sup>47</sup> In the Flannery edition of the Council documents, for instance (cited in n. 38 above), we read on p. 757: “Since, therefore, . . . affirmed by the Holy Spirit, we must acknowledge that the books of Scripture, firmly, faithfully and without error, teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the sacred Scriptures.” The Abbott edition (also cited in n. 38 above) translates this sentence as follows: “Therefore, since . . . asserted by the Holy Spirit, it follows that the books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching firmly, faithfully, and without error that truth which God wanted put into the sacred writings for the sake of our salvation” (p. 119). Likewise, a prominent Italian version, *Documenti: il Concilio Vaticano II* (Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane, 1966), renders the sentence on p. 507 as: “*Poiché dunque . . . asserto dallo Spirito Santo, è da ritenersi anche, per conseguenza, che i libri della Scrittura insegnano con certezza, fedelmente e senza errore la verità che Dio, per la nostra salvezza, volle fosse consegnata nelle Sacre Lettere*” (“ . . . wanted put into the Sacred Writings”).

<sup>48</sup> Cf. the first sentence of the original text cited at the beginning of this section (4[b]).

<sup>49</sup> It will be noted that we have retained in translation the commas used in the Latin text before and after the relative clause (*quam Deus . . . voluit*). Omitting them tends to obscure the Council’s intention to be understood as teaching that **all** affirmations of the inspired writers, irrespective of their specific theme or subject-matter, are “without error” (cf. below, n. 54).

<sup>50</sup> The above version has sixteen words, the Abbott version has fourteen, and the Flannery translation has sixteen (cf. above, n. 47).

<sup>51</sup> Cf. above, n. 38.

correction and for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (II Tim. 3:16-17).<sup>52</sup>

These two alternate translations, we suggest, bring out more clearly that authentic sense of the Latin text which Pope Paul VI certainly understood and intended to teach. To render “*veritatem, quam . . .*” as “that truth which . . .” (i.e., using the demonstrative “that”<sup>53</sup> and omitting the comma after *veritatem* in translation<sup>54</sup>) does not accurately reflect the original any more than does the translation of *Litteris Sacris* as if it were an indirect object of *consignari*.

We have seen in this essay how Paul VI’s intervention in the redaction of *Dei Verbum* 11 helped to ensure that the teaching of Vatican Council II on the truth of Sacred Scripture remained in continuity with the doctrine of his predecessors. Correctly understood and translated, the conciliar passage we have studied reaffirms the doctrine that all the sacred writers’ affirmations, regardless of their theme or subject-matter, are guaranteed to be true by virtue of their simultaneous divine authorship. At the same time, Vatican II has developed that doctrine by giving more hermeneutical weight to the fact that the purpose of Scripture is to teach salvific knowledge, and not to impart scientific or historical information from a modern secular or ‘academic’ standpoint. The next article in this series will pass on to the Pope Paul’s teaching regarding that principle by which the Church insists that Catholic biblical exegesis – unlike Protestant exegesis – can never be carried out in independence from the truth that has been handed down through Tradition and her own Magisterium.

<sup>52</sup> The words “keeping in mind,” while not literally in the text, reflect the purpose of an adjectival clause which merely describes, rather than identifies, its antecedent (cf. below, n. 54). In this case they also reflect the official commentary of the *relator*, who said that the salvific purpose of Scripture was something “to be kept in mind” (*cuius ratio habeatur*) in understanding inerrancy (cf. above, Part A, n. 33).

<sup>53</sup> This would be an accurate rendition only if the Latin had said “*eam veritatem, quam . . .*”. The use of “that” instead of “the” in this context leaves the translation more open to that interpretation which the Pope wished to exclude when he intervened in the redaction, namely, a distinction between two alleged types of biblical truth, “salvific” and “non-salvific.” For if one uses the demonstrative “that” and omits the comma after “truth” (cf. n. 54 below), this suggests a distinction between two kinds of truth supposedly found in the Bible, i.e., between “**that truth which [is given] for the sake of our salvation**” and another kind of truth which is **not** given for that reason.

<sup>54</sup> The omission of this comma in translation renders the meaning less clear. An adjectival clause can be used either to **identify** its antecedent noun by distinguishing it from other members of the same class, or simply to **describe** an antecedent whose identity is already sufficiently established. For instance, if I refer to “the girl who was wearing dark glasses” (no comma), it is because I wish to explain **which** girl I am talking about. But if I have already explained which girl is under discussion and wish to give further information about her in passing, I would say, “the girl, who was wearing dark glasses, did such-and-such” (with commas). Now, ecclesiastical Latin uses a comma in both cases, modern vernaculars only in the latter (descriptive) case. Thus, in the expression before us – *veritatem, quam Deus nostrae salutis causa Litteris Sacris consignari voluit* – only the historical and literary context can tell us with certainty whether the comma after *veritatem* should be omitted or retained in translation. Omitting it tends to favor the interpretation according to which the Council intended here to identify a certain class or sub-division of biblical truth which is of salvific import, distinguishing it from another ‘non-salvific’ class – which might contain an admixture of error. But our commentary has shown, on the contrary, that the whole point of substituting this clause for *salutarem*, after Pope Paul had requested that this adjective be simply omitted without replacement, was to make it clearer that the schema was not implying any such restrictions on the truth of Scripture. Indeed, the fact that the Latin does not say *eam veritatem* (cf. n. 87 above) is already a very strong syntactical indication that the relative clause is not intended to distinguish one supposed type of biblical truth from another. The relative clause after *veritatem*, therefore, is intended only to describe, not to distinguish. It gives us further relevant information about biblical truth **as such**, namely, the fact that all of it has been recorded “for the sake of our salvation.” Thus, if the “salvific-purpose” expression is to be kept in the form of a relative adjectival clause, the commas after *veritatem* and *voluit* should definitely not be omitted in translation. Nevertheless, the omission of the comma after “truth” only makes the translation more doctrinally unclear, not plainly unorthodox. Such vernacular versions will still be read as affirming the authentic Catholic doctrine of biblical inerrancy if we assume that the distinction implied by omitting the comma is that between biblical truth and extra-biblical truth (with all of the former being presented as both salvific and uncontaminated by error), and not that between “salvific biblical truth” and a supposed “non-salvific biblical truth” (with only the former being presented as uncontaminated by error).