



Timothy Flanders

Timothy S. Flanders is the author of *Introduction to the Holy Bible for Traditional Catholics*. In 2019 he founded The Meaning of Catholic, a lay apostolate. He holds a degree in classical languages from Grand Valley State University and has done graduate work with the Catholic University of Ukraine. He lives in the Midwest with his wife and four children.

Unraveling Scripture: Dei Verbum and ‘Limited Inerrancy’

 onepeterfive.com/limited-inerrancy

Timothy Flanders

December 4, 2019



St. Pius X says that “amongst the chief points of [Modernist] teaching” is the “intrinsic evolution of dogma”—that the faith must evolve and become something of a different substance, conforming to the modern world [1]. If this is the central error, it depends upon foundational principles that are false. One of these foundational principles is the error of Limited Inerrancy. This was the claim that the original text of the Holy Scriptures contain errors in some way — whether in faith, morals, or simple historical or scientific facts.

The reasoning is simple. Since this archaeological discovery was made, or evolution was discovered, or some other modern assertion got popular, we found out that the Holy Bible actually has an error in it. Since we discovered this error, we must then correct it using our sophisticated modern scholarship. But since there is an error in the Word of God, then God did not inspire it as we thought, therefore the entire Tradition must also be in error on this point. If that’s the case, then God also did not inspire the Tradition as we thought. If these errors exist, then certainly God does not ask us to hold Scripture and Tradition as sources of revelation *in all cases*, but merely in some cases.

If Scripture and Tradition contain errors, then “Modern Man” ultimately become the source of revelation. It is up to the Modernist to use his great erudition to find out which points of the Holy Bible he is willing to follow (which of them accord with his great intellect). This all ends up making a fool out of the entire Deposit of Faith, and that is what Modernism does.

It for this reason that “limited inerrancy” was condemned by Leo XIII, Pius X, Benedict XV, and Pius XII before Vatican II [2]. The Catholic doctrine on the inerrancy of the Holy Scriptures is summed up with acumen by St. Augustine:

On my part I confess [concerning] those Books of Scripture which are now called canonical that I have learned to pay such honor and reverence as to believe most firmly that none of their

writers has fallen into any error. And if in these Books I meet anything which seems contrary to truth, I shall not hesitate to conclude either that the text is faulty, or that the translator has not expressed the meaning of the passage, or that I myself do not understand. [3]

Thus could Ven. Pius XII say in an encyclical in 1950 that this error has been “already often condemned” [4]. Naturally, then, the original document at Vatican II on Divine Revelation, *De Fontibus Revelationis*, [addressed this point](#) with these words:

Because divine Inspiration extends to everything, the absolute immunity of all Holy Scripture from error follows directly and necessarily. For we are taught by the ancient and constant faith of the Church that it is utterly forbidden to grant that the sacred author himself has erred, since divine inspiration of itself necessarily excludes and repels any error in any matter, religious or profane, as it is necessary to say that God, the supreme Truth, is never the author of any error whatever.

The teaching was rooted firmly on the Tradition of the Church as well as the recent encyclicals confirming this. It took into account all the implications of this error, in that it would ascribe to God Himself an error that, as we have said, would only play completely into the hands of the Modernists.

But the *Nouvelle théologie* thinkers were deeply offended by this document, causing an uproar at the Council. They campaigned fiercely to have the whole document thrown out, and they succeeded. Ratzinger wrote of the document:

The basic orientation was there, but on the other hand there was much to improve. Primarily, that it be less dominated by the current Magisterium, and had to give greater voice to the Scriptures and the Fathers. [5]

The Magisterium of the last few popes had all but dogmatized the complete inerrancy of Scripture. Where did Ratzinger and his allies wish to take the document other than the current Magisterium? The *Nouvelle théologie* periti believed they

had progressed so much in their learning that they could circumvent the “current Magisterium” and interpret Scripture and Tradition in a new and better way.

On the floor of the Council, some bishops openly called for the document to concede the error of Limited Inerrancy. Franz Cardinal König of Vienna stated openly that the Holy Word contains errors (*a veritate deficere*), based on the recent archaeological discoveries [6]. The *Nouvelle théologie* and its allies battled against Lefebvre, Ottaviani, and their allies for the whole of the Council over this document. It was not until the very end, in November of 1965, when this document on the very foundation of the Faith was finally promulgated by Paul VI.

What did the document say about limited inerrancy? In the end, because the *Nouvelle théologie* party held such power at the Council, there had to be a compromise between the defenders of inerrancy and the advocates for error:

Therefore, since everything asserted by the inspired authors or sacred writers must be held to be asserted by the Holy Spirit, it follows that the books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching solidly, faithfully and without error that truth which God wanted put into sacred writings *for the sake of salvation*. [7]

This phrase on limited inerrancy is an equivocation. It can be read to exclude all errors, or it can be read to include errors, since inspiration extends only to “that truth” that is “for the sake of salvation.” Benedict XV addressed this exact reasoning when he said decades earlier:

Their notion is that only what concerns religion is intended and taught by God in Scripture, and that all the rest — things concerning ‘profane knowledge,’ the garments in which Divine truth is presented — God merely permits, and even leaves to the individual author’s greater or less knowledge. Small wonder, then, that in their view a considerable number of things occur in the Bible touching physical science, history and the like, which cannot

be reconciled with modern progress in science! (*Spiritus Paraclitus*, 19)

Thus was this phrase hailed by the liberal heretics as a gateway out of which they could conjure up the wicked spirit of Alfred Loisy. The Modernists then went wild. America magazine would write decades later in triumph:

In the postconciliar years the phrase [from *Dei Verbum*] “for the sake of our salvation” became a critical principle militating against any literal interpretation of those parts of the Bible that legitimated sexual or social oppression.

Indeed, as Benedict XV and the other popes had predicted, the Holy Word of God was now under the Modernists’ control, who could then reinterpret even moral commands to be simply “ancient history” and not necessary for salvation. Even “Conservatives” have been carried away into this error [8].

This nefarious effort is on display with impunity by James Martin, foremost exponent of the Jesuit religion. In a 2018 lecture, Martin ridiculed the Law of Moses as outdated, censuring its prohibition against sodomy.

Most recently, in a tweet last month, he used his characteristic equivocating to advocate the same thing. Ever the apostle of Twitter, His Excellency Bishop Strickland, duly criticized his errors, which Martin deflected:

With the coolness of a python, Martin casually brushed off the remark from Strickland by shifting the blame while adding in the *ad hominem* “fundamentalists.” He ended with a haughty reference to *Dei Verbum* and a laugh of “many thanks.” He then prattled on to celebrate how smart he is with his chosen Protestant scholar. Naturally, in his second self-aggrandizement, he cited *Dei Verbum* again.

How could a bishop respond to this? The equivocations started with *Dei Verbum* and the overhaul of the Magisterium by *Nouvelle théologie*. But as Bp. Strickland pointedly asked: “If we go down that road, where do we stop?” Indeed, Your Excellency.

[1] Pope St. Pius X, *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* (1907), 13

[2] Leo XIII, *Providentissimus Deus*, 21; St. Pius X, *Lamentabili*, 11; Benedict XV, *Spiritus Paraclitus*, 19; Ven. Pius XII, *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, 1; *Humani Generis*, 22

[3] Ep. lxxxii., i. *et crebrius alibi*. Quoted in Leo XIII *Providentissimus Deus*, 21. Leo XIII allowed certain expressions from the Holy Scriptures to be “ordinary speech,” which simply “comes under the senses.” For example, the cosmological concept of the “firmament of heaven” (Gen. 1:6) need not be considered as a physical dome in the sky out of which pours rain. Rather, this was simply a description of what the naked eye tells a reasonable man.

[4] *Humani Generis*, 22

[5] Benedict, *Last Testament: In His Own Words* (Bloomsbury: 2017), 99

[6] Denis Farkasfalvy, O. Cist. “Inspiration and Interpretation,” *Vatican II: Renewal within Tradition* (Oxford University Press, 2008), 86

[7] *Dei Verbum*, 11. Emphasis mine.

[8] In an ostensibly Conservative Catholic volume, *Vatican II: Renewal Within Tradition* (Lamb and Levering, ed., Oxford: 2008), Conservative biblical scholar Fr. Francis Martin states on page 67 that this phrase from *Dei Verbum* “eliminates many of the problems of the inerrancy debate and allows a simple acknowledgement of the inaccuracies (historical, textual, and so forth) that appear in the sacred text.”

Dei Verbum and the Collapse of Moral Theology

IPS onepeterfive.com/dei-verbum-moral-theology

Timothy Flanders

March 3, 2020



In [a previous article](#), we discussed how the error of Limited Inerrancy was condemned by multiple popes as well as the original document on Revelation from Vatican II. **Because *Dei Verbum* was vague on this point, it allowed liberal heretics to place themselves as authorities over the Word of God to pass judgement on its “errors” while pushing their feminist, Marxist, or other erroneous interpretations.** In this article, we will discuss another related

issue that the document helped to unleash: the collapse of moral theology.

At the time of the Council, moral theology was based firmly on a centuries-old tradition of natural law going back to Aquinas and Augustine before him. The scholastic moral tradition built upon this foundation, which reached its zenith in the figure of St. Alphonsus Liguori (d. 1787), doctor of moral theology. This tradition formed the interpretative hermeneutic to judge moral questions. It was so fundamental that Pius IX could declare that the consensus of the scholastics was a source of infallibility [1].

One of the central efforts of the Modernists was the assertion that their superior learning in linguistics and history allowed them to surpass the wisdom of the scholastics. It was true that the 19th century witnessed a great increase in linguistic knowledge as well as manuscript discoveries leading to new critical editions of ancient texts (J.P. Migne's *Patrologia Graeca*, for example, first appeared in 1857). However, if the Modernists were successful in circumventing the scholastics, they could create a new hermeneutic of their own choosing, thereby imposing their own philosophy onto Scripture and Tradition, all the while maintaining that they were reviving an ancient understanding long forgotten. This led Pius IX to condemn this idea in the Syllabus of Errors:

[Condemned]: The method and principles according to which the ancient scholastic doctors treated theology are by no means suited to the necessity of our times and to the progress of the sciences. [2]

With this condemnation and the pontificates of Leo XIII and Pius X, the scholastics were exalted — particularly St. Thomas — and their detractors were silenced. Nevertheless, after the death of Pius X (1914), this same anti-scholastic “ressourcement” movement was permitted to spread. In 1935, Yves Congar wrote

his essay, “The Deficiency of Theology,” in which he criticized the scholastic method in the way that the Syllabus had condemned [3]. Congar and his allies believed that secularization had been the result of relying too heavily on the scholastic method and ignoring the everyday lives of the faithful.

While it is true that every good movement has its excesses, the alternative solution given by Congar was to create a new hermeneutical key to the Tradition, different from the scholastics’. **Their moral theology would be based on not the longstanding natural law tradition, but their own interpretation of Scripture.** This was the beginning of the *Nouvelle théologie* movement, which continued to spread through to the pontificate of Pius XII. In 1950, this pontiff condemned the movement’s anti-scholastic bias with these words:

Everyone is aware that the terminology employed in the [scholastic] schools and even that used by the Teaching Authority of the Church itself is capable of being perfected and polished; and we know also that the Church itself has not always used the same terms in the same way. It is also manifest that the Church cannot be bound to every system of philosophy that has existed for a short space of time. Nevertheless, the things that have been composed through common effort by Catholic teachers over the course of the centuries to bring about some understanding of dogma *are certainly not based on any such weak foundation.* These things are based on principles and notions deduced from a true knowledge of created things. ...

We may clothe our philosophy in a more convenient and richer dress, make it more vigorous with a more effective terminology, divest it of certain scholastic aids found less useful, prudently enrich it with the fruits of progress of the human mind. *But never may we overthrow it, or contaminate it with false principles, or regard it as a great, but obsolete, relic.* [4]

For this is what the *Nouvelle théologie* sought to do: overthrow the whole scholastic method as an “obsolete relic.”

Notice that the Roman pontiff allows for the scholastic method to be polished and perfected. **But the *Nouvelle théologie* wish not simply to add to the scholastic method, but to overthrow it and impose a new system of moral theology.**

But as we know, the *Nouvelle théologie* thinkers were able to gain ground and take virtual control of the Second Vatican Council. The crucial aspect of the moral tradition was contained in the more general debate over Scripture and Tradition, with moral theology contained in the latter. The original schema on revelation left no room for doubt about the authority of Tradition:

Let no one, therefore, dare to consider Tradition to be of inferior worth or refuse it his faith. For although Holy Scripture, since it is inspired, provides a divine instrument for expressing and illustrating the truths of faith, still its meaning can be clearly and fully understood or even presented only by means of the apostolic Tradition. Indeed, Tradition and it alone is the way in which some revealed truths, particularly those concerned with the inspiration, canonicity and integrity of each and every sacred book, are clarified and become known to the Church. [5]

These words firmly held the Tradition as a source of Revelation. The consensus of the scholastics was understood to be so closely tied to revelation as to be an authoritative hermeneutic of the same.

But with the struggle of *Dei Verbum* to appease Protestants and provide new terms for “modern man,” the clear authority of Tradition was made vague and thus also the authority of the moral tradition. Decades later, Ratzinger would admit that at the time of Vatican II and immediately after:

Catholic moral theology suffered a collapse that rendered the Church defenseless against [the sexual revolution.] ... Until the Second Vatican Council, Catholic moral theology was largely founded on natural law, while Sacred Scripture was only cited for background or substantiation. In the Council’s struggle for a new

understanding of Revelation, the natural law option was largely abandoned, and a moral theology based *entirely on the Bible* was demanded. [6]

Dei Verbum failed to make clear that Tradition is also a source of revelation, to the point that even Paul VI could say in a general audience that “the whole of the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum* is an apologia of the Holy Scriptures as the supreme rule of faith” (March 26, 1969). Rather, as Ratzinger admits, a moral theology based on the Bible alone was called for.

Just like the Modernists before them, the *Nouvelle théologie* party attempted to abandon the scholastics in favor of going “back to the sources” for a moral system. But in so doing, they were rendered defenseless against the onslaught of secular debauchery. As Ratzinger admits, this led to “the realization that from the Bible alone morality could not be expressed systematically” [7]. As such, they ended up adopting modern philosophy as their hermeneutic instead of the scholastics. This led to the proliferation of a moral philosophy that justified the moral depravities of divorce, contraception, and abortion against the natural law.

Because of [their alliance with the liberals](#) at the Council against the Curia, the conservatives ended up marginalizing the scholastic tradition, which would have been their defense, as Ratzinger indicates, against the excess of the liberals.

Just as Paul VI had done with *Humanae Vitae* (1968) and his *Credo* (1968), John Paul II also attempted to save the Council from itself in *Veritatis Splendor* (1993) and *Ad Tuendam Fidem* (1998). But neither these efforts nor the Benedict pontificate was able match the rigor with which Pius X once drove the Modernists underground, because Pius refused to compromise with Modernism. **And so the false moral theology unleashed by *Dei Verbum* and the abandonment of the scholastic**

moral tradition obtained through the seminaries and universities until the pontificate of Francis.

Here the collapse of moral theology has reached its climax, wherein heretical propositions in moral theology are being promoted by the pope and many other officials to whom he has given power. The foolish experiment in overcoming the wisdom of the scholastics at Vatican II has been shown to be a failure, and the Church now stands in desperate need to recover the wisdom that men scorned as an “obsolete relic.” This is our defense against the onslaught of secular morals and continued bombardment of our tradition from Vatican officials. As the Amazon Synod showed, these men have adopted modern ideologies as their hermeneutic. We must reject the imposition of an alien philosophy onto the faith and morals that our fathers professed. We must identify the root of the problem, then remain rooted instead within the tradition that the Church has recognized as sacred.

[1] Pius IX, *Tuas Libenter* (1863) Denzinger 1683

[2] *Syllabus of Errors* (1864), 13

[3] Jürgen Mettepenningen, *Nouvelle Théologie – New Theology: Inheritor of Modernism, Precursor of Vatican II* (T&T Clark International: 2010), 31

[4] *Humani Generis* (1950), 16, 30. Emphasis mine.

[5] *De Fontibus Revelationis*, English translation by Fr. Joseph A. Komonchak (2012) (accessed November 16, 2019), articles 4, 5

[6] Benedict XVI, “The Church and the Scandal of Sexual Abuse,” translated by *Anian Christoph Wimmer* (National Catholic Register: 2019). Accessed November 23, 2019. Emphasis mine.

[7] *Ibid.*

Image: Newtown Graffiti via Flickr (cropped).

