

The Incarnate Word: Inerrancy as a Hermeneutic for Catholic Exegesis

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The purpose of this paper is to explore the idea of divine inspiration and its corollary of inerrancy which forms the foundational principle for an adequate exegesis of Holy Scripture. Since the rise of modernist rationalistic methodologies, the premise that Scripture is both divinely inspired and inerrant has been attacked both explicitly and implicitly. Over the last century there has arisen, as Cardinal Ratzinger's Erasmus lectures infer, a 'crisis in Biblical interpretation'. At the heart of this crisis is the rejection or weakening of the understanding of the two-fold dimension of Scripture which asserts that the Word is at once fully human and fully divine. In particular, the Catholic magisterial insistence on the divine Authorship of Scripture, the inspiration of all parts of Scripture without limitation, and the necessary corollary which flows from this (*i.e.*, inerrancy) have, *de facto*, been eclipsed in many academic circles by a virtual unilateral obsession with the human dimension and the neglect or even rejection of the divine dimension. But, like the Incarnation, it is necessary to keep both elements in a healthy, fruitful tension if we are to avoid error. Therefore this paper will explore the concept of inerrancy as a hermeneutic foundation for a proper (Catholic) exegesis of Scripture.¹ The paper will have four parts:

1. Present Situation
2. Scripture Witness
3. The Relationship with the Incarnation
4. Magisterial Teaching

1. Present Situation

¹ This paper is an edited version with additions of a longer paper presented at the Fellowship of Catholic Scholars.

One has only to read the works of such varied exegetes as Claus Westermann² and Gordon Wenham³, study the Biblical Pontifical Council's document on Biblical Interpretation or review the proceedings from the 1990 Erasmus Conference⁴ (whose keynote address was given by Cardinal Ratzinger) to see that there is a wide consensus that there are fundamental problems in the present state of modern Biblical exegesis. The presuppositions of modern critical methodologies are now routinely questioned, even by those who are committed to this form of exegesis. As a consequence, other approaches that develop a synchronic approach or which take account of language, rhetoric, the reality of symbolic and typological thought, etc. have developed exponentially over the past few decades. But there is little consensus as to how we can securely arrive at the truth in Scripture, with the result that the struggle over the nature of the Scriptures and their authentic interpretation has not abated. This is clearly evidenced by Cardinal Ratzinger's Erasmus Lecture which was published under the title "Biblical Interpretation in Crisis." At the heart of his lecture, the cardinal challenged some of the faulty philosophical presuppositions of critical orthodoxy which had become iron-clad dogma in the modern exegetical schools. His call ultimately was for a reasoned analysis of modern methodological approaches regardless of how sacrosanct they had become and to sift out the good from the problematic:

"The time seems to have arrived for a new and thorough reflection on exegetical method....What we *do* need is a critical look at the exegetical landscape we now have, so that we may return to the text and distinguish between those hypotheses which are helpful and those which are not."⁵

² Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary.*, trans. John J. Scullion (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984) 567-606.

³ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15 Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 1 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987) xxv-xlv.

⁴ Joseph, Cardinal Ratzinger, *Biblical Interpretation in Crisis: The Ratzinger Conference on Bible and Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989). (Hereafter, *Interpretation in Crisis.*)

⁵ Ratzinger, *Interpretation in Crisis*, 21-22. Most importantly, he calls for a return to the text. Focus had shifted away from the text which in some cases was seen as not being authoritative since the 'canonized text' was only the historically and/or culturally conditioned stage of an evolutionary process. Subtexts, previous formulations from competing or vanquished theological voices were equally valid. Our present need is to recover once again the importance of the text as received canonically and as possessing definitive authority for the community of the Church.

However, this type of “evaluation” cannot be carried out in a vacuum but must be guided by sound principles. Only such principles will enable us to perceive the genuine nature of different proposed methodologies and to determine whether they in fact encounter and explain the Biblical text or end up distorting it. By way of anticipation, the thesis of this paper is that one can turn to *DV* and find within it sound principles by which authentic exegesis can be carried out.

2. Scriptural Witness

There are four passages which are critical in arriving at an understanding of the Scriptures’ ‘self-consciousness’ of their own nature:

First, there is the witness to the divine encounter which is captured in the Scriptural texts. There are multitudinous times when the phrase, “***Thus says the Lord***” or “***the Lord said to***” is used to show explicitly that the origin of this Word was from God alone. The consciousness of the writers and the witness of the Bible attest to a belief that an external, objective word of God was given and received clearly within human history. It was not a human creation *per se* but rather an authentic divine Word communicated *adequately* by God to His people and *received*. The primary activity and initiative lies with God. The clear emphasis is on the Word received.

Secondly, there is an understanding of the permanent validity of this Word. This is particularly enunciated in the prophetic literature, particularly in the Isaian canon. Israel is facing its own utter national destruction because of its apostasy. (Hosea had warned that Israel was entering into a period which can theologically be understood as that of non-existence.⁶) In the face of this existential doom, the prophet Isaiah proclaims a word of ultimate restoration. It will be this word alone which will sustain the hope of Israel. It is this creative Word which will perdure in the midst of all destruction and which can be trusted. Isaiah proclaims that “the grass withers, the flower droops, but the word of our God stands forever.”⁷

⁶ This is not too strong a depiction of what happened. In the prophecy of Hosea, the third child is to be named ‘*ammi*’ which interpreted means ‘not my people’. This is the reversal of the covenant formula (see Ex 19) and means that the covenant of Israel is at an end.

⁷ All Hebrew and Greek text are from *Bible Work* 6.0. Translations are authors or NAB.

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Precisely because the enunciated Word expresses the will of God, it has enduring permanence. It will judge us and all our specific histories. While couched in human language and categories, it is neither culturally nor historically bound to such a degree that it prevents the communication of the fullness of truth or limits its permanent value.

Thirdly, Scripture understands itself to be intrinsically related to God and articulates this in terms of being ‘God-breathed’. Paul, in 2 Tim 3: 16, writes that “All scripture (*pa/sa graph.*) is inspired by God (*qeo, pneustoj* –literally, God-breathed) and is useful for teaching, for refutation, for correction, and for training in righteousness.” The word *qeo, pneustoj* is often translated as ‘inspired’; however, the Greek of the New Testament is much more graphic in its portrayal of this intimate and intrinsic relationship between God and the Scriptures. Literally, this word means ‘God-breathed’ and it is this *original* Greek text which is quoted and referred to in *Dei Verbum*.

Fourthly, in the prologue of John’s gospel, the Word of God is seen to be none other than God, Himself, and this Word assumes human flesh and lives amongst us. The Word is not only personally addressed to God’s people, is not only intrinsically related to the personhood of God, but is itself a person. “The Word was with God, and the Word was God...And the Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us” (Jn 1:1, 14).

3. The Relationship Between Scriptures and the Incarnation

In his preface to the 1993 Biblical Commission’s Document, John Paul II articulated a tradition that is solidly found within the Church’s tradition which links the written Word of God to the Word which became Incarnate:

“It is true that putting God’s words into writing, through the charism of scriptural inspiration, was the first step toward the incarnation of the Word of God.⁸ (:6)”

⁸ Pontifical Biblical Commission, *Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 1993) Preface of John Paul II, section 6.

This is an affirmation that the word written is *intrinsically* linked to the word incarnate. From this premise, certain conclusions flow: “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.”⁹ It should be noted that it is this area that is often disputed in the modern understanding of Scripture. A dichotomy is often effected between the text and the person of Christ and, consequently, the Scriptures are seen primarily as the product of human endeavor which by its nature can only be conditioned by its historical context and the fallibility of its creators. Like the Monophysite heresy, this not only leaves us with the humanity of the Word but a fallen humanity at that. To argue for a proper Christological understanding of the nature of Scripture is to avoid this pitfall and to place in proper (positive) tension the truly divine and the truly human aspects of the text whose interplay prevents error and allows truth to emerge so that the community can securely know the way back to the Father.

4. Critical Magisterial Teaching

In discussions on the nature of Scripture, it is easy to make generalization about the magisterial teaching over the centuries and to provide counterarguments such that the papal documents became increasingly enlightened over the years rejecting former naïve understandings. However, an examination of the magisterial texts shows that the Church has taught a clear, consistent, undeviating and unambiguous doctrine about the nature of Scriptures. Surely there is a proper evolution as deeper and deeper truth about this nature are grasped but not so as to contradict what has always been taught. The fact is that the Church wrestled with contentious issues and came to enunciate with ever greater clarity the truth of God. It is important also to note that these teachings were usually proffered in the midst of critical controversies surrounding revelation and so address the subject in a direct and definitive manner and not as a corollary to some other issue.

i.) The Council of Trent in its dogmatic formulations on revelation state in part that: “All the books both of the Old and of the New Testament- seeing that one God is the author of both...” (Council of Trent, 1546, par. 1) Note that God is seen as the Author of the texts, not just some amorphous influence.

⁹ *Interpretation of the Bible*, 16

ii.) The First Vatican Council in its document *On Revelation* states: “These books the Church holds to be sacred and canonical not because she subsequently approved them by her authority after they had been composed by unaided human skill, nor simply because they contain revelation without error, but because, being written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they have God as their Author, and were as such committed to the Church. (1st Vatican Council 1869-70,) This text affirms that the Scriptures have authority not because of some subsequent confirmation by the Church but precisely because God is Author. It also affirms that the Scriptures are without error.

iii.) Leo XIII in 1898 taught that “All the Fathers and Doctors agreed that the divine writings, as left by the hagiographers, are free from all error ... for they were unanimous in laying it down, that those writings, in their entirety and in all their parts were equally from the afflatus of Almighty God, and that God, speaking by the sacred writers, could not set down anything but what was true.” (*Providentissimus Deus* :21) Here, Leo stresses the *unanimous* consent of the Church Fathers on the inerrancy of Scripture.

iv.) Leo continues, and (in a forceful manner which precludes any doubts about either what he is affirming or *what the unchanging faith of the Church in this matter is*) states: “But it is absolutely wrong and forbidden, either to narrow inspiration to certain parts only of Holy Scripture, or to admit that the sacred writer has erred. ...For all the books which the Church receives as sacred and canonical, are written wholly and entirely, with all their parts, at the dictation of the Holy Ghost; and so far is it from being possible that any error can co-exist with inspiration, that 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 unchanging faith of the Church*, solemnly defined in the Councils of Florence and of Trent, and finally confirmed and more expressly formulated by the Council of the Vatican. (*Providentissimus Deus* :20-*emphasis added*)

v.) Often, Pius XII is portrayed as being the liberator of Catholic biblical exegesis through his encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, saving it from the strictures of the traditional understanding of Scripture. However, Pius XII begins his encyclical by reiterating his own allegiance to Leo’s teaching and establishing *Providentissimus Deus* as foundational for Catholic exegesis.

He states that *PD* “is considered the supreme guide in Biblical studies” (:2) and explicitly states that he is “ratifying and inculcating *all* that was wisely laid down by Our Predecessor” (:2) [emphasis added]. It is clear that Pius does not have an alternative agenda by which he hopes to fundamentally alter the Church’s teaching or understanding of Scripture or the manner it carries out exegesis.

vi.) Pius specifically takes up the problematic attempts to restrict inerrancy to only faith and morals. Here he concurs with Leo’s rejection of such a limiting of inspiration and condemns it as erroneous: “When, subsequently, some Catholic writers, in spite of this solemn definition of Catholic doctrine, by which such divine authority is claimed for the "entire books with all their parts" as to secure freedom from any error whatsoever, ventured to restrict the truth of Sacred Scripture solely to matters of faith and morals, and to regard other matters, whether in the domain of physical science or history, as "obiter dicta" and—as they contended—in no wise connected with faith, Our Predecessor of immortal memory, Leo XIII in the Encyclical Letter *Providentissimus Deus* ...justly and rightly condemned these errors. (*Divino Afflante Spiritu* 1943, par 1)

Certainly, the pontiffs in their different eras addressed the concerns of their day but they did not do it as the expense of the Church’s perennial teaching. They were able to incorporate modern understandings and sensibilities into the tradition not by changing the tradition but by engaging in the modern debate *through* the fundamental truths which the tradition had affirmed. This is similar to Christology which needs to engage modern philosophical constructs and incorporate whatever appropriate insights can be gained in this encounter. But this does not necessitate a rejection or a perverting of the truths about the nature of Christ. Similarly, our understanding of revelation needs to engage the modern understanding of language, history, symbol, narrative, etc. but not in such a way as to deny or reject the truths that have already been appropriated by the Church.¹⁰

Dei Verbum:

A major contribution in the modern era has been the articulation of the nature of revelation in *Dei Verbum* (*DV*). It explicitly anchors itself in

¹⁰ This is a critical concept to grasp. We are not inventing or creating our understanding of Scripture. The truth about Scripture (as about the Incarnation, etc.) is a truth which is continually being ‘received’ and to the degree that we ‘receive it’, we grow in our appropriate knowledge of the text and its nature.

Jewish, New Testament and Patristic categories and represents a maturation in the Church's thinking (*not a fundamental change*). The debates preceding *DV* shows that the final document was not rejecting any traditional understandings about Scripture but rather was presenting them in a positive light, clarifying what the perennial teaching was (*particularly* on the topics of inerrancy, tradition and sources) while taking into account the advances that had been made within the modern perspective.¹¹ There were great struggles over the thematic contents and the precise wording of this document. It is also equally clear that the attempts to challenge the Church's teaching were explicitly identified and rejected. (But these struggles did foreshadow the larger theological conflicts that would emerge in the post-conciliar era.) After the Council, there was a struggle as to the proper interpretation of *DV*. Was the Word of God mediated through the medium of human language but given in such a manner that it truly reveals God's mind and therefore possesses authority? Or is it so culturally conditioned that, while inspiring, must be adapted and *corrected* according to modern realities and constructs to arrive at some relevant truth? This became the fundamental epistemological question and it concerns both the nature of the medium (*i.e.*, Scripture) and man's capacity to grasp it. It was precisely around these questions that the Conciliar debate raged and why the wording of the text of *DV* was of such critical concern to the Council Fathers.¹²

Criteria for Interpretation

It is essential that we discover the appropriate criteria by which to understand *DV* and its teaching. It cannot be found in resorting to some supposed 'spirit' of the Vatican Council. That merely ends up in a subjective morass of conflicting opinions in which virtually any interpretation of the *Dei Verbum* is possible. Instead, a balanced approach would include the following four major elements: 1.) the final text of *Dei Verbum* must be considered as definitive 2.) the approach must be cognizant of stages in its evolution¹³ 3.) the official determinations (given by the Council's Theological Commission) must be taken into account and 4.) it must not be separated from the organic, continuous teaching of the Church but seen as

¹¹ In fact, one of the earlier sectional titles included the term 'inerrancy'.

¹² Hereafter *DV*.

¹³ See also Ratzinger, *Commentary*, 209: "In accordance with the legitimate method of the interpretation of conciliar documents in general, here also the whole discussion in the Council and the Theological Commission must be used as sources for a better understanding."

being firmly rooted in it. This respects the textual definitiveness, historical consciousness, official hermeneutical determinations, and the organicity with the *fidei depositum*. Only in this way can both the diachronic and synchronic dimensions of the conciliar text be held in proper balance.

The Evolution of *DV*

In keeping with the nature of the Council, *DV*'s aim was not to proclaim any *new* doctrines *per se* but rather to enunciate the authentic Catholic teaching on the nature and interpretation of in view of the modern situation. The document confirmed this organic link with the past by stating that it is “following in the footsteps of the Council of Trent and of the First Vatican Council” (par. 1). Negatively, this affirmation states there is no break with the developing tradition of the church. Positively, it links the conciliar constitution organically to that tradition. This hardly argues for a radical re-definition of the Church's understanding of Scripture.

i.) Inspiration and Its Direct Effect

At the heart of the Conciliar debates was the issue of inspiration. No other topic was of such importance because the question of inspiration fundamentally affects every aspect of biblical interpretation.¹⁴ Importantly, *DV* deals with the epistemological question of the adequacy of language and revelation and states in article 6 that the purpose of the revelation is to enable religious truth to be known “with no trace of error.” This requires both that whatever language used in revelation is adequate to the job and that there is no room for error. This is followed by an affirmative declaration (in section 9) concerning the origin and nature of Scripture by stating that “sacred Scripture is the Word of God” which is then further specified by its causality: “inasmuch as it is consigned to writing under the inspiration of the divine Spirit” (:9). This teaching flows directly from Scripture, itself, and is a reaffirmation of the Church's constant teaching.

Given the turbulent climate of Biblical studies in the decades prior to the council, it was not surprising that the debates, particularly over inspiration and inerrancy, were tense and pointed. The struggle was over the degree to which the presuppositions of modernity and its categories of

¹⁴ One can never adequately address the nature of Scripture, its importance, or its interpretation apart from the question of inspiration. Given this, it is puzzling why the Pontifical Biblical commission's document, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, states that it “does not aim to adopt a position on...the theology of inspiration” (p. 34).

thought were to form the Church's approach to revelation. As Ratzinger commented, with the introduction of the first draft of *DV* (which was traditional in the narrow sense of the word) "the inevitable storm broke."¹⁵ The atmosphere became so tense that seven days after its introduction, Paul VI removed the original schema from the council and set up a Mixed Commission to reformulate it.¹⁶ The contentious issues involved were the material completeness/sufficiency of Scripture, the role of modern exegetical endeavors, tradition, the inerrancy of Scripture and the historicity of the Gospels.¹⁷ At one point Pope Paul VI directly intervened asking for clarification of the last three issues, including inerrancy.¹⁸ These heated debates finally led to the theological commission giving a definitive interpretation concerning inerrancy and provided *a change in the wording of the text so as to prevent inspiration from being limited* which had been the aims of some Council Fathers.

The Question of Inspiration

The original title of Chapter 3 (articles 11-13) was 'The Interpretation of Inerrancy.'¹⁹ In the spirit of updating (*aggiornamento*), there was the desire to make a change from the negative formulation of *inerrancy* to the positive construction of the *truths of salvation*. Some fathers however wanted to go beyond this and argued for a change in the church's doctrine of the nature of Scripture and to 'admit' that Scripture, rather than being without error, actually speaks in a way that is *deficere a veritate*.²⁰ Cardinal König was a key leader in this attempt and raised specific 'difficult' texts²¹.

¹⁵ Ratzinger, *Commentary On The Documents of Vatican II*, Vol. III, ed. H. Vorgrimler (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969) 160.

¹⁶ Ratzinger, *Commentary*, 161.

¹⁷ Ratzinger, *Commentary*, 155-166.

¹⁸ Ratzinger, *Commentary*, 164.

¹⁹ This clearly shows that this was the accepted understanding of the nature of Scripture prior to the Council. The themes in the preparation documents were not theological novelties but basic presentations of the traditional faith.

²⁰ See Alois Grillmeier, "The Divine Inspiration and the Interpretation of Sacred Scripture" in *Commentary On The Documents of Vatican II*, Vol. III, ed. H. Vorgrimler (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969) 206. [Hereafter, *Divine Inspiration*.]

²¹ Mark 2:26 (David entering into the house of the Lord while Abiathar was the high priest); Matthew 27:9-10, (the prophecy concerning Judas' death); and Dan 1:1 (the chronology of the Babylonia king). All three issues could have been addressed and solutions proffered by scholars with requisite Semitic or

His position was that the error which exists in certain parts of the Scripture does not affect the integral witness of the other parts of Scripture. But this was precisely what the magisterium had vigorously safeguarded against numerous times. This view was challenged and fought against by others in the Council who saw that this novelty stood in complete opposition to all magisterial teaching on the subject.

Grillmeier had properly warned of a “‘monophysite’ doctrine of inerrancy”²² in which the human element is simply absorbed by the divine, but to have an authentic approach, one must see the Scriptures as ‘fully human’ and ‘fully divine’ in which, just as Christ is truly human ‘yet without sin,’ so the Scriptures are truly human ‘yet without error.’ As noted above, JPII had stated: “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.”²³

The Church’s mind on the issue of inerrancy and inspiration can be comprehended. The original draft of the document on revelation had spoken in the unambiguous language of previous dogmatic statements and explicitly described the Scriptures as being ‘without any error’.²⁴ Given the pastoral nature of the Council, it was thought best to present the truths of the faith in a positive form. (*e.g.*, inerrancy becomes ‘truth of salvation’). However, this formulation leaves some room for ambiguity and could be interpreted as establishing a dichotomy between different types of assertions within the Scriptures - some with, and some without, error. [It would seem that the logical consequences of this would be that the Church would then have to define *formally* what parts of Scripture (which were somehow all inspired by God) were actually truth-filled and to be relied upon and those which were erroneous yet still given by God, so the faithful could know what was the truth.]

biblical backgrounds. This is not to say that there are no difficulties; that has been acknowledged since the earliest times. But reading texts in the context of their culture, understanding various grammatical and citation usages, etc. can provide clues as to how to properly resolve these issues.

²² (Grillmeier, *Divine Inspiration*, 201).

²³ Grillmeier, *Divine Inspiration*, 16.

²⁴ Grillmeier, *Divine Inspiration*, 199-200: “The text...presented to the Council fathers in the first session was... Chapter II, “De Scripturae Inspiratione, Inerrantia et Compositione litteraria” ...Thus the ‘absolute inerrancy’ of Scripture is stated here in very strong terms.”

Archbishop Paul Philippe offered strenuous objections to this direction and showed that it would be to divorce the conciliar debates from the organic continuity of the Church's teaching. As he stated:

If it says the holy books "teach the saving truth ... without error, it would seem that inerrancy is restricted to matters of faith and morals, for that reason or even to a greater extent because as acknowledged by the Relator this formula was chosen in order that the demands of the (Council) Fathers be satisfied who were requesting that the effects of inspiration be expressed positively and that the object of inerrancy be clearly circumscribed.

... And furthermore, with this explanation it is not possible to limit the object of inerrancy. I think therefore that this formulation cannot be harmonized with the constant doctrine of the Magisterium of the Church...

Therefore, the Holy Scripture cannot be said 'to teach' the saving truth without error because it then insinuates distinctions amongst the assertions of the Scriptures, as if they taught some truths which pertained to salvation without error, and then others do not have such content and hence are not under inerrancy in the same degree. ...

Finally, I request the phrase of the prior text "without any error" be restored as the documents of the Magisterium (indicated above) always express themselves, so that they (these words) thoroughly exclude every sort of error from Sacred Scripture.

Archbishop's Philippe's comments were an accurate portrayal of the (logical) positions which the Church had staked out in this debate which has raged for the better part of the 20th century.

The central problem was that the schema's formulation ('truth of salvation') was ambiguous enough to cut at the heart of the doctrine of inerrancy. It was clear from the vote on September 22 1965 that "the fathers feared this false interpretation" of this new phrase.²⁵ It was suggested that the term *salutaris* be deleted so that *truth* would not be restricted. Paul VI sent a letter to the president of the Theological Commission suggesting that they consider the advantage of dropping the phrase *veritas salutaris*.²⁶ It is

²⁵ Grillmeier, *Divine Inspiration*, 211. Grillmeier goes on to assessment the situation and states the matter clearly: "In its reply...the Theological Commission had to go into the main difficulty: 'the truth of salvation' (*veritas salutaris*) restricts inerrancy to statements on faith and morals (*res fides et morum*) and is thus contrary to the documents of the teaching office."

²⁶ Grillmeier, *Divine Inspiration*, 213.

clear from this exchange that the Pope and the Council were very aware of the dangers of this understanding and how it could dissolve the unity between the inspiration and inerrancy of the texts.

In the end, after much struggle, the term *veritas salutaris* was indeed dropped and another phrase substituted for it. It now became “veritatem, quam Deus nostrae salutis causa litteris sacris consignari voluit” – truth, which God wanted put into sacred writing for our salvation. Also, the definitive meaning of the phrase was given by the Theological Commission which stated:

The expression *salutaris* should in no way imply that Scripture is not, in its totality, inspired and the Word of God.²⁷

In summary, there were significant tensions and indeed diametrically opposed opinions in the Council as to the meaning and extent of inspiration and inerrancy. But a number of the Council Fathers clearly saw that limiting inspiration or inerrancy was a grave error which entailed the rejection of the Tradition. Consequently,²⁸ the wording of the final text was changed precisely to alleviate this concern. The final document clearly affirms the constant teaching of the Church in this area and *Dei verbum* can only be seen as an organic growth of *Providentissimum* and *Divino Afflante* which, in fact, are given as a hermeneutical lens through which to interpret *DV*.

A final element of *DV* that can help in resolving the modern crisis in biblical interpretation is its Christological structure. Both the Council as a whole and *DV* had a decided Christological emphasis which acted as a hermeneutical control. Beyond the numerous references to Christ as the Word, article 13 draws the parallel made between the incarnation and the Scripture:

For the words of God have been made like human discourse, just as the word of the eternal Father was in every way made like men. (:13)

This Christological dimension of the Word must always be accounted for in any exegetical encounter with the Word. In fact, it becomes the clue to

²⁷ Grillmeier, *Divine Inspiration*, 213.

²⁸ See Augustin Cardinal Bea’s article which details the evolution of this section of *DV*. “Vatican II and the Truth of Sacred Scripture” in *Letter and Spirit*, 1 (2005) 173-178.

unravel the modern exegetical crisis. In the first centuries of the Church's life, she had to unravel the 'exegetical' crisis of the *Word-Enfleshed*. What was the true nature of Jesus of Nazareth? Faithful to the written Word and guided by the Holy Spirit, the Church was able to articulate what she had always experienced. Jesus is truly God and truly man *yet without sin*. In the same way, the exegetical crisis over the nature of the *Word-Inscribed* can also be resolved in a similar manner. This is eminently valid because the *enfleshed* Word and the *inscribed (written)* Word are intrinsically linked. Because the Word became flesh, then it can be posited that what one says of the *Word-Inscribed* can also be said of Christ. The Scriptures therefore are truly human and truly divine, yet without error.

In conclusion, there must be limits to which one can push the interpretation of a text whether it be the Scriptures or conciliar documents. To go beyond this point is no longer to be working with the text or to be bound by it, but rather to be controlled by one's own agenda, whatever that may be. There must also be a congruence between interpretation and the *markers* of objective reality, *i.e.*, history, true literary forms, authoritative traditional understanding and the coherence of the Scriptures as a whole. Otherwise we are caught in a Derridian world of de-constructionism, left with only a disintegrated text, rudderless, and wandering about in a sea of subjective surmisings. It is only as we seek the objectivity of truth that we are drawn up into reality which frees us from all false images and which allows us to enter into true communion with our fellow man, with our true selves, and finally with God.

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