

lated with a human response, apart from which we do not know what is meant by "God." Different responses are emphasized: the experientialist's feeling of numinous awe, the existentialist's self-commitment, the personalist's I-Thou attitude, the expressionist's "appreciation," the imagist's image-interpreted action, the instrumentalist's submissive faith. Moreover, theologians differ concerning the extent to which the response in man is man's act or God's act. But all would agree that revelation is neither understood nor accepted in a personal state of neutrality, a bare assent like the assent which men can give to propositions in positivist science. Revelation is not an item of information which a man might both understand and accept, and yet go on to ask: "So what?"

2. A Roman Catholic Commentary

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MY DISTINGUISHED COLLEAGUE, Doctor D. D. Evans, has just summed up with exceptional clarity the tendencies of contemporary Protestantism regarding the concept of Revelation. At the lecturer's suggestion, our ecumenical group now awaits a Roman Catholic commentary on his exposé. I shall try not to disappoint those who chose me to give this commentary and particularly to answer the questions which Roman Catholic theology has just been asked. For the sake of clarity I have considered the problems at three different levels: God, the Bible, and the Church.

I

There is no such thing as revealed truth. There are truths of revelation, that is to say, propositions which express the results of correct thinking concerning revelation; but they are not themselves directly revealed. . . . I do not believe in any creed, but I use certain creeds to express, to conserve, and to deepen my belief in God. What is offered to man's apprehension in any specific Revelation is not truth concerning God but the living God Himself.

These two quotations of Archbishop William Temple could perhaps surprise or even displease many Roman theologians. They would appear to them as a negation of Revelation itself; a relegation of God to his transcendence, to the detriment of any possibility of conceptual communication between men and the Divine. But I see in these quotations other than this, and I would even go so far as to compare these texts with the most traditional conclusions of Roman Catholic theology! Let us therefore examine them attentively in order to understand them in all their amplitude.

Speaking of the object of faith, Thomas Aquinas says: "Actus autem credentis non terminatur ad enuntiabile, sed ad rem" (IIa IIae, q.1 art. 2 ad

zum). That is: "The act of faith does not have for its object the proposition of a reality, but the reality itself." In Roman Catholic theology, nothing created may enter into the object proper of faith. Faith is called a theological virtue precisely because it has for its object God himself, subsistent truth revealing itself gratuitously to man. Very few theologians (de Lugo, for example) would have wanted to make of ecclesiastical propositions a partial object of faith; but this opinion was never held by the majority. Even classic manuals consider the Church's propositions as no more than the ordinary means of knowing what is revealed. They are not any more the object of faith in God than a letter from a friend is the object of the faith we have in him. In this way the Roman Catholic theologian also may affirm that he does not believe in any creed but only in the living God himself. To think otherwise would be, I believe, very close to an idolatry of words.

But all this refers to the nature of the act of faith and not to its modalities. In so far as God's testimony of himself is communicated to man, be it done directly or indirectly, faith has its specific object. The problem at hand is to determine whether or not a mediate Revelation is possible and sufficient. Do created realities exist whose proper role would be to make God himself known to man? Here Roman Catholic theology firmly answers: "Yes." Independently of all subjective elements in man, God expresses himself to the world, and this is what we call Revelation: "Whether they listen or not," writes Ezechiel, "let them know that there is a prophet in their midst" (2:5).

In the eyes of Roman Catholic theology, one must carefully distinguish between the objective fact of Revelation and the subjective answer, which is addressed to it by the faith in man. Revelation is not to be identified with the feelings of experientialism; the commitment of existentialism; the thanksgiving of personalism; the human actions of imagism; or the response of faith of verbal instrumentalism. I have named all the "pigeon-holes" except for one—expressionism—for it is this last opinion which has the most in common—I believe—with Roman Catholic theology.

While summing up expressionism, Dr. Evans said: "Thus revelation (divine or human) requires three elements: the inner nature or state to be revealed, the observable behaviour which is the vehicle of revelation, and the appreciative response of a recipient." In the case we are dealing with, God is the object which wants to reveal itself. I would call Revelation, in a strict sense, the observable behaviour of God in history, and I would call Faith man's appreciative response. The propositions have no other role than to recall and explain the interventions of God in history as seen by the believer's faith, without being in any way capable of rendering them adequately. And in this sense, I would be willing to say with expressionism: "no propositional description of the agent is equivalent to the self-revealing expressive action itself. . . . Propositions concerning God are bound to be inadequate." The Bible, on this point, considered as a product of man's faith, is nothing more than a proposition or, as expressionism would say, "a

record of God's expressive actions in human history." But this fact, for Roman Catholic theology, in no way diminishes the inspiration, the authority, or even the inerrancy of the Bible. Let us now answer the question: "What is the Bible for Roman Catholic theology?"

II

The Bible is "human word"; this is self-evident. The Bible indeed may be considered as a mere historical document issued from an ancient Near-Eastern tribe; a modest literature; a collection of diversified books of unequal value. But this does not prevent it from being, at the same time, "Word of God," since it is God himself who has chosen to envelop himself in this portion of the *Welthaftigkeit*. To say that the Bible is the Word of God is to say that God is the author of Scripture; it means that God has chosen and formed the human mode of expression of his message. In a word, it means that one holds to scriptural inspiration which, for Roman Catholic theology, extends to the whole of the canonical text.

One must not draw from this doctrine, as one would be tempted to do, the conclusion that each word of Scripture is a revelation from God, a divine enunciation and a miraculous dictation of the Holy Spirit. Several theologians of the past, Roman Catholic as well as Protestant, have not escaped this deviation. We all know of the unfortunate exaggerations of Bannez, whose concept of inspiration, as a mechanical dictation of the Spirit, reduces the biblical author to the role of a . . . tape-recorder!

Today, theologians bring forward new distinctions: the sacred writer is fully author in his own order, just as any ordinary writer. He takes in hand no easy task, but rather one full of watching and sweat, looking after ideas and words. It is in this human work that God's own inspirational action has become incarnate, and in such a manner that the work produced, although keeping all the limits and deficiencies of its human origin, is a true vehicle of what God wants to say and in no way betrays the substance of the truths he intends to reveal. This is what we call biblical inerrancy.

This inerrancy is to be confused neither with divine truth in itself nor with human omniscience. Indeed, we do not say that the Bible contains all of God's truth, but we affirm that, when the Bible teaches a doctrine formally, it can say nothing but the truth, since God himself chose it to testify to his revelation. Neither do we say that the Bible pronounces itself without error on all matters and from all aspects; on the contrary, apart from his formal teaching expressing a speculative judgment in the determined field in which he wishes to commit himself, the biblical author is left simply to the powers (or weaknesses!) of his own human intelligence. Even though it affirms that our faith has God, and not human propositions, for its object, Roman Catholic theology is not attempting to say that the Bible is not inerrant. Biblical teachings are true, even though they do not deliver divine truth adequately, owing to the limits of human language.

Doctor Evans said: "God reveals himself, not propositions concerning himself, and so the Bible is not infallible"; and also: "Most Protestants (at any rate most of us in ecumenical dialogue with Rome) no longer claim infallibility for the Bible." If by saying that the Bible is not infallible, Dr. Evans means to reject the idea that the Bible is competent in all things, that it constitutes a collection of divine revelations on every subject it deals with, and that in each of its verses one is to find the totality of the divine Absolute, I believe that he then shares the opinion of the majority of contemporary Roman Catholic theologians. But if he intends to deny the Bible the power of formally teaching only the truth, even inadequately, I fear we are faced with a new, and paradoxical division among Christians!

Towards the end of his exposé, Dr. Evans was inquiring as to whether or not Roman Catholic theology is willing to accept a division of biblical inerrancy into inerrancy with respect to God, and inerrancy in historical matters. I have no objection to this, provided we distinguish among historical facts. When the Bible narrates the resurrection of Lazarus, it is in no way using the same *genre littéraire* as when it tells us that David was red-haired! I believe that these are, first and foremost, problems of criticism. At any rate, Roman Catholic theology holds that what is part of the *Heilsgeschichte* is much too close to God himself to permit us to question biblical inerrancy in this matter. Moreover, the historical facts, which God leads to their proper end, have too great an importance in the mentality of the biblical authors; so that we cannot believe that these authors, when writing historical books, could not intend to teach us formally the substance, if not the modalities, of these facts. When the *genre littéraire* adopted by the sacred author permits us to see clearly that he does not intend to give historical value to the whole or to one of his affirmations, then Roman Catholic theology refuses, evidently, to speak of inerrancy in historical matters. But, in other cases, it fears anti-historical prejudice, and often prefers to retain its judgment, while awaiting further enlightenment from Science.

In a word, only God is the light which reveals itself to men and which faith contemplates. The Bible is simply its reflection, but a reflection willed by God himself and substantially accurate despite its human obscurities. But a new problem arises here: Do the faithful have that which is necessary to grasp correctly the full light of God in the reflections of the Bible? To this question Roman Catholic theology firmly answers: "Yes." And this is what we call the infallibility of the Church.

III

I purposely prefer to speak here of "infallibility of the Church" rather than Pontifical infallibility. Roman Catholic theology discerns three levels, or better still, three modalities of infallibility: the community of Christians, the Episcopal college, the head of the Bishops. The relations among these

three levels or modalities are still very vaguely defined by Roman Catholic theologians themselves. One affirmation remains, nevertheless, clear and precise: the community of the faithful, as such, cannot err in the interpretation of the Word of God, and especially the Bible. When the Church as a whole, in a solemn manner, proclaims its faith using formulas and propositions, it is God's truth that it expresses. In order to understand this infallibility better, let us try to situate it in regard to the Bible and divine Truth.

The Bible is a true reflection of the light of God manifested to the world. By reading it, by understanding it, by living it, the faithful attain the Lord and grasp the eternal truth of God. No human authority has the right to take anything away from or add anything to it. Still we all have the duty to understand it better.

Dogmatic definitions in the Roman Catholic Church have for their object the explication and the explanation of the Word of God. Roman Catholics must sincerely recognize that the scriptural source of their dogmas is too often overlooked by preachers and theologians themselves. If these definitions seem to stray from the Word of God, it is precisely because they frequently deal with truths to which the Bible testifies only obscurely. Nevertheless, pontifical and conciliary documents have never permitted themselves to define solemnly a dogma without referring to biblical texts which could, at least implicitly, contain the proposed truth. Because the Bible makes use of human language, the divine message which it contains must be translated and developed. Ecclesiastical definitions answer this necessity.

To say that these definitions are infallible is to affirm that they do not substantially betray the affirmations of Scripture: issuing, in the final analysis, from these affirmations, they constitute, with them and like them, a reflection of eternal light. They are the faithful servants of the Word of God, whose written testimony cannot remain dead letter, but must live of the life of the Spirit in a community that hears and echoes it.

From this infallibility of the propositions of the Church, we can in no way conclude that they render adequately the transcendental truth of God. Dogmatic definitions, as well as the Bible itself, are in the order of created beings. Because of their limits, they are very weak vehicles, but true vehicles nonetheless. Otherwise one must deny the legitimacy and the sufficiency of all mediate revelation and question, if not the very Incarnation and Divinity of Christ, at least the mystery of the condescension of God and the possibility of a knowledge and expression of the divine realities by way of analogy. The definitions of the Church are not the object of our faith, but they signify in truth the realities which God reveals to us by his almighty Word of which the Bible is the faithful witness.

Towards the end of his presentation, Dr. Evans asked if Roman Catholic theology would accept that Tradition could err in historical matters. I would establish the same distinction as previously given in the matter of biblical inerrancy. All the affirmations of Tradition concerning historical facts do

not have the same value. Certain facts that a certain tradition could present as historical have no necessary connection with the history of Salvation. Again here it is for scientific criticism and, above it, though generally after it, to the magisterium of the Church to apply the needed criteria.

If it were possible to sum up so vast a subject, I would say that, for Roman Catholic theology, the two poles of Revelation (God and man) give themselves up immediately one to each other in the act of faith, but both see in the Bible and the Church the normal place and the true expression of their mysterious, existential, and personal encounter.