

Sola scriptura: Benedict XVI's Theology of the Word of God

by

Aleksandar S. Santrac, BA, MA, DPhil

Student Number: #23181184

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Promoter: Dr Stuart Rochester

Co-Promoter: Prof. Dr Rikus Fick

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the feasibility of an ecumenical joint statement on the *sola scriptura* principle. Through study of the crucial elements of this principle (the nature and the scope of the authority of the Word of God, the nature of the relationship between revelation, tradition and the Holy Scriptures, and biblical hermeneutics) this work attempts to create a possible basis for an ecumenical dialogue between Protestant/Evangelical and Catholic theology. It defines and evaluates the *sola scriptura* principle in the Protestant Reformation (Martin Luther and John Calvin specifically), contemporary Evangelical theology, traditional Catholic theology and post-Vatican II progressive Catholic theology, with special emphasis on the theology of Joseph Ratzinger (Benedict XVI) with regard to the Word of God. Apart from the current biblical dialogue on *sola scriptura* between Evangelicals and Catholics, based on identifiable presuppositions, this research also offers a unique list of indispensable requirements for redrawing the emphasis in the theology of Scripture, for both Evangelical and Catholic communities of faith, in order to create a viable ecumenical joint statement. Evangelicals have to become more aware of the role and authority of the community of faith as a “deeper author” in the origin, preservation and interpretation of Scripture, while Catholics must recognize that tradition(s) and authoritative interpretations of the magisterium are subject to the scrutiny of the Word of God/Holy Scripture as *norma normans* of ecclesial tradition. Based on these assumptions the research finally offers an ecumenical joint statement that transcends both traditional and some progressive formulas of *sola scriptura*.

Key words: *Sola scriptura*, Hermeneutics, Word of God, Holy Scriptures, Martin Luther, Protestant Theology, Evangelical Theology, Benedict XVI, Catholic Theology, Ecumenical Dialogue, *norma normans*

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SOLI DEO GLORIA!

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

According to some progressive evangelical sources it seems that Roman Catholic theology essentially never rejected the most important pillar of traditional Protestant faith, *sola scriptura*. The initial working definition of this pillar, from the orthodox Protestant perspective, includes:

- i. the primary and absolute authority of the Scripture, as originally given, as the final court of appeal for all doctrine and practice;
- ii. the sufficiency of the Scripture as the final written authority of God;
- iii. the clearness (perspicuity) of the essential biblical message;
- iv. the primacy of the Scriptures over all tradition rather than a total rejection of tradition and
- v. the principle that Scripture interprets Scripture without external authority (Geisler and Mackenzie, 1995:178-179).

Harold O.J. Brown, distinguished professor and mentor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and Reformed Theological Seminary, known for his activism against abortion, says that the principle of *Scripture alone* as the *final* authority in matters of faith and morals is an old one in Christendom, one that has never really been repudiated, *not even by the Roman Church* (Brown H., 1988: 308). Norman Geisler and Ralph E. Mackenzie boldly affirm that there is more *unanimity* between Protestant and Catholic understandings of *sola scriptura* than expected, at least in the material sense (Geisler and Mackenzie, 1995: 33). (Bloesch, 1994: 155) asserts that if we rediscover the dynamism of divine revelation (namely, the Word of God), both Catholics and Protestants might reach a new understanding of the relationship between tradition and Scripture and even a convergence on this issue.

Furthermore, there is a movement among progressive younger Evangelicals to embrace positions closer to Roman Catholicism in order to avoid the risk of subjective interpretation of the Scriptures (Hutchens, 1991: 3-10; Bloesch, 1994: 153;). They affirm that the authority of the Scripture is inseparable from the church's *tradition* and that the

function and interpretation of the Bible is impossible apart from this same tradition (Franke, 2004: 204-205, 209-210; Grenz, 2003: 33; Bloesch, 1994: 155; Neil, 1954: 114).

On the other side, one of the most influential Roman Catholic theologians in the history of the church Joseph Ratzinger, the current Pope Benedict XVI, states that the principle of perspicuity or unambiguousness of the Holy Scriptures in Lutheranism (which is foundational for the *sola scriptura* principle) has to be dropped. He says:

It is untenable on the basis of the objective structure of the Word, on account of its own dynamic, which points beyond what is written. It is above all the most profound meaning of the Word that is grasped only when we move beyond what is merely written (Ratzinger, 2005a: 34).

The *sola scriptura* principle would be impossible, therefore, on the basis of the structure of the Word of God, and the experience of its interpretation (Ratzinger, 2005a:34). By the expression ‘structure of the Word of God’ Ratzinger/Benedict XVI seems to mean the *dynamic constitution/relation of revelation of God/God’s Word with its written expression (Holy Scriptures)*. On the basis of its inner *structure*, however, the Word always comprises a *surplus* beyond what could go into the book (Ratzinger, 2005a:33). The meaning of the Word cannot be put into a written format because it includes oral tradition of the church (Ratzinger, 2005a: 34). It seems, therefore, that Benedict defines the structure of the Word of God as dynamic revelation of God (Word of God) that includes living tradition and the written expression as a testimony to the Word (Scriptures). Consequently, he claims that this structure calls for abrogation of the principle of *sola scriptura*.

Karl Rahner, an ecumenical Catholic theologian, further argues that the Bible is an expression of the self-constitution of the church. Scripture is the Church’s Book (Rahner, 1978: 373). In the same spirit, Cardinal Avery Dulles adds that the Bible is never self-sufficient. “It does not determine its own contents, vouch for its own inspiration, or interpret itself. The Bible is God’s gift to the Church, which is its custodian and authoritative interpreter” (Dulles, 2006: 17).

Speaking in ecumenical terms, Benedict XVI affirms that “nowadays, even the greater part of evangelical theologians recognize, in varying forms, that *sola scriptura*, that is, the restriction of the Word to the book, cannot be maintained” (Ratzinger, 2005a: 33).

1.2 Problem Statement

On the one side, some contemporary evangelical theologians affirm that Roman Catholicism, at least in the material sense, does not reject the principle of *sola scriptura*. The progressive Evangelicalism also calls for re-interpretation of the concept of tradition. On the other side, Roman Catholic theologians affirm the insufficiency of the Scripture on the basis of the dynamic structure of the Word of God and its interpretation. Moreover, progressive Catholicism confirms that progressive Evangelicals do not support this principle any more.

This complex contemporary situation calls for clarification and investigation, especially if one has in mind the traditional difference between Protestant and Roman Catholic understandings of *sola scriptura* embodied even in the modern attempt for ecumenical reconciliation (within the document *Evangelicals and Catholics Together* [1994]):

Evangelicals hold that the Catholic Church has gone beyond Scripture, adding teachings and practices that detract from or compromise the Gospel of God's saving grace in Christ. Catholics, in turn, hold that such teachings and practices are grounded in Scripture and belong to the fullness of God's revelation. Their rejection, Catholics say, results in a truncated and reduced understanding of the Christian reality (ECT [Colson *et al.*, 1994]: art. 4).

In order to create the possibility of genuine *philosophical* and *theological* (not just formal or organizational) ecumenical understanding of the principle of *sola scriptura* one has to discover both evangelical and Roman Catholic contemporary positions in every detail of their historical, theological and biblical argumentation. This assessment, evaluation and investigation of Protestant/evangelical and Roman Catholic arguments about *sola scriptura* within the context of possible ecumenical reconciliation would represent the main scholarly contribution of this work.

Some limitations have to be specified at the beginning. First, arguments of only some prominent representatives of both sides will be explored. On the side of Evangelicalism the emphasis first is on the theology of the Word through a historical investigation of the Reformers with special accent on Martin Luther. This will lay a foundation of the orthodox Protestant understanding of the *Scripture alone* principle.

Finally, some of the recent ideas of the most renowned evangelical theologians will be considered.

In regard to the Roman Catholic understanding of *sola scriptura*, first of all, we will look at the basic historical-traditional understanding of the Council of Trent and the pre-Vatican II position on the Holy Scripture. Afterwards, the Vatican II perspective will be investigated including some of the ecumenical theologians of progressive Catholicism. Lastly, the fundamental theology of the Word of God by Benedict XVI as one of the most progressive Catholic theologians will be examined in detail.

In both evangelical/Protestant and Roman Catholic perspective we will, therefore, try to follow the historical/theological development of the understanding of the *sola scriptura* principle culminating in the theology of progressive Evangelicalism and Benedict XVI today. In addition, only some biblical arguments about *sola scriptura*, based on the contemporary scholarly and public debates, will be assessed.

The second limitation takes into consideration the structure and nature of the *sola scriptura* principle. This work cannot explore all background issues of fundamental theology essential for the proper understanding of *sola scriptura*. Two elements have been chosen because they have been already plainly cited by Benedict XVI as the preliminary points for rejection of the traditional Protestant understanding of the *Scripture alone* principle. These elements are: 1. The *authority* of the Word of God with the dynamic structure and nature of revelation and 2. *Hermeneutical* principles relating to the Holy Scripture which substantially determine one's understanding of the *sola scriptura* belief.

The central question of this work, therefore, is: 'How feasible is the ecumenical joint statement between Protestant/evangelical and Roman Catholic perspectives on the authority, nature and interpretation of the Holy Scriptures?'

The questions that naturally arise from this problem are:

- How can we assess the historical/theological development of the Reformers' understanding of the principle *sola scriptura* within the tradition of Protestant orthodoxy?

- What is the position of modern/progressive Evangelicalism on the principle of *sola scriptura* having in mind the authority and structure of the Word as well as interpretation of Scripture?
- How can we understand the traditional Catholic understanding of the relationship between tradition and the Bible and the appropriate hermeneutical principles by which Scripture may be interpreted?
- What are the arguments of modern/progressive post-Vatican II Roman Catholic theologians (especially Joseph Ratzinger-Benedict XVI) on the principle of *sola scriptura*?
- How should one evaluate the belief in *sola scriptura*, and what would be the criteria for the acceptance or rejection of the belief in the Bible and according to plain reason?

1.3 Aim and Objectives

The main objective of this study is to provide philosophical and theological assessments of both evangelical and Roman Catholic understandings of the principle of *sola scriptura* from an ecumenical point of view.

The objectives of this study must be seen in their relationship to the aim. In so doing, I intend to approach the subject from six angles:

- i) To study the Reformers' understanding of the principle of *sola scriptura* (especially Martin Luther) within the historical tradition of Protestant orthodoxy.
- ii) To find out how different are modern evangelical positions on the relationship between tradition and the Bible taking into account progressive views on the hermeneutics of the Word.
- iii) To examine and evaluate the arguments for the traditional Catholic understanding of the relationship between tradition and Scripture and the hermeneutical principles shaped by the Catholic Church.
- iv) To assess the arguments of modern/progressive Roman Catholic theologians (especially Joseph Ratzinger, Benedict XVI) on the principle of *sola*

scriptura having in mind the authority of the Word of God and philosophical and theological rules of its interpretation.

- v) To establish biblical criteria for the acceptance or rejection of the principle of *sola scriptura*, and thereby to formulate a particular understanding of it that exploits the insights of progressive and non-traditional contemporary arguments based on plain reason.
- vi) To propose a feasible joint statement of ecumenical reconciliation between evangelical and Roman Catholic perspectives on the authority, nature and interpretation of the Holy Scriptures.

1.4 Central Theoretical Argument

The central theoretical argument of this study is that, if one recognizes and properly understands the progressive and non-traditional arguments of contemporary Protestant/evangelical and Roman Catholic positions on the *sola scriptura* principle, based on the understanding of the authority, dynamic nature of the Word of God and hermeneutical principles by which Scripture may be interpreted, ecumenical theological reconciliation based on a joint statement is possible and plausible.

1.5 Methodology

This study will employ linguistic and textual research, using tools from modern literary studies and historiography, particularly for the critical assessment of the existing contributions with the purpose of identifying and discussing the major concerns in the area of research.

Primary sources of both Protestant/evangelical and Roman Catholic authors will be used. Speaking about evaluation of Protestant/evangelical understandings of *sola scriptura*, the complete works of Martin Luther (and some other Reformers) will be used including primary sources of specific contemporary evangelical theologians who have written extensively on the understanding of the Word of God or the Bible. For interpretation of Catholic theology a detailed study will be undertaken of the offered interpretations of the

principle *sola scriptura* (authority of the Scriptures and its interpretation) by major councils of the Roman Catholic church (Trent, Vatican II) and original sources of traditional and progressive Catholic thinkers including the most prominent among them, Benedict XVI.

Hereby, the attempt will be made to determine how similar are the arguments of modern Evangelicalism and progressive Catholicism and how possible and realistic is a common ecumenical statement on the *sola scriptura* principle. The task of outlining an ecumenical vision of the doctrine of Scripture will be a substantial contribution of this work. I also acknowledge that I will give my best to avoid any bias on account of my own theological presuppositions and beliefs.

2.0 SOLA SCRIPTURA IN TRADITIONAL PROTESTANTISM

2.1 Introduction

The main objective of this chapter is to investigate the traditional protestant perspective on authority and interpretation of the Scripture. Starting from the teachings of the Reformers, with special emphasis on Martin Luther, arguments and aspects of the *sola scriptura* principle formulated by Reformation and Protestant orthodoxy will be analysed. Martin Luther has been selected for two reasons. First, he is a key representative of the Reformation. Second, in the context of ecumenical dialogue on the Scripture between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism (Benedict XVI) it seems indispensable to consider Luther's approach to Bible systematically and methodically because Progressive Catholicism (including Benedict XVI) very often refers to Luther's *sola scriptura* within ecumenical reinterpretation of his theology. It is critical, therefore, to first present Luther's perspectives on the Holy Scripture and only then the perspectives of other Reformers and orthodox Protestants. This research will collate historical/traditional protestant assumptions about the doctrine of the Holy Scriptures, focusing on two elements of the *sola scriptura* principle: (1) the authority and dynamic structure of the Word and (2) hermeneutical principles relating to the Bible. Evangelical theology (Chapter 3) cannot be understood and assessed without this foundational protestant perspective.

In the following section the place of Scripture within the theology of Martin Luther will be thoroughly investigated.

2.2 Martin Luther

2.2.1 Introduction

One of the most notable ecumenical Catholic theologians, Hans Küng, states that Martin Luther (1483-1546) reformed the medieval church "in the spirit of Scripture" (Küng, 1994: 137). Luther fearlessly called for the return of the church to the gospel of Jesus Christ "as

it was experienced in a living way in Holy Scriptures” (Küng, 1994: 140). Today, an ecumenical question might follow: Was it only a *paradigm change* with preservation of the *substance of faith* or a *change of faith*? (Küng, 2002: 136-137). How far from medieval theology has Luther gone with his *sola scriptura*?

For Luther, his experiential theological approach to the understanding of the Scripture began during the so-called “tower experience”. *Only in the Bible* Luther found the teaching about imputed righteousness of Christ without human merit as a foundational soteriological principle of the Reformation. Scholars today agree that Luther came to rest his case supremely on the *authority of Scripture* (Klug, 1997: 125).

The entire content of his (Luther’s) discovery in the tower was the insight that, *according to the simple and literal meaning of this written Word of God*, man is justified by the gracious imputation of God when by faith he appropriates the Gospel promise of forgiveness of sins in the blood of Christ (Saarnivara quoted in Klug, 1997: 125, italics mine).

Thus, when Luther understood that Christ only (*solus Christus*) provided the righteousness only by his grace (*sola gratia*) that is recognized and accepted only by faith (*sola fide*) he based this understanding only upon the unequivocal testimony of the Holy Scripture (*sola scriptura*). Luther’s soteriological teachings were firmly anchored in the *authority and clarity* of the Bible.

The *sola scriptura* principle, however, was not an invention of the Reformation. It was inherited, as were many other *theologumena*, from some late medieval theologians, preachers, and philosophers. It was used with different emphases and nuances by Roger Bacon, John Wyclif, John Hus, Marsilius of Padua, William Occam, Jean Gerson, Wessel Gans-fort, and others. Like Luther, all of them used *sola scriptura* primarily as a *negative* principle to oppose the claims of a special and independent authority as argued by the Roman Curia (Westhelle, 2005: 375). There is nothing unique in the fact that Luther appealed to the Bible for authority for his convictions. The schoolmen had done this centuries earlier. As a key example, William of Ockham taught *sola scriptura* long before Luther. Unambiguously, Luther was trained in the Ockhamist tradition, which touted scripture over papal authority (Strieter, 1974: 92; Bray, 1995: 158).

Nevertheless, Luther’s understanding of *sola scriptura* was coloured by his comprehension of justification by faith and not only by criticism of ecclesial authority, and this is probably the most important point of division with medieval progressive thinkers.

Following this historical assumption of the foundational doctrine of the Reformer the research will proceed with detailed investigation of his understanding of the authority/nature of the Bible and its interpretation. These two significant elements of the principle of *sola scriptura* have been chosen in the study precisely because they represent the momentous points both in Luther's theology *per se* and in the ecumenical dialogue and comparison with both traditional and progressive Roman Catholic theologians.

2.2.2 The Authority of the Scriptures

The doctrine of the authority of the Holy Scripture was the preliminary catechetical teaching for the ancient church. The medieval church departed from this teaching not *materially* (because the primacy of the Word of God was always assumed) but *formally*, by introducing the authority of the church fathers, the councils, the pope, and the rational approach of scholasticism. Luther's reaction primarily concerned the dynamic relationship between the authority of the Scriptures and the authority of the church (or Tradition). In this debate Luther's subtleties of understanding the dynamic structure of the Word *versus* Scripture will be also briefly examined.

2.2.2.1 Scripture and Church (Tradition)

In the discussion of relationship between Scripture and Church two different levels must be highlighted. First, Luther's position on the Roman Catholic Church's claim of canonization will be briefly assessed and second, some of the statements of Luther will be analysed, where he explicitly stated that the church of his time departed from the *sola scriptura* principle by introducing human teachings based on different authorities.

In Luther's teaching the Church can never be a validating power over the Holy Scriptures. Paul Althaus, in the standard scholarly work, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (1966), quotes Luther:

The Holy Scripture is the queen which must rule over all and to which all must submit and obey. No one, no matter who may be, is allowed to be the master and judge of the Scripture, rather all must be its witnesses, disciples, and confessors (WA 40, 119 quoted in Althaus, 1966: 75).

(Althaus, 1966: 75) concludes that, according to Lutheran perspective, no one is in a position to authenticate the Scripture, *Scripture validates itself*. In the process of canonization the medieval church believed that Scripture represented “the church’s book” and that without validation and interpretation of the teaching office of the church Scripture has no authority. The dynamic process of canonization cannot be explored in detail here (see F.F. Bruce, 1954, 1983, 1988; Dunbar, 1995; McDonald, 2002 & Zaman, 2008). Nevertheless, Luther’s position on canonization might be compared to that of St Irenaeus, as Lutheran scholar Vitor Westhelle, in his article “Luther on the Authority of Scripture” (2005) claims:

For Irenaeus *the church does not establish the canon, it receives it and this reception is an act of humility and deference to the apostolic witness*. That means, in receiving the scriptures as ground and pillar, we are giving credence to the witness of those who knew Jesus and were eye-witnesses of his life, death on the cross and resurrection. What they saw is left for us to believe, but we do believe on account of those who have seen it and recognized him to be the one the prophets foretold and pointed to. And their testimony, as left in print, was regarded by Irenaeus as sufficient to anchor the faith of the church (Westhelle, 2005: 377, italics mine).

As Luther claimed, as recipients of the canon we are only witnesses, disciples and confessors. What is more vital in the opus of Luther’s writings and more significant for our discussion here is the second level of the relationship between Scripture and the Church, namely the relationship between the Bible and Tradition (historic teachings of the church).

In his sixty-second of the ninety-five famous *Theses*, nailed at the Cathedral of Wittenberg in October 31, 1517, Martin Luther boldly proclaimed that “the true treasure of the Church is the Most Holy Gospel of the glory and the grace of God” (Luther, 1915: 29-38). Tradition is, therefore, contrasted to and perhaps devalued by the power of the purity of Christ’s Gospel. In his disputation *Concerning the Letter and the Spirit* Luther clearly taught that teachings of the reformers were based on the Holy Scriptures unlike ‘papists’ who claimed to believe that Scripture was not *enough* in refutation of heresy (Luther, 2005: 89). For Luther, self-sufficiency of the Scriptures as the final authority of dogma and practice was a presupposition of all his theology. He constantly made a distinction between the divine teachings of the Scripture and the human teachings of the pope and the papists (Luther, 2005: 90, 97). According to his testimony, even enemies of the Reformation themselves admitted that Luther was on the side of the Scriptures and that their human work was not based on the Scripture because it contained historical additions of humans, namely tradition (Luther, 2005: 90). *Sola scriptura* was affirmed, therefore, on the basis of

distinction between self-sufficient and self-validating teachings of the Scripture and supplementary novelties of human wisdom. Attacking the position of his contemporaries who were completely faithful to the medieval perspective on the Bible, in his *Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans*, 1522, Luther states:

Paul foreseen that out of Rome and through the Romans would come the seductive and offensive canons and decretals and the whole squirming *mass of human laws and commandments* that have now drowned the whole world and wiped out this epistle *and all the Holy Scriptures*, along with the Spirit and faith itself; so that nothing remains anymore except the idol, the Belly, whose servants St. Paul here rebukes (Luther, 2005: 106, italics mine).

Here Luther plainly affirms that the culmination of human wisdom in the medieval Roman church actually was a result of Rome's inclination to respect human tradition *above* the writings of the Holy Scripture. It seems that Luther confirmed, on the basis of this discussion with Catholic "hyper-Christian and hyper-learned" theologians that the medieval church went beyond the authority of the Holy Scripture and *added* to the divine teachings some other teachings of papacy, scholastic philosophy or theology. Since Catholic theologians of the time accepted these authorities as an integral part of the church we can claim that Luther also rejected the authority of the medieval church on the basis of the authority of the Holy Scriptures.

On the other side, Luther did not reject the concept of tradition altogether if we define tradition as insightful exegetical comments by church fathers. In his *Epistle to Hebrews* he used the quotations and theological explanation of the text by Chrysostom (Luther, 1962: 86, 88-89, 100, 121, 187, 203, 227), Augustine (Luther, 1962: 34, 39, 122), Jerome (Luther, 1962: 37-38, 53, 204, 320), and even Peter Lombard (Luther, 1962: 34, 36, 203). Furthermore, in his early works he respected and appreciated theological contributions of Augustine (Luther, 1962: 94, 172, 342, 314, 266), Bonaventure (Luther, 1962: 254-5, 255), Gabriel Biel (Luther, 1962: 171, 261), Scotus (Luther, 1962: 256-7, 267), and of course William Ockham (Luther, 1962: 257-8, 259-60) as his "spiritual mentor". It must be pointed out, therefore, that Luther does not strip medieval Christianity from reformation Christianity. That is to say, *Luther does not leave the Church with nothing but the Bible*. Much of the tradition and historical theology is affirmed by Luther, and maintained in his reformation of the Church. While Luther subordinates the Church, councils, fathers, creeds and reason to the Word, he does not in any way seek to remove these elements from playing an active and crucial role in the Church, concludes Scott David

Foutz in his “Martin Luther and Scripture” (Foutz, 2005: 1). Although Reformers believed that the Scriptures stood on their own feet rather than depending on the authority of the magisterium, Luther (and Calvin) deeply respected early patristic tradition (Thiselton, 1992: 179; Goldsworthy, 2006: 195). Thus,

When Luther maintained the principle *sola scriptura*, he was not suggesting that the tradition of the church was without value. Rather, he was arguing a case of relative clarity and weight. In other words, if a conflict arises in the interpretation of faith, then Scripture carries the authority that transcends and judges any of the church’s tradition (Hasel, 2005: 37).

Heiko A. Oberman contends that the issue of the Reformation was not Scripture *or* tradition but rather struggle between two differing concepts of tradition (Oberman, 1963: 225-55 quoted in Franke, 2004: 205). Keith Mathison furthermore, in his *Shape of Sola Scriptura* (2001), clearly indicates that

When Luther’s understanding of “tradition” is examined, it must be kept in mind that Luther did not reject the true Catholic tradition; he rejected certain traditions. Luther’s attack on these traditions must not be confused with an attack on the Church (Mathison, 2001: 97).

Consequently, the only principle that seems to be unambiguous in Luther’s teachings is *prima scriptura*. The authority of the ancient church fathers and teachers, medieval theologians and their theological-philosophical systems is supported only if it supports the teachings of the whole Scripture (Luther, 2005: 262). In *The Smalcald Articles* (1537) Luther emphasized that if a teaching “lacks support in Scripture” like, for example, Augustine’s teaching on purgatory or the mass or the invocation of saints, it cannot be accepted (Luther, 2005: 343.344; 2008). In *Answer to Latomus* he exclaims:

I want to have the pure unadulterated Scriptures in all their glory, undefiled by the comment of any man even the saints, and not hashed up with any earthly seasonings (Luther, 1962: 344).

Luther clearly emphasized that he did not want to believe “fancies” of Church fathers but the Word of God (Luther, 1962: 343). Scripture became the cornerstone of all knowledge of God. The Word provided the sole foundation for both individuals and the institutionalized Church (Foutz, 2005: 1). We might argue here that Luther’s claim to the principle of *sola scriptura* was inconsistent with conscious or unconscious appropriation of assumptions and content of medieval deposit of faith in his theological system. However, the discussion here has a different focal point, namely Luther’s public statements on the authority and primacy of Scripture and refutation of unbiblical teachings.

After many disputes Luther apparently came to the irrefutable conclusion that there is no “preestablished harmony” between Scripture and church and that Scripture exists *prior to and is ranked before and above the church* (Lohse, 1999: 188). This is the reason for failed dialogues between Luther and Catholic theologians of the time. While they persistently insisted on his subordination to the authorities of the pope, councils, church fathers and scholastic theologians he was ready to receive better instruction *only* from the Holy Scriptures. For this reason he could boldly declare the authority of the Word of God above all other authorities, at Worms on April 18, 1521:

Unless I am convinced by Scripture and by plain reason and not by Popes and councils who have so often contradicted themselves, my conscience is captive to the word of God. To go against conscience is neither right nor safe. I cannot and I will not recant. Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me (quoted in Mueller, 1957: 106).

It might be that the hope in ecumenical understanding of Scripture lies elsewhere.

2.2.2.2 *The Word of God and Scripture*

Martin Luther did not just acclaim the primacy of the written Holy Scriptures in doing theology or making the church’s standards. He was a profound theologian of the *living* Word that seemingly transcends the written expression of the Bible. In his work *On the Councils and the Church* (1539) Luther clearly claimed that the Word of God is a *dynamic oral proclamation* necessary for the spiritual life of God’s people. This is the Word preached, believed, professed and lived (Luther, 2005: 367). In his earlier theology, for example, *The Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (1517-1518), the comment on Hebrews 4, 12 reveals the transcendent nature of the Word of God:

The Word of God is over and above all things, beyond all things and within all things, before all things and behind all things, and therefore everywhere, it is impossible to escape from it anywhere. Since also it is living and because of that eternal, its power to hurt and cut can never be brought to an end (Luther, 1962: 96, 94-96).

Here Luther somehow equates the living Word of God with God Himself. The Word of God (revealed in Christ) is the living proclamation of the nature of God. This is the Word that is preached (*verbum vocale*) by which the Church is illuminated, says Luther (Luther, 1962: 159). It is the bread of life *testified* by the Scriptures “which the faithful receive *from the mouth of the preacher*” (Luther, 1962: 159). It has to be *listened to*, put to the test, and always and continually preferred to all else (Luther, 1962: 212). The Word of God,

therefore, is a dynamic and living expression or manifestation of all God's revelation that has to be made known to the world and especially to the church through oral proclamation of the Gospel, namely preaching.

Accordingly, Luther's theology makes a distinction between God and His written revelation "God and Scripture of God are two things, no less than Creator and creature" (Luther, quoted in Lohse, 1999: 188). Robert W. Bertram, in his "Scripture and Tradition in the Lutheran Confessions" (2001), claims that this distinction is based on the difference between God's Word (form of the Gospel) and the Holy Scripture (its norm). He explains:

The biblical Word of God is not first of all a critical "norm." It is that, too, but only secondarily. Primarily the Word is creative and authorial. It is the judge not just judging testimony but, before that, eliciting it and, only insofar as that fails, standing aloof as an external norm. Before the Word is a "norm" (Richtschnur) it is "the pure and clear fountain [Brunnen] of Israel." Before the Word is a norm it is a "form," and more as an active verb than a noun, formative of and informing its later witnesses with its own unique "form of doctrine," "the pure doctrine of the holy Gospel" — freely translated, "the fresh teaching of the hallowing Good News (Bertram, 2001: 181, italics mine).

"Formality" of the Word of God, therefore, precedes the "normativity" of the Scriptures.

Furthermore, in his *Freedom of a Christian, 1520*, Luther confirms one more additional point. The Word of God already described as the *gospel of Christ* is the Word of life, truth, light, peace, righteousness, salvation, joy, liberty, wisdom, power, grace, glory and of every incalculable blessing. The entire spiritual estate—all the apostles, bishops, and priests are called and instituted only for the ministry of this Word (Luther, 2005: 394). The Word of God proclaimed, consequently, is the preaching of the Gospel of Christ. The Gospel is not the Scripture, says Luther, because Christ did not call his teaching Scripture, it is the good news or a *proclamation* that is spread not by pen but by word of mouth. Luther boldly argues: "So we go on and make the gospel into a law book, a teaching of commandments, changing Christ into Moses, the One who would help us into simply an instructor" (Luther, 2005: 97). If you study the Scriptures you will learn Christ there. Old Testament is of no account, although it bears the name Holy Scripture, has no meaning outside of the Gospel (Luther, 2005: 97, 121). For Luther, this Gospel is not just the historical and objective revelation of Christ. It has to become *internalized* within the human spirit. Speaking about the final meaning of the verse "God to be justified in his words" (Ps. 51:4), Luther says that it is "the Word of God in the heart" (Luther, 1962: 247).

Thus, the transcended Word of God, revealed in Christ's Gospel and preached in the church, somehow surpasses the written expression found in the Bible. It goes beyond what is merely written.

Yet, the same phrase, "the Word of God", Luther, without any doubt, applies to the Holy Scriptures. Apart from the discussion on inspiration that clearly reveals Luther's acceptance of the Bible as the Word of God, I assert here that Luther unambiguously uses the expression God's word to describe the Holy Scripture (Luther, 2005: 370; Luther, 1962: 23, 73-6, 89, 93, 353). Scripture is the Word of God because God has said *something* in the Scriptures (Luther, 2005: 130). This confirms propositional revelation in the authoritative Holy Scriptures. Apart from "fancies" of humans Luther asserted the authority of the Scriptures as Word of God (Luther, 1962: 343). He also affirmed the authority of the whole Holy Scriptures comparing "the holy Word of God" with "devil's lies or fables" (Luther, 2005: 78). In *The Smalcald Articles* the authority of God's Word as the Scripture is juxtaposed with the authority of the pope (Luther, 2005: 344; 2008) because Luther saw the discrepancy between authority of the Word and authority of tradition. This authority comes from the Holy Scripture as "the *words of the Spirit* bound to carry majesty and authority" (Luther, 1962: 211). William H. Lazareth, an evangelical 'catholic' Lutheran theologian claims that Luther believed that the canonical Scriptures of the Old and the New Testament are "the written Word of God" (Lazareth, 1989: 73). He concludes, however, with stressing the Luther's paradoxical teaching on the nature of the Word of God:

Hence, *Word and Scripture were neither identified nor separated by Luther despite the demands of human reason.* Faith testifies rather to a self-disclosing God hidden under the "servant rags" of the testimony of believers to God's mighty acts in history. *Luther does not pretend to understand or explain this mystery of divine revelation.* In the simplicity of faith which gratefully accepts all the precious gifts of God as miracles, Luther characteristically treasures the Scriptures as "the swaddling clothes and manger in which Christ was wrapped and laid" (WA 10, 576). The manger is not itself the baby, but one must first go to the manger if the baby is to be found: so too with Holy Scriptures and the Word of God (Lazareth, 1989: 60, italics mine).

Paradoxically speaking, therefore, Luther believed in both distinction and identification of the Word of God and Holy Scriptures based on the unexplainable mystery of God's revelation. This paradox furthermore, according to the writings of Martin Luther, might be expressed by the fact that God's Word is always related to its testimony in the Holy Scriptures. The reason for this has to be soteriological; our hearts and minds are so dull and

sinful (totally depraved) that we cannot receive the direct Word of God unless it is translated into the written expression of the Word, the Scripture.

Luther's theology of the Word and Scripture (paradox of distinction/equation) seems promising for ecumenical Protestants and Catholics who see the opportunity to understand relation between Tradition and Scripture in these terms. Roman or evangelical Catholics claim that they neither sever tradition from Scripture as an independent source of divine revelation, nor divorce Scripture from the tradition at the expense of the uniqueness of the Gospel both within and "beyond the pages of the Bible" (Lazareth, 1989: 71). Ecumenical Luther, therefore, is the Luther of the paradox of the distinction/equation of the Word of God and the Bible. This portrait of Luther plays a crucial role in the understanding of relationship between Scripture and tradition.

To sum up, the *sola scriptura* principle in the writings of Martin Luther is primarily based on the self-validating authority of the canonical Holy Scriptures. The Bible, although not a totality of the revelation of the Word, is the only perfect written expression of the Word of God because it flawlessly testifies to the living and dynamic expression of the Gospel of Christ (the Word proclaimed). The authority of the Holy Scriptures, both in doctrine and morals, stands in contrast to the authority of the pope, the teaching offices of the church, councils or rational expressions of faith both by church fathers and scholastics. The church, therefore, needs to listen to, obey, internalize and proclaim the Word of God from the Scriptures.

We should now explore the *sola scriptura* principle through its second element, namely hermeneutical principles of the Bible.

2.2.3 The Interpretation of the Scriptures

Technically speaking Luther did not have *hermeneutics* because it is the invention of nineteenth century theology (McKim, 1998: 218). When we do speak about Luther's doctrine of scriptural interpretation we should have in mind at least three important fundamentals of his "hermeneutics": *the clarity (perspicuity) of meaning* of the Scripture, the logic of the principle that *Scripture interprets itself* and *the Christ-centeredness* or Gospel-centeredness of interpretation of the Bible. Generally, scholars of Luther agree that his interpretation of the Scriptures is founded on four hermeneutical principles: inspiration

(*inspiratio*), unity (*tota scriptura*), clarity (*claritas scripturae*), and sufficiency (*sola scriptum*) (Thompson, 1997: 373; Thomas, 2008: 141-143). In the discussion here, as mentioned above, three ideas will be considered: the *clarity* of the Bible, the *sufficiency* (Scripture interprets itself) and *unity* of interpretation based on the element of Christ-centeredness of the Bible. The inspiration of the Scriptures in its relation to the infallibility/inerrancy debate is not included in this research of the elements of *sola scriptura* principle, so it will not be addressed here.

2.2.3.1 *The Clarity and Meaning(s) of the Scriptures*

In his discussion with Erasmus, Luther emphasized that the subject matter of the Scriptures “is all quite accessible, even though some texts are still obscure owing to our ignorance of their terms” (LW, vol. 33, pp.25-26 quoted in Lohse, 1999: 195). This statement is quoted in the context of the unambiguous Christ-centeredness of the Holy Scriptures. The centrality of Christ is so clear and obvious that the Scripture itself becomes *clear* and *unequivocal* because it is interpreted “from and toward Jesus Christ”. The clarity of the Scriptures is based on the obviously clear revelation of the central figure of the Bible, Christ.

Second, clarity also flows out of the fact of intelligibility of the translation of the Bible. Mark Thompson, in his article “Authority and Interpretative Method in Luther’s Approach to Scripture” (1997) recognized that

[Luther’s] life-long commitment to the task of translating the Old and New Testaments arose from a conviction that *Scripture is intelligible on its own terms* and that every effort should be made to enable Christian men and women to engage directly with the text in their own language (Thompson, 1997: 375, italics mine).

Luther, of course, made a distinction between the outer clarity (*claritas externa*) and the inner clarity (*claritas interna*) of the Scriptures. Outer clarity is based on this intelligibility of any translation, but inner clarity can be apprehended only by the Holy Spirit who discloses its true meaning (Lohse, 1999: 195).

Thirdly, the clarity of the Scriptures is based on the *plain meaning* of the Scriptures. The medieval theology believed in the fourfold sense of the Bible called *quadrigena*. *Quadrigena* consists of a *literal* plain historical meaning, an *allegorical* spiritual meaning applied to the Body of Christ today, a *tropological* meaning that refers to the present moral

application and an *anagogical* meaning that refers to last things. In Latin (quoted by Luther) that would be:

*Littera gesta docet: quid credas, allegoria
Moralis, quid agas: quo tendas anagogia* (Luther 1962: 112).

It seems that Luther, in his early writings, used at least tropological analogy to describe the biblical text (Luther, 1962: 112). In his early works, therefore, he did not totally depart from the fourfold structure of interpretation. But Thompson notes:

Yet his early endorsement of the *Quadrigena* gradually gave way to a greater stress on the grammatical sense of the text and its historical situation (though in an attenuated form allegory continued to feature in his expositions throughout his life). His early application of the 'Letter and spirit' distinction was later replaced by the more productive 'law and gospel' dynamic which he developed from hints in Augustine" (Thompson, 1997: 376).

The contrast is not between Luther's concentration on the historical sense and a medieval preference for figurative or spiritual meanings, as if, for example, Luther always interpreted the Old Testament as the story of Israel while medieval exegetes interpreted the Old Testament as the story of Christ and the church. Some medieval exegetes, whom Luther knew very well, like Nicholas of Lyra, paid careful attention to Old Testament history; and Luther frequently made the Old Testament refer to Christ as its fulfilment (Hendrix, 1983: 231). Christ was the spiritual fulfilment of the Old Testament not in allegorical but historical sense.

In the course of time Luther finally rejected the allegorical approach to interpretation. This could be supported by the following quote:

Likewise, even though the things described in Scripture mean something further, Scripture should not therefore have a twofold meaning. Instead, it should retain the *one meaning to which the words refer*. Beyond that, we should give the idle spirits permission to hunt and seek the manifold interpretations of the things indicated besides the words (Luther, 2005: 79).

He also adds: "The Christian reader should make it his first task to seek out the *literal* sense, as they call it. For it alone is the whole substance of faith and Christian theology; it alone holds its ground in trouble and trial" (LW. 9.24 quoted in Luther, 2005). Obviously, Luther preferred the literal meaning of the text. Nevertheless, he did not like the term itself. "Literal meaning is not a good term," says Luther, "because Paul interprets the letter quite differently than they do. Those who call it 'grammatical, historical meaning' do better" (Luther, 2005: 80). Luther apparently claimed that Origen and Jerome erred in ignoring the literal meaning of the words and actual history of Israel; thus the spiritual

meaning which they discovered is always something *completely strange to the text* (Luther quoted in Althaus, 1966: 96). Paul Althaus claims that, while ancient church fathers interpreted the text *allegorically* (see Goldsworthy, 2006: 94; Moo, 1995: 181) (not concerned with the actual historical situation described in the text), Luther interpreted the text *spiritually* (finding the meaning of the text within the particular historical context pointing beyond themselves to Christ as the ultimate goal of history) (Althaus, 1966: 96). Luther's spiritual hermeneutics is, therefore, based primarily on *Christ-centeredness*. Allegorical interpretation is completely repudiated. This sense of the Scriptures is far different from the interpretation of "papists". Using the example of the interpretation of sacraments Luther makes distinction between his interpretation of Scriptures and Rome's interpretation (Luther, 2005: 376). Luther rejected the *symbolic theology* approach that distinguished between sensual, rational and spiritual (Luther, 1962: 117) based on the platonic distinction between body, mind and spirit. For him the literal historical meaning was the "cradle" for the spiritual meaning. In order to find Christ reader must search for historical literal meaning.

In addition, Luther's "tower experience" and his subsequent religious experience led him to the literal meaning of the revelation of Christ's righteousness. Luther's devout and reverent conviction that the Word of his loving Father in Christ must be taken seriously led him to the affirmation that the Scripture must always be accepted and expounded "as the words declare", says (Mueller, 1957: 114) in his article "Luther and the Bible" (1957). The literal meaning of the Scripture, unlike the medieval exegetical approach, was a foundation for spiritual meaning. The pope, Luther claims, is a false authority of interpretation; Luther presents him as the "desolating sacrilege in the holy place" because his teachings and interpretation are based on his dreams, not the Spirit or the letter, although he presumes the authority of the apostles (Luther, 2005: 86). Luther writes that the *Sophists* of his time are the "sole interpreters of Scripture and yet they do nothing else with it except tear it into tiny fragments and render them *ambiguous* and *obscure*" (Luther, 1962: 326). He also adds:

It is true that for many people much remains abstruse, but this is not due to the obscurity of Scripture, but the blindness or indolence of those who will not take the trouble to look at the very clearest truth... on this account I have attacked the pope, in whose kingdom nothing is more commonly stated or more generally accepted than the idea the Scriptures are *obscure* and *ambiguous*, so that the spirit to interpret them must be sought from the Apostolic See of Rome... The Scriptures are *perfectly clear* (LW 33: 27, 90, 99 quoted in Westhelle, 2005: 376).

These statements indicate that Luther was antagonistic to *external* authorities of scriptural interpretation (magisterium) that made the Scripture an obscure book and that he preferred the clear, literal and historical meaning that leads to spiritual meaning of Christ-centeredness in contrast to all *mystifying* hermeneutical principles of his times. This point was so crucial to him that he ended up as an attacker of the Catholic Church.

Nevertheless, R. L. Hatchett, in his article “The Authority of the Bible” (2002), argues that Luther’s method of interpretation was not completely original because Luther followed the late-medieval call for the return to the literal meaning in doctrinal disputes (Hatchett, 2002: 199). What is even more thought-provoking in the ecumenical context is that, even though Luther supported a literal meaning of the Bible, this does not mean that he was always *literalistic*. In his treatise *How Christians Should Regard Moses* (1525) he speaks about *proper* interpretation of the Old Testament. He makes a distinction between the Word of God for me (one kind of application) and the other word of the Old Testament that is not personally applied. That is the reason we should not keep the Old Testament literally (like Radicals), says Luther (Luther, 2005: 130). This might be a reason for his rejection of all chiliastic movements of the radical reformation that applied “theocratic” or legal principles of the Old Testament. Luther definitely made a distinction between “Letter” (outer Word) and “Spirit” (inner Word) (Lohse, 1999: 190). Apart from christocentric or typological meaning of the Scripture Luther’s spiritual meaning might be a possibility of affirming the principle of *sensus plenior* (deeper sense) that today seems to have an ecumenical note. Raymond Brown, notable Catholic scholar, defines *sensus plenior* as

the additional deeper meaning, intended by God but not clearly intended by the human author, which is seen to exist in the words of a biblical text (or group of texts or even a whole book) when they are studied in the light of further revelation or development in the understanding of revelation (Brown R., 1955: 92).

In the light of this interpretation of the spiritual meaning of Scripture, we might find some elements in Luther’s hermeneutics that point to *sensus plenior*. The rejection of *quadrigena* does not make him, after all, completely literalistic.

Ultimately, in Luther’s hermeneutical task the following question becomes indispensable: if Scripture can be understood (clarity or perspicuity) and interpreted spiritually without the teaching office of the church (magisterium) which, according to Luther, very often contradicts itself what, then, is the criterion of its proper interpretation?

2.2.3.2 *Scripture Interprets Itself*

Those who presume to comprehend the sacred Scriptures and the law of God by their own natural capacity and to understand them by their own efforts, are making a grievous mistake. It is from this sort of attitude that heresies and impious dogmas arise, the moment men approach the Scriptures not as receptive pupils but as masters and experts (Luther, 1962: 127).

This is how Luther begins the task of recognizing the basic principle of scriptural interpretation. Absolute doubt in human reason and human effort, together with positive humility and awareness of our shortcomings in the understanding of the Word of God, are necessary rudiments for proper interpretation. A receptive spirit and humble mind and heart are prerequisites for appropriate explanations of the text. Commenting on Luther's art of interpreting Scripture, Pak says:

This virtue of humility is practiced in the reading of Scripture by the recognition that the parameters and basic content of Scripture have already been outlined by the divine author to guide faithful readings and delimit unfaithful readings. This is the next way in which the Christian is called to submit and surrender his or her own will and control in the faithful practice of reading Scripture (Pak, 2008: 88).

Luther, however, never advocated "individualistic isolation in Scripture interpretation". He was convinced that Scripture and church belong together. The difference with the Roman Catholic position is that the *determining factor* is not the individual's *teaching office* but *the self-authentication of the Scriptures* in utterances of faith (Lohse, 1999: 188). Even Augustine, as the pillar of Roman Catholic theology and Luther's spiritual teacher, believed that obscure passages of Scripture are to be explained by those which are clearer (Augustine, 1963: 351; 1947: 146; see section 4.4.2.1). The use of reason, in this context, is a dangerous practice. The infallible rule of the interpretation of Scripture is Scripture itself. Augustine's perspective on self-interpretation of the Scripture seems contrary to the idea that the Church is the infallible interpreter of Holy Scripture (Kerr, 1957: 69). This also makes Augustine an ecumenical theologian (see sections 7.3.1.1 and 7.3.2.1).

As a disciple of Augustine, Luther based his hermeneutics on the self-authentication of Scripture defined as the principle *sacra scriptura sui ipsius interpres* (Sacred Scripture interprets itself). Luther claims: "that by itself Scripture is most certain, most easy to understand, most clear, *its own interpreter*, testing, judging and illuminating everything by everything" (Luther, WA 7 quoted in Lohse, 1999: 190, italics mine). This foundational

thesis goes way beyond the methodology that involves work with a concordance, by means of which a particular scriptural passage is to be interpreted by other passages and must be brought into agreement with them. It refers specifically to the effect that the text has, with reference to the one who reads, hears, and interprets it. In this comprehensive sense the sentence *sacra scriptura sui ipsius interpretres* means: The text itself causes one to pay attention. It is not the interpreter who makes sense of the text or makes the text understandable. The text itself needs to say what it has to say for itself. In that case, the point concerning Holy Scripture that is frequently made, which regards Holy Scripture as the formal principle of Protestantism, finds easy resolution. For Luther, the authority or sufficiency of Scripture is not only material. Even Catholic mediaeval theologians accepted the content and material sufficiency of Scripture as the revelation of God. Lutheran Protestantism describes the Bible as materially sufficient, but it also views the Scriptures as formally sufficient. It is self-sufficient in its *interpretation* and it is *content driven*. The content of the Bible, therefore, becomes self-authenticated without any external, authoritative or rational/philosophical systems of interpretation.

Finally, speaking about the principle *scriptura sui ipsius interpretres* we must not forget that emphasis is not on the object of interpretation (the text of the Scripture) (although it is assumed) but on the authoritative subject of the interpretation (interpreter). As Westhelle brilliantly explains:

The common English translation is not precise and suggests that one should be using the scriptures *against* the scriptures in order to find the correct meaning. This is in fact a post-Enlightenment translation, which, although not completely wrong, misses the sharpness of the literal translation. It should literally be translated as "the scripture is in itself the interpreter." That the scripture interprets itself has the precise meaning that it is not interpreted, but is the interpreter itself (Westhelle, 2005: 378).

Thus, Luther confirms his insistence on *sola scriptura* by stressing the interpretive element of the principle: Scripture is its own interpreter (both as an object and the subject of interpretation). This self-sufficiency of the Bible is never devoid of the authority of the church in the process of interpretation (which is not infallible), but this authority, according to Luther, rests only on the clear recognition of the Holy Scripture as the specific and authoritative *received* gift of the Word of God. This is what *sola scriptura* means.

Luther's hermeneutics is anchored in one more element: Christ-centeredness of the Bible. How crucial it is for the understanding of his interpretative task?

2.2.3.3 *Christ as Midpoint of the Scriptures*

“There is no doubt that all the Scripture points to Christ alone”

“Take Christ out of Scripture and what more will you find in them?”

“All of Scripture everywhere deals only with Christ.”

“Christ is the king and lord of Scripture” (Luther quoted in Lazareth, 1989: 62).

These words of Luther unambiguously point to the centrality of Christ in the Holy Scriptures. During a sermon in 1515, Luther warned:

He who would read the Bible must simply take heed that he does not err, for the Scripture may permit itself to be stretched and led, but let no one lead it according to his own inclinations but let him lead it to the source, that is, the cross of Christ. Then he will surely strike the centre (Luther quoted in Monergism.com, 2009: 1).

Christ-centeredness is not only related to the Gospel as the essence of the message of the Word of God but to *all* biblical writings. In *What to Look For and Expect in the Gospels*, (1521) Luther emphatically states:

Christ in John 10 declares that he is the door by which one must enter, and whoever enters by him, to him the gatekeeper (the Holy Spirit) opens in order that he might find pasture and blessedness. *Thus it is ultimately true that the gospel itself is our guide and instructor in the Scriptures*, just as with this foreword I would gladly give instruction and point you to the gospel (Luther, 2005: 97, italics mine).

Therefore, Scripture is the living voice of the gospel (*viva vox evangelii*) (McKim, 1998: 218). Luther never read or interpreted Scripture apart from the living experience with Christ. Furthermore, in his *Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans* (1522), the Gospel in Romans is presented as bright light, almost sufficient to illuminate the entire Holy Scriptures (Luther, 2005: 99). This Gospel in Romans is, of course, *justification by faith* that has become the focal point of the interpretation of every text of the Scripture. Althaus rightly recognizes the real meaning of Luther’s Christ-centeredness of the Scripture. He says:

Scripture is always to be interpreted according to the analogy of Scripture. And this is nothing else than the analogy of the gospel. Christocentric interpretation for Luther thus means gospel-centered interpretation, understood in terms of the gospel of justification by faith alone...Thus if the text is opposed to Luther’s gospel-centered interpretation of Scripture, his interpretation becomes *gospel-centered criticism* of Scripture (Althaus, 1966: 79, 81).

Thomas W. Strieter, in his article “Luther’s View of Scripture” (1974: 93), calls this Luther’s criticism “*reductionism*” since it reduces the Scripture’s testimony to the Gospel of righteousness by faith. This is the basis of Luther’s tendency to undermine the importance of some biblical books like the Epistle of James.

Thompson, (1997: 375) correctly asks:

His particular insistence that the entire Scripture 'inculcates Christ (*Christum treiben*)' led him to new conclusions. Yet this actually raises other questions about his entire approach. Is Luther's identification of the centre of Scripture undermined by the way he marginalised parts which did not fit the pattern?

The answer would be: probably yes. Christ-centeredness is understood by Luther as gospel-centeredness at the expense of other teachings of the Scriptures, sanctification for example, that did not seem relevant or pointing to Christ/Cross directly.

However, Luther did not create a new canon of books. The argument over which books were to be canonical happened after Luther's death, as has been adequately shown. When Luther suggested that John, Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, and I Peter were the chief books of the New Testament, it was because they show Christ and teach you all that is necessary for you to know. Each book of the Bible has value, but in these books in particular, Luther *suggested* (for he left it to the "pious" reader to evaluate), the central message is clearly portrayed (Thomas, 2008: 149). Luther himself, therefore, did not create canon within canon. His gospel-centeredness led him only to recognize the specific Christ-centeredness in some of the books. Luther believed in *one testament* (will and promise) of Christ (McKim, 1998: 217). Luther's critiques try to point to his inconsistency in affirmation of *sola scriptura*. However, Luther remained faithful to *all* Scriptures though, in some of them, he did not recognize Christ-centeredness or Cross-centeredness.

Furthermore, the continuously christological perspective which Luther takes toward the Scripture resulted in what has come to be known as his *incarnational* understanding of the written Word. Rather than employing theological or philosophical terms to describe the christocentric dimension of the word, Luther consistently uses christological terminology. Luther drew deliberate parallels between Christ as the incarnation of God, and the Scripture as the incarnation of God as pertaining to His Word and will, between the Word made flesh and the Word written. Luther referred to God's Word in Scripture as *inlettered*, just as Christ, the eternal Word of God is *incarnate* in the garment of humanity (WA. 48.31). This is the final affirmation of Christ-likeness and Christ-centeredness of the Holy Scriptures. Scripture fully resembles Christ. Therefore, it cannot be separated from its focal point. Luther, hence, established the christological principle as the focal point of his hermeneutics. Hereby the *sola scriptura* principle represents the furtherance of the *solus Christus* principle. It also opens the ecumenical possibility of saving or liturgical Christ-

experience in the living Word (or tradition) beyond what is written in the Scriptures. Luther, however, did not go so far. For him, *only* the Bible is the perfect cradle of the holy Infant.

2.2.4 Concluding Remarks

In summing up Luther's principle of *sola scriptura* the comprehensive statement of Mark Thompson might be useful:

Luther was convinced that Scripture is the Word of God, inspired, coherent, intelligible, and sufficient, and as such it must always stand over and above all the words of men. He was also convinced that this Word is to be understood on its own terms, with the expectation that God has coherently and clearly communicated himself and his purposes in it. As he told the Diet of Worms: 'my conscience is captive to the Word of God (*capta conscientia in verbis Dei*)' (Thompson, 1997: 376).

Luther was so persuaded about the self-sufficiency of the Holy Scripture that his aim in writing books has become to throw such light on the Bible that people would finally leave his books and go back to the Bible itself (Miller, 1983: 111). The Scripture principle in theology of Martin Luther has some specific elements elaborated in this research. *Sola scriptura* is based first on the element of authority of the Bible as the Word of God above the authority of the church both in influence and content of faith (i.e., teachings). This does not undermine the reality of the Word as a transcending dynamic principle of the revealed and proclaimed Word of the Gospel of Christ. Secondly, the *sola scriptura* principle is based on the element of perspicuity of the Scriptures and its grammatical-historical meaning as a necessary precondition of self-interpretation of the Bible and its Christ-centeredness.

Historically, Luther stands as a spiritual and theological giant between medieval and protestant understandings of Scripture. His principle of *sola scriptura* represents a continuation of late medieval "reforming" theology and an introduction to Protestant orthodoxy. Today, however, he has become the focal point of reference for ecumenical theologians, both evangelical and Catholic, precisely because ecumenical interpretation of Luther opened the possibility of reinterpretation of the relationship between Scripture and tradition, or introducing the dynamic concept of the Word "beyond what is merely written". Moreover, Luther taught that the Spirit accomplishes His work *in the Church*. The Spirit-inspired Word of God and the Spirit-indwelt people of God must be distinguished, but they

cannot be artificially separated (Mathison, 2001: 100). Luther never propagated individualism or isolationism in the interpretation of the Scriptures. He only pointed to the apparent abuses of the scriptural authority, its nature and hermeneutical task in which Christ and his voice in Scripture transcends all religious authorities.

Luther was always relevant. His understanding of the Scripture and his preaching of the Bible was all the time based on the needs of the relevant audience. His relevancy continues today, for some thinkers agree that Luther, with his understanding of truth, human nature and God, could be described as postmodern (Kleinhans, 2000: 488-495). Respecting the legacy of this reformer's relevancy we hear today an urgent call for pertinent, postmodern, ecumenical understanding of Luther especially of his Scripture principle.

2.3 The Reformation and Its Theology of the Word

In this section of the research I will analyse two main representatives of the Swiss Reformation, Jean Calvin (1509-1563) and Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531), with specific reference to the Radical Reformation. Unlike Luther's theology of the Word that was more thoroughly investigated above, Calvin's theology of the Scriptures, Zwingli's view of the theology of the Word and the Radicals' view of the Scriptures will be examined only partially. Arguments about the dynamics of the revelation, authority of the Word of God, and interpretation of the Scriptures again will be the key elements of the *sola scriptura* principle investigated in this segment of the work.

2.3.1 Scripture in the Theology of John Calvin

2.3.1.1 Dynamics of revelation of the Word in the Theology of John Calvin

Calvin's doctrine of Scripture can be understood only against a background of his doctrine of *natural revelation* (Kantzer, 1957: 115). In his introduction of the famous *Institutes of Christian Religion* (1536) [1975] Calvin explains that the knowledge of God is based on the immediate response of *sense of divinity*. He states:

We lay it down as a position not to be controverted, that the human mind, even by *natural instinct, possesses some sense of Deity*. For that no man might shelter himself under the *pretext of ignorance*, God hath given to all some *apprehension of his existence*... *The memory of which he frequently and insensibly renews*, so that, as men universally know that there is a God, and that he is their Maker, they must be condemned by their own testimony, for not having worshipped him and consecrated their lives to his service (Institutes I, Book I, ch. iii, 1, italics mine).

This sense of divinity (*sensus divinitatis*), however, is sufficient only for the knowledge of God as the Creator. In order to know God as Redeemer a human being needs *special or supernatural revelation* (see Santrac, 2011:79-92). Natural revelation is not enough to lead sinners to repentance and regeneration and it can never provide a complete system of theology (Kantzer, 1957: 119). Calvin says: “Since the human mind, through its weakness, was altogether unable to come to God if not aided and upheld by his *sacred word*, it necessarily followed that all mankind, the Jews excepted, inasmuch as they sought God without the Word, were labouring under vanity and error.” (Institutes I, Book I, ch. vi, 3). Even knowledge of God as the Creator has to be enlightened and interpreted by the specific revelation of the Word of God.

Revelation of the Word of God is therefore necessary for salvation and for the knowledge of Christ and redemption. Unlike Luther, Calvin did not pay much attention to the distinction between the dynamic Word of God and specific written expression in the Holy Scriptures. It seems that he assumes the equation between the two. According to Calvin, the Scriptures are the very words of God (the Word of God) (Calvin, *Catholic Epistles*, 264 quoted in Kantzer, 1957: 149). Since God is the author of the Scriptures (Calvin believed in the inspiration process by dictation to the prophets) the Bible can be regarded as equivalent with the Word of God. Furthermore, in his commentaries there is an explicit claim that the Scriptures can be associated with the Word of God (Calvin, 1958: 83, 90). Although Calvin, therefore, probably assumed that there must be a difference between the revelation of the Word (proclaimed in the Gospel) and specific written expression of the Bible, he unequivocally stressed the authority of the Scriptures as the Word of God. Apparently, this has become the legacy of the reformed tradition (see Van Genderen and Velema, 2008: 58-63).

2.3.1.2 Authority of the Scriptures in the Theology of John Calvin

First and utmost is Calvin's confirmation of the authority of the Scriptures *above* the authority of the church. He says:

A most pernicious error has very generally prevailed; viz., that Scripture is of importance only in so far as conceded to it by the suffrage of the Church; as if the eternal and inviolable truth of God could depend on the will of men. With great insult to the Holy Spirit, it is asked, who can assure us that the Scriptures proceeded from God; who guarantee that they have come down safe and unimpaired to our times; who persuade us that this book is to be received with reverence, and that one expunged from the list, did not the Church regulate all these things with certainty? On the determination of the Church, therefore, it is said, depend both the reverence which is due to Scripture, and the books which are to be admitted into the canon (Institutes I, Book I, ch. vii, 1).

And he continues:

Nothing therefore can be more absurd than the fiction, that the power of judging Scripture is in the Church, and that on her nod its certainty depends. *When the Church receives it, and gives it the stamp of her authority, she does not make that authentic which was otherwise doubtful or controverted but, acknowledging it as the truth of God, she, as in duty bounds shows her reverence by an unhesitating assent* (Institutes I, Book I, ch. vii, 2, italics mine).

Calvin, therefore, clearly affirms that the authority of the Holy Scriptures does not have a *derived* authority from the church, but *independent* authority derived from God as the source of His truth and from the power of his revelation/Word. It is not only church's book, but God's book *given* to the church. The Church only acknowledges its divine origin and authority.

The authority of the church is not completely discarded, however. Calvin supports the importance of the consent of the church that preserved the Scriptures, as long as it is obedient to the Word, of course. In his words:

Add, moreover, that, for the best of reasons, *the consent of the Church is not without its weight*. For it is not to be accounted of no consequence, that, from the first publication of Scripture, so many ages have uniformly concurred in yielding obedience to it, and that, notwithstanding of the many extraordinary attempts which Satan and the whole world have made to oppress and overthrow it, or completely efface it from the memory of men, it has flourished like the palm tree and continued invincible (Institutes I, Book I, ch. viii, 12, italics mine).

By this Calvin also establishes that obedience to the Word puts the church in the safe position of the depositor of the true faith of Christ. By some means, tradition is "sifted". Calvin still gives to Councils and fathers "rank and honor" but he also puts them under Christ (Calvin quoted in Mathison, 2001: 117). As long as the Church listens to the Word

of God it remains secure in Christ. If it deviates from the origins of its existence it loses the essential qualities of God's church. Thereby Scripture becomes the final court of appeals. This is what *sola scriptura* truly means. If religion is based on Scripture, it is approved by God. If it is not based on Scripture, it is not approved by God. Calvin affirms this opposition between the Word of God and traditions:

This is how we can distinguish true religion from superstition: when the Word of God directs us, there is true religion; but when each man follows his own opinion, or when men join together to follow an opinion they hold in common, the result is always concocted superstition (Calvin, 1958, 78).

Therefore, "there is no true religion before God except it be formed according to the rule of the Word of God" (Kantzer, 1957: 155). Thus, Calvin unambiguously highlights the authority of the Scriptures *above* the authority of the church and *against* the authority of unreliable traditions.

God's Word in the Holy Scriptures, moreover, has its inner validation (self-validation) *only* through the principle of the *testimonium interim Spiritus Sancti* (internal testimony of the Holy Spirit). The inner or internal testimony of the Holy Spirit is a specific doctrine of Calvin. He explicitly states:

Let it therefore be held as fixed, that those who are inwardly taught by the Holy Spirit acquiesce implicitly in Scripture; *that Scripture carrying its own evidence along with it, deigns not to submit to proofs and arguments, but owes the full conviction with which we ought to receive it to the testimony of the Spirit.* Enlightened by him, we no longer believe, either on our own judgement or that of others, that the Scriptures are from God; but, in a way superior to human judgement, feel perfectly assured - as much so as if we beheld the divine image visibly impressed on it -that it came to us, by the instrumentality of men, from the very mouth of God (Institutes I, Book I, ch. vii, 5).

Therefore, *fides divina* or faith in the divine authenticity of the Scriptures is not natural to human beings. Its origin must be traced to the *direct intervention of God*. It is entirely the supernatural work of God (Kantzer, 1957: 128). Internal revelation of the Spirit of God bears witness to the external revelation of the Scriptures. The same Spirit who has spoken through the prophets must penetrate our hearts, Calvin exclaims, and sealed them with the "inward testimony of the Spirit" (Institutes I, Book I, ch. vii, 4; Book I, ch. ix, 2-3). The testimony of the Spirit is more excellent than all reason/argumentation (Frame, 1995: 232; for further research on the testimony of the Spirit see Sproul, 2005: 91-117). Scripture, therefore, for Calvin is "self-authenticated" (Spirit-authenticated) and its authority is not subject to proof or reasoning (Rogers & McKim, 1979: 104). Calvin's principle of inward illumination of the Spirit is also confirmed by the Westminster Confession of the Faith

(1646), 1:6: "Nevertheless, we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word" (for further research on the Confession see Mathison, 2001: 138-142). This has become the indispensable element of the Reformed theology of Scripture if the Protestant or evangelical tradition wants to preserve the *sola scriptura* principle in its original expression and strength.

Applying this foundational theological element of the authority of the Scriptures (*sola scriptura*) how did Calvin develop his hermeneutical principles?

2.3.1.3 Interpretation of the Scriptures in the Theology of John Calvin

In his first published commentary, *Commentary on Romans* (1539), Calvin remarks that the best virtues of commentators are "clarity and brevity." These virtues require the interpreter to aim for both transparency of exposition and focus. Having in mind the historical background of hermeneutics Calvin says: "Allegory is to be strictly excluded. When the purpose is to let the matter itself speak out in the exposition, there is no time for luxuriating in the wealth of problems that so many exegetes love, not for the sake of the text, but to draw attention to themselves" (Calvin, *Corpus Reformatorum*, 59.33 quoted in Biggs, 2007: 1). Calvin apparently, like Luther, insisted on the *literal* meaning of the Scriptures. In opposing Origen and allegorical interpretation, Calvin asserts:

Let us know that the true meaning of Scripture is the genuine and simple one [*germanus et simplex*], and let us embrace and hold it tightly. Let us...boldly set aside as deadly corruptions, those *fictitious expositions which lead us away from the literal sense* (Calvin, *Corpus Reformatorum*, 50.237 quoted in Biggs, 2007, my italics; see Institutes I, Book 4, ch. xvii, 22).

B.S. Childs suggests that "Calvin does not need to add a secondary or spiritual meaning to the text because the literal sense is its own witness to God's divine plan" (Childs, 1977: 87). The actual text transmits the divine message in its clarity and purity.

Calvin, father of modern historical-grammatical exegesis (McKim, 1998: 178), clearly rejects Origen's interpretation of the phrase "the letter kills". Calvin says:

This error (allegorization) became a source of much evil. It not only gave the licence for corrupting the true meaning of the Scripture, but also led to the notion that the more unprincipled the allegorizer, the more expert he was as an interpreter of the Scripture (Calvin, 1958: 108).

On the other side, Calvin's understanding of *spiritual meaning*, similar to Luther's, is the major part of biblical hermeneutics, especially in the Old Testament interpretation. In dealing with the Decalogue, Calvin raises the issue of extending the meaning of a law beyond its literal meaning. He states as a general principle, "The commandments and prohibitions always contain more than is expressed in words." But he seeks, "to temper this principle" so that it may not lead us "to twist Scripture." In other words, Calvin looks beyond the literal meaning of a passage to the author's goal (Institutes I, Book 2, ch. viii, 8 in Biggs, 2007). Furthermore, Calvin claimed that some Old Testament passages *might be allegorized* if there is no historical fulfilment of their prophecies (McKim, 1998: 176-177).

Also, Calvin criticized the argument by Catholic theologians that in 2 Pet 1, 20 Peter speaks of *private* interpretation as an obstacle to the Church's understanding of the Scriptures (Calvin, 1958: 88). Private interpretation is not always in opposition to the traditional understanding of the exegetical task. Calvin would affirm that private interpretation is never an obstacle to true hermeneutics because the Spirit testifies the truth of the Scripture is the interpreter of itself. Therefore, Spirit and Scripture itself become guarantees of the genuine understanding of the Bible. This understanding is always based on the principle of Christ-centeredness or Gospel-centeredness.

"By the Gospel," Calvin says, "I understand the clear manifestation of the mystery of Christ. I confess, indeed, that inasmuch as the term Gospel is applied by Paul to the doctrine of faith, (2 Tim. 4: 10,) it includes all the promises by which God reconciles men to himself, and which occur throughout the Law" (Institutes I, Book 2, ch ix, 2). This Gospel represents the focus and meaning of the Holy Scriptures. Calvin exclaims: "We must not look for the Word of God anywhere except in the preaching of the gospel" (Calvin, 1958: 83).

Calvin assumes that Christ cannot be properly known in any way than from the Scriptures; and if it be so, it follows that *we ought to read the Scriptures with the express design of finding Christ in them* (Calvin, 2012: verse 5:39). He concludes: "Progress in the Word of God goes with a right knowledge of Christ" (Calvin, 1958: 104). Calvin affirmed, therefore, that the Bible has no other purpose and that it cannot be interpreted by any other principle than as the communication that God had come in Jesus Christ (Rogers & McKim, 1979: 107). He believed in the Christ-centered *incarnational* interpretation of the Holy Scriptures.

Considering Calvin's "christocentric interpretation", "allegory" or any type of "spiritual interpretation" he clearly taught that allegory has nothing to do with Christ-centered interpretation (Biggs, 2007). Calvin made a sharp distinction between allegory and spiritual Christ-centered understanding of the Scriptures. Rejecting *quadriga*, Calvin retains spiritual meaning but it is either deeper understanding of the letter of the commandment or Christ-centered hidden meaning (typological or possibly *sensus plenior*).

Calvin, moreover, believed in the principle of accommodation (*accomodare*) that he learned from Latin rhetoricians. It is the process of fitting, adapting and adjusting language to the capacity of hearers. Therefore, Calvin was faithful to the tradition of the church fathers in this sense. The accommodation principle is the clue for the interpretation of the Bible because it provides proper understanding of God's relationship to humankind (Rogers & McKim, 1979: 98-99). Apart from this methodology, moreover, Calvin borrowed his theological ideas from church fathers (especially Augustine) and the idea of *sense of divinity* from Cicero and perhaps even Plato (Santrac, 2011: 14-15).

Calvin's understanding of the principle of *sola scriptura* is based, therefore, on unambiguous authority of the Bible over Church and Tradition, on self-authentication of the Scriptures by the testimony of the Holy Spirit, and on clarity, single meaning and Christ-centered spiritual interpretation of the Bible. Tempering the last principle there might be a prospect of ecumenical understanding of Calvin's *sola scriptura* based on deeper meaning(s) of the Scripture. This hermeneutical principle again might open the new vista for the ecumenical dialogue between the Reformed church and Roman Catholicism.

2.3.1.4 Differences between Luther and Calvin

Both Luther and Calvin, "like the ancient fathers before them, asserted the Scripture as the sole source of revelation and denied the existence of equally authoritative extra-scriptural revelation" (Mathison, 2001: 120). Having in mind the brief interpretation of the elements of the *sola scriptura* principle in Luther's and Calvin's theology, let us me make a comparison between them. Gerald Bray, in his article "Scripture and Tradition in Reformation Thought" (1995) states:

Where Luther had generally been content to purge the church of what he regarded as anti-Evangelical corruptions, Calvin wanted to build the church exclusively on the basis of what was taught in Scripture. This was basically the same principle as that of the Anabaptist ‘radicals’, though Calvin’s conclusions were not the same as theirs. It is probably easiest to picture him as trying to achieve a balance between the two Protestant tendencies. In the end, he can be said to have used the Anabaptist principle to obtain results much closer to those of the Lutherans (Bray, 1995: 164).

Calvin, was, therefore, more radical than Luther. He made a further step in reforming the church by promoting the exclusivity of the authority of the Scripture as the Word of God.

At the same time, paradoxically speaking, Calvin accepted some insights from pagan philosophers claiming that the “admirable light of truth was shining in them” (Institutes I, Book 2, ch. ii, 15). His concept of the sense of divinity was borrowed from Cicero, not the Holy Scriptures. We can affirm that, unlike Luther, Calvin was open to philosophy and tradition creating the concepts that belong more to the realm of Christian philosophy of humanism, than to the Bible only. Unlike Luther he did not despise the wisdom of the pagans in every sense and hereby became a *humanist reformer* faithful to the tradition of Christian humanism (Erasmus, Colet, Reuchlin, d’Etaples, Budaeus and Vives) in borrowing the ideas from ancient philosophers (Rogers & McKim, 1979: 89, 92).

This is the apparent paradox of Calvin’s thought. On one hand, he was a radical reformer claiming the supremacy of the Scripture and the ultimate rejection of all traditions. On the other hand he was under the heavy influence of tradition both in philosophy and theology. This last element of his theology/philosophy can substantially contribute to ecumenical understanding of the *sola scriptura* principle. Furthermore, for reformers such as Luther and Calvin, *sola scriptura*, therefore, was not an appeal to the neutrality of readers, as if we should read the Bible without theological pre-understandings. It was an appeal to the Bible as the primary source and final authority for one’s theological affirmations and traditions. This rule of faith is guidance for functional theology providing a general (and perhaps ecumenical) theological framework in which the Bible is read (Billings, 2010: 21-22).

2.3.2 Scripture in the Theology of Ulrich Zwingli

Regarding the *authority* of the Holy Scriptures, in his *Ten Theses of Bern* (1528) Zwingli clearly stated that the Bible is the Word of God, the voice of Christ Himself. Therefore, the Church of Christ makes no laws or commandments without God's Word. Hence all human traditions, which are called ecclesiastical commandments, are binding upon us only in so far as they are based on and commanded by God's Word (Zwingli cited in Rogers & McKim, 1979: 463). It is understandable that Zwingli supported the Lutheran and Calvinistic principle that Scriptures are the very words of God and that the principle of *sola scriptura* includes the final authority of the Scriptures above the church and human tradition. In his *Sixty-seven Articles* (1523) Zwingli claims that he is ready to be corrected and instructed, but *only* from the Scriptures (Zwingli cited in Rogers & McKim, 1979: 462). This principle of *Scripture only* reminds us of Luther's expression of faith at Worms where faithfulness to the Holy Scriptures was a condition for every theological debate or Christian practice.

Concerning the *interpretation* of the Scripture, in his sermon *The Clarity and Certainty of the Word of God* (1522) Zwingli clearly states that Scripture is *clear in itself* and that it can be understood "without *any* human instruction". This statement attributes the proper interpretation only to the Spirit of God (Zwingli cited in Hendrix, 2009: 44). The light of Christ is in the Scriptures and that light is *clarity itself* (2009: 45). If teachers teach their own thoughts they should be rejected; if they teach according to the Word of God it is not them who teach but God himself (2009: 46). Zwingli continues and says that the Word of God *interprets itself* and offers the correct understanding (2009: 47). At the end of the sermon, Zwingli offers some suggestions concerning how we could properly understand the Scriptures; these are summed up in one principle: the Word of God humbles us and demands the rejection of human doctrines (2009: 48-49). Zwingli, however, studied humanistic philosophy and Scholastic theology which probably impressed him much and might have produced bias in some of his interpretations. Nevertheless, he always claimed the Reformation principle of *sola scriptura* as unambiguously flowing from the Scriptures themselves.

Sola scriptura, according to the Swiss reformer, is primarily based, therefore, on the sole authority of the Scriptures as the revealed Word of God in contrast to human tradition,

and on the clarity and self-sufficiency of the Bible in the process of interpretation. However, Zwingli also follows Calvin in appropriation of the insights of pagan philosophers and thereby provides the ground for ecumenical discussion on the relationship between the Scripture and tradition. Again *prima scriptura* becomes one of the prerequisites for the ecumenical dialogue on Scripture.

2.3.3 The Radical Reformation and Scripture

Regarding the authority and interpretation of the Bible, the Radical Reformation, paradoxically, reflects the teachings of the chief reformers. The material authority of the Scripture was confirmed, although the content of radical theology and practice differed sometimes from the teachings of “the pillars” of the Reformation.

Thomas Müntzer (1489-1525), the German chiliast, claimed that the church cannot be infallible and it should be continuously edified by the Word of God and held free from error (Williams G. H., 1957: 50). The authority of the Scriptures is above the authority of the church as an institution. Conrad Grebel (c. 1498-1526) states that the divine Word is found only in pure and clear Scripture, and that we need to reject, hate and curse all devices, words, customs, and opinions of men (Williams G. H., 1957: 75). He confirmed, therefore, the authority of the Scriptures *above* human tradition. Michael Satler (c. 1490-1527), the martyr, claims that he was ready to recant his teaching if the opposers proved with the Holy Scriptures that he was wrong (Williams G. H., 1957: 142). This is a clear solicitation of the *sola scriptura* principle.

Speaking about the hermeneutics of the Radical Reformation, Balthasar Hubmaier (c. 1480-1528) stresses the importance of the primacy of the Word in the interpretation. Heresies are the result of the one who makes “patchwork of the Scriptures, not putting together the opposing Scriptures and uniting them both in final conclusion” (Williams, G. H., 1957: 115). One of the examples he uses is the interpretation of the double will of God. Luther claimed that God’s will has two dimensions: revealed will of God in the Scriptures and hidden mysterious will of God that predestines human beings for salvation (Althaus, 1966: 130-140). According to the preached Word of the Holy Scriptures he came to a different conclusion (Williams G. H., 1957: 133). Hubmaier unambiguously established the

principle of clarity and unity of the Scriptures, as well as the principle of Scripture interpreting Scripture.

Radicals, of course, in contrast to protestant reformers, believed that the Spirit *defined* the Word, rather than the Eternal Word (Word of God) recorded in Scripture (or tradition) defining and interpreting the Spirit as in their contemporaries (Williams G. H., 1957: 32). Emphasis on the Spirit in the Radical Reformation had a double function. First, Müntzer claimed: “He who has not the Spirit does not know how to say anything deeply about God, even if he had eaten through a hundred Bibles!” (Williams, G. H., 1957: 58). This principle of interpretation would be easily accepted by Reformers. However, Müntzer moves on and wants to say that the “inner Word heard in the depth of the soul through the revelation of God” (Romans 10, 8 and 20) is contrasted to the mere letter (Williams G. H., 1957: 58). These *private revelations and visions* worried the Reformers. Eric W. Gritsch in his volume *Thomas Müntzer: A Tragedy of Errors* (2000) claims that Müntzer and the Radicals “turned Luther’s theology upside down focusing on the subjective experience of the Holy Spirit rather than on the authority of external Word” (Gritsch, 2000: 126). It seems that the Radical Reformers deviated from the traditional protestant *sola scriptura* principle by rejecting final authority of the written expression of God’s revelation, i.e., the Word of God. The *Scripture only* principle was discarded not by the tradition of human opinions but by the ecstatic subjective experiences with the Holy Spirit (that very often contradicted the written revelation of the Spirit, i.e., Scripture). Keith Mathison claims that the Radical Reformers supported the position “Tradition 0”, namely that the interpretation of the Bible is “strictly individual matter” (Mathison, 2001: 128) without any historical interpretation or tradition, as it was the Reformers’ position (Tradition I).

However, Anabaptists (Radicals) did not devalue the Scripture by putting in its place a sole reliance on the Holy Spirit. Although they did emphasize the work of the Holy Spirit they upheld their high view of Scripture (McKim, 1985: 35). Agreements with the Reformers’ *sola scriptura* principle, therefore, would be: the authority of the Bible above the church, clarity of Scriptures, freedom from church structure in its interpretation and obedience to the Word of God. Disagreements would be: application of the Bible in public life, sharp distinction between Old and New Testaments, and revelation of the Word of God (as a broader principle than Scripture) to the individuals in the community (McKim, 1985: 36-37). This last element, interestingly enough, opens the possibility of ecumenical

dialogue between radical forms of reformation and Roman Catholic views on revelation as a broader principle than the principle of *Scripture only*.

In the following conversation with Protestant orthodoxy of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the *sola scriptura* principle will be reinterpreted and transformed.

2.4 Protestant Orthodoxy

Protestant orthodoxy covers the period following the period of the Reformation. Within the purpose of this study it does not seem necessary to investigate every Lutheran, Calvinist or Radical Reformation theologian. In addition, intention of this work is not to investigate every possible school of historical approach to the Scripture (liberal, fundamentalist, neo-orthodox, existential, process theology approach, narrative, liberationist or feminist) (see McKim, 1985: 38-153) although some of them will be brought up later when and if necessary. The emphasis of this study is on reformers and evangelical thinkers, not primarily on Protestant orthodoxy. However, in order to create the link between the Reformation and the Evangelical Scripture principle at least the position of Protestant Scholastic Theology will be closely examined. Therefore, in the first part only general principles of early European Protestant orthodoxy, concerning the *sola scriptura* principle, will be offered, and in the second part the objective is to find out the peculiarities of the *sola scriptura* principle in the work of some of the representatives of the so-called ‘Princeton school’ of rational protestant theology in United States, who paved the way for evangelical interpretation of the Scriptures.

2.4.1 Early Protestant Orthodoxy on Scripture

During the seventeenth century Protestantism developed a system of orthodox dogma that one accepted *intellectually*. This system brought about a “new scholasticism”, particularly among Lutherans in Germany, who became more interested in dogma than in expression of doctrine in practical life (Cairns, 1996: 375). Besides, the Reformed scholasticism of the seventeenth century endeavoured to systematize the teachings of the Reformers by casting it into a philosophical Aristotelian mould. Theology was structured as a logical

philosophical system. The knowledge of Thomas Aquinas' philosophy and its application was renewed. All Protestant orthodox thinkers in this first period claimed that *reason had at least equal standing* with faith in religious matters (Rogers & McKim, 1979: 186-7). This happened partially because of the influence of Counter-Reformation and partially because of the inclination of protestant orthodox thinkers to explore new hermeneutics based on philosophical systems. Regarding the principle of *Scripture only* James Spivey correctly recognized: "While giving tacit assent to *sola scriptura*, in fact these theologians developed a *neo-scholastic hermeneutic resembling Roman Catholic methodology*, except for protestant dogmatic presuppositions" (Spivey, 2002: 114, italics mine). It seems that history repeats itself. In the current hermeneutical trends both Protestant/evangelical and Catholic methodologies again find themselves transformed by the postmodern philosophical hermeneutical insights (see sections 3.3.6 & 3.3.10 for Evangelicals and 5.6.3.2 for Catholics). Hope in the ecumenical Scripture principle, paradoxically, lies in the endorsement of some philosophical assumptions in contemporary theology of the Bible.

Therefore, very early following the period of the Reformation, Protestantism started to redefine the *sola scriptura* principle on the basis of the new hermeneutical elements. The authority of the Scriptures, speaking from the perspective of the Reformers, was undermined with reason and philosophy. Regarding the interpretation of the Scriptures, the Bible was viewed as a *non-historical body of propositions* that offered material for the construction of a logical philosophical system (Rogers & McKim, 1979: 186). Moreover, verbal inspiration was emphasized because human authorship and historical contextualization were severely undermined. It seems that these theologians accepted divine inspiration at the expense of human contribution. This might have been the reason for a radical reaction of liberal theology that claimed the authentic understanding of the Scriptures.

Although the Synod of Dort (1648) accepted the canon of the Synod of Dordrecht (1618-1619), that "doctrine the Synod judges is to be drawn from the Word of God, and to be agreeable to the confession of the Reformed Churches," it has become universally accepted that the beginning of the seventeenth century including Dort gave expression to the development of *rational* Reformed scholasticism (Rogers & McKim, 1979: 188). Some representatives of the "new world" acknowledged rational orthodoxy inherited from their European predecessors.

2.4.2 Later Protestant Orthodoxy on Scripture

The so-called ‘Princeton theological school’ reflects some of the elements of Protestant orthodoxy and its understanding of the Holy Scriptures. Concerning the authority of the Bible one of the most notable representatives of this school, Charles Hodge (1797-1878), unambiguously states: “The infallibility and divine authority of the Scriptures are due to the fact that they are the Word of God, and they are the word of God because they were given by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost” (Hodge, 1985: 41). Therefore, Hodge affirms the Reformation principle that the authority of the Bible is based on its origin. However, at the same time Hodge says that Scripture has to be *critically* accepted. “In the inspiration process writers of the Scripture were infallible only pertaining to the religious matters as spokesmen of God, but not pertaining to the scientific, philosophical or historical matters” (1985: 44). Hodge denies inerrancy and thereby limits the authority of the Scriptures by a reasoning process that assesses the truth of the Scriptures. Interpretation of the Bible is based on clarity and the testimony of the Spirit. Hodge says:

If the Scriptures be a plain book, and the Spirit performs the functions of a teacher to all the children of God it follows inevitably that they must agree in all essential matters in their interpretation of the Bible. And from that fact it follows that for an individual Christian to dissent from the faith of the universal Church (i.e., the body of true believers), is tantamount to dissenting from the Scriptures themselves (Hodge, 1873 [2010], 1:184).

In similar language he adds:

It [the church] owes its whole authority to the fact that it is a common understanding of the written word, attained and preserved under that teaching of the Spirit, which secures to believers a competent knowledge of the plan of salvation therein revealed (Hodge, 1873 [2010], 1:116).

Therefore, faithful to the tradition of the Reformers Hodge stressed the *sola scriptura* principle on the basis of the authority and self-sufficiency of the Scriptures. For him, the Bible is “the only infallible and inspired Word of the living God, only the Scriptures can inherently bind the consciences of men” (Hodge quoted in Mathison, 2001: 146). Hodge would deny the intermediary role of the magisterium of the church in the validation or the interpretation of the Bible. It must not be overlooked, however, that his theology was also very rational. This means that he did accept possible historical interpretations of the Church (“Tradition I” position) and did not support “Tradition 0” position (Mathison, 2001: 145). Charles Hodge was under the influence of Hegelianism, Scottish realism and Thomas

Aquinas (Rogers & McKim, 1979: 274-298). For the Reformers, faith in Scripture and faith in Christ became inseparable aspects on one's personal trust in God. Hodge, however, separated these two experiences. First, we need to know the Scriptures through rational evidences and then we know Christ personally. This epistemological model of *understanding seeking faith or reason leads to faith* seems opposite to the Augustinian principle of *credo ut intelligam* (Rogers & McKim, 1979: 296; McKim, 1985: 70), though the outcome is the same. This departure from the Reformers opens the possibility of the creation of *systematic* theology as a philosophical discipline or as McKim puts it "the principle of Scripture as doctrine" (McKim, 1985, 69-70), and possibly the construction of a Protestant tradition that resembles the Roman Catholic concept of tradition and combines Holy Scripture with philosophical methodology and insights.

On the question: What is meant by saying that the Scriptures are the only infallible rule of faith and practice? Archibald Alexander (A.A.) Hodge (1823-1886), the son of Charles Hodge, would reply:

Whatever God teaches or commands is of sovereign authority. Whatever conveys to us an infallible knowledge of his teachings and commands is an infallible rule. The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the only organs through which, during the present dispensation, God conveys to us a knowledge of his will about what we are to believe concerning himself, and what duties he requires of us (Hodge, A.A., 1860: 1).

A.A. Hodge, furthermore, criticized the "Romish" theory that claimed that the rule of faith and practice consists of Scripture and tradition, or the oral teaching of Christ and his apostles, handed down through the Church. This theory holds that tradition teaches additional truth not contained in the Scriptures and that this tradition interprets Scripture (1860: 1) so that the Church has become the divinely constituted depository and judge of both Scripture and tradition. A.A. Hodge, therefore, is faithful to the Reformed tradition as he denies that church has the authority to validate and interpret the Holy Scriptures.

B.B. Warfield (1851-1921), the last of the great Princeton theologians, furthermore, claims:

The authority of the Scriptures rests on the simple fact that God's authoritative agents in founding the church gave them as authoritative to the church which they founded (Quoted in Rogers & McKim, 1979: 334).

The Bible is the infallible truth (1979: 334). Warfield confirms that the written account of the Scripture is the "very Word of God" (Warfield, 1948: 299). For him, "Scripture says" is the same as "God says" (Warfield, 1948: 348). Paradoxically speaking,

however, regarding the nature of the Word, unlike Luther and Calvin, he made a distinction between *incarnation* and *inscripturation* claiming that both are the divine Word, but Christ is the divine-human person while the Bible is *cooperation in performance of divine-human work* (Warfield quoted in Rogers & McKim, 1979: 337). This is a rejection of Luther's *incarnational* understanding of the Scriptures as a resemblance of Christ's *incarnation*. Obviously B.B. Warfield was emphasizing the human authorship of the Scriptures. However, he did not explain what would be the consequences of this theory for the authority and interpretation of the Scriptures. "Warfield gave full *formal* acknowledgement to the humanity of scripture, but he can justly be accused of failure to develop the implications of it" (Lane, 1986: 94).

Like Calvin, moreover, Warfield and Charles Hodge were under the influence of philosophy, like Scottish realism or Thomas Reid's Common Sense realism, that claims that "every person had ordinary experiences that provided intuitively certain assurance of (a) the existence of the self, (b) the existence of real objects that could be seen and felt; and (c) certain "first principles" upon which sound morality and religious beliefs could be established" (Cuneo and Woudenberg, 2004: 85). The Princeton theologians built their elaborate theological system on the basis of common-sense realism, Biblicism and confessionalism paving the way for the conservative evangelical theology. Therefore, Warfield could not claim that the authority of the Scriptures is based only on the Reformation principle of the internal testimony of the Spirit (Rogers & McKim, 1979: 331). He claimed that common sense *rational evidences* are an integral part of the working of the Spirit. Warfield leaned toward the theological-philosophical structure of Thomas Aquinas' thinking exactly the same way as Charles Hodge, because the Princeton school believed in the distinction between *natural revelation (reason)* and *special revelation (in Scripture)* (McKim, 1985, 65).

Protestant orthodoxy, to sum up, respected the legacy of the Reformation concerning the authority and interpretation of the Scriptures. However, it added to the Scripture principle a distinctive methodology and sometimes even content based on the rational philosophical systems of the time. Yet again, this perspective opens the possibility of ecumenical dialogue with Roman Catholicism on the Scripture principle.

2.5 Conclusion

Martin Luther, the giant of the Reformation, claimed that the *sola scriptura* principle is based on the elements of the authority of the self-validating Scriptures above the church and traditional teachings, the perspicuity and clarity of the Scriptures, as well as the self-interpretation of the Bible. Calvin added the principle of inward illumination of the Holy Spirit as an important prerequisite for spiritual interpretation. Both Calvin and Zwingli affirmed the Lutheran principle of *sola scriptura*. However, they were also Christian humanists who sometimes borrowed philosophical ideas or ideas of the church fathers in their construction of theological systems. The Radical Reformation emphasized the independent revelations of the Spirit as equally valid as the written Word, and Protestant rational orthodoxy claimed that the Scripture principle had to be understood within the context of rational evidences for its validation and interpretation as well as common sense realism.

It seems that hope for ecumenical dialogue on the Scripture principle between traditional Protestantism and Roman Catholicism lies in: (1) The understanding of the broader principle of the transcendent Word of God that goes beyond written Scriptures, (2) Interpretation of the Scripture that depends on 'protestant tradition', namely early church fathers (Augustine) and philosophical hermeneutics and/or external authorities and (3) Exploration of the meaning of *sensus plenior* or deeper spiritual meaning of the biblical text.

However, it does not seem adequate to talk about the probability of a joint ecumenical statement on Scripture between historical Protestantism and Catholicism. The considerable historical and theological breach has been made, and it takes some original determinations to move the ecumenical project forward. Contemporary ecumenical evangelical understandings of *sola scriptura* might contribute to this development in a more feasible way.

3.0 SOLA SCRIPTURA AND MODERN EVANGELICALISM

3.1 Introduction

The main objective of this chapter is to present the modern Evangelical position on the principle of *sola scriptura* having in mind two elements of the principle: (a) the scope of the authority of the Scripture within the particular debate about the nature of the Word of God and (b) hermeneutical principles for biblical interpretation. First of all, the issue of modification of the historical Protestant understanding of the *only Scripture* principle, presented in Chapter 2 of this research, will be expanded here by modern Evangelical theologians. Second, in conversation with the subsequent exploration of Roman Catholic traditional doctrine of Scripture (Chapter 4), basic tenets of evangelical understanding of the Bible will be presented. This will be very helpful in formulation of an ecumenical understanding of the principle of *sola scriptura*. Therefore, this chapter represents the theological-historical link between Chapters 2 and 4.

Dutch theologian Peter van Bemmelen, professor emeritus of theology at Andrews University, Michigan, brilliantly recognized the general and modern trend of the shift in Protestant theology regarding the understanding of the authority of Scripture and nature of tradition. He says:

Protestants are moving closer to the Catholic position. Even evangelical scholars have begun to put greater emphasis on the consensus and authority of Christian tradition. It seems that this inevitably must lead to a curtailment of the *sola scriptura* principle, which for many centuries was held to be a fundamental principle of Protestantism (Bemmelen, 2000, 52).

In addition, regarding hermeneutical principles, a notable evangelical scholar says: “Contemporary evangelical scholars widely differ from the hermeneutical emphasis in the writings of Reformers. Evangelical studies converge with non-evangelical [catholic?] studies in many ways” (Goldsworthy, 2007:191-192).

The required task of this chapter should be an investigation of feasibility of these theological observations. The *sola scriptura* principle seems to have undergone certain alterations during the post-Reformation and pre-evangelical period. Several examples will be mentioned followed by the exploration of twentieth century Evangelicalism. The focus will not be on a specific denomination but on several representatives who belong to diverse protestant traditions.

3.2 Pre-Evangelical Understanding of the Scripture Principle

John Wesley (1703-1791), father of Methodism, believed that the pathway to spiritual truth was threefold: Scripture, reason and experience. Actuality of the Christian experience is, therefore, based on Scripture, reason and Christian antiquity (Turner, 1957:174). As a continuation of Protestant orthodoxy it seems apparent that Methodism drifted from the original Reformers' principle of *Scripture only*. Reason and Tradition played equal roles in the theological and spiritual search for the ultimate truth of God. In this historical context it seems that this broadening of the Scripture principle brought a new understanding of revelation and the Word of God in general. If Scripture is not self-sufficient or if it is somehow limited for spiritual understanding of God, then a new condition appears in the theological understanding of revelation. Scripture ceased to be the focal point of God's revelatory activity. This is exactly what neo-orthodox theologians spoke about.

Traditional Reformers' theology of Scripture is primarily shaped and modified by the twentieth century neo-orthodox views of God's revelation. Emil Brunner (1889-1966) believed that the idea whereby the Word of God was equated with the words of Scripture goes back to a late Jewish innovation (Brunner in Jewett, 1957:212). The Bible is human word *about* God, not God *Himself* as He confronts me in Christ, His transcended Word (Brunner, 1964: 52). It is not personal but impersonal objective revelation. There is an abyss between human words and God's Word. The Bible is a human historical word about the divine *personal* Word (Brunner, 1964: 23), and for that reason it participates in the inadequacy and fallibility of all that is human (Brunner, 1964: 47-49; Jewett, 1957:216). Christianity, therefore, is not about "the words" but "the Word of God" (Brunner, 1958: 152). Scripture represents "*human* testimony about God" (Brunner, 1958: 155, italics mine). It appears that Brunner believes that the Bible bears record of revelational events. It is not revelation in itself (1958: 217-218). For neo-orthodoxy revelation is continuously a subjective experience. It is widely accepted that Brunner stressed the non-propositional nature of revelation and the non-identity of God's Word with the human words of the Bible (Grenz & Olson, 1992: 83, 81-86). Consequently, Brunner, as a neo-orthodox theologian, claimed that Jesus Christ is Himself the only ultimate revelation of God and *personal* Word of God (Brunner, 1964: 23) and as such the only true *meaning* of the Scriptures (Brunner,

1958: 152). The Bible is not the ground of Christian faith, but its means. “I do not believe that Jesus is the Christ because I believe the Bible. Because I believe in Christ, I believe in the Scriptures” says Brunner (Brunner quoted in Jewett, 1957:219). In other words, the Bible *becomes* the Word of God to me in the moment of revelation when I become “contemporaneous” with Christ (1958: 220). It has *only* instrumental authority, and it is closely related to historical encounter (On revelation and history see Goldingay, 1994: 299-313). If Brunner’s position is disapproved, from the perspective of traditional Protestantism, his theology is but a step further in the direction to say that God may reveal Himself apart from and even outside of the Bible. This might be a limitation of scriptural authority and self-sufficiency. Furthermore, Paul King Jewett, in his “Emil Brunner’s Doctrine of Scripture” (1957), asks a crucial question:

Though *we* may be bound to a given means, God is sovereign. Why should he be bound to means? Since the Bible is not itself God’s Word but only a means of revelation, who is to say that God could not speak through other means, other books? (Jewett, 1957:237)

Brunner would have replied that the Bible, so far as it is God’s Word *to us*, is not like other religious books (Brunner, 1958: 154). Nevertheless, post-Reformational *limitation* of scriptural authority, as the literal written Word of God, whether by reason, encounter or tradition is evident. The concept of the Word of God has been reformulated into a broader principle that encompasses revelation(s) of God beyond what is merely written in the Scriptures. Speaking in ecumenical terms, therefore, Brunner’s project of the encounter theology is a valuable input about Jesus Christ as the ultimate and personal Word of God that validates the witness of the Scriptures and gives meaning to the proclaimed Word.

Karl Barth (1886-1968), probably the most important Christian thinker of the twentieth century, similarly believed that the Bible was human testimony in which the voice of God could be heard. In as much as the Bible is proclaimed in the Church it becomes the Word of God (Barth, 1936: 136). The Word revealed and the Word proclaimed takes logical precedence. However, three forms of the Word of God (the Word as revelation, proclaimed Word and the written Word) should never be regarded in isolation (1936: 136) For Barth, Scripture is *the witness* to the revealed Word or divine revelation (Barth, 1956: 457, 462-463, 473, 479). In his own words:

The Bible, further, is not itself and in itself God’s past revelation and is God’s past revelation in the form of attestation. By really attesting revelation the Bible is the Word of God (Barth, 1936: 125).

Correctly understood this “attestation” (verification or testimony) is always related to a crucial agent of God’s revelation, personal Word of God through Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, though not revelation, Scripture might be called God’s written Word (Barth, 1936: 136; see Bromiley, 1995: 290). “By *becoming* the Word of God in virtue of the actuality of revelation, the Bible and proclamation are also the Word”, says Barth (Barth, 1936: 136, 131). Scripture, therefore, *becomes* the Word of God in revelational encounter within human existence, or more precisely “the being of the Bible as the Word of God, as Holy Scripture, is a *being in becoming*” (McCormack, 2004: 55-56). This is an apparent influence of existential philosophy. Barth unequivocally stated:

The Bible is the Word of God only as a means because again and again apart from human decision or initiative God *uses* the Scriptures to produce the miracle of faith in Jesus Christ (Barth quoted in Grenz & Olson, 1992: 71).

The witness of the Holy Scripture is in fact witness to Jesus Christ (Barth, 1956: 485). In the spirit of Luther Barth unequivocally affirms that the Bible is the Word of God as the genuine and supreme criterion of the proclamation and also of dogmatics (Barth, 1936: 302). In fact, Luther’s paradox of equation/distinction of the Word of God/revelation and the Holy Scriptures is partially endorsed.

According to Karl Barth, therefore, the Bible becomes God’s Word in dynamic subjective process of encounter with the divine. Again, a critique of Barth might be based on his devaluation of the Scripture to a secondary role in the process of God’s disclosure (Bromiley, 1995: 290). Placing Barth’s theology into an active ecumenical dialogue with Roman Catholicism there are a few remarks he made about the Word of God that might be alluring in this context. Barth affirmed:

Holy Scripture is the Word of God to the Church and for the Church. We will not be obedient to the Church but to the Word of God, and therefore in the true sense to the Church (Barth, 1956: 475).

In ecumenical terms, Barth, therefore, affirms the paradoxical tension between the authority of the Scriptures (the Word of God) and the authority of the Church. Obedience to the Word of God always comes first because it is the obedience to Christ as the revealed Word of God, but this obedience is, by its virtue of submission to the community that produced Scripture, obedience to the Church as well. This makes Barth completely ecumenical (see sections 7.3.1.1 & 7.3.2.1). Both the authority of the Word and the Church are preserved in

the dynamic and dialectic way. This is exactly what is needed in the feasible ecumenical joint statement on the Scripture principle.

In the same neo-orthodox terms some of the notable contemporary theologians like Wolfhart Pannenberg (1928-), a German theologian of revelation as history, emphasized that the Bible cannot be a deposit of divine revelation. Pannenberg affirmed that Scripture is the sourcebook of a specific tradition in relation to *history* of religions. Therefore, the doctrine of Scripture cannot any longer be the foundation of theological reflection. The authority of the Scripture is the goal and not the presupposition of theology (Grenz & Olson, 1992: 196). Pannenberg's theory of *revelation as history* is an apparent constraint on a traditional understanding of the *sola scriptura* principle. Scripture, according to evangelical tradition, is not just the inclusive part of God's revelation *as history* but an exclusive deposit and criterion of His special revelation *in history*.

Even C.S. Lewis (1898-1963), probably the most populist theologian of the twentieth century, did not see Scripture as God's Word proper but rather the vehicle that has been chosen and elevated above itself for this calling. In the spirit of Brunner he claims:

It is Christ himself, not the Bible, who is the true Word of God. The Bible, read in the right spirit and with the guidance of good teachers, will bring us to Him (C. S. Lewis, *Letters* quoted in Burson, 1998:127).

Scripture has only instrumental authority and represents the means through which God's *personal* Word speaks.

To sum up, even before modern Evangelicalism a curtailing of the *sola scriptura* principle has become evident. On the basis of the dynamic nature of revelation and the concept of the authority of the Word of God these renowned theologians claim that Scripture cannot be equated with the general revelation of the Word of God and that Scripture must be understood only in conjunction with experience of the encounter with God, the antiquity of church tradition or even constructions of human reason. Luther, as it is mentioned in Chapter 2, indeed made a theological distinction between the Word of God and the Holy Scripture but these theologians reject his paradoxical thought that in spite of this difference the Scripture remains the Word of God not only as a witness but also as the revelation of God. It seems clear, therefore, that conscious or unconscious ecumenical labours for unification of Protestant/Evangelical and Catholic positions on Scripture had started long before modern Evangelicalism.

3.3 Evangelical Theology of the Scripture Principle

Speaking about evangelical understanding of the Holy Scripture, first of all, evangelical thought has undergone a considerable evolutionary process. In this process varieties of evangelical understanding of the Scripture emerged. In hermeneutics, for example, there are different forms of evangelical hermeneutics: evangelical docetism, evangelical Zionism, evangelical Judaism, evangelical Bultmannism, evangelical Schleiermacherism, evangelical Catholicism, evangelical pluralism or evangelical pragmatism (Goldsworthy, 2007:167-180). In this research different notable representatives of evangelical views of the Scripture are situated in their historical context of the modern period. They are presented consecutively both in the historical sense and the theological sense of understanding of the *sola scriptura* principle. Prior to this investigation, it would be appropriate to highlight the unified evangelical understanding of the Bible, the so called “high view” of the Scriptures. Steve Lemke, in his article “The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture” (2002) succinctly summarizes this view in the following statements:

1. A high view of biblical inspiration affirms that all Scripture is true.
2. A high view of biblical inspiration presupposes a confessional stance (a hermeneutic of affirmation rather than a hermeneutic of suspicion).
3. A high view of biblical inspiration takes authorial intent seriously.
4. A high view of biblical inspiration makes good hermeneutics imperative.
5. A high view of biblical inspiration is careful not to impose modern standards of truth or accuracy which were unknown in that era and alien to the author’s purpose.
6. A high view of biblical inspiration, while acknowledging that there are phenomena in Scripture which appear inconsistent or inaccurate, affirms that these difficulties can be resolved.
7. A high view of biblical inspiration views the Bible as a divine/human book (Lemke, 2002:189-192).

Of course, as it will be discerned, among evangelical scholars there are many different minor deviations from some of these statements. However, this proposition of faith, namely the understanding of divine inspiration of the Bible, represents the foundational approach to the authority and interpretation of the Bible. Speaking about relationship between the high view of the inspiration of the Bible and the *sola scriptura* principle, the following comment would be very beneficial:

The issue of revelation and inspiration is assumed but does not define the *sola scriptura* principle because those who have a high view of Scripture still do not side with the *sola scriptura* and follow tradition. The reverse, however, is true, those that do not accept a high

view of the origin of Scripture do not hold *sola scriptura*, which means they accept tradition as a complement to Scripture more readily (Canale, 2011b, comment).

One more word before the presentation of the Scripture principle by various evangelical theologians; in this section of research the focal point will be on the key elements of each representative's view of the *sola scriptura* principle, that is, features that are pertinent to the ecumenical discussion that follows. These include investigation of the nature of revelation, the authority and the nature of the Word of God in relation to the Scriptures, and basic hermeneutical principles of biblical interpretation. Not every representative of evangelical doctrine of the Scripture speaks about all these elements. A systematic summary with concluding arguments on the principle of *sola scriptura* and its elements will be offered at the conclusion of the chapter.

3.3.1 Carl F.H. Henry

Father of modern evangelicalism, Carl F.H. Henry (1913-2003) waged battle against both liberalism and fundamentalism. Douglas Groothuis, professor of philosophy at Denver Seminary, emphasizes Henry's commitment to the supernatural origin and inspiration of the Holy Scripture:

Henry was properly scandalized that a supernatural worldview rooted in an inspired and inerrant Bible and grounded in a crucified and resurrected Lord of the universe would withdraw from the great matters of social justice and limit itself to personal salvation and codes of personal conduct (Groothuis, 2004: 1).

Henry was a Christian activist, and his engagement in culture is also based on the high-view of the revelation of God/ Scripture.

It is always accurate that the understanding of the whole cluster of concepts surrounding the Scripture principle requires the correct definition of revelation (Beegle, 1983: 87). Henry, known for his magnum opus *God, Revelation and Authority* (1999), starts the discussion on the Scripture principle with the notion of revelation of God and its relation to human understanding. He says:

Divine revelation is the source of all truth, the truth of Christianity included; reason is the instrument for recognizing it; Scripture is its verifying principle' logical consistency is a negative test for truth and coherence a subordinate test. The task of Christian theology is to exhibit the content of biblical revelation as an orderly whole (Henry, 1999:1.215)

Revelation, therefore, according to Henry is objective, propositional, conceptual, rational, intelligible and coherent (Grenz & Olson, 1992: 292-293). The Bible *inscripturates*

divinely revealed truth in verbal form, but Henry rejected inerrancy in its strictest form (Grenz & Olson, 1992: 294).

In his less prominent but chief article for the discussion here, “Divine Revelation and the Bible” (1957), Carl F.H. Henry extensively treats the topic of the relationship between God’s revelation and the Scriptures.

The terms “revelation” and “Scripture” assuredly are not synonymous. No era of Christian thought has made the egregious error of equating them absolutely, although modern opponents of historic Christianity frequently gain sympathy for their low views of the Bible by imputing excessive and obviously objectionable claims to the theological tradition. When Christianity speaks of the Word of God, it designates not only the *rhema theou*, the spoken and written word of God in the grammatical sense, but also *logos theou*, the personal Word, or the speaking Logos, the agent in creation and the supreme revelation of God incarnate (Henry, 1957:254).

The category of revelation is, therefore, broader than the category of the spoken and written words of Scripture since it covers special historic events which the Bible normatively interprets, including the incarnation. Henry (1957:255) indicates that special revelation is broader than the Bible in an added sense. He apparently leans toward the neo-orthodox position claiming that “The Bible is indispensable *witness* to special redemptive revelation” (Henry, 1957:258). In the following statement he seems to discard both liberal and conservative evangelical positions on the Scripture principle by emphasizing that the Bible is a witness of God’s revelation:

Contrary to liberal theology the Bible is not simply the highest form of general divine revelation, but *witnesses to a special divine revelation*. Contrary to evangelical theology, the canon of Scripture is based not on the unique inspiration of chosen writers, but is a human collection bearing a *unique witness* to special or redemptive revelation and distinguished by the chronological priority attaching to the prophetic and apostolic testimony (Henry, 1957:259, italics mine).

Henry tries to avoid extremes of liberalism and fundamentalism. He finally concludes that “no identity exists between the Bible and its written form of words and sentences and special divine revelation. *To identify the Scriptures with revelation is, in the framework of this thought, to commit idolatry and is to regard the Bible assertedly a fallible human product, as a paper Pope*” (Henry, 1957: 259, italics mine). Authority does not reside only in the Book but in the dynamic acts of God. “Special revelation is a continuing process, not a completed product identical with the Bible”, concludes Henry (1957: 260). On the other hand, Carl Henry seems to equate the Holy Scriptures with the Word of God. He accepts the Lutheran paradox equating Scripture with revelation:

The Bible is no mere record of revelation, but is itself revelation. Revelation is *inscripturated*. Scripture is a mode of divine disclosure, a special written form of revelation (Henry, 1957:256).

It is true, nevertheless, that this equation is mentioned more in the context of discussion of the difference between human reasoning and philosophy on one side and revelation on the other (Henry, 1990: ch 2). Statements of this kind are not always made in the context of discussion on relationship between revelation and the Scripture. It is, however, clear that Henry believes that the Scripture “conveys divine revelation as a logically interconnected content, as the Word of God” (Henry, 1999: 2:74). Eventually, though the Scriptures are the Word of God Henry affirms that the ultimate specific revelation is Jesus Christ as the Word of God (1999: 2:87). There is no discrepancy here because each revelation is “an indispensable and individual facet of God’s comprehensive disclosure” (1999: 2:88).

Concerning hermeneutical principles Henry calls for evangelical hermeneutics that is based on presuppositions of transcendent revelation (presuppositionalism) (see Goldsworthy, 2007:183-184, 52). He truly belongs to the Lutheran tradition of interpretation trying to avoid philosophical hermeneutical principles of immanent human philosophy and tradition.

Speaking about Scripture, therefore, Carl F.H. Henry’s main contribution is faithfulness to the Lutheran paradox of distinction/equation of the Word of God and Scriptures. He also consciously leans toward a neo-orthodox solution of this paradox. The *sola scriptura* principle is, therefore, modified by the new insights on revelation but again affirmed in the biblical hermeneutical principles.

3.3.2 Bernard Ramm

Described as an “irenic evangelist” (Grenz & Olson, 1992: 300), Bernard Ramm (1916-1992), in contrast to Carl F.H. Henry, tries to think evangelical theology beyond the Enlightenment or Rationalism with relation to contemporary issues and with intellectual integrity (1992: 299). As a modern/postmodern evangelical theologian Ramm does not see any conflict or contradictions between science and the Bible (1992: 304). He devoted his life to the defence of the Word of God claiming in his *Protestant Christian Evidences* (1953):

A thousand times over, the death knell of the Bible has been sounded, the funeral procession formed, the inscription cut on the tombstone, and committal read. But somehow the corpse never stays put. No other book has been so chopped, knifed, sifted, scrutinized, and vilified. What book on philosophy or religion or psychology or belles lettres of classical or modern times has been subject to such a mass attack as the Bible? With such venom and skepticism? With such thoroughness and erudition? Upon every chapter, line and tenet (Ramm, 1953: 22).

Regarding the authority of the Holy Scripture, in his *Special Revelation and the Word of God*, (1961) Bernard Ramm explains the ultimate authority of the Scriptures above the church.

If the Word of God is the truth of God addressed by God magisterially to the Church, *how can the church hear this magisterial word if she seeks in every way to control it*...Protestant suspicion is that the Roman Catholic Church is answerable *only* to herself, and if this is the case correction by the word of God is ruled out in principle even though in practice reforms may and do come (Ramm, 1968: 174-175).

According to this remark it seems that there is no hope for an ecumenical understanding of the *sola scriptura* principle because Roman Catholics always situate church above the Scriptures. However, when he speaks about the authority of the Scriptures in relation to the Word of God or revelation there might be some avenues of common understanding of the tradition principle. In his *Pattern for Religious Authority* (1959) Ramm makes a distinction between imperial authority (God Himself), delegated authority (Bible/prophets) and veracious authority (Bible/prophets). The Scriptures have derived or delegated and veracious authority coming from God's imperial authority. Indeed, Miller correctly noticed: "The problem of authority of the Bible is the problem of authority of God over humanity" (Miller, 1983: 115).

Ramm, furthermore, defined the pattern of authority of the Bible: the objective Word, the written Scripture, together with subjective word, the inner illumination and conviction of the Holy Spirit constitutes the authority for the Christian (Ramm quoted in Erickson, 1996: 251). Ramm, nevertheless, argues:

Final authority lies neither in the book itself nor in the Spirit but in the revelation Jesus Christ to which the Bible *witnesses* as the Spirit *effects* illumination (Ramm, 1960: 62-65, italics mine; see Grenz & Olson, 1992: 306).

This Scripture principle based on the revelation of Jesus Christ seems to be based on the neo-orthodox encounter principle. Ramm fully accepted Barth's position in his work *Beyond Fundamentalism* (1983). Therefore, Christology was the interest of Ramm especially because Christ is the midpoint of the Scriptures. His conclusion is that the

inspiration of the Scriptures cannot be separated from Christ-centeredness of the Scripture (Ramm, 1968: 117).

However, the question still remains: Is Scripture revelation? Ramm explains that Scripture is the central core of revelation, representative segments of revelation and redemptive line of revelation. Special revelation is longer and wider than Scripture, but Scripture is the heart of special revelation (Ramm, 1968: 169). Apparently, Ramm reflects Carl Henry's doctrine of revelation. On the other hand, he seems to affirm the equation of the Word of God and the Scriptures: "The mind of God is so intimately associated with the *graphe*, that 'God says' can be replaced with the synonymous expression '*graphe* says' " (1968: 166). He continues: "So the word of God once uttered continues as the efficacious word of God by virtue of the magisterial authority of the Speaker" (1968: 150). Ramm obviously accepted that "special revelation *as form* is the word of God" (1968: 147). But then again, there is also an *oral form* of the Word of God in apostolic preaching and apostolic tradition (1968: 147). Consequently, Ramm, at the same time, condemns idolatry of "paper Pope" or in his term "bibliolatry" (1968: 121), and "magical use" of Scripture (1968: 147). The former may be applied to Protestant traditional adoration of the Scripture principle and the latter may be applied to Roman Catholic sacramentalism in Scripture liturgical reading.

The hermeneutics of Bernard Ramm is based on foundational principles of the Reformation. Ramm speaks about the clarity of the Scriptures (a basic hermeneutical principle) only in the context of analogy or unity of the Scriptures (Ramm quoted in Goldsworthy, 2007:196-197). In his *Protestant Biblical Interpretation: A Textbook of Hermeneutics* (1970), following an affirmation of the historical position on biblical interpretation and the basis of inspiration, Ramm says that the Protestant method of interpreting the Holy Scriptures is based on certain *theological* convictions (Ramm, 1970: 97). He says: "Scripture as the Word of God means that interpretation must be seen in a theological context" (1970: 97). Bernard Ramm did not reject the concept of tradition and its role in hermeneutical task. In the spirit of Luther Ramm affirms the clarity of the Scriptures as a presupposition for correct interpretation (1970: 98). Unlike Catholic magisterium that claims to possess the Spirit of Christ and the mind of the Spirit, Ramm affirms the principle that *Scripture interprets Scripture* (Ramm, 1970: 104). Ramm also rejects allegorization on the basis of the unity of the Scriptures and priority of the literal

exegesis (1970: 111, 124). On the other hand, he also denies “letterism” or mechanical literalism as the only approach to interpretation and confirms that literal interpretation is just a starting point for some layers of meaning (1970: 121). These layers are, in fact, *typological elements in the Scripture*. Typology is the key of the spiritual interpretation of the Scriptures. Typology, says Ramm, is

specifically the interpretation of the Old Testament based on the fundamental theological unity of the two Testaments whereby something in the Old shadows, prefigures, or adumbrates something in the New (Ramm, 1970: 223).

It does not mean, however, that these typological “strata of meaning” call for our allegorical imagination based on non-biblical ideas (1970: 125). The theologian must not extend his doctrines beyond the Scriptural evidence and he must handle it correctly with intelligence and care (1970: 171). Only what is taught in Scripture is *directly* binding to conscience, concludes Ramm (1970: 178).

To sum up Ramm’s position on Scripture, he remained faithful to the basic tenets of the Reformation. Nevertheless, with the neo-orthodox theory of revelation as a broader concept and a hermeneutical search for deeper meaning there might be a potential openness to the ecumenical understanding of revelation and hermeneutics. However, for younger generations of ecumenical evangelical theologians, who wish to see the radical transformation of the *sola scriptura* principle, he did not move far enough (Grenz & Olson, 1992: 309).

3.3.3 J.I. Packer

James I. Packer (1926-) from Regent College, Vancouver, is one of the most influential evangelical theologians in North America. Regarding the authority of the Bible he warned that we live in the modern *secularized* period where the Scriptures have become “burdensome extra” (Packer, 1977: 9). The authority of the Bible is a universal question (Packer, 2003: 7). He explains that there is a hundred years of conflict about the Bible within Protestantism. His solution might be described as openness in orthodoxy.

According to Packer’s observation of the history of the Scripture principle, first the problem of *inerrancy* appeared, and then the problem of *revelation*—the method of God’s communication, now the central interest is *interpretation* (Packer, 1977: 10). Revelation,

authority and interpretation are the elements of the *sola scriptura* principle that are indispensable in this research. Packer, therefore, becomes a very relevant figure.

Without any doubt, Packer's theology is based on his "high view of Scriptures" (Packer, 2003: 24). Regarding the authority of the Scriptures and its relationship to the church and tradition Packer affirms:

that the Holy Scriptures are to be received as the authoritative Word of God....We deny that the Scriptures receive their authority from the Church, tradition or any other human source (Packer, 1979: 144).

He continues to confirm that the Bible is the "decisive" authority (Packer, 2003: 29). Packer stresses that the Scripture is the Word of God and the "final authority for all matters of Christian faith and practice" (Packer, 1958: 75). He claims that in the Roman Catholic Church authority over the Scriptures for its interpretation is given through "ecclesiastical tradition and conviction" (Packer, 2003: 29). Catholics say that we come to the conclusion that the Bible is the rule of faith (*regula fidei*) not by simply comparing Scripture with Scripture (Packer, 1979: 116). In order to save the Protestant principle of the authority of the Bible Packer confirms that only Scripture itself can judge the doctrine of Scripture (Packer, 1958: 76). Following this discussion, in the context of the inerrancy debate Packer claims that Roman Catholics really do not need any position because the interpreter of the Scripture is the infallible church (Packer, 1979: 76). However, Packer rejects both Roman Catholic and Protestant (Orthodox) perspectives claiming that "the Scripture is both clear and sufficient; that the God given Scriptures are the self-interpreting, self-contained rule of Christian faith and life in every age" (Packer, 1978:64). Packer, however, is not clear on infallibility (Packer, 2003: 29) or inerrancy (House, 2009: 1864).

One thing is certain: Packer claims that the Bible has been rejected as the Word of God. He criticizes "mesmerism of rational criticism" as the major movement contributing to the accepted belief that the Bible is not the Word of God (2003: 21-22). According to Packer, Protestant theologians actually have become obsessed with the historical-critical method undermining the authority and the supernatural nature of the Scriptures. Edgar Krentz, for example, in his *Historical-Critical Method* (1975) argues that this method is

the child of the Enlightenment... historical criticism has led to a gap between historical and theological understanding, for it seeks to understand all historical materials by reason and expects to arrive at truth (Krentz, 1975: 85).

Consequently, searching for the “historical integrity of the text” historical-critical method undermined the concept of divine inspiration of the Bible and, in addition, theological interpretation of the Scriptures. Packer fought fiercely against this trend.

What is Packer’s view on the relationship between the revelation of God and the Scriptures? Similar to Carl F.H. Henry Packer affirms that the basic principles of revelation in the Bible are (1) objectivity or “there-ness” of God’s instruction in the Scriptures and the rationality of the method of deciphering and applying it (2003: 21-22). Packer also defends propositional revelation. Dewey M. Beegle, in his article “The Biblical Concept of Revelation” (1983) contends for the propositional revelation and inductive method in Packer’s terms:

The proper use of the inductive method demands the observation of the theological presuppositions and claims of the Scripture along with the data that fit into the so called scientific category of human, non-theological history. However, we do need inductive method because we need to correct traditions where they have misinterpreted passages in the Bible (Beegle, 1983: 90-92).

Since Packer fought against all heterodoxy he endorses the idea that knowledge of God is both conceptual (propositional revelation) and relational (encounter revelation) (Packer, 1978: 64). Criticism of the liberal Protestant views of revelation defined in the spirit of community rather than in the ancient book, namely Christology from below, has been strongly endorsed by J.I. Packer. He also repudiates the neo-orthodox views of Barth and Brunner who claim that the Bible is the means whereby the event of revelation takes place (1978: 72; House, 2009: 1866). Holy Scripture is not just a *witness* of Christ’s reign; it is its *instrument* (Packer, 2003: 23). Packer poses valid questions:

If the relation between Scripture and revelation is not one of identity, what is it? And how, in detail, are we to distil God’s revelation from the total contents of the Bible? (Packer, 1979: 27).

Unlike Carl F.H. Henry, James Packer did not accept Luther’s paradox of equation/distinction of the Word of God/revelation and the Holy Scriptures. He apparently opted for equation as the safest way of keeping the authority of the Scriptures as the Word of God. In fact, for Packer, the words of human authors are the words of God (Packer, 1958: 81, 87). Christ’s incarnation is not a perfect analogy of “inscripturation” of the Bible (1958: 83-84), but still the Bible does not lose its identity of the Word of God because of its human authorship. Scripture is not a human testimony about God, it is rather “God’s written testimony of Himself” (1958: 87).

Together with Thomas Oden, Packer wrote a manifest of biblical authority based on the *Chicago Statement* (1978). Packer claims that evangelical belief includes this affirmation:

We affirm that the written Word in its entirety is revelation given by God. We deny that the Bible is merely a witness of revelation, or only becomes revelation in encounter, or depends on the responses of men for its validity (Packer & Oden, 2004:45).

Packer noticed that the *sola scriptura* principle is *the* essence of the Reformation and “the essential motivation and concern” (Packer quoted in Sproul, 1979: 111). R.C. Sproul thinks that Packer does not claim *sola scriptura* in the same way in which he claims that *sola fide* is the essence of Christianity and necessary for salvation (1979: 111). This seems to be a reinterpretation of Packer who never repudiated the orthodox teaching of *sola scriptura* in spite of his contribution to the ecumenical movement recent years. It must not be overlooked that he is also one of the contributors to the document *Evangelicals and Catholics Together* (1994). He does believe in an ecumenical approach even to the doctrine of Scripture.

Regarding the hermeneutical principles of the Scriptures Packer did not accept anything besides biblical principles of interpretation. This means that evangelical hermeneutics must be clearly distinguished from liberal or even neo-orthodox hermeneutical positions (House, 2009: 1865). Subjective interpretations are the inevitable result of neo-orthodox hermeneutics, claims Packer (House, 2009: 1865). Therefore, the infallibility of the sacred Scriptures does not guarantee the infallibility of its interpreters (Packer, 1958: 96). The Bible should be the complex organism that “interprets itself” (1958: 94). Self-interpretation is Packer’s defence against the new tide of philosophical hermeneutics in Evangelicalism. Through the *Chicago Statement* Packer confirms his belief in historical-grammatical exegesis and denies dehistoricizing and relativizing the Scriptures (Packer & Oden, 2004: 54-55).

For a minority of evangelical authors the future security of evangelical theology may rest securely only on a high view of the Scriptures expounded by James I. Packer (House, 2009: 1868-1869). Francis Schaeffer, as one of them, seems to affirm that the Bible is the holy and inspired Word of God and that this is the foundation of vital Christianity (Schaeffer, 1978:15-19) Scripture, he claims, is the central core of consistent evangelicalism (Schaeffer quoted in Sproul, 1979:112). Unquestionably, J. I. Packer belongs to this branch of evangelicalism.

In the following section contributions of some contemporary Dutch theologians will be presented and evaluated.

3.3.4 Berkouwer, Riderboss and Contemporary Dutch Theology

Gerrit Cornelis Berkouwer (1903-1996), a leading Dutch evangelical theologian and very influential author in the United States, chair of systematic theology at Free University, Amsterdam, wrote a series of publication *Studies in Dogmatics* (1975). One of the books in the series, *Holy Scripture* (1975), deals with the nature of the Bible. It is a vivid exposition of all aspects of Scripture. The focus here is on Berkouwer's stance on nature, authority and hermeneutics of the Scriptures. In the Introduction he claims:

There can be no doubt that for a long time in church history certainty of faith was specifically linked to the trustworthiness of the Scripture as the Word of God (Berkouwer, 1975: 11).

Regarding the authority of the Bible, Berkouwer states: "No one can accept the Scriptures *because* the church testifies that it is the Word of God" (1975: 11). The Bible is not validated by the authority of the Church. It is authenticated by its own authority as the Word of God. The authority of Scriptures is unambiguously grounded in *Deus dixit* (God has spoken) in the human words of the Bible (1975: 143). Berkouwer, therefore, stresses that the Scripture is the *vox Dei* (voice of God) and the trustworthy Word of God (1975: 12).

Consequently, all historical-critical method is a delusion without any hope (1975: 15). This does not mean, however, that Scripture as a human word cannot be examined and investigated (1975: 20). The scientific approach to the Scriptures even becomes our duty because the Word was given in human words (1975: 365). Fundamentalism should be rejected because in its eagerness to keep the divinity of Scriptures it denies the human apostolic testimony (1975: 22).

In the context of discussion on inspiration and nature of the Scripture Berkouwer also accepts Calvin's inward testimony of the Holy Spirit as a principle of understanding the Scriptures (1975: 41). *Testimonium Spiritus Sancti* has recently become, however, "the Achilles' heel of the Protestant system" (Strauss quoted in Berkouwer, 1983: 179). The reason for this is the recent emphasis on tradition of the Church as a validating interpreting

agent of Scripture. Although this inner testimony seems indefensible it is actually a sign of power and triumph of the Spirit in the world (Berkouwer, 1983: 179).

On the other hand, it seems that Berkouwer, together with Ebeling, accepts the denial of equality of the Word of God and the Holy Scripture (1975: 332) putting the emphasis on the oral proclamation of Christ as the Word of God. The written Word is the norm against human traditions but it has a derived authority from the oral Word of God. Berkouwer offers some biblical evidences to support this difference (1975: 334; see sections 6.2.3 & 6.3.3). However, unlike neo-orthodoxy and in the spirit of Luther, Berkouwer claims that Scripture cannot become the Word of God only by its use, for that would be a form of transubstantiation (1975: 317). The Word of God is not only a sacramental and liturgical means of salvation, it is primarily the authoritative norm of oral tradition.

Following his discussion on inspiration and canonicity of the Scriptures, Berkouwer deals with their authority and interpretation (Berkouwer, 1975: 105). In Berkouwer's hermeneutics of Scripture the Lutheran idea of *perspicuity of Scriptures* is affirmed (1975: 296). Scripture should be interpreted with Scripture precisely because of its clarity (1975: 279). Hermeneutically speaking he warns against the prejudice of so called dogmatic exegesis that might endanger the *sola scriptura* principle (1975: 117). I agree with Berkouwer that it is not easy to spot when and where we use dogmatic exegesis in the interpretation of the text instead of biblical exegesis. Conscious acceptance of dogmatic exegesis represents Roman Catholic tradition as a valid source of the revelation of God (Berkouwer, 1975: 117). However, the fact is that we always approach the text with pre-understandings and real hermeneutics springs out of *relationship* between our life and the text, concludes Berkouwer his hermeneutical vision (1975: 118).

Francis Schaeffer has an insightful comment on the difficulty of presuppositions and conscious evaluation and assessment of our assumptions:

Many people catch the presuppositions like some children catch measles. They have no idea where they come from. *But that is not the way the thinker chooses his presuppositions. His presuppositions are selected on the basis of which presuppositions fit what is; that is, what presuppositions give solid answers concerning what is.* It is only the Christian presuppositions which explain what is—in regard to the universe and in regard to man (Schaeffer, 1970:31, italics mine; see also Goldsworthy, 2007:52).

Berkouwer endorses the “presuppositional” hermeneutics what makes him ecumenical since Roman Catholic Church does speak about the conscious effort to remain within the

assumptions of the tradition which offers solid answers in regard to Christian deposit of faith.

Nature and interpretations of Scriptures are so complex that Berkouwer very often uses the expression “mystery of the Scriptures” (Berkouwer, 1975: 366) to describe the Bible. He is also using this expression to present the strong tension between objectivity and subjectivity in the interpretation of the Bible. “It is possible to malign the Scriptures without realizing its dimensions...losing contact with the mystery” (1975: 363).

It seems apparent in this brief assessment of Berkouwer’s theology of the Scripture that this Dutch theologian remained faithful to the basic Lutheran structure of the Scripture principle with the possibility of openness to ecumenical broadening of the Word of God as tradition of the church. His determination to view Scripture as a mystery might provide the background for the spiritual meaning of the Bible (*sensus plenior*) as well. Berkouwer’s Lutheran foundations are also confirmed by Carl W. Bogue in his essay *Berkouwer: A Hole in the Dike* (2011):

A fundamental impression that emerges from Berkouwer’s writings is that he seeks to be in subjection to the Word of God. Theology is “relevant” only when it is “relative to the Word of God.” “...Theology is occupied in continuous attentive and obedient listening to the Word of God.” Because God’s love in Jesus Christ is revealed in Scripture, “beyond the word of Scripture we dare not go.” The English translation adds, “There is nothing beyond that.” That sentence is not in the Dutch, but *it does reflect the total dichotomy in Berkouwer’s thought between explicit scriptural teaching and all other knowledge, whether deduced from Scripture or from non-biblical sources* (Bogue, 2011: section 3, italics mine).

Herman Nicolaas Ridderbos (1909 – 2007), another evangelical theologian of Dutch Reformed Church, was one of the most important New Testament theologians of the 20th century—particularly because of his emphasis on the history of salvation (*Heilsgeschiede*) or biblical theology. Speaking about complex relationship between the Word of God and the Scripture he says:

Inspiration does not mean deification. *We cannot say everything of Scripture that we say of the word of God, nor can we identify the apostles and prophets during their writing with the Holy Spirit.* The word of God exists in eternity, is perfect. But Scripture is neither eternal nor perfect. Inspiration consists in this, that God makes the words for his divine purposes. As such the human words stand in the service of God and participate in the authority and infallibility of the word of God and therefore can be so called (Ridderbos, 1983: 187, italics mine).

Ridderbos obviously affirms the Lutheran paradox of the equality/distinction of the Scripture and the Word of God. This might lead to convergence with the Catholic

understanding of the broader concept of revelation. Concerning tradition, in ecumenical terms he concludes:

The concept of tradition as it is used by Paul has the connotation of *authority*, certainty *irrefutability*. Protestants thus do well not to give up this concept out of reaction against its use in Roman Catholicism (Ridderbos, 1983: 185).

Progressive Evangelicalism recognizes this principle.

Cornelius van Til (1895-1987), the great predecessor of modern Dutch Evangelicalism, commented that for the Roman Catholic Church human finitude rather than sin necessitates special revelation (Van Til, 1967:31). Evangelicals, in contrast, should guard their belief in total depravity as crucial for the understanding of revelation. The doctrine of sin necessitates the high view of special revelation in the Holy Scriptures.

In ecumenical terms, however, contemporary insights of Berkouwer and Ridderbos emphasize the validity of church tradition in the validation and interpretation of the Holy Scriptures. Consequently, both of these theologians who ultimately claim that *only* Christ of the living tradition is the ultimate Word of God and God's perfect revelation would probably affirm the following judgment:

Nature and grace mean that the Bible and church coordinate—that is, the Protestant view of the exclusive authority of Scripture is ruled out. Thus the Roman Catholic church finds its final norm of objectivity on the declaration of the teaching, living church (Goldsworthy, 2007:115).

Recently the Dutch Reformed theologians J. Van Genderen and W.H. Velema, in their volume *Concise Reformed Dogmatics* (2008), explain the nature of revelation and Scripture by defending the orthodox Lutheran and Calvinistic understanding of *sola scriptura*. Following an extensive debate on the nature of revelation (Van Genderen & Velema, 2008: 20-57) in which these theologians express their biblical and conservative “reservations” about Barth’s theology (2008: 32), they recognize that

the *distinction* that we make between the Word of God that has come to people from the beginning and the books of the Bible implies no *separation* between the two (Van Genderen & Velema, 2008: 58).

Though Scripture could be the servant without being the revelation of God, the Church believes, according to the testimony of the Scriptures themselves, that the Bible is the holy and divine Word (Van Genderen & Velema, 2008: 59). The Dutch theologians clearly reject as relativistic the Barthian concept of the Scriptures as a testimony to the divine Word (2008: 61), and affirm the Lutheran paradox of distinction/equation of the

Word of God and the Bible. Their volume represents the contemporary challenge to the neo-orthodox tendencies in both Evangelical and Catholic theology. The testimony of the Scriptures indeed may be imperfect but the Bible is the perfect representation of who God is. It has the “revelatory character” (2008: 60). The Bible is the Word of God because there is, without exaggeration, a sign of identity, claim Van Genderen and Velema (2008: 76; see Berkouwer, 1975: 145).

In regard to the authority of the Scriptures Van Genderen and Velema state that the Reformed theory of biblical authority is in conflict with Rome (2008: 84). Though modern Catholicism speaks more about the Scriptures this does not mean they would accept *sola scriptura* (2008: 85). Martin Luther believed in “autopisty” of Scripture and full *auctoritas* (authority) of the Bible *above* the Church (2008: 84). “The highest judge in disputes” is not the Church, but Scripture (2008: 84). Some modern tendencies undermine the authority of Scripture by emphasizing the “core” of the message of the Bible; however, it is always subjectively determined and defined (Van Genderen & Velema, 2008: 90).

Speaking about hermeneutics, Van Genderen and Velema affirm the *claritas* of the Scriptures, unlike Roman Catholics who believe that the Bible is never sufficiently clear (2008: 96). This does not mean that the Bible is always without mysteries, but it has a clear and transparent message of God (2008: 98-99). Scripture interprets itself, and this is done by the Spirit who always comes “by means of the Word” (2008: 101). This is a clear demonstration of the *sola scriptura* principle. The Holy Spirit and its testimony are sufficient for the correct interpretation of the Bible.

Finally, Van Genderen and Velema (2008: 102) clearly reject the Roman Catholic concept of two sources (Scripture and tradition). The Reformed position recognizes tradition only if it is based on Scripture or derives from Scripture (2008: 105). Therefore, *sola scriptura* means not only the defense of the authority of Scripture but the continuing putting it into *practice* by asking the question, “What does God have to say to us in His word?” (2008: 105). Finally, Van Genderen and Velema conclude that “the Word needs no authorization on the part of the church. This would place it above Scripture, which is not the case” (2008: 108). The authorization comes from the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit (2008: 108).

Van Genderen and Velema seem to express the more traditional Lutheran and Calvinistic principle of *sola scriptura*. Contemporary Dutch evangelical theology,

therefore, approaches with caution the recent ecumenical, progressive evangelical developments in non-critical appropriation of the “catholic” concept of tradition and its relationship to Scripture as God’s Word. The same watchful sentiment is shared by R.C. Sproul.

3.3.5 R.C. Sproul

R.C. Sproul (1939-), an American evangelical theologian and pastor, and founder of *Ligonier Ministries*, claims that the Holy Scriptures themselves seek to emphasize the divine origin and authority of Scripture (Sproul, 1977: 12). Sproul reminds us that the Bible comes from God. He is the ultimate author. After all, it is his word. It comes from him; it carries the weight of all that he is (Sproul, 1977: 22). Speaking about revelation Sproul affirms that in the Bible God reveals himself. The Scriptures come to us as *divine self-disclosure* (Sproul, 1977: 25). Sproul equates Word of God with the Holy Scriptures and this is not unusual since his theology is always grounded in his pastoral method. Sproul claims that the *sola scriptura* principle ascribes to the Scriptures a *unique* authority that must be understood as not merely descriptive but in a normative sense (Sproul, 1979:105). Sproul also believes and defends *inerrancy* (Sproul, 2005: 63-90). The space does not allow me here to enter into this discussion.

Sproul clearly recognizes, however, that Luther and Calvin did not mean by *sola scriptura* that the Bible is “the only authority in the Church. Rather, they meant that the Bible is the only *infallible* authority in the church” (Sproul, 2005: 17). He explains:

Over against the dual-source theory of the Council of Trent, stands the *sola* of *sola scriptura*. The Reformers, however, did not despise “the treasury of church tradition” (decrees of first councils, insights of church fathers). No authority outside of the Scriptures was considered infallible but open to correction and critique (1979: 109).

Therefore, though Sproul affirms the *sola scriptura* principle in the spirit of the Reformation he also recognizes that the principle may be modified as *prima scriptura*. Sproul does not reject church tradition but in the Lutheran way delimits it with the *prima scriptura* principle. In regard to the evangelical view of tradition he articulates:

The term *tradition* is often viewed by a jaundiced eye among evangelicals. It suffers from the problem of guilt by association. In order to distance itself from the role played by tradition in Rome, zealous evangelicals face the danger of throwing out the baby with the bath water (Sproul, 2005: 44).

Sproul, thus, defends Mathison's "Tradition I" theory (see section 2.3.3), namely that we should not deny the authority of the historical apostolic tradition. He reminds us that we should be willing to subject to "our church confessions and to the authority structure of our ecclesiastical bodies" (Sproul, 2005: 126). *Sola scriptura* is understood within the context of the theological interpretation of the Church.

Unlike Carl Henry and neo-orthodox theologians, Sproul believes that the content of the Bible should be regarded as the revelation of God (Sproul, 2005: 128). It is propositional revelation because it "communicates a content which may be understood as propositions" (Sproul, 2005: 129). His high view of Scripture is confirmed by the insistence on the equality between the Word and Scripture.

In his hermeneutics expounded in detail in his volume *Knowing Scripture* (1977) Sproul explains the Lutheran principle of the clarity of Scripture: "Laymen unskilled in the ancient languages and the fine points of exegesis may have difficulty with parts of Scripture, but the essential content is clear enough to be understood easily" (Sproul, 1977: 15). Essential content is always based on the Christological principle, of course. He supports the *private* interpretation as the principle of the Reformation (Sproul, 1977: 35-36), but then warns against the danger of subjectivism (1977: 37). The objective meaning of the Scripture as a first step is a safeguard against subjectivism, claims Sproul (1977: 39). Private study and interpretation must be balanced by the collective wisdom of the teachers. Although he does not call for going back to Middle Ages when priests were these teachers, he calls laymen to do Bible study *with or under the authority* of their pastors and teachers (Sproul, 1977: 41). This seems to be a very thought-provoking observation especially in the context of ecumenical understandings of hermeneutics. I am not quite sure whether Sproul would accept the authority of the teaching office, but it appears that he opens that prospect.

In the Reformation debate on hermeneutics, their primary rule was called the *analogy of faith* (*sacra scriptura sui interpres*) (1977: 46). Plain and evident meaning was affirmed in opposition to *quadrige* in the Middle Ages, reminds Sproul (1977: 54). Though a scriptural passage has one meaning, it may have a host of applications to the wide variety

of nuances in our lives, says Sproul (1977: 55). It is not quite clear what Sproul assumes here but again, though he denies *sensus plenior* or “deeper sense” he still opens the door for multiple interpretation in the application of the text. Sproul, as a minister, is well-known in his calling for *existential meaning of the Scriptures*, not in a sense of Bultmanian approach, but in a sense of a passionate involvement in Bible study (1977: 65). He concludes that Bible should be interpreted according to its literal sense (*sensus literalis*). However, he adds an interesting point. To interpret the Bible literally is to interpret it as literature (1977: 48). Finally, even to Sproul himself it is not quite clear how we can escape the cultural conditioning of our interpretation and solve the problem of extra-biblical assumptions (1977: 104).

To sum up, for R.C. Sproul, *sola scriptura* means: (1) Scripture’s uniqueness and infallibility/inerrancy as a normative authority above tradition and, (2) The uniqueness of the Bible as a source of the special revelation of God (Sproul, 1979:109). The treasury of church tradition is assumed, however, specifically in the living interpretations of Christ’s revelation in the Bible that may not be privatized. In his moderate criticism of the private reading of the Bible based on the historical and theological “Tradition I” Sproul might become open to the ecumenical dialogue.

3.3.6 Millard Erickson

Millard Erickson (1932-), the distinguished Professor of Theology at Western Seminary in Portland, Oregon, is accommodating alternate views on a number of issues, but he remains one of the most vocal opponents of the most liberal side of evangelicalism, such as postmodern evangelicalism. His theology of the Holy Scriptures is basically expounded in his *Christian Theology* (1996) and several other volumes.

Study of the doctrine of the Scriptures, says Erickson, is important because it is fundamental to all other doctrines. He warns: “While changes in the doctrine of Scripture may not immediately result in changes in other areas, sooner or later such changes are inevitable” (Erickson, 1994: 91). The Scripture principle, therefore, is indeed the fundamental question of theology.

Speaking about the nature of revelation, Erickson believes that if revelation includes propositional truth, then it is of such a nature that it can be preserved. It can be written down or *inscripturated*. By *derivation* this written record can be called revelation (Erickson, 1996: 196). Criticizing the position of neo-orthodox theologians who claim that the Bible *becomes* the Word of God through the revelation encounter, Erickson claims that the Scripture is God's message irrespective of anyone's reading of it. "Its status as revelation is not dependent upon anyone's response to it. It is what it is" (Erickson, 1996: 253). Scripture as revelation is a fact that is not contingent on personal encounter with the divine. Erickson remains faithful to his conservative position although he belongs to the new generation of evangelical theologians.

Having no space and no need for discussion of his theories of inspiration (Erickson, 1996: 206-207) or inerrancy (Erickson, 1996: 221-240) let us explore his position on the authority of the Holy Scriptures. It seems that he follows Bernard Ramm's principle of derived authority. Erickson highlights:

God Himself is the ultimate authority in religious matters. He has the right, both by virtue of who he is and what he does, to establish the standard for belief and practice. With respect to major issues he does not exercise authority in a direct fashion, however. Rather; he has delegated that authority by creating a book, the Bible. Because it conveys his message, the Bible carries the same weight God himself would command if he were speaking to us personally (Erickson, 1996: 246).

Sola scriptura, therefore, has been emphatically expressed on the basis of the origin and authority of the Scriptures. Erickson criticizes both the Roman Catholic position that only through the church we can understand the Bible, and rationalism that claims human reason is the means of establishing the meaning and divine origin of the Bible (1996: 246). Consequently, "as belief in the sufficiency of biblical authority declines, theologians tend increasingly to rest faith upon *something additional* to the Bible" (Erickson, 1994: 104, italics mine). Furthermore, Erickson claims that the authority of the Bible is historical and normative, but that we must make a distinction between historical commands to the original recipients and normative authority today (Erickson, 1996: 259). Tradition has a positive value; it can assist us to understand the Scripture and its application. The Fathers, however, should be viewed as commentaries to the text, not as the text itself. Their authority comes only from their "utilization and elucidation of Scripture", says Erickson. In the spirit of Luther he stresses:

Whenever a tradition, whether it is a teaching of ancient origin or of a recent popular leader, comes into conflict with the meaning of the Bible, the tradition must give way to the Scripture (Erickson, 1996: 258).

Sola scriptura is affirmed by putting the Scripture above and before any other human tradition. Erickson also accepts Calvin's position regarding the *internal working of the Holy Spirit* (1996: 247). However, only objective Word and subjective word of illumination represent the final authority of the Word (1996: 251). Here Erickson claims that the Scripture validates itself and authenticates itself as the Word of God.

Hermeneutics, for Erickson, has a complementary, not competitive role. It means that though we believe that the Word of God is understood by the illumination of the Holy Spirit we still need hermeneutical rules as an objective component. Even the Reformers used the best of classical scholarship to get the meaning of the Bible (Erickson, 1996: 258). Historical criticism substantially altered the meaning of the Scriptures by introducing critical method of the interpretation of supernatural events (Erickson, 1994: 92). *Closed continuum*, the reality without possibility of God's intervention in history, left no space for divine interference with human immanent experience or for illumination of the Spirit. Everything is restricted to scientific or natural laws and factors, diagnoses Erickson (1994: 105).

James D. Smart, in his essay *Theological Significance of Historical Criticism* (1983), correctly noticed: "The inadequacy of historical criticism in its earlier form became evident in the inability to deal with Scripture as witness to a unique and life-transforming revelation of God to humanity" (Smart, 1983: 227). The only positive side of historical criticism might be the recognition of distinction between our biased dogmatics and ideas of the Scripture. Smart brilliantly recognized this:

The big problem in exegesis is the struggle between theology of the biblical author and theology of the interpreter. Allegory in the Middle Ages could find any meaning in the text. Reformers emphasized the biblical languages as the key of true interpretation. Today evangelicals believe that only careful study of biblical languages and context could determine the true meaning. With historical criticism we became aware of the distinction and distance between theology based on Scripture and theology of the church or denomination (Smart, 1983: 230-231).

In this sense, Erickson appropriates biblical criticism as useful in the legitimate use of critical methodology only (Erickson, 1998: 54-55). He offers a brief history of historical-critical method described above with special emphasis on contemporary *structural* exegesis that tries to transcend the subjective position of historical criticism. This might be the last

attempt of the Evangelical movement to save the objective meaning of Scripture. Postmodernism, however, shifted to reader-response criticism that claims that meaning is something which the reader creates or brings to the meeting with the text (Erickson, 1994: 93). As an evangelical theologian, exploring hermeneutical principles, Erickson stays committed to *evangelical hermeneutics* in contrast to postmodern hermeneutics. He supports the orthodox view of the Bible vs. historical biblical criticism.

Richard M. Davidson makes a useful table of comparisons between historical-critical method with its emphasis on the principles of criticism, correlation and analogy, and the historical-biblical method with its supernatural suspension of these principles (Davidson, 2003: 10). Suspension, nevertheless, does not mean that we should reject scientific research of the Holy Scriptures. Paradoxically, Erickson claims that we will see more fundamentalist views of the Bible as its authority declines (Erickson, 1994: 95). Authority of the Scriptures is always based on the paradoxical unity of divine and human element.

Erickson recognized that, in postmodern terms, personal experience, modern psychology, lack of reading of the Bible, and the third world emphasis on community have led to various attempts to alter the meaning of the Bible (Erickson, 1994: 96-104). In addition, the content of the Bible as the Word of God is also sacrificed, and the time has come for introducing of the principle *tota scriptura* as one of the conservative evangelical theologians says:

For twenty-first century Christians, the issue is not only the *sola scriptura* principle but also its correlate principle *tota scriptura*. The issue is not only whether we add to the authority of the Word of God but also whether we take away from it. In the hearts and in the minds of many Christians, criticism of the Bible has reduced the authority of Scripture to a bare minimum or nullified it altogether (Bemmelen, 2005: 83).

By reducing the testimony of *tota scriptura* to some minimal “gospel” theology there is a tendency for evangelicalism to assimilate trends that at first are seen as antithetical to its basic view. Roger Lundin, in his “Decostructive Therapy” (1986), calls it “evangelical culture-lag”. Lundin points out that what evangelicals condemn when it first appears, they eventually come to adopt, with some variations (Lundin, 1986: 15-16 also quoted in Erickson, 1993: 104). This is precisely what Erickson tries to avoid. For him, the Scripture principle has been rejected on the basis of the influence of modern scientific, political, and philosophical developments (1993: 105). After all, for postmodern hermeneutics, words do not rest upon anything and language does not represent the ultimate reality (1993: 111). In

his *Evangelical Interpretation: Perspectives on Hermeneutical Issues* (1993) Erickson offers critical evaluation of deconstructive postmodernism and presents a proposal for evangelical postmodern hermeneutics (Erickson, 1993: 114-125). The following principles represent his hermeneutical spiral:

1. Trace our own presuppositions or assumptions and show how the system that derives from them may be more consistent.
2. Move from words to concepts.
3. Move from meaning to meaningfulness (Is it true? vs. Does it matter?) *Significance* should be more important than *signification*. We must be relevant.
4. Affirm meaning of a whole vs. meaning of individual statements.
5. Establish relationship of meaningfulness of the texts to individual needs of human beings.
6. Employ the phenomenology [see Santrac, 2011] for some dimensions of human experience to which the Bible relates.
7. Reject historical criticism on the basis of the change in science. There are no fixed laws of the universe any more.
8. Reject individualism in biblical interpretation. We have to work synergistically.
9. Include more disciplines in hermeneutics (linguistics, for example).
10. Explore meta-hermeneutics (discussion about hermeneutics as a philosophical discipline).
11. Find out global and multicultural issues in searching for universal conceptions.

Upholding this evangelical hermeneutics in the face of postmodern challenges, Erickson wants to “save the baby” out of the water. Erickson is aware of new trends in hermeneutics and calls for employment of some of them, especially principles (8) and (10), as they are used in the ecumenical approach to hermeneutics. Nevertheless, he wants to remain truly Protestant in the historical sense and to affirm the *sola scriptura* principle. Solutions, Erickson closes, lie in a return to biblical truth not only in content but in the *concept of truth*. Revelation which the apostles received through the Old Testament was believed to be true in the absolute sense. It was not true only for them and their time but true universally, absolutely and enduringly, he concludes (Erickson, 1998: 36).

Millard Erickson, therefore, though cognizant of the contemporary postmodern and ecumenical challenges to the traditional evangelical concept of revelation, Scripture and *sola scriptura*, boldly opts for the moderate Lutheran perspective on the Scripture principle. In disagreement with Erickson’s project some of the representatives of modern Evangelicalism have shifted towards the postmodern/ecumenical understanding of the Scripture principle. One of them is James Barr.

3.3.7 James Barr

James Barr (1924-2006), was a Scottish Old Testament scholar and Professor at Manchester, Vanderbilt and Oxford, who was fighting against the fundamentalism and conservative evangelicalism (especially regarding inerrancy) of James I. Packer and Bernard Ramm. For Barr, revelation is equivalent to communication. The term revelation may not be used for the Old Testament, even New Testament writings. Barr stresses that revelation cannot be used as a term that speaks about our source of knowledge of God or about real communication from God to humanity (Barr, 1966: 88). He continues:

My argument is not against the word revelation, but against the way in which the use of this word has grouped together a number of different things in a way that does not suit them and so distorts them (Barr, 1966: 86).

Thus, it seems that Barr is transforming the doctrine of revelation in the face of contemporary theological challenges. He keeps the concept but then gives it a completely different meaning. Barr does almost the same with the idea of *tradition* in the context of its relationship with the Holy Scripture. He starts with an explanation of the concept of tradition and says: “Faith and religion, within the Bible, were not faith and religion defined and determined by a Bible.” Christianity has become *scriptural* religion only later after the Bible was perceived as complete, finished and delimited entity (Barr, 1983: 1-2). Religion has become controlled by the Scripture (1983: 6) what is in great contrast to the Old Testament world, according to Barr. Absolute scriptural control of faith is a conception foreign to the Bible (1983: 14). The New Testament is not interested in the doctrine of Scripture at all, concludes Barr (1983: 19). Consequently, the Word of the New Testament would be only the Word proclaimed. This reflects some new ecumenical understandings of the Catholic dogmatics.

Barr seems to affirm that the concept of the authority of the Scriptures is imposed by the church onto the Bible which does not speak about the authority of the written Word as the absolute norm (1983: 22). Unlike Protestant orthodoxy Barr does not see tradition only as a human affair or as absolutely different from inspired scripture. The production of Scripture was preceded by a period of tradition, written or oral. The Scriptures, therefore, belong to the church’s tradition. On the other hand, the Bible is not just a tradition, it gives

input into tradition as the Word of God (1983: 27-28). Unambiguously, the entire Bible is the Word of God for us all (Barr, 1984: 119).

Thus, Barr noticed that traditional Protestants do not consider that Scriptures of biblical times were the product of tradition, editing and revision on the part of community (1983: 28). The specific reason for this is that they want to avoid the Catholic dogma of the authority of the church above Scripture. Barr emphatically states that the Catholic position is more correct if we ask the question: from where did the scriptures come? The answer is: from church tradition (1983: 29). Barr says:

The Bible is not the product of a few inspired individuals who wrote down a complete text of their book at the beginning, but the product of community tradition in which utterances, writings and accounts have been adjusted for new circumstances and added to with new insights plus interpretations of the old (Barr, 1984: 71; see also 127).

The Bible is, therefore, a product of a long process of formation and revision of *traditions* (Barr, 1980: 58). Though being a Christian (belonging to the community of faith) is preceded by belief in the authenticity of the Holy Scriptures (Barr, 1980: 55), still, for Barr, community is crucial in the process of the understanding and interpretation of the Bible.

Of course, Scripture is not an aimless input of tradition, it is the norm of tradition. Paradoxically, Protestants are right when they claim that tradition should not be placed on the same level as Scripture or that tradition should determine the right exegesis of the Scripture (Barr, 1983: 31). On this matter Barr, as an evangelical, concludes:

Biblical authority on Protestant terms (on Catholic or Orthodox terms it may be otherwise) exists only where one is free, on the ground of Scripture, to question, to adjust and if necessary to abandon the prevailing doctrinal traditions (Barr, 1983: 31).

Freedom of interpretation, therefore, must be preserved even in the face of threat of Protestant multiple sectarianism (1983: 34-35). In regard to the authority and nature of the Scripture and its relationship to tradition Barr stresses that the Bible is the book of the community and of the historical tradition of Christian faith (this is a more Catholic perspective), but he also thinks that the Bible is not chained by the tradition but it should be freely explored, applied in theological discussions and should even lead to doctrinal changes (this is a more evangelical perspective). Barr would be, therefore, the first evangelical ecumenical theologian of the Holy Scriptures *par excellence*. His project bridges the gap between the traditional theological perspective of Evangelicals and Catholics.

In regard to his hermeneutics he first says that the historical critical method has some sense of scientific objectivity unlike Protestant sectarianism (Barr, 1983: 113). It has even become a good fortune for the fundamentalist movement (Barr, 1984: 66). Fundamentalism is based on emotions and refuses to allow the intellect to play upon the verities of the Christian religion (Barr, 1980: 69). Historical-critical method might be useful in correcting fundamentalistic tendencies. Barr recognizes that not all proponents of the historical critical method are opposed to the supernatural (1984: 78). He also acknowledges apparent paradoxes, discrepancies, contradictions and theological imperfections in the Scriptures (Barr, 1984: 79-81). For Barr “the Bible is more a battleground than a book of true facts” (Barr, 1980: 53). Ultimately, it has only soteriological function (1980: 53). The real operating force in biblical research is *creative prejudice* and every scholar is guided by it (Barr, 1983: 113). The final criterion of interpretation, however, cannot be creativity, but truth (1983: 118). Theological interpretation of the Bible is always critical and subjected to criticism, because it does not rest in the objective data of revelation but on estimation and weighing of the data (1983: 121, 126). For Barr, even the Bible itself might be subjected to critical theological evaluation (Barr, 1984: 120). This would mean that every theological system has flaws. Consequently, exegetical prejudices, based on the historical consciousness of tradition, would be even welcomed. Furthermore, the process of the hermeneutical task, according to Barr, is based on the assumption of the nature and origins of the Scripture, and what is crucial in this process is the presence of the Holy Spirit. Barr highlights:

God was present in the community in the Spirit as it formed and shaped the traditions that became scripture. As the Spirit gave understanding to the community and its leadership in the formation of these traditions and in the crystallization of them as scripture, so the Spirit today gives understanding to the community in the interpretation of these same scriptures (Barr, 1984: 128).

The participation of the community in the forming of biblical faith is twofold: theological and ethical (Barr, 1980: 130). Community is a living organism with theological reflection and ethical practice. Concluding his work Barr says: “Faith is not derived from scriptures but scriptures are derived from faith” (Barr, 1983: 126; Barr, 1980: 56). Faith is understood as a living tradition. Barr would go so far to assert that “the boundary of the canon does not necessarily or always express precisely the horizon of authority in Christian believing” (1983: 126). It seems that Barr affirms that God’s revelation is not bounded to the Scriptures and that it goes beyond what is merely written. A valid question could be raised

here: Does the Bible have any primacy over tradition as it is expressed in the *sola scriptura* principle? Barr responds in ecumenical terms:

The scripture says nothing about *sola scriptura*. The Scripture may itself reveal that it is dependent on tradition, even if it may in the long run be said to have primacy (Barr, 1984: 176).

The Bible, however, has a primary authority and we have to be ready for all serious possibilities of interpretation (Barr, 1984: 177). Barr always vacillates, therefore, between Protestant concept of *sola scriptura* and Catholic emphasis on two sources of revelation.

In conclusion, James Barr apparently gives a significant contribution to an ecumenical understanding of the Scriptures. He claims that evangelicalism has many different gifts to give to the ecumenical movement but its understanding of the Bible is not one of those. If there is one single gift that should be given to the ecumenical movement it should be the evangelical doctrine of the Scripture (Dayton, 1983: 34). Clark Pinnock, Donald Bloesch and Stanley J. Grenz, “neo-evangelical” theologians of the postmodern and ecumenical era gave this gift to the movement by doing exactly what Barr called for.

3.3.8 Clark Pinnock

Clark Pinnock (1937-2010), was a Professor Emeritus of Systematic Theology at McMaster Divinity College. As a proponent of “open theism” theology he belongs to the new generation of evangelical theologians, who, unlike Erickson, wanted to be more open to the contemporary understandings of the Scripture. In his *Scripture Principle* (2002) Pinnock’s basic question is how to respond cogently to liberal biblical criticism by keeping all the necessary elements of *sola scriptura*: divine inspiration, the human element and the dynamics of the Spirit. He tries to defend the full authority of the Bible and provide balanced understanding of interpretation. In spite of ecumenical tendencies we face the crisis of the “Scripture principle” (Pinnock, 2006: xiii). This predicament is based on the misinterpretation of the *sola scriptura* principle. Reinterpretation of the concept of tradition and convergence between the evangelical and the Roman Catholic doctrine of the Scripture is the ultimate goal of Pinnock’s project.

Speaking about the dynamic relationship between natural and special revelation Pinnock claims that Jesus Christ is the centrepiece of special Christian revelation. Luther emphasized this material center of every book of the Bible. Christ is the Word of God.

Scripture exists to bear witness to Him. Of all the forms of revelation Christ is the best (Pinnock, 2002:10). Consequently, the Word of God is not equated with a Christian Bible. The original New Testament meaning of the Word is the proclamation of the Gospel of Christ, says Pinnock following James Barr. This belief gives an adequate reason for the proclamation of the gospel in our own words today (Pinnock, 2002:14). Regarding the authority and interpretation of the special revelation he affirms:

What the coming of the Spirit does mean for our doctrine of revelation is that the norms given in a classical disclosure are dynamic in the sense that they can be dynamically interpreted and freshly applied in ever-changing situations. It means that revelation is not locked in the past as a collection of inflexible rules but is a disclosure that comes alive today (Pinnock, 2002:13).

The Bible is not a set of propositions but the means of grace by which God is able to speak to us in new ways (2002: 13). Pinnock here does not speak only about contextualization or an accommodation principle. He speaks about *multiple meanings* of written revelation in different circumstances. This might correspond to the layers of meaning in the Catholic tradition of *quadriga*, and to Benedict XVI's exegetical method of canonical exegesis (see section 5.6.3.3).

Regarding the Bible vs. tradition issue, Scripture is just a *part of tradition* (2002: 15). Scripture is an extension of modality of divine speech, revelation cast into a written form (2002: 16). Pinnock unreservedly quotes Vatican II about the dynamic function of the Scripture as the Word of God in worship. He also says that Scripture is a charter or constitution by which the church may measure its doctrine and practice (2002: 18). God has generated scriptural witness to make effective other forms of special revelation (2002: 19). Revelation, therefore, normatively outlines mighty acts of God but it is not exhausted in the Scripture (2002: 20). Quoting Avery Cardinal Dulles in *Models of Revelation* where he speaks about symbols of revelation formulated in more than just propositions and facts, Pinnock, resembling neo-orthodoxy, affirms the subjective interpretation of the encounter as a critique of the various objective interpretations of the revelation and Scripture (2002: 24). It is clear that Pinnock rejects Carl F.H. Henry's and Erickson's position of propositional revelation.

In regard to hermeneutics he claims that interpretation is a human activity in which we distinguish between the primary biblical data and any presuppositions and interests we bring to the task (Pinnock, 1994: 103). God can speak to us in every new situation (Pinnock, 2002: 201), because the Spirit is using the text in dynamic ways. Word and Spirit, text and

situation exist in dialectical relationship (2002: 201). On the other hand, Pinnock calls for *translators* (those who understand the dynamic nature of revelation and its contemporary application) vs. *transformers* (those who change the content of revelation to suits modern tendencies) (2002: 211). Contemporary human opinions and sentiments can be boldly exalted above Scripture and no one is free from this temptation (2002: 219). Our hermeneutical translation must be both dynamic (not as in heresies), and equivalent (not as in fundamentalism). We need to be both faithful and creative (2002: 220). In ecumenical terms he finally claims that it was difficult for Luther and Rome to understand each other. Quoting St Ignatius of Loyola he calls for *ecumenical mutual understanding even within the debate on Scripture* (2002: 223). This reconciliation between conservative and liberal tendencies to Scripture principles should be the end of ill-conceived dispute. We need to recover a Christ-centered non-technical approach to the Bible (2002: 223). By technical approach he has in mind technical inerrancy as a support for the Reformation Scripture principle. It should be rejected on the basis of Christ-centered dynamic function of the Bible to bring salvation, concludes Pinnock (2002: 224).

We may say that, so far, Clark Pinnock expresses his view of *sola scriptura* in terms closer to the Catholic contemporary approach to the Scripture principle. He openly calls for a reinterpretation of *sola scriptura* in the face of a proper understanding and a broadening of the principle of the Word of God that opens the possibility of an ecumenical doctrine of Scripture. With Pinnock starts the innovative theology of the Scripture in ecumenical terms. Let us explore two giants of the younger generation of evangelical theologians who seem to support this innovative theology of the Bible in ecumenical and/or postmodern terms, Donald Bloesch and Stanley J. Grenz.

3.3.9 Donald Bloesch

Donald Bloesch (1928-2010), a "progressive evangelical" or "ecumenical orthodox" scholar, criticized the excesses of both the theological left and right. He often decried the abandonment of traditional values among liberals, but also the obnoxious, reactionary habits of some conservatives.

Evangelicals appeal to the authority of the Bible, he says, because they see the Scripture as the written Word of God (Bloesch, 1983:118). However, the exact relationship between divine revelation and the human written document is still the subject of debate

(Bloesch, 1983:118). In Barthian terms, Bloesch makes a clear distinction between the Bible and revelation of God:

The Bible is not in and of itself the revelation of God but the divinely appointed means and channel of this revelation (Bloesch, 1994:57).

Bloesch claims that in Paul's writings the "mystery of the gospel" is distinguished from "the prophetic Scriptures". The Word of God, therefore, transcends the human witness, and yet it comes to us only in the servant form of the human word (1994: 57). The Bible is not the Word of God literally because then every command of God would become universal (1994: 58). The Bible is an instrumental norm for faith but not an absolute norm (1994: 58). "One might say that the Bible is the Word of God in a formal sense—as a light bulb is related to light. The light bulb is not itself the light but its medium" (1994: 59). It seems that according to Bloesch God says much more than what his witnesses in the Bible say (1994: 60). Is this the starting point of affirming the Catholic concept of tradition? Concerning the Bible as a witness to revelation Bloesch claims, in the spirit of Karl Barth, and criticizing the position of Berkouwer, that Scripture is more than a human witness to revelation: it is revelation itself mediated through human words. "It is not in and of itself divine revelation, but when illumined by the Spirit it becomes revelation to the believer" (Bloesch, 1983:119). We affirm that Scripture is not only a human witness and medium of divine revelation, says Bloesch in moderately Barthian fashion, but also a divinely inspired witness and medium (Bloesch, 1983:122). Calvin and Luther also made the distinction between Word of God and the Scripture, reminds Bloesch (1983: 60). He agrees with Barth on the threefold forms of the Word of God: living, proclaimed and written. Only when the written Word or the proclaimed Word is united with the revealed Word does it become revelation (1983: 62). The Bible does not transmit revelation, it functions as *sign* of revelation. It participates in the transcendent Word of God not directly but through the Holy Spirit (1983: 70).

Regarding the relationship between the authority of the Church and the authority of the Bible, for Bloesch, *sola scriptura* means the *primacy* of the Scripture (*prima scriptura*), not the rejection of church tradition (Bloesch, 1994: 145). He recognizes that "in modern Protestantism there seems to be a movement away from *sola scriptura* to a view that coincides with a sectarian Catholicism that denigrates Scripture by elevating church authority" (1994: 146). Bloesch reminds us that the Bible is in the hands but not in the

power of the Church, as Barth said (1994: 147). The Word beyond the written Scriptures has the ultimate authority:

The Bible takes precedence over the church not as a historical record or written code but as the Word of life and redemption that comes directly from God. It is this Word which existed before the writing of the Bible and brought this writing into existence, that has *preeminent authority in the life of the church* (1994: 151, italics mine).

Defending the concept of tradition, as interpreted by some Catholic thinkers, he says that tradition is just amplification and interpretation of the Word in the community of faith. It has to be respected but also accepted critically (1994: 151). Only the Word is infallible:

The foundation of the Christian faith is not the infallibility of the papal office or even of church tradition, not even the canon of Holy Scripture, but the living God Himself and his Word that is both ever new and ever the same. This Word created both the community of faith and the canon of Holy Scripture, and this Word therefore judges both church and Scripture (Bloesch, 1994:155, italics mine).

Bloesch concludes his interpretation of the Word of God in ecumenical terms calling for the unification of positions:

By rediscovering the transcendence and dynamism of divine revelation, both Catholics and Protestants might come to a new understanding of the relationship between church tradition and Scripture, and a convergence on this issue might indeed become possible (Bloesch, 1994:155).

Bloesch's hermeneutical principles start with a critique of the evangelical rational school of Princeton by denying that the Scripture is directly available to human reason (Bloesch, 1983:149.145). He also criticizes both fundamentalist and modern schools of understanding of Scripture (Bloesch, 1983:139). Since the words of the Bible are not identical with divine revelation the hermeneutical task becomes more difficult (1983: 173). For Bloesch, the grammatical-historical meaning is just the beginning; we have to proceed with the central meaning of the Scriptures (the Gospel) and its application in our life situation (1983: 174). Analytical criticism of the exegesis must be followed with synthetic criticism of the theologian (1983: 174). The text of the Scriptures does not have merely immediate historical meaning but a *plenitude of meaning (sensus plenior)* which can be assessed only if the text is interpreted in the light of *further revelation* or development in the understanding of revelation (1983: 176). The *sensus plenior*, (deeper meaning) defined by Catholic scholars has also recently been accepted by Protestant scholars by expression "fuller sense" (Moo, 1995:201). Raymond Brown, a Catholic scholar, defines *sensus plenior* as

...the additional deeper meaning, intended by God but not clearly intended by the human author, which is seen to exist in the words of a biblical text (or group of texts or even a whole book) when they are studied in the light of further revelation or development in the understanding of revelation (R. Brown, 1955:92).

This “double authorship” or “double meaning” principle has been widely recognized and discussed within biblical theology (see Virkler & Ayayo, 2007: 24-25). Douglas Moo also calls this the principle of accommodation. However, the multiple application of a biblical text to a situation not envisaged in the text itself (meaning of words) is distinguished from typology (meaning of things) (Moo, 1995:202). In the debate on “fuller sense”, F.F. Bruce correctly recognized the abuse of the *sensus plenior* principle:

...the way to ensure that the extended interpretation or existential application of the text does not get out of hand is to *determine the primary sense* and keep it constantly in view. The plenary sense, to be valid, must be the plenary sense *of the biblical text*: it will remain that if its relationship and consistency with the primary sense be maintained. Hermeneutic must never be divorced from exegesis (Bruce, 1977: 108, emphasis mine).

Similarly, Richard M. Davidson warns against the misapplication of the *sensus plenior* principle by confirming biblical theological position:

In their exploration of the “deeper” meaning of Scripture, in particular with regard to the typological fulfillment of OT persons, events, and institutions, the NT writers do not read back into the OT what is not already there (“inspired” *eisegesis*), or what is not apparent to the human researcher (*sensus plenior*), or an arbitrary assigning of meaning that strips away the historical “husk” (*allegory*). Rather they remain faithful to the OT Scriptures, which have already indicated which persons, events, and institutions God has divinely designed to serve as prefigurations of Jesus Christ and the Gospel realities brought about by Him. The NT writers simply announce the antitypical fulfillment of what had already been verbally indicated by the OT prophets (Davidson, 2003: 17-18).

Going back to Bloesch, the hermeneutical principle of *sensus plenior* is a natural conclusion of his sharp distinction between the Word of God (revelation) and the Holy Scriptures. The Word of God offers the possibility of multiple meanings or deeper meaning that goes beyond what is merely written in the Scriptures. Bloesch creatively states that the interpretation of the Scripture is not an art to be learned but a gift to be received. No technique or formula can disclose the real Word of God (1994: 180-181). Spiritual understanding of the Word is understood as existential appropriation over against apprehension that is only intellectual (1994: 187) and this seems faithful to the tradition of the Reformers. Apparently, Bloesch accepts new tendencies toward reconsidering the possibility that the text may have a spiritual meaning beyond the natural one (1994: 187).

According to his ecumenical interpretation it seems that *sensus plenior* is impossible without active participation in the tradition of the church:

I believe that we must make a clear-cut distinction between the *historical* meaning of the text and its *revelational or spiritual* meaning. The first includes both authorial intention and the way in which the text was received in the community of faith. The second refers to the pneumatic or revelatory meaning that the text assumes when the Spirit acts on it in bringing home its significance to people of faith in every age. *This second meaning is accessible only to those who participate existentially in the tradition of the faith, for only they are in experiential contact with the realities to which the text witnesses*(1994: 190, italics mine).

This is possible only because the Spirit is still active in the ongoing history of the community of faith (1994: 192). Bloesch furthermore believes in a Christ-centered meaning (Christ as final interpreter of the Scripture) (1994: 206), and a typological meaning but he goes beyond believing in a “fluidity of meaning” though within certain parameters (1994: 191). As people of God, the Church can know and hear the transcendent Word of God, the very truth of revelation but we cannot comprehend it. Bloesch calls this dynamic hermeneutics “historical-pneumatic hermeneutics” (1994: 207). Openness to the Spirit is prerequisite for attaining the spiritual and theological significance of the text in question (Bloesch, 1983:145). He makes a conclusion:

I do not share the vision of much traditional orthodoxy that the Bible is impregnated with universal, unchanging truths that are waiting to be discovered and formulated. Instead I hold that the Bible is filled with the Spirit of God, who brings new light to bear on ancient wisdom –light that leads not only to renewed understanding but also to obedience. The Scripture does teach truths, but these are always fresh truths applied to the situation in which we live and work (1994: 208).

Therefore, translation to the modern forms of language is necessary (Bloesch, 1983:144). These fresh truths are the voice of the living Christ “reaffirmed by our fathers and mothers in the faith of the church through the ages” (1994: 208).

To sum up, Bloesch apparently offers the possibility of ecumenical reconciliation of the Protestant principle of *sola scriptura* and the Catholic principle of Tradition as one “wellspring” expounded in *Dei Verbum* partially based on Barthian understanding of the Word as a broader principle. In its ultimate form and within the hermeneutical principles of *sensus plenior* offered by Donald Bloesch, the authority of the Scriptures is partly validated by the community of faith inspired by the Spirit. Spiritual meaning of the Scriptures is the logical outcome of transcending the Protestant principle of historical-grammatical exegesis. Bloesch’s evangelical project clearly goes beyond what is merely written in the Scriptures as the Word of God. The notion of the community of faith as the foundational principle of

validation and interpretation of Scripture becomes essential ecumenical contribution in the theology of Stanley J. Grenz.

3.3.10 Stanley J. Grenz

Stanley J. Grenz (1950-2005), one of the recent brilliant and leading postmodern evangelical scholars unfortunately died at a relative young age. He made a revision of evangelical theology in response to the challenge of postmodern philosophy and culture. I have chosen this theologian as the last one in this presentation of interpreters of Scripture in evangelical theology because he has gone the farthest way in trying to accommodate the Scripture principle to the contemporary challenges of ecumenical theology.

For Grenz, theology in postmodernism must be post-individual and post-rational and it must focus on spirituality (Grenz, 1995b: 97-101). Grenz tried to leave behind the modern project with its individualism, rationalism and formalistic approach to religion. Regarding the approach to the Bible, Grenz specifically emphasized that we should “shake ourselves loose of the radical individualism” (Grenz, 1995b: 98). Community is always integral to the process of knowing. The cognitive framework of the community mediated to the individual is *crucial* to identity formation (1995b: 98). This means that the Holy Book cannot be validated and interpreted outside of this communal approach to the Scripture. Grenz proves this by putting the doctrine of Scripture in the section after Pneumatology within the broader context of community as the crucial theological framework for his Systematic Theology (see Grenz, 2000). Quoting Bernard Ramm, he explains that the authority of the Scripture flows from the Holy Spirit’s work of revelation and inspiration within community (Grenz, 2000: 380; 2001:64-65). Grenz claims that the origins of the Scriptures are in the community:

The Scriptures witness to the fact that they are the final written deposit of a trajectory that incorporates a variety of elements, including oral traditions and other source documents. *Within the community* these took on a life of their own, as it were, forming part of the authoritative materials that the community under the Spirit’s direction interpreted and reapplied to new situations (Grenz, 2000: 386, italics mine).

He continues:

Our Bible is the product of the community of faith that cradled it. The compiling of Scripture occurred within the context of the community, and the writings represent the self-understanding of the community in which they developed (Grenz, 2000: 386).

Therefore, the canon was formed only in the community of faith that already existed prior to the understanding of the divine inspiration of the Scriptures. Apparently, Grenz explicitly puts the Bible within the tradition of the church, as the authoritative multifaceted deposit of faith. Regarding the authority of the Scriptures he says that affirmation of biblical authority follows logically from what we said concerning the revelatory significance of the Bible... “Only the Bible constitutes the written record of the revelatory historical occurrences, together with the prophetic interpretation and application of these events” (Grenz, 2000: 403). As authoritative for faith and practice the Bible radiates outward from this narrow conception until it encompasses all of life (Grenz, 2000: 404).

What is the relationship between revelation and the Scriptures in the opus of Grenz’s theology. First of all, he makes a distinction between different models of revelation: historical (Pannenberg), propositional (Henry) and experiential (partly neo-orthodoxy). It seems that he supports the third model. He claims that we cannot simply equate the revelation of God with the Bible (2000: 394). New Testament writers preclude us from making a simple one-to-one correspondence between the words of Scripture and the Word of God. The expression “the Word of God” was never used for Jewish Scriptures, claims Grenz. Therefore, revelation precedes Scripture. This is obvious historically from the inscripturation process. Revelation and Scripture are, however, interrelated because “revelation arose together with the process of the development of the canonical Scriptures” (Grenz, 2000: 395). God’s revelatory work included as well the community’s attempts to determine the implications of the divine self-disclosure for life (2000: 395). Revelation does not lie only prior to the text, but also within the process of formation of the text as the community of faith sought to understand the ongoing work of God (Grenz, 2001: 72). It seems that Grenz values the experience of the community as revelatory experience.

In his theology the Bible is (1) derivative revelation as a witness to the historical self-disclosure of God and the record of that revelation; (2) functional revelation that points beyond itself to the revealed God and inform the reader as to how God can be known and (3) mediate revelation as the word about God. As it mediates this awareness to us, *the Bible is God’s revelation*. Only in this sense, is the Bible God’s word to humankind (Grenz, 2000: 397; 2003: 22). The connection between the Word and the Scriptures is quite unique in Grenz’s theology. He claims that Scripture is revelation because the sovereign Spirit has bound authoritative divine speaking to this text. The church looks to this text as the Spirit

speaks (Grenz, 2003: 22). Grenz explains that when he says that the Spirit is speaking through the text it is not *locution*, the Spirit is not speaking the actual words of the Bible. Through the words of the Bible the Spirit speaks and performs an *illocutionary act*, namely He is always speaking something new to the church (Grenz, 2003: 23). Therefore, not the written Scriptures but the Spirit creates the community of the Word (2003: 23). So far Grenz follows Barth and Bloesch. Paradoxically, and contrary to Barth and Bloesch, however, Grenz affirms that the Bible remains Scripture (the Word of God) apart from our personal hearing of the Spirit's voice in opposition to the danger of subjectivism (Grenz, 2001: 68). Having in mind his previous discussion with arguments that deny the equality of the Word of God with Scripture this idea remains unexplained and perplexing.

Furthermore, Grenz's perspective on illumination of the Scripture is inseparable from its inspiration. The canonized form of the Scriptures depended on the authority of the traditions exercised in the life of the ancient community which in turn led to the fixation of the biblical texts in their canonized form (Grenz, 2000: 384, 385). Grenz, as a postmodern evangelical, supports the idea that Bible is not to be seen as a final product to be analyzed with sophisticated methods, but "as a potentiality of meaning which is actualized by succeeding generations in light of their needs and by means of approaches supplied and authenticated by their world views" (Edgar V. McKnight quoted in Grenz, 2000: 385). Despite our human inclinations the Bible must be read as a text first of all and above all *in the church*. Theology plays the key role in assisting, not hindering the community of Christ in reading canonical scripture as text (Grenz, 2001: 63-64).

It seems that although he believes in the Protestant *sola scriptura* Grenz openly sides with Vatican II in emphasizing the importance of tradition. For him, theological tradition, not only the Scripture, is a signpost for theological construction (Grenz, 2001: 64). The final authority is the Holy Spirit speaking through the text. This means that the theological "norming norm" is the message the Spirit declares through the text (Grenz, 2001: 74). Grenz supports a sharp distinction between historical and theological interpretation of the Bible (cf. Karl Barth). Historical interpretation is just "clearing the deck for the essential theological interpretation" (Smart, 1983: 228). Grenz also accepts the notion, developed by Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, a Roman Catholic theologian at Harvard Divinity School, that Scripture has a *constitutional* role (see Fiorenza, 1990: 361-362). The Bible has a foundational role in forming the community and in setting forth the communal

identity. The Bible has also a constitutional role for the ongoing community throughout history (Grenz, 2001: 79). The Spirit, therefore, is using the Scripture to create the community of faith. “The Bible is the instrumentality of the Spirit”, declares Grenz. With the Scriptures the Spirit is creating a new world among us (Grenz, 2001: 80).

In my brief reaction to Grenz’s theology, if the Scriptures have multiple meanings due to the Spirit who creates different worldviews, then we are left in an uncertain terrain regarding the proper and literal historical meaning of the Scriptures. Somehow objectivity of the Word of God has been replaced by the subjective ever fresh applications of Scripture. Who is the determining factor of truth: the on-going community of faith with its fresh applications of the living Word or the Holy Scripture as a fundamental criterion of the doctrine and practice? Grenz’s thought definitely creates paradoxical tension between the authority of the community and the authority of the Word of God. Perhaps that was his original intention.

Regarding the hermeneutical task of Grenz evangelicals in general have two assignments: (1) to confront the challenges that come from the current intellectual philosophical academic world and (2) to formulate biblical hermeneutics based on Christ and consistent with Christian theism (Goldsworthy, 2007:297). In this difficult task Grenz opts for the accommodation of postmodern hermeneutics to evangelical theology (Grenz, 2001:85-89). The postmodern hermeneutical paradigms of Wilhelm Dilthey, Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer seem to be incorporated into this theological hermeneutics (Grenz, 1995a, 98-112). Grenz says about Gadamer:

Meaning emerges as the text and the interpreter engage in dialogue, in a ‘hermeneutical conversation’. The goal of this dialogue is an intersection of the horizon of the author and the horizon of the interpreter (so called fusion of horizons) (Grenz, 1995a: 110).

In Gadamer’s language Anthony Thiselton stresses that understanding of the text is the result of both text and interpreter being conditioned by their place in history. Two horizons or two sets of variables are brought in relation to each other (Thiselton, 1980:16; Goldsworthy, 2007:278.149-150). It seems that Grenz applies this principle to his Scripture principle:

Reading of the text is reading within the community of faith. We are conscious of participation of the contemporary church linked to the ancient church. As we want to hear other communities of faith the reading of text becomes the ecumenical reading (Grenz, 2001: 91).

Apparently, reading of the text by the ancient church and reading of the text by contemporary readers represent Thiselton's two sets of variables brought together. Grenz claims that *sola scriptura* is an element of the Reformers' anti-traditionalism – not detached from the past, however (2001: 99). Grenz quotes Meno Simons to support this idea (2001: 104).

The *sola scriptura* principle remains the Reformation slogan over which Catholics and Evangelicals disagree, says Grenz (2003: 12-13). However, in ecumenical terms Grenz addresses recent developments that reveal that Evangelicals accept the concept of tradition and that, after all, Christianity existed before the Bible, and Catholics affirm that the primary function of tradition is to point us back to Scripture (Grenz, 2003: 13). Grenz says that devaluation of tradition was a reaction to the Council of Trent, so that the sole source of theology has become Scripture (Grenz, 2001: 103). Consequently, the concept of tradition has been lost in Evangelicalism. Quoting Richard Lints' *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomenon to Evangelical Theology* (1993), Grenz expands some reasons for that: inductive Bible study, the para-church trans-denominational approach (the evangelical movement has no cohesive tradition), and a-historical devotional piety (2001: 109). In addition, there is a danger that the Bible can be enslaved by individualism (reading the text only for ourselves). If the Church rejects the historical tradition and reading of Scripture within tradition it cannot arrive to the apostolic sources but only "to the biases of our own situation" (Lintz, 1993: 71 quoted in Grenz, 2001: 109). An evangelical scholar John Franke agrees:

To suggest that the Protestant slogan *sola scriptura* implies an authority apart from the tradition of the church, its creeds, its teachings and its liturgy is to transform the formula into an oxymoron. Separating Scripture and church in such manner was certainly not the intention of the Reformers... Scripture and tradition must function together (Franke, 2004: 204-205).

Fackre, another evangelical theologian confirms the same idea:

The circle of tradition is not closed, for the Spirit's ecclesial Work is not done. Traditional doctrine develops as Christ and the Gospel are viewed in ever fresh perspective. Old formulations are corrected, and what is passed on is enriched. The open-endedness, however, does not overthrow the ancient landmarks. As tradition is a gift of the Spirit, its trajectory moves in the right direction, although it has not arrived at its destination (Fackre, 1996: 19 quoted in Franke, 2004: 207).

In these terms, Grenz confirms that tradition is a historical deposit, a heritage that provides a hermeneutical trajectory in which our own theological discourse can properly transpire

(Grenz, 2003: 28). In other words, “the Christian tradition provides a spiritually animated, historically extended and socially embodied context in which to interpret, apply and live out the communally formative narratives contained in the canonical texts” (Franke, 2004: 209-210). Nevertheless, it should be presupposed that both Grenz and Franke believe in the *prima scriptura* principle. In the current debate one may find the lonely neo-Lutheran voices like that of Frank M. Hasel:

To opt merely for the primacy of the Scripture, rather than for Scripture alone as the final norm and ultimate authority for faith and practice, is to part ways with the Protestant principle that Scripture alone is the final norm for theology and the sole source of its own interpretation (Hasel, 2005: 43).

In ecumenical terms of Grenz, Scripture, heritage and culture, therefore, are a threefold, interrelated single source for theology--they are inseparable (Grenz, 2003: 33). Evangelicalism is firmly grounded in the tradition of the church, concludes Grenz (1993: 105-106). In the spirit of modern Emergent movement, he even states that the primary function of the Bible is not to inform us about the doctrinal teachings, but to be a “book of the church” for spiritual exercises:

Against the intent of evangelical theologians themselves, therefore, the reigning approach has actually contributed to the silence of the Bible in the church and thereby undermined the primary role of Scripture as the source of spiritual sustenance. In this manner, contrary to their own intent, well-meaning evangelicals have served unwittingly to undermine the evangelical Scripture principle itself (Grenz, 2004: 41).

Grenz evidently believes that he saves the Scripture principle from its historical Protestant/evangelical distortion. The true meaning of the Scripture would be the Christ-centered casebook for spiritual formation.

To sum up, Stanley J. Grenz explicitly affirmed the *sola scriptura* principle only in the context of the authority of the community (church) and its living tradition. Interpretation of the Bible should be founded on the Spirit-based multiple messages, found in the Scriptures as an instrument, and given to the church as fresh and new in every age. Obviously, Grenz was one of the postmodern evangelical theologians who paved the way for ecumenical understanding of the Scripture principle, accepted by Roman Catholicism as well. Doubtfully, one would be able to criticize Grenz on the nature of biblical revelation that has to go back to propositional revelation of Carl F. H. Henry (Decker, 2004: 1-2). His theology is left without the *sola scriptura* principle, or at least it is seriously redefined in order that it may fit the ecumenical ambitions of both Evangelicals and Catholics, and Stanley J. Grenz has done it scrupulously.

Prior to thorough investigation of the traditional Roman Catholic position on the Scripture principle (Chapter 4), a summary of arguments about the Scripture principle given by different representatives of contemporary evangelical theology will be presented in the following section.

3.4 Evangelicalism and *sola scriptura*

To make an attempt to merge the arguments of diverse theologies presented above is not an easy task. Regarding the *sola scriptura* principle, with its fully-fledged implications concerning the authority nature and interpretation of the Word of God, it may be said that there has been an evolutionary progression of theological thinking in modern evangelicalism.

Some theologians like Packer, Berkouwer and Erickson adhere to the orthodox approach to the Bible as the written revelation of God rejecting the absolute authority and validity of revelation beyond what is written, others like Henry and Ramm were trying to save the Lutheran paradox of distinction/equality of the Word of God and Scriptures for the sake of the proper understanding of revelation, while others like Barr, Pinnock, Bloesch and Grenz detached themselves from traditional Protestantism and embraced neo-orthodox or even completely ecumenical understandings of Scripture and the Word with a possible outcome of dual revelation with one “wellspring” (Vatican II). The last group of younger evangelical theologians have reinterpreted the broadened Lutheran principle of the Word of God as a continuing revelation in the community of the church and thus, have explicitly called for an ecumenical understanding of the Scripture principle. Fernando Canale correctly recognizes that biblical Christians today “should not continue to assume that Protestant and Evangelical theologies and ministerial practices are compatible with the *sola-tota-prima Scriptura* principle...As a forgotten task, the biblical Reformation of the Church lies still in the future” (Canale, 2011a: 28).

In the summary of this debate on contemporary Evangelicalism one point should always be emphasized:

Christianity is a historic “given” religion. It comes to us. We are free to accept it, but not to remake or modify it. Since it comes to us through the Bible, the Bible is therefore authoritative as the only record of the saving events by which Christian faith was brought into being... In declaring the books of the Bible authoritative over her life, the church was but witnessing to the historic nature of her faith and the uniqueness of the saving events by which she was brought into being and by which she was to be forever nurtured (Miller, 1983: 103-104).

With the desire to create an evangelical theology of the Scripture that will suit the ecumenical program this must never be forgotten. The hermeneutical task, furthermore, is always based on the general and normative principle of *sola scriptura*. Goldsworthy reminds us:

The principle of ‘Scripture alone’ points us to the phenomenological and material priority of Scripture... To know God and his creation, we have to take account of the nature of Scripture and of the phenomena that present themselves in Scripture. Hermeneutics is concerned with the practical application of Scripture alone (Goldsworthy, 2007:49).

Consequently, one needs to believe that the practical application of hermeneutics is “about reading God’s word with understanding so that we might be conformed more and more to the image of Christ. Whatever the role of the intellect in hermeneutics, it is still a spiritual discipline” (Goldsworthy, 2007:314). Moreover, if Christ is found in the Scriptures *only* “he will be the touchstone of biblical authority for us” (Miller, 1983: 116). Therefore, there is no genuine Scripture principle without the ultimate authority of Christ in the Bible and practical spiritual hermeneutics that leads us to salvation in Him. The Bible is the Christ-centered propositional and personal deposit of God’s truth. Ecumenical or not, the evangelical theology of the Scripture always remains the theology of Christ-centered revelation of God.

The following chapter will present the Scripture principle (the nature of the relationship between Scripture and tradition, dynamics of the Word of God and hermeneutics of the Bible) in the historical teachings of the traditional theology of the Roman Catholic Church. The main objective is to present and assess some decrees of the most important councils of the Roman Catholic Church: (the Council of Trent and Vatican I), and papal documents and opinions of the most prominent Catholic traditional theologians before Vatican II.

4.0 SOLA SCRIPTURA AND TRADITIONAL CATHOLICISM

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter an appropriate theological platform of traditional teaching of Roman Catholicism on the Holy Scripture will be positioned, prior to the exposition of some unique elements and ecumenical openness of the Scripture principle of Vatican II, of progressive Catholic theologians and particularly of the theology of Pope Benedict XVI (Joseph Ratzinger) (Chapter 5). One point should be kept in mind at this point of the research. The traditional Catholic position on the Scripture has diverse dimensions and aspects, especially if one has in mind ancient (patristic) and medieval (scholastic) traditions in mind, and it is not always viable to trace in them the specific features of the *sola scriptura* principle, that is, the scope and authority of the revelation/Word of God and biblical hermeneutical principles. Consequently, following the example of Chapter 3, a conclusion of the matter, with a summary of key elements of the *sola scriptura* principle or those components that affect the *sola scriptura* belief, will be presented at the end of this chapter.

The Scripture principle in traditional Catholic theology is primarily based on the distinction between the biblical authority and the authority of tradition and the church, as well as on the determination of the limits and the rights of the teaching office in the interpretation of the Scripture. The examination of the official decrees of the Council of Trent, regarding the doctrine of Scripture, follows.

4.2 The Council of Trent and the Bible

The Council of Trent (*Concilium Tridentinum*) (1545-1563), one of the most important ecumenical councils convened as an integral part of the agenda of the Counter - Reformation, met in twenty five sessions in three different periods. The purpose of the council was a counter-attack on teachings of the Reformers and the establishment of traditional Catholic teachings on sacraments, original sin, justification, Eucharist and especially about the relationship between the Scripture and tradition (for historical

background see Bokenkotter, 2002: 241-245; Shelley, 2008: 274-279). The fourth and fifth sessions were almost entirely dedicated to the problem of this relation. Following the declaration that the Holy Scriptures, given by Christ through apostles, are the fountain of both the saving and moral truth, delegates of the council stressed:

...clearly that this truth and discipline are *contained in the written books, and the unwritten traditions* which, received by the Apostles from the mouth of Christ himself, or from the Apostles themselves, the Holy Ghost *dictating*, have come down even unto us, transmitted as it were from hand to hand; (the Synod) following the examples of the orthodox Fathers, receives and venerates with an equal affection of piety, and reverence, *all the books both of the Old and of the New Testament--*seeing that one God is the author of both --*as also the said traditions*, as well those appertaining to faith as to morals, as having been dictated, either by Christ's own word of mouth, or by the Holy Ghost, and preserved in the Catholic Church by a continuous succession (Waterworth, 1848: session 4, first decree, italics mine).

Apparently, the council affirmed that the nature of inspiration of the Scriptures is based on dictation, and the Scriptures should be venerated. This is clearly a sacramental Catholic approach to the Word of God. It is widely accepted that Roman Catholic theology regards sacraments as a “visible Word of God” (see Fesko, 2009). In these terms the Bible itself should be venerated as a visible material incarnation of the Word of God. Thus, the literal dictation of the words of God becomes the cause and a rationale for sacramental veneration of the Bible.

Secondarily, the Council unmistakably affirmed the list of the books of the Scriptures that include deuterocanonical books, what Protestants and Luther labelled as the Apocrypha.¹ The Catholic notion of inspiration of the Bible, therefore, differs from the Protestant notion, since the list of sacred books is different. This disagreement points, furthermore, to a difference of belief in canonicity and the authority of the Church.

¹ The decree reads: “And it has thought it meet that a list of the sacred books be inserted in this decree, lest a doubt may arise in any one's mind, which are the books that are received by this Synod. They are as set down here below: of the Old Testament: the five books of Moses, to wit, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy; Josue, Judges, Ruth, four books of Kings, two of Paralipomenon, the first book of Esdras, and the second which is entitled Nehemias; Tobias, Judith, Esther, Job, the Davidical Psalter, consisting of a hundred and fifty psalms; the Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Canticle of Canticles, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, Isaias, Jeremias, with Baruch; Ezechiel, Daniel; the twelve minor prophets, to wit, Osee, Joel, Amos, Abdias, Jonas, Micheas, Nahum, Habacuc, Sophonias, Aggaeus, Zacharias, Malachias; two books of the Machabees, the first and the second. Of the New Testament: the four Gospels, according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; the Acts of the Apostles written by Luke the Evangelist; fourteen epistles of Paul the apostle, (one) to the Romans, two to the Corinthians, (one) to the Galatians, to the Ephesians, to the Philippians, to the Colossians, two to the Thessalonians, two to Timothy, (one) to Titus, to Philemon, to the Hebrews; two of Peter the apostle, three of John the apostle, one of the apostle James, one of Jude the apostle, and the Apocalypse of John the apostle. *But if any one receive not, as sacred and canonical, the said books entire with all their parts, as they have been used to be read in the Catholic Church, and as they are contained in the old Latin vulgate edition; and knowingly and deliberately contemn the traditions aforesaid; let him be anathema*” (Waterworth, 1848: session 4, first decree, concerning the canonical Scriptures, italics mine).

Catholics believe that the Church determines and verifies the authenticity of the sacred books, while Protestants insist on the authentication of the sacred writings by the dynamic and providential role of the Holy Spirit. Don Closson, in the conclusion of his article “The Old Testament Apocrypha Controversy” (2004), provides a positive ground and a progressive theological idea for the ecumenical understanding of this problem. He argues:

Many Catholics argue that the additional books found in the Apocrypha (Septuagint plus), which they call the deuterocanon, were universally held by the early church to be canonical. This is a considerable overstatement. However, Protestants have acted as if these books never existed or played any role whatsoever in the early church. This too is an extreme position. Although many of the early church fathers recognized a distinction between the Apocryphal books and inspired Scripture, they universally held them in high regard. Protestants who are serious students of their faith cannot ignore this material if they hope to understand the early church or the thinking of its earliest theologians (Closson, 2004: 5).

Inasmuch as Closson offers here an effective, constructive, ecumenical and reconciliatory historical-theological position on the Apocrypha, I will not discuss this issue again in the concluding chapter of this research where an ecumenical joint statement will be offered. The inspiration of the Scriptures, as a separate theological element within the ecumenical Scripture principle, is a marginal issue for this research (see 2.2.3; for further brief investigation of the inspiration of the Apocrypha see Hickey, 1979: 455-457).

Regarding the authority and the nature of revelation, the fourth decree of the Council of Trent stresses *two distinct sources of revelation of God*, written books of the Holy Scripture and unwritten tradition received from apostles but genuinely preserved in the Catholic Church, known as *partim/partim*. The Council of Trent assumes, therefore, that since God is the author of both the Scripture and the traditions there should be no contradiction between them. Revelation should be understood as one, though this concept is far from “one wellspring” theory of Vatican II. That revelation is just actualized or objectified by *partim/partim*. Furthermore, in the first decree of session 4, the list of accepted books of the Scriptures is quoted contrary to the Jewish/Protestant canon, and the tradition of the Vulgate is promulgated to the extent that those who do not accept this tradition are anathematized. The second decree of session 4 deals with specific rules of printing and distribution of the official translation of the Vulgate. What becomes relevant for this research is the last paragraph of this important decree:

Besides the above, wishing to repress that temerity, by which the words and sentences of sacred Scripture are *turned and twisted* to all sorts of profane uses, to wit, to things

scurrilous, fabulous, vain, to flatteries, detractions, superstitions, impious and diabolical incantations, sorceries, and defamatory libels; (the Synod) commands and enjoins, for the doing away with this kind of irreverence and contempt, and that *no one may hence forth dare in any way to apply the words of sacred Scripture to these and such like purposes; that all men of this description, profaners and violators of the word of God, be by the bishops restrained by the penalties of law, and others of their own appointment* (Waterworth, 1848: session 4, second decree, italics mine).

By this promulgation, the Roman Church clearly stated that the right to handling and interpretation of the sacred Scripture belongs to the Church and bishops. They have a right even to discipline those who apply/or interpret the Scriptures differently, namely “turn and twist” the sacred Scripture. Here are excluded not only Protestants of the time, but also Catholic believers who strive to interpret the Scriptures in a private manner, contrary to the hermeneutical tradition of the teaching magisterium. Privatization of interpretation is totally discouraged and ultimately condemned. This decree appears as fully consistent to the agenda of the Counter-Reformation.

Nevertheless, in the *Decree on Reformation* the Church positively regarded the reading and the study of the Scriptures, promising benefits for those who faithfully minister in the Word for the good of the Church. However, it seems that the magisterium of the church or theological schools has a right to oversee and control “lectureship of the sacred Scripture” as well as persons who engage in this reading (Waterworth, 1848: session 5, second decree). Moreover, the Scripture should be read within the boundaries of the Catholic faith (tradition) (Waterworth, 1848: session 5, second degree,). Obviously, stimulated by the program of the Counter - Reformation, the Council has done away with *personal* reading and *private* interpretations allegedly promulgated by Martin Luther and other Reformers. It has been already observed that Martin Luther interpreted the Holy Scripture with the auxiliary material of the church fathers and that the broad concept of the Word of God somehow included extra-biblical revelation always evaluated with the Scriptures (*prima scriptura*) (see section 2.2.2.1). Therefore, the Council of Trent emphasized only dissimilarities between traditional Catholicism and Lutheranism.

Formally speaking, the Council of Trent rejected the principle of *sola scriptura* on the ground of the nature or the scope of revelation/Word of God. The unwritten tradition of the church must be revered since it “*too contains the Word of God, having its origins in the teaching of the apostles,*” stresses an evangelical scholar (King, 2009: 356, italics mine). Thereafter the theological formula *partim/partim* has become the model of the Catholic

interpretation of the dynamic character of revelation. The unwritten tradition has become the dogmatic source of God's revelation. The Council of Trent "wanted to define, against the Reformation, the existence of unwritten apostolic traditions containing, *possibly, dogmatic truths*," says Yves M.J. Congar in his *Tradition and Traditions* (1997) (Quoted in Mathison, 2001: 130, italics mine). The principle of *sola scriptura* was also repudiated on the basis of the authority for validation and interpretation of the Scripture; this authority belongs only to the magisterium of the Church. Consequently, the principle that Scripture interprets itself was rejected as well. Lastly, the Scripture principle, as it was formulated by the Protestants, was renounced on the ground of rejection of the private interpretation and even cloistered reading of the Scriptures.

In fact, the Catholic dogmatism of the Council of Trent did not take at all into consideration any liberalization of the Scripture principle done by the Reformers. Speaking in today's ecumenical terms, the decrees of the Council of Trent about the relationship between the Bible and tradition do not seem promising. This does not mean, however, that the concept of tradition has been entirely reformulated by progressive Catholicism. It has only been adapted in the ecumenical dialogue of Vatican II using the indispensable accommodation principle. It is time now to look at the decrees of the universal council of Vatican I.

4.3 Vatican I and Revelation

Vatican I (1870), the ecumenical council devoted to the endorsement of papal infallibility and the historical victory of ultramontanism (Hollerich, 2009: 424), had several sessions on the nature of revelation and the Holy Scriptures and published several canons on this topic.

Regarding the canon it affirms the decree of the Council of Trent:

If anyone does not receive as sacred and canonical the complete books of Sacred Scripture with all their parts, as the holy Council of Trent listed them, or denies that they were divinely inspired: let him be anathema (Tanner, 1990, [Vatican I]: session 3, canon 2).

Speaking about the authority for validation of the Scriptures it was clearly underlined that the Church is *above* the Scriptures:

Likewise I accept Sacred Scripture according to that sense which Holy mother Church held and holds, since *it is her right to judge of the true sense and interpretation of the Holy Scriptures*; nor will I ever receive and interpret them except according to the unanimous consent of the fathers (Tanner, 1990, [Vatican I]: session 2, canon 3, italics mine).

The Church, therefore, in its historical authority of the magisterium and the Fathers, has a right to determine the authority of the Scriptures and its interpretation. Determination of the different layers of meaning of the Bible belongs to the Church *only*. Regarding the dual revelation of the Council of Trent, Vatican I confirms the *partim/partim* principle:

Now this supernatural revelation, according to the belief of the universal Church, as declared by the sacred Council of Trent, is *contained in written books and unwritten traditions*, which were received by the apostles from the lips of Christ himself, or came to the apostles by the dictation of the Holy Spirit, and were passed on as it were from hand to hand until they reached us (Tanner, 1990, [Vatican I]: session 3, chapter 2, canon 5, italics mine).

This is a triumphant and insightful replication of the decrees of Trent. As (Lane, 1975: 49) puts it: “The First Vatican Council confined itself to reiterating the decisions of Trent”. However, unlike the Council of Trent, for the first time revelation in general is defined as *the Word of God*, a broader principle that contains Scripture and Tradition. The Council asserted:

This we shall do with the bishops of the whole world as our co-assessors and fellow-judges, gathered here as they are in the Holy Spirit by our authority in this ecumenical council, and relying on *the word of God in Scripture and tradition* as we have received it, religiously preserved and authentically expounded by the Catholic Church (Tanner, 1990, [Vatican I]: session 3, canon 10).

It seems that the interpretation of revelation (Trent) as the Word of God (Vatican I) opened the possibility for a new understanding of the Scripture-tradition relationship and prepared the way for contemporary ecumenical Catholic interpretation of the principle of *sola scriptura*. Revelation is based on one principle or “wellspring” of the Word of God, and not on two separate principles of the Bible and Tradition. This “one source” theory of revelation has become the touchstone of Vatican II’s *Dei Verbum*.

Regarding the interpretation of the Bible, Vatican I, in its attempt to respond to the misunderstandings of the Council of Trent, clearly established the principle that only the Church has a right to interpret the Scriptures because only the Church has a true deposit of faith:

Now since the decree on the interpretation of Holy Scripture, profitably made by the Council of Trent, with the intention of constraining rash speculation, has been wrongly interpreted by some, we renew that decree and declare its meaning to be as follows: that in matters of faith and morals, belonging as they do to the establishing of Christian doctrine,

that meaning of Holy Scripture must be held to be the true one, which Holy mother Church held and holds, since it is her right to judge of the true meaning and interpretation of Holy Scripture (Tanner, 1990, [Vatican I]: session 3, chapter 2, canon 8, italics mine).

Therefore, according to the decrees above, Vatican I discards the *sola scriptura* principle on the same ground as the Council of Trent: (1) authority of the church above the Scripture, and (2) a rightful duty of the Church to develop and interpret meaning(s) of the Bible. The Bible is again presented as the Church's Book. The sole difference between these two councils is possibly the broadening of the principle of revelation (the Word of God) that consists of the Sacred Scriptures and of traditions that, at all times, go beyond what is merely written. Interestingly enough, in its dealing with infallibility dogma, which is not the subject of this research (for further research see Bokenkotter, 2002: 322-327), Vatican I claims that this new teaching was the "absolutely manifest teaching of the Sacred Scriptures" (Vatican I, session 4, chapter 1, canon 4). It appears that a Catholic believer knows it would be ineffectual to prove the infallibility of the pope *only* from the Bible. Therefore, it seems here that Vatican I affirms the Sacred Scripture as just a *part* of a broader tradition of the Church. Consequently, when the Council can say that tradition naturally verifies something, it is assumed that the Word of God from the Sacred Scriptures belongs to that same tradition. Therefore, the *partim/partim* of the Council of Trent has been progressively transformed into a not fully formed concept of "one wellspring" of revelation that will reach its maturity at Vatican II.

4.4 Pre-Vatican II Theology of Scripture

This unit of the research will explore both official papal documents relating to the *sola scriptura* principle and the traditional Catholic theology of God's revelation and the Holy Scriptures. As it is commonly recognized, Catholic dogmatic theology always has these two dimensions: (1) official promulgations/encyclicals/letters by the pope and the magisterium of the Church, and (2) theological judgments and systems (*theologumena*) created by the individual theologians that subsequently have become the pillars of the Catholic dogmatic theology. Potential discrepancies or even contradictions between the two might be helpful in providing some space for searching for a unified/ecumenical position on the Scripture in relation to evangelical theology.

4.4.1 Papal Documents on the Scripture before Vatican II

Between 1890 and 1950 several important encyclicals and apostolic letters were issued concerning the nature, authority and interpretation of the Scriptures. Some of them are the fully- fledged presentations of the doctrine of the Bible. However, the focus here is on the elements of the nature and authority of the Word and the hermeneutical principles of the Bible.

Pope Leo XIII (1878-1903), in his well-known encyclical *Providentissimus Deus* ("On the Study of Holy Scripture" - November 18, 1893, hereafter referred to as PD), was trying to build up the conservative doctrine of the Scripture against the attacks of the modernists (or rationalists). This seemed to be the main purpose of the encyclical. Regarding the authority of the Sacred Scriptures Pope Leo XIII says:

...since the divine and infallible *magisterium* of the Church rests also on the authority of Holy Scripture, *the first thing to be done is to vindicate the trustworthiness of the sacred records at least as human documents*, from which can be clearly proved, as from primitive and authentic testimony, the Divinity and the mission of Christ our Lord, the institution of a hierarchical Church and the primacy of Peter and his successors (Leo XIII, 1893, PD: article 17, par. 45, italics mine).

The magisterium has the authority to determine the authenticity of the biblical books and therefore, although its authority “rests on the authority of Holy Scripture” it is the determining factor for recognizing the validity of each book of the Bible. It has, moreover, the *infallible* hierarchical authority of the Church. Speaking about the nature and elements of revelation the Pope clearly affirms the *partim/partim* construction of the Council of Trent:

Supernatural revelation, according to the belief of the universal Church, is contained both in unwritten Tradition, and in written Books, which are therefore called sacred and canonical because, "being written under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, they have God for their author and as such have been delivered to the Church (Leo XIII, 1893, PD: article 1, par. 1).

Though he gives the impression that revelation or the Word of God has dual expression--as Scripture and Tradition--the Pope does not avoid usage of the expression Word of God for the Holy Scripture:

Among the reasons for which *the Holy Scripture* is so worthy of commendation - in addition to its own excellence and to the homage which we owe to *God's Word* - the chief of all is, the innumerable benefits of which it is the source; according to the infallible testimony of the Holy Ghost Himself (Leo XIII, 1893, PD: article 3, par. 5, italics mine).

Leo XIII, therefore, explicitly states that Scripture is the Word of God (Leo XIII, 1893, PD: article 4, par. 11.13; article 16, par. 41), and that this indisputable fact is also testified by the early Fathers (Leo XIII, 1893, PD: article 7, par. 26). Therefore the Church has a sacred duty to transmit the Word of God as “it is written”:

The calm and fair consideration of what has been said will clearly show that the Church has never failed in taking due measures *to bring the Scriptures within reach of her children*, and that she has ever held fast and exercised profitably that guardianship conferred upon her by Almighty God for the protection and glory of *His Holy Word*; so that she has never required, nor does she now require, any stimulation from without (Leo XIII, 1893, PD: article 8, par. 27, italics mine).

The Pope claims that the battle against the Reformers, who claimed self-sufficiency of the Holy Scripture, has been replaced with the battle against “rationalists” (Leo XIII, 1893, PD: article 10, par. 27) or “higher criticism” (Leo XIII, 1893, PD: article 17, par. 50) which is an obvious reference to historical-critical methods (see sections 3.3.7 & 5.6.3.3). For Leo XIII the theology of the Word of God resembles the Lutheran paradox of equality/distinction between Scripture and the Word. PD evidently has an embryonic ecumenical tendency. The Pope probably did not recognize and present this paradox intentionally. However, it might be used effectively in the current ecumenical dialogue on the nature of the Word of God.

Nevertheless, the authority of interpretation of the Scriptures belongs only to the magisterium based on the tradition of interpretation that must be taken into consideration:

Where the *charismata* of God were, there the truth was to be learnt, and that Holy Scripture was safely interpreted by those who had the apostolic succession. [Teachings of the Holy Fathers are] taken up by the Council of the Vatican, which, in renewing the decree of Trent declares its “mind” to be this - that “in things of faith and morals, belonging to the building up of Christian doctrine, that is to be considered the true sense of Holy Scripture which has been held and is held by our Holy Mother the Church, whose place it is to judge of the true sense and interpretation of the Scriptures; and therefore that *it is permitted to no one to interpret Holy Scripture against such sense or also against the unanimous agreement of the Fathers* (Leo XIII, 1893, PD: article 14, par. 32-33).

However, the Pope leaves open the possibility of the combination of private interpretation inspired with the Holy Spirit and the universal interpretation of the magisterium. He continues:

Wherefore the first and dearest object of the Catholic commentator should be to interpret those passages which have received an authentic interpretation either from the sacred writers themselves, under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost (as in many places of the New Testament), or from the Church, under the assistance of the same Holy Spirit, whether by her solemn judgment or her ordinary and universal *magisterium* (Leo XIII, 1893, PD: article 14, par. 34).

According to this testimony of Pope Leo XIII, there might be some teachers or sacred writers of the church who can amalgamate their own private readings with the interpretation of the church's tradition. Unlike the Council of Trent the private interpretation has not been repudiated altogether. The tradition of the Church also consists of this blending of *theologumena* and the authoritative interpretation of the magisterium. However, there is no clarity and no ultimate solution for the discrepancies between commentator's interpretations and the position of the magisterium. This might be one of the weaknesses of the traditional Catholic hermeneutics.

Finally, the hermeneutics of PD reminds us that traditional Catholic teaching does not accept only the literal or typological meaning of the Bible, but also the *sensus plenior*:

For the language of the Bible is employed to express, under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, many things which are beyond the power and scope of the reason of man - that is to say, divine mysteries and all that is related to them. There is sometimes in such passages a fullness and a *hidden depth of meaning which the letter hardly expresses and which the laws of interpretation hardly warrant.* (Leo XIII, 1893, PD: article 14, par. 31).

Divine mysteries of the Bible seem to be the justification for deeper meaning, namely the *sensus plenior*. This could be the birth of the *sensus plenior* doctrine later developed in the hermeneutics of Roman Catholic as well as evangelical theology (see section 3.3.9). Deeper sense theory unquestionably provides some space for a thoughtful ecumenical dialogue between the Catholic *quadriga* and the evangelical search for spiritual meaning of the Scripture.

To sum up, though Pope Leo XIII affirmed the historic Catholic position on the Scripture principle, he offered some pioneering techniques to transcend the gap between the traditional universal councils and the contemporary applications of their decrees. The recognition of the dynamic nature of the Word of God, applicable also to the Bible, and the possibility of a private commentator's interpretation open the possibility of ecumenical dialogue with the Protestants. Leo XIII indeed made an attempt to go beyond the Council of Trent.

His successor, Pope Pius X (1903-1914), in his encyclical *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* ("On the Doctrines of the Modernists" - September 8, 1907, hereafter PDG) continues to combat the heresy of modernism. He criticizes the content of modernist teachings and the methodology used in these scientific studies. The separation of science and faith seems to be the most serious flaw in modernist teachings, according to Pius X

(1907a, PDG: article 18). Modern agnosticism, theology and science are in contrast with the teachings of the Church and the magisterium's authority to promulgate doctrine.

In Article 22 "Holy Scripture" and Article 34 "How the Bible is dealt with" the Pope speaks about the nature and study of the Scriptures. Regarding the nature of Scripture Pius X says:

Inspiration, they [modernists] reply, is distinguished only by its vehemence from that impulse which stimulates the believer to reveal the faith that is in him by words or writing. It is something like what happens in poetical inspiration, of which it has been said: There is God in us, and when he stirreth he sets us afire. And it is precisely in this sense that God is said to be the origin of the inspiration of the Sacred Books (Pius X, 1907a, PDG: article 22).

Catholic teaching, however, is opposed to this liberal understanding of the inspiration of the Bible (Pius X, 1907a, PDG: article 22). In similar terms the Pope claims:

We believe, then, that we have set forth with sufficient clearness the historical method of the Modernists. The philosopher leads the way, the historian follows, and then in due order come internal and textual criticism. And since it is characteristic of the first cause to communicate its virtue to secondary causes, it is quite clear that the criticism we are concerned with is an *agnostic, immanentist, and evolutionist* criticism. Hence anybody who embraces it and employs it, makes profession thereby of the errors contained in it, and places himself in opposition to Catholic faith (Pius X, 1907a, PDG: article 34).

Therefore, Catholic teaching, with its much more superior knowledge of the Scriptures compared to that of Modernists, as Pius X emphasized (article 34), is based on the supernatural origin and interpretation of the Bible. Hermeneutics, according to Pius X, is always based on theological and historical interpretation of the tradition and the magisterium.

In his *Motu Proprio Letter Praeestantia Scripturae Sacrae* ("On the Decisions of the Biblical Commission" - November 18, 1907, hereafter PSS), Pius X proclaims:

Wherefore we find it necessary to declare and to expressly prescribe, and by this our act we do declare and decree that all are bound in conscience to submit to the decisions of the Biblical Commission relating to doctrine, which have been given in the past and which shall be given in the future, in the same way as to the decrees of the Roman congregations approved by the Pontiff; nor can all those escape the note of disobedience or temerity, and consequently of grave sin, who in speech or writing contradict such decisions, and this besides the scandal they give and the other reasons for which they may be responsible before God for other temerities and errors which generally go with such contradictions (Pius X, 1907b, PSS: par. 3).

All doctrinal conclusions, seemingly believed to be based on the Scripture, must be created by the particular body of the church - the Biblical Commission, subjected to the

magisterium and ultimately the Pope himself. Therefore, the Scriptures are not the ultimate criteria and norms in formulating the doctrine. The *sola scriptura* principle has been disclaimed on the basis of the authority of the Church (and the Pope) in the determination of orthodox/heterodox doctrinal statements. The Biblical Commission requires the consent of all theological opinions (*theologumena*) to the authority of the establishment of the Church.

Pope Benedict XV (1914-1922), the irenic Pope of the First World War, in his encyclical *Spiritus Paraclitus* ("On St. Jerome" - September 15, 1920, hereafter SP) speaks on the occasion of the fifteenth centenary of the death of St Jerome, the Catholic Church's "Greatest Doctor," divinely given to her for the understanding of the Bible (Benedict XV, 1920, SP: article 1, par. 1). By elaborating on the life and study of St Jerome, the Pope asserts that this saint and theologian affirms the "super eminent authority" (Benedict XV, 1920, SP: article 10, par. 23) of the Scriptures. However, in traditional Catholic terms Benedict XV affirms that "God's Church is the divinely appointed guardian of God's Word" (Benedict XV, 1920, SP: article 60, par. 111). In this "word of truth" there is nothing discordant or conflicting. Consequently, "when Scripture seem to be in conflict with itself both passages are true despite their diversity" (Benedict XV, 1920, SP: article 14, par. 38). The Bible, the Pope claims, must be also absolutely immune from error (Benedict XV, 1920, SP: article 16, par. 41). Based on the teaching of Leo XIII Benedict XV affirms the historical truth of the Scripture (Benedict XV, 1920, SP: article 23, par. 43). This truth is always based on Christ-centeredness as a principle (Benedict XV, 1920, SP: article 30, par. 45). Christ is always the touchstone of the understanding of biblical revelation and the hermeneutical task. Moreover, in expounding the Scriptures the Church needs the Holy Ghost for the understanding of them (Benedict XV, 1920, SP: article 35, par. 45).

According to Benedict XV, Jerome seems to be the inspiration for the ultimate call for devout Bible study (Benedict XV, 1920, SP: article 46, par. 80). Regarding the biblical authority in refuting heresies the Pope outwardly supports the genius of Jerome's concept of the Bible's self-sufficiency and says: "it is from the Bible that we gather confirmations and illustrations of *any* particular doctrine we wish to defend" (Benedict XV, 1920, SP: article 48, par. 82, italics mine). The Bible finally becomes "the soul of theology" (Benedict XV, 1920, SP: article 48, par. 82). It is not clear, however, whether the Pope supports the self-sufficiency of the Scriptures for doctrinal development. This idea would

be too radical, and it sounds evangelical, but the statements allude to biblical defence of dogmas. Consequently, in the *partim/partim* structure of revelation at least formal primacy of the Scripture might be confirmed here. Any teaching of tradition should be based on and assessed by the testimony of the Word of God. Hereby Benedict XV unlocks the venue for the dialogue with contemporary Evangelicalism. The *prima scriptura* principle seems to be the reasonable outcome of the Pope's apology of the sacredness and solemnity of God's revelation in the Holy Scripture.

In the hermeneutical vision of the Pope the literal meaning expounded by Jerome is affirmed (Benedict XV, 1920, SP: article 51, par. 89). However, Benedict XV says that "the history itself is often presented in metaphorical dress and described figuratively" (Benedict XV, 1920, SP: article 51, par. 89) and this is the reason for the employment of allegorical sense, although the Pope calls them "deeper and hidden meanings" (Benedict XV, 1920, SP: article 51, par. 90). He quotes Jerome's inspirational statement:

Everything we read in the Sacred Books shines and glitters even in its outer shell; but the marrow of it is sweeter. If you want the kernel you must break the shell (Jerome quoted in Benedict XV, 1920, SP: article 52, par. 92).

Faithfulness is, of course, required as a prerequisite for grasping of these "mysterious" meanings (Benedict XV, 1920, SP: article 55, par. 97). Moreover, Christ is the keystone and the center of the Scriptures. "Love of Christ must ever be the chiefest and most agreeable result of a knowledge of Holy Scripture", concludes Benedict XV (Benedict XV, 1920, SP: article 63, par. 120).

Pope Benedict XV, therefore, highly values the Holy Scriptures as the source of doctrine and practice of the Church, and recognizes the Christ-centered aspect of its revelation. On the other hand, he never claims the full self-sufficiency of the Scriptures or private interpretation and remains faithful to the Catholic dogma that the Bible is "the Book of the Church". The Word of God, the broad principle of revelation, has been preserved and protected within the historical tradition of the Church. Nevertheless, the value of Benedict XV's exposition of the teachings of Jerome resides in the fact that this golden age Church Father was aware of the necessity for the self-sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures as the Word of God (*prima scriptura*); this has become one of the pillars of the Reformers' Scripture principle or at least the dogmatic expression of the Protestant orthodoxy. Benedict XVI (Joseph Ratzinger) apparently built up his contemporary theology of the

Word, within the current ecumenical vision, on the legacy of his irenic predecessor Benedict XV.

Pope Pius XI (1922-1939) in his Motu Proprio Letter *Bibliorum Scientiam* ("On Academic Standards for Teachers of Scripture" - April 27, 1924, hereafter BS) proclaims the foundational dogma of the Catholic understanding of revelation:

All that we know about God, about Christ our Redeemer, about the original foundation of the Church, and about the rule of moral conduct *derives from these sacred books*, which the church embraces as a further source of divine revelation in a way no different from its alliance on the unwritten Tradition (Béchar, 2002, BS: 112, italics mine).

Paradoxically, the first part of the statement reminds us of the Protestant teaching of the self-sufficiency of the Scripture. Everything that needs to be known about God is known through the Bible. Yet, in the second part of the statement the Scriptures are just the *partim* of the deposit of revelation given also through tradition that goes beyond what is merely written. This paradox seems promising in the ecumenical dialogue on Scripture. In the rest of the Letter Pope Pius XI reminds us of the importance of Bible study and invites all levels of the church structure to support biblical studies (Béchar, 2002, BS: 112-113).

Pope Pius XII (1939-1958), the Pope of the turbulent times of the Second World War, in his encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* ("On the Most Opportune Way to Promote Biblical Studies" - September 30, 1943, hereafter DAS) at the fiftieth anniversary of *Providentissimus Deus*, rejoices in the evolution of Bible studies in the Catholic church:

But it is right and pleasing to confess openly that it is not only by reason of these initiatives, precepts and exhortations of Our Predecessors that the knowledge and use of the Sacred Scriptures have made great progress among Catholics; for this is also due to the works and labors of all those who diligently cooperated with them, both by meditating, investigating and writing, as well as by teaching and preaching and by translating and propagating the Sacred Books (Pius XII, 1943, DAS: par. 10).

Apparently, Pope Pius XII repeats and confirms the theology of Scripture expounded by his predecessors. There are a few notions that should be highlighted in his elaboration on the nature of Scripture and its interpretation. Regarding the nature of the Word of God, he confirms the christological *incarnation* principle as the appropriate one, already expanded in the thought of Thomas Aquinas:

The Angelic Doctor already observed in these words: "In Scripture divine things are presented to us in the manner which is in common use amongst men." For as the substantial Word of God became like to men in all things, "except sin," so the words of God, expressed in human language, are made like to human speech in every respect, except error. In this consists that "condescension" of the God of providence, which St. John Chrysostom

extolled with the highest praise and repeatedly declared to be found in the Sacred Books (Pius XII, 1943, DAS: par. 30-31).

Every view of Scripture that endorses the *inscripturation* principle of analogy with Christ's incarnation must be considered as a high view of Scripture, though in Catholic dogma it is always found within the context of sacramental theology of the Word in the liturgical sense. Verbal inspiration for the purpose of veneration of the Word of God as a sign of divine grace might be one of the presuppositions here, but still, we cannot deny the Catholic high view of the Word of God in theological and doctrinal sense which is an asset in the ecumenical dialogue with evangelicals. Regarding the exegesis Pope Pius XII warns against false interpretation based on ignorance of the literary structure of the Bible:

Hence the Catholic commentator, in order to comply with the present needs of biblical studies, in explaining the Sacred Scripture and in demonstrating and proving its immunity from all error, should also make a prudent use of this means, determine, that is, to what extent the manner of expression or the literary mode adopted by the sacred writer may lead to a correct and genuine interpretation; and let him be convinced that this part of his office cannot be neglected without serious detriment to Catholic exegesis (Pius XII, 1943, DAS: par. 38).

It seems that this principle supports the employment of the *critical* analysis of the Scriptures. Catholic theology does not reject historical-critical method in its essence. However, as its modern counterpart critical method today needs to uphold the historical validity of the supernatural revelation of God. Chapter 5 will address this issue in detail. Hermeneutically speaking, says the Pope, God has a purpose in leaving the ambiguous texts in the Scripture:

God wished difficulties to be scattered through the Sacred Books inspired by Him, in order that we might be urged to read and scrutinize them more intently, and, experiencing in a salutary manner our own limitations, we might be exercised in due submission of mind (Pius XII, 1943, DAS: par. 45).

Nonetheless, the purpose of biblical studies is not primarily to resolve contradictions. The purpose of the study and hermeneutics is again the knowledge of Christ, concludes Pius XII (1943, DAS: par. 57). Revelation of the Word without Christ-centered knowledge of the Scriptures has no meaning in Christian life.

The final papal document, before Vatican II, that will be explored in this unit of the research is the Pope Pius XII's encyclical *Humani Generis* ("On Certain False Opinions Threatening to Undermine the Foundations of Catholic Doctrine" - August 12, 1950, hereafter HG). The Pope primarily claims that the Word of God is *contained* in the Sacred Scripture as the foundation of religious teaching (Pius XII, 1950, HG: par. 8). God is the

author of Scripture, asserts Pius XII (1950, HG: par. 22). Dogma, however, is not based on the Scripture only, but on the Holy Scripture and the Fathers of the church (Pius XII, 1950, HG: par. 14). *Partim/partim* has been reformulated to such an extent as to completely discard the *sola scriptura* principle. Furthermore, only the Church and its magisterium has a right to biblical interpretation precisely because “those who disagree with the true Church complain openly of their disagreement in matters of dogma and thus unwillingly bear witness to the necessity of a living Teaching Authority” (Pius XII, 1950, HG: par. 8).

The Pope explains:

The sacred Office of Teacher in matters of faith and morals must be the proximate and universal criterion of truth for all theologians, since to it has been entrusted by Christ Our Lord the whole deposit of faith - Sacred Scripture and divine Tradition - to be preserved, guarded and interpreted... (Pius XII, 1950, HG: par. 18; see also HG, par. 21).

There are some theologians, even in the Catholic Church, who might recognize the Reformation principle of *prima scriptura* over Tradition in this hermeneutical task. To those Pope Pius XII explicitly replies:

Thus they judge the doctrine of the Fathers and of the Teaching Church by the norm of Holy Scripture, interpreted by the *purely human reason* of exegetes, instead of *explaining Holy Scripture according to the mind of the Church* which Christ Our Lord has appointed guardian and interpreter of the whole deposit of divinely revealed truth (Pius XII, 1950, HG: par. 22, italics mine).

The Pope claims that every private interpretation, based on human intellect and reason, has to be tested by the historical and corporate “mind of the Church”. It is not completely clear how this “mind of the Church” is related to the “mind of Christ”. As both Catholics and evangelicals agree, Christ, through the Church, is the ultimate interpreter of His Word. The dynamics of this hermeneutical process are not fully explained in the papal document. His repudiation of *prima scriptura* principle, however, does not sound encouraging in the ecumenical dialogue.

Furthermore, Pius XII insists that above the magisterium or teaching office there is the office of the papacy. Theological disputes over the teaching of Scripture or tradition should be always be ended by the authority of the supreme Pontiff, concludes the Pope (Pius XII, 1950, HG: par. 20). For example, in regard to the interpretation of the dogma of theistic evolution Pope Pius XII draws a general principle of submission to the magisterium and the Pope:

The Teaching Authority of the Church does not forbid that, in conformity with the present state of human sciences and sacred theology, research and discussions, on the part of men

experienced in both fields, take place with regard to the doctrine of evolution, in as far as it inquires into the origin of the human body as coming from pre-existent and living matter - for the Catholic faith obliges us to hold that souls are immediately created by God. However, this must be done in such a way that the reasons for both opinions, that is, those favorable and those unfavorable to evolution, be weighed and judged with the necessary seriousness, moderation and measure, and provided that all are prepared *to submit to the judgment of the Church, to whom Christ has given the mission of interpreting authentically the Sacred Scriptures and of defending the dogmas of faith* (Pius XII, 1950, HG: par. 36, italics mine).

According to HG, therefore, only the Church (magisterium and the Pope) can interpret the Bible and the teaching office has become a necessity due to diverse and multiple conflicting interpretations of the Protestant denominations. This is one of the most fundamental Catholic arguments against the principle of *sola scriptura*. Nevertheless, the contemporary evangelical movement with its recent emphasis on tradition and the need for the teaching office within the hermeneutical task of the Church's interpretation of the Scriptures (see Ch. 3) reflects some of the ideas of Pius XII. Ecumenical dialogue seems favourable in this context.

To sum up, all papal documents between 1890 and 1950 still endorse the *partim/partim* structure of God's revelation. Revelation is always given through written Scriptures and unwritten tradition. Some documents seem to stress the primacy of Scripture, but only materially and implicitly. More explicitly, the documents broaden the principle of the Word of God and apply this principle to the joint revelation of the Scripture and tradition. Though some papal documents leave room for private theological interpretation of the Scriptures, doctrine or dogma should always be based on the final judgment of "the mind of the Church", the magisterium (teaching office) and the Pope himself. The community of the church, with the delegated authority of its teaching office, is always the determining factor of the hermeneutical task. This task rejects critical methods while still affirming historical, revelational and theological interpretations of the Sacred Scriptures. Therefore, traditional Catholic teaching of papal documents clearly rejects the principle of *sola scriptura* and leaves no possibility for a different or ecumenical interpretation. Though there are some theological insights and spiritual discernments that may be used in the ecumenical dialogue, it is clear that, for papal documents before Vatican II, the principle of *sola scriptura* is an impossible oxymoron. Papal documents immediately prior to or after Vatican II will be investigated in Chapter 5.

In regard to *sola scriptura*, what is the standpoint of traditional wisdom of the prominent traditional Catholic theologians/saints/fathers before Vatican II?

4.4.2 Catholic Theology of the Scripture before Vatican II

In this section the aim is to investigate the Scripture principle in its constitutive elements expounded by some of the most remarkable representatives of the traditional Catholic theology. Theology of the biblical nature and authority and its interpretation has been addressed in different periods by different theologians/fathers/saints of the Church. Nonetheless, I will have to narrow down the selection of these thinkers to some of the pillars of the Catholic dogmatic theology of the Word of God. From the golden patristic period the theology of St Augustine will be looked upon. Augustine, as it is widely accepted, has been pulled by both Catholics and Protestants in different yet sometimes analogous directions (Cairns, 1996: 139; Hunter, 2009: 192). Therefore, his thought represents an underpinning of the Western theological heritage, and he is an indispensable philosopher/theologian in regard to the ecumenical dialogue today. Thomas Aquinas has been selected as an Angelic Doctor and “the prince” of scholasticism. Aquinas is, of course, the foundational thinker of almost all Catholic dogmas today. From late scholasticism William of Ockham has been selected because of his introduction of the *sola scriptura* principle prior to the Reformation. Finally, in more contemporary period before Vatican II, among others, the name of John Cardinal Henry Newman is preferred. His Anglican background and unique emphasis in the theology of the Scripture principle might be helpful in the ecumenical dialogue. What did St Augustine teach about *sola scriptura*?

4.4.2.1 St Augustine and the Bible

One of the most notable biographers of St. Augustine (ca. 354-430), Van der Meer, recognized that:

The whole work of Augustine owes its very flesh, its very bones and marrow to the Word of God... It would be difficult to point to a man who was more completely filled by Holy Scripture than was Augustine... He literally lived in Holy Scripture (Van der Meer, 1961: 343).

Augustine's doctrine of the Bible was, therefore, the key foundation of his philosophical-theological system. Though at start he was a philosopher, Augustine always emphasized the pre-eminence of Christianity as "true philosophy" and the true religion based on Scripture among other tenets (Harrison C., 2005: 73). To find God's wisdom Augustine turned to the tradition of the Bible, "the keystone of the Christian communities of Africa" (Brown, 2000: 31), and "the mirror for the active Christian" (2005: 406). For Augustine the Bible had become "the basis of a Christian culture, a *doctrina Christiana*" (Harrison C., 2005: 261). For this saint progress in theological and spiritual wisdom was always portrayed as progress in the understanding of the Holy Scriptures (2005: 174).

In the current debate about the Scripture principle, the authority and the nature of the Bible/Word of God and some particular hermeneutical principles of St. Augustine will be assessed for the purpose of finding common ground with evangelical theology in the ecumenical dialogue on the *sola scriptura* principle. In the writings of Augustine the authority of the Holy Scriptures is fully endorsed (Augustine, 1953: 138). He says that "divine Scripture is of more sublime authority" (1953: 422). Here Augustine affirms the divine origins and nature of the Bible. From the very start of his theological discussions he warns against drifting away from the Scriptures and the rule of faith and accepting the opinion of certain persons (Augustine, 1959: 10). He was completely aware of the dangers of false interpretations from his struggles with the Manichaeans (see Harrison C., 2005: 81-82), who claimed to have a corrected and more authentic version of the Scriptures. For Augustine the real threat and harm of Manicheans is that educated men in the Church might reject the testimony of the writers of the Bible (Teselle, 1970: 205). He presupposed that there might be some people coming to the church without knowledge of the true meaning of the Bible, especially proud educated men. This was also Augustine's problem (Pope, 1961: 145). In opposition to mostly educated heretics who distorted Scriptures by false and deceitful doctrines Augustine uplifted the Scriptures as the foundation for the "holy testimonies of the divine books" (Augustine, 1963: 10; 1966: 4; 1955: 336). It seems that he validates the principle of self-sufficiency of the Scriptures when it comes to theological conflicts with heterodox teachings. Therefore, contrary to theological opinions of the time Augustine affirms that the Scriptures are trustworthy and they expound sound teaching (Augustine, 1955: 166). In his book *Contra Faustum* he explicitly states:

In order to leave room for such profitable discussions of difficult questions, *there is a distinct boundary line separating* all productions subsequent to apostolic times from the

authoritative canonical books of the Old and New Testaments... In the innumerable books that have been written latterly we may sometimes find the same truth as in Scripture, *but there is not the same authority. Scripture has a sacredness peculiar to itself* (Augustine, 2012a: book XI, art. 5, italics mine).

In the summary of Augustine's emphasis on the authority of the Scriptures, he claims Christians have a right to judge non-canonical writings, including his own. There is a "boundary" between the canonical scriptures and everything else, and Scripture enjoys a peculiar sacredness (see also Scholasticus, 2007). The final authority in doctrine and ethical matters resides only in the Bible. Augustine emphatically concludes:

Lest any person should think or believe that I make these statements on my own authority, and that one who speaks without the support of the Scriptures can easily be despised, I shall now produce citations from both the Old and New Law, the source of those precepts by which a way of life is disclosed to us, to show what God, from the very beginning of the world, ordered the human race to observe and by what He has always been pleased or offended (Augustine, 1952: 20, italics mine).

On the other hand, Augustine never claimed that the Bible is self-sufficient because it is the Church's Book. Augustine believed that faith without the church was no faith at all. "To be a Christian means to celebrate the Word of God *in Church*" (Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos* quoted in Scholasticus, 2007, italics mine). He claims that the essence of worship is the hearing of the Word of God in the church where "the feast of the Holy Scriptures is always ready" (Augustine quoted in Van Der Meer, 1961: 343). In Augustine's theology the church is the custodian and teacher of the Scriptures. The most famous statement, in his *Against the Fundamental Epistle to Manichaeus*, expresses this idea: "I would not believe the holy Gospels if it were not for the authority of the Holy Catholic Church" (Augustine, 2012b: Ch. 5). It is almost certain that Augustine here speaks about the process of canonization because he affirms that the authority of the majority of the Catholic churches is the criterion for the canonization (Augustine, 1947: 69). According to Mathison, the statement is not a mediaeval metaphysical statement that puts the church above Scripture, as metaphysical priority. (Mathison, 2001: 42) is right when he states that the context speaks only about the necessary role of the church. These roles, I would add, are canonization and preservation of the holy writings of the Bible. Therefore, Augustine would still maintain his teaching of the *priority* of the Scriptures *above* the authority of the teachings of the church when it comes to doctrinal disputes. Practically, Augustine did not leave room for the discrepancies between the teachings of the Bible and theological patristic tradition. Augustine never "set Holy Scripture up against

tradition” (Van der Meer, 1961: 286-287). He even claims that elements of the Church’s tradition such as: the Lord’s Day instead of Sabbath or the great feasts of Easter, Ascension and Pentecost are based on Holy Scripture (1961: 287). Every doctrine of tradition he based on Scripture because he believed that the Bible *is* sacred tradition. Theoretically, however, this possibility must exist if we recognize his teaching about the primary function of Scripture as the Word of God. This might be a reason why Augustine is pulled in different directions by Catholics and Evangelicals (see Cairns, 1996: 142). Catholics accept his emphasis on ecclesial role as a guardian of Scripture, while evangelical theologians stress the importance of theological evaluation of the Church by the Word of God. In regard to the Scripture principle this makes Augustine perfectly ecumenical (see sections 7.3.1.1 & 7.3.2.1).

Furthermore, Augustine believes that God speaks in the Bible through a human being after the manner of human beings because He is seeking us - human beings (Augustine, 1954: 42; cf. Paul VI, 1965, *Dei Verbum*: Ch. 3). Therefore, Augustine’s theology of the Scripture leaves space for the reasonable and critical examination of the Bible since it is not just a product of God but also of humans. Unambiguously, however, for Augustine the Bible is the Word of God as a single communication, not just a heterogeneous collection of separate human testimonies or books (Brown P., 2000: 249). He still strongly believed that Scripture is the unity of the Word/words of God in written form (Morton, 2006: 5).

According to Augustine, how should we *interpret* these divine-human writings? Since the authority and the nature of the Bible, as one element of the Scripture principle, have been already affirmed in Augustine’s theology, the time is now to look closely at his specific hermeneutical principles. First of all, Augustine asserts that there are norms and principles for interpretation of the Scriptures (Augustine, 1947: 19.20). Hermeneutics indeed is a discipline of interpretation. Spiritually speaking, comprehension of the Bible is possible only through three virtues: good conscience, faith and charity (Augustine, 1947: 60). In Augustinian terms, if the Church exercises these virtues it will come to the clear meaning of the Word of God. Even the obscurity of Scripture or the alleged absence of clarity is useful because it calls for interpretation and the search for one meaning instead of another (Augustine, 1947: 65). *Claritas* of one meaning is a final goal of biblical

interpretation. It seems Augustine believed in the *primary meaning* of the Bible, namely *literal meaning*, as a foundation for further hermeneutical exercise.

Moreover, the Bible can interpret itself. This Lutheran idea is present in Augustine's writings in its immature and undeveloped form. Scripture, says Augustine, has made a summary statement "that of which it will explain more carefully later on" (Augustine, 1963: 351). Obscure passages should be interpreted with clear passages (Augustine, 1947: 146). In Augustine's theology of the Bible the proof text method is fully endorsed (1947: 147). The Bible becomes "veiled by God in order to exercise the seeker" (Augustine quoted in Brown P., 2000: 258). Augustine, thus, has become the "father" of two principles of the hermeneutics of the Reformers: unity and clarity of the Scriptures and *sacra scriptura sui ipsius interpres*.

Nevertheless, speaking about different senses, Augustine says that Scripture has layers of meaning, though each of them must be in accordance with the truth (1947: 147; Augustine, 1953: 388). In Augustine's writings the spiritual meaning is praised above the literal meaning as a final hermeneutical solution for puzzling texts in dialogue with heretics (Augustine, 1953: 126). When the mystic veil is removed one sees the spiritual meaning (1953: 136). Augustine, hence, confirms the allegorical method. The Old Testament should be interpreted not only in the literal sense but "figuratively" as well. "The reader should interpret as a symbol even those acts which he has taken literally", articulates Augustine (1947: 143). There is no doubt that the allegorical interpretation is fully sanctioned by Augustine (Van der Meer, 1961: 442-3).

Spiritual meaning, however, is always based on Christ, because without Him the Word is "obscured and covered over" (Augustine, 1947/II, 402). The Old Testament is manifest in the New (Christ) and the New Testament is hidden in the Old (Augustine, *Quaest. in Hept. 2, 73* quoted in Paul VI, 1965, DV: Ch. 4). Augustine believed in the unity of the testaments. Hermeneutical task of Augustine, however, is not as simple as it looks. Morton recognized:

He [Augustine] regards Scripture as the most inscrutable yet pertinent source of written language. Recognizing Scripture's abstruse nature, Augustine seeks to standardize methods for reading and deciphering the figurative language that suffuses biblical text (Morton, 2006: 2).

Evidently, Augustine was under the influence of his pre-conversion studies of Neoplatonism and Platonism (see C. Harrison, 2005:77-79; Kenny, 2010: 261). Later on,

in *Confessions*, he narrates his struggle to capture God's mystery through his rational faculties. Morton nicely portrayed Augustine's hermeneutical struggles:

By laboriously charting his mind's landscape and locating the source of his faith within a mysterious, 'higher' interior space, he reflects the Neo-platonic belief that man exercises his rational faculties so as to transcend his purely earthbound state and aspire toward God (Morton, 2006: 4-5).

Augustine, therefore, unequivocally endorses his neo-platonic hermeneutical method. In his exegetical method in the interpretation of Genesis Augustine borrows from Plotinian doctrine (Teselle, 1970: 199). Angels, for example, are described as those who have "spiritual matter". Undoubtedly, Augustine has "brought some [pagan] errors into the stream of Christian thought" (Cairns, 1996: 142). In the hermeneutical task Augustine's suggestion of an unstable relationship between sign and signified complicates his parallel efforts to standardize hermeneutics (Morton, 2006: 8). Augustine unintentionally elucidates the instability of language, thereby exposing potential problems of exegesis for future theologians and secular intellectuals. Apart from this linguistic-exegetical debate one point is clear: due to different philosophical influences, both in content and methodology in the exegetical task of Augustine, it would be extremely difficult to affirm the *sola scriptura* or even the *prima scriptura* principle as the Reformers formulate it. It is true that even the Reformers borrowed the hermeneutical conclusions from contemporary theology and philosophy, but as far as I know, they differ from Augustine because they rejected the allegorical method and different hermeneutical methodologies of philosophical/pagan and patristic hermeneutics.

In regard to the authority that should determine the ultimate interpretation of the Bible, Augustine indeed believes in the "teaching office". He clearly says: "Explanation of the Scriptures should be sought from those who are by profession teachers of Scripture" (Augustine, 1966: 3). This statement, of course, may be understood in the spirit of the New Testament doctrine of the spiritual gifts. Still, by endorsing the idea of a professional teacher it is clear that Augustine believed that laity would not be able to find the mystical layers of meaning in the Holy Scriptures. This presupposes the necessity of the magisterium of the church.

To sum up Augustine's position on the *sola scriptura* principle: first, he clearly emphasized the primacy of Scripture's teachings in comparison to patristic tradition. He once said: "What more can I teach you than what we read in the Apostle?" (Augustine, *On*

the Good of Widowhood, 2 quoted in Mathison, 2001: 39). He affirms that the Bible is the ultimate *regula fidei* (2001: 40). On the other hand, he never divorced Scripture from the tradition of the church since the Bible is the church's book. He was the first to believe in the two sources revelation theory (Mathison, 2001: 42). Long before the Council of Trent he endorses the *partim/partim* principle. Speaking about hermeneutical principles Augustine is the foundation of allegorical interpretation of the Bible. His allegorization was based on neo-platonic striving toward the pure heavenly meaning of the text and the existence of human being.

Speaking about Augustine's understanding of the *sola scriptura* principle the following comment is worthwhile:

As "Augustinian Doctor," Luther naively and incorrectly thought Augustine applied the *sola Scriptura* principle in his biblical interpretation and theological writings. The Roman Catholic Church considers Augustine a saint and a doctor of the church. He was instrumental in consolidating the merging of philosophical and biblical ideas on which the Roman Catholic theological system stands. By following the theological lead of Augustine, Luther's thought stands on the same Roman Catholic philosophical principles and theological system. Following Luther, Protestantism, and American Evangelicalism stand on the same foundation. Not surprisingly, the "emerging" of the twenty-first century Emerging church movement, springs from tradition and its Neoplatonic metaphysical foundation (Canale, 2011: 11).

Canale here speaks about presupposition of doing systematic theology in general sense. Augustine and Luther are juxtaposed and the result is a complete theological unity. Though the comment might sound as an oversimplified theological observation it is very useful for this research.

One point is certain: Augustine is indeed the foundational thinker for the ecumenical understanding of the *sola scriptura* principle, namely recognition of theological and liturgical unity of the Scripture and tradition as one well-spring of revelation (Vatican II). Consequently, Augustine, with his theology of the primacy of the Bible still within the presupposed tradition of the church, more than any other of the church fathers, would represent the vital ecumenical link between Roman Catholic and evangelical understanding of the Scriptures.

4.4.2.2 St Thomas Aquinas and the Scriptures

Mary Ann Fatula, in her volume *Thomas Aquinas: Preacher and Friend* (1993), says that, at the Council of Trent, after the Bible was uplifted as the Word of God, Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae* "was placed upon the altar, as a sign of honor for this work so full of the Holy Spirit's wisdom" (Fatula, 1993: 294). The Roman Catholic Church admires and venerates St Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) as Angelic Doctor and as the foundation of mediaeval and traditional understanding of God's character, His revelation and the church. His understanding of two twofold approach to the truth has become the standard for Catholic dogmatics.

Aquinas, in his magnum opus *Summa Theologiae* undeniably affirms the authority of the Holy Scriptures:

The formal objective of faith is the first truth as it is made known in Scripture and in Church teaching. Anyone, therefore, who does not hold as *the infallible and divine rule of faith* and Church teaching that derives from divine truth *as handed down in Scripture*, does not have the habit of faith (Aquinas, 1963, vol. 31: 159, italics mine).

It seems that the Scripture principle is understood here as *prima scriptura*. The authority of the Bible is always primary because tradition "derives" from it. Thomas Aquinas lectured principally on the Scriptures "since the Bible was a foundation of all theological teaching" (Walz quoted in Geisler, 1991: 43). Norman Geisler, in his *Thomas Aquinas: An Evangelical Appraisal* (1991), pronounces that, for Aquinas, the Bible is the divinely inspired Word of God (Geisler, 1991: 45). Scripture is a superior revelation of God. Aquinas states:

We believe the successors of the apostles and the prophets only in so far as they tell us those things which the apostles and prophets have left in their writings (Aquinas, *De Veritate*, XIV, 10 quoted in Geisler, 1991: 48).

For Aquinas, certainty of faith rests in the "authoritativeness of Sacred Scripture" (Aquinas, 1963, vol. 41: 159). Scripture delights our hearts; it is the "sweetness of God's Word" (Fatula, 1993: 95-96). The Bible, for Aquinas, is also the Word of God to be preached, it is the perfect knowledge of God's Word (Aquinas, 1963, vol. 41: 189, 192, 195, 294). In fact, he constantly bore witness to the Word of God in reading, arguing and preaching (Chenu, 2002: 21). Aquinas believed that "theology arises out of, develops, and fulfils itself in the atmosphere of this living Word received in faith" (2002: 21). This view presumes that the living Word of God, as the broad principle of revelation, also goes

beyond what is merely written. There is no doubt, therefore, that *Summa Theologiae* represents a “living emanation from the *pagina sacra* (the sacred page of the Bible)” (Chenu, 2002: 21). Unambiguously, for Thomas Aquinas the Scriptures have become the primary source and authority of divine Word.

In regard to the scriptural authority in theology, Aquinas’ teaching is based on the observation that mixing philosophy with theology of the Word is like mixing water with the pure wine of the Word of God (Chenu, 2002: 28). According to Aquinas, in theological formulations, testimonies of the sacred Scriptures are the final authority of faith (Aquinas, 1975: 18).

“What has been passed to us in the words of sacred Scripture may be taken as principles...”, says Aquinas (1975: 18). In conflict with the heretical teachings of infidels, in his *Summa Contra Gentiles*, he always stresses the proofs from the sacred Scripture above natural reason (Aquinas, 1975: 39, 66-67, 71, 75). Aquinas clearly asserts that Scripture must be structured and interpreted against heretics and this is of utmost importance (Aquinas, 1975: 19). Aquinas plainly teaches the primacy of Scripture in every theological dispute.

Aidan Nichols, in his *Discovering Aquinas* (2002), recognizes that the Bible is central to Aquinas’ picture of Christian theology (Nichols, 2002: 29) including apologetics. For Thomas, *sacra doctrina* is *sacra scriptura* (Nichols, 2002: 31). The Bible has become a “soul of theology” (Nichols, 2002: 32). Aquinas undeniably confirms:

Our faith rests on revelation made to the prophets and the apostles who made the canonical books, not on a revelation if there such be, made to any other teacher (Aquinas, 1963, vol. 1: q. 1, art. 8).

In a sense, St Thomas’ doctrine has only *one* ground of faith and *one* source-the Scriptures.

However, as a mediaeval theologian, he also draws on tradition, though these are rather a *single* source than *two* sources. He regards Scripture as something to be read and interpreted with the living tradition of the church. These are two aspects of the same revelation, and not separated. When Thomas develops the doctrine of the Catholic Church his faith posits basically on scriptural statements (Aquinas, 1963, vol. 6: 130). Nevertheless, it is still done within the proper context of tradition of the Church. Aquinas rejected the separation between the two. In regard to traditional Catholic theology of revelation as *one* source Thomas Aquinas represents the standard:

Thomas presupposes that this divine revelation has been preserved in the Scriptures and in the consistent teaching of the Church Fathers, and that is the responsibility of the teaching

authority of the Church to preserve, identify and teach the true meaning of the Scriptural and patristic doctrine (Gratsch, 1985: 3).

Therefore, Scripture *and* Tradition represent the one and sole deposit of faith. Creeds of the church derive their authority from the Scriptures only as “a later symbol” that does not “abolish an earlier one, but elaborates on it” (Geisler, 1991: 49). Creeds are not additions to the Bible but are drawn out of them, confirms Thomas (Aquinas quoted in Nichols, 2002: 29). Tradition is never separated from the Scripture in Aquinas’ thought. Nichols uses the term “traditioning” of the Scripture or *tradition sacrae scripturae*, and explains that Aquinas means: Scripture itself is *transmitted* by tradition (Nichols, 2002: 30). It is an integral part of the revelatory process of tradition.

Furthermore, for Thomas Aquinas, tradition also represents Aristotle because this philosopher is quoted the most often after Scripture (Aquinas, 1975: 22; see Cairns, 1996: 231). Nonetheless, in his theology, Scripture has *incontrovertible* authority while church fathers and pagan philosophers have authority based on *probable* arguments. Yet, the authority of the Scriptures against the authority of other teachings and heresies is always defined within the context of church tradition. Self-sufficiency and self-validation of the Bible would be intolerable. Emphasis on value of tradition is incontestable.

In regard to this interaction between the Bible and tradition, in the context of Aquinas’ biblical *interpretation*, Brian Davies, in his standard volume *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (1992), claims that

Scripture is not a dead thing wearing its full significance on its face. He thinks that we must treat it as contemporary, and that we need to engage with it using our best available resources, so that there is a kind of *dialogue between the words of Scripture and the believing Church* which makes use of them and draws its life from them. This in turn means that, for him, the truths conveyed in Scripture can be other than surface indications might suggest (Davies, 1992: 115, italics mine).

This observation of the scriptural “contemporaneous” role in the Church calls for further explanation of Thomas Aquinas’ hermeneutical method. Regarding Aquinas’ hermeneutics he clearly endorses medieval *quadriga* as fully effective model of biblical interpretation. He formulates the classical understanding of these layers of senses:

The allegorical sense is brought into play when the things of the Old Law signify the things of the New Law; the moral sense when the things done in Christ and in those who prefigured him are signs of what we should carry out; and the analogical sense when the things that lie ahead in eternal glory are signified (Aquinas, 1963, vol. 1: 39).

The interplay between sign and the signified has been borrowed from St Augustine and it is based on church fathers' hermeneutical principles. The signification of words-things is extensively explained in *Summa Theologiae*:

The author of Holy Scripture is God, in whose power it is to signify His meaning, not by words only (as man also can do), but also by things themselves. So, whereas in every other science things are signified by words, this science has the property, that the things signified by the words have themselves also a signification. Therefore that first signification whereby words signify things belongs to the first sense, the historical or literal. That signification whereby things signified by words have themselves also a signification is called the spiritual sense, which is based on the literal, and presupposes it (Aquinas, 1963, vol. 1: q. 1, art. 10).

Even though Aquinas accepted *quadriga* there is no confusion in the Holy Scripture since all meanings “are based on one, namely the literal sense” (Aquinas, 1963, vol. 1: q. 1, art. 10). Thomas used literal sense ahead of his time even though some of his contemporaries considered literal sense to be a very primitive level of the interpretation (Fatula, 1993: 18). For Aquinas, like for Augustine, *sensus literalis* is always the basic sense of the Scripture (Geisler, 1991: 50). Undoubtedly, *quadriga*, in its full structure, was formed under the influence of Augustinian Neoplatonism. Aquinas, however, under the influence of Aristotle (Shelley, 2008: 201), tries to interpret the text literally. He insists on literal meaning and that all other meanings have their foundation in literal meaning (Mathison, 2001: 67; Smith, 2009: 284-5). According to Aquinas' model of interpretation, the spiritual sense is something that God *attaches* to the reality to which the literal sense of the text refers (Nichols, 2002: 33). Aquinas believed in *sensus plenior*. The primary sense is the sense of the words intended by the sacred writer; the fuller sense, or second sense, is not understood by the sacred writer but is nonetheless intended by the Holy Spirit, who is not limited by the human instrument. The typical sense affirms that words are signs of other realities (typological sense). Accommodated sense is about all applications that can be seen in the inspired text by way of logical deduction or some type of analogical adaptation remote from primary meaning (Aquinas, 1963, vol. 10: 177-178, comment). Evidently, therefore, Aquinas endorsed *sensus plenior* long before the contemporary exponents of this method like Raymond Brown or some evangelical scholars today (see section 3.3.9). It is limited to the hidden meaning unknown to the original writer. It is not quite certain whether it is equivalent to the spiritual meaning. What is clear is that one thing in Scripture points to another *deeper* reality (Gratsch, 1985: 6).

Speaking in ecumenical terms, Normal L. Geisler describes Thomas Aquinas almost as an “evangelical”. In regard to *quadriga*, Geisler states that Aquinas only occasionally “lapsed into an allegorical interpretation” and that he “stood firmly on the side of a literal meaning” (Geisler, 1991: 56). This might be an ecumenical exaggeration. What may open new vistas for hermeneutical ecumenical dialogue between Catholics and Evangelicals is Aquinas’ affirmation of *sensus plenior* or the “double authorship” principle that probably should not be equated with allegory. The authority of magisterium is also significantly circumvented if allegorical method of *quadriga* is detached from *sensus plenior*, already imbedded in the biblical text.

To sum up, Aquinas represents the late scholastic affirmation of a dynamic unity between revelation in Scripture and revelation in Tradition with an emphasis on *one* wellspring of the Word of God. He never separated the authority of Scripture from the authority of tradition, though he claimed that his theology is always based on the pure testimony of the “sacred pages”. Thus, Aquinas’ idea of the Scripture principle does not support the *sola scriptura* norm. The Bible is still the *partim* of God’s authoritative revelation. With its “one wellspring” concept of revelation and hermeneutical implications of the spiritual interpretation of the Bible, however, it became the underpinning for Vatican II’s *Dei Verbum* and the possible ecumenical dialogue with evangelical theology.

4.4.2.3 William Ockham and the *Sola Scriptura* Principle

One of the late Scholastics of the Nominalist school, William of Ockham (ca. 1280-ca. 1349) openly acclaimed the *sola scriptura* principle prior to Reformation. Though not a revolutionary against the spiritual power of the papacy based on divine law (Kenny, 2010: 329), he insisted that the ecclesial power of the church should be derived immediately from the people/council (Coopleston, 1972: 256). The papal interference in the affairs of secular politics was publicly denounced (Kenny, 2010: 328). Rejecting the authority of the Church and reason, Ockham insisted on the transcendence of God and that God could not be philosophically demonstrated. He was a Barthian before Barth (Coopleston, 1972: 238-239) by endorsing the idea of God who can be known *only* through revelation (by faith) (1972: 255).

In his “Excerpt from Eight Questions on the Power of the Pope” William Ockham was concerned with the open contradiction between the words of the pope and “the divine Scriptures” and claimed that the Bible has a superior authority (Ockham, 1956: 441). Together with Marsilius of Padua he distinguished between the authority of the church and that of Scripture, to the detriment of the former. The concept of the coincidence of Scripture, tradition and church was in serious decline (Lane, 1975: 45). Ockham, however, still believed in the two sources theory of revelation, but he went a step further claiming that scripture *alone* was the source of immutable articles of faith (Mathison, 2001: 79). Evidently, the rationale for this revolutionary thought was the apparent inconsistency between the words of the Scripture and the proclamation of the establishment of the church of his times. In the juxtaposition of ecclesial power of the Pope and divine power of the Word in the Bible Ockham preferred the testimony of the Scriptures, and became the precursor of the Reformers.

William Ockham apparently transcended Thomas Aquinas’ appealing to revelation that has two sources or expressions, that is, Scripture and tradition, with the former having *definite* primacy. The Bible should have had a material and formal priority to the extent that the new principle has been endorsed, namely *sola scriptura*. Thereby, as a Catholic thinker he prepared the ground for the Scripture principle proclaimed by the Reformers and became the possible historical inspiration for ecumenical reconciliation with the evangelical Scripture principle.

4.4.2.4 John Henry Newman and the Bible

John Cardinal Henry Newman (1801-1890), converted Anglican theologian, is of special interest as the forerunner of contemporary Catholic theology of the Scriptures. He became perhaps the most original Catholic thinker in the nineteenth century (Hollerich, 2009: 428). As a profound philosopher of religion he developed an original notion of faith and certainty (Kenny, 2010: 986-9, 778).

The transition from the Oxford movement and the High Church party of the Anglican Church to the Roman Catholic Church in 1845 was not difficult (Cairns, 1996: 394, 405) since ecumenical tendencies were highly respected and endorsed in the Britain of his time. Bruce L. Shelley, in his ecumenical *Church History in Plain Language* (2008),

states: “Step by step the Oxford men moved toward the Church of Rome” (Shelley, 2008: 371). The name Protestant was shunned because Newman believed that Catholicism refers to early “catholic” Christianity (2008: 371). Continuity between Roman Catholicism and Anglicanism was especially respected in Newman’s foundational theological interpretation of revelation and Scripture.

John Henry Newman was a prolific writer. The volume that has been selected here for investigation of his Scripture principle is *On the Inspiration of Scripture* (1967). The most significant feature of Newman’s ideas of the inspiration of the Bible is the recognition of the human limited element in the formation of the sacred books (Newman, 1967: 7). The human element of the people of God is crucial in understanding the revelation of God. Newman says that those who object to the Catholic *interpretation* of the Scriptures are in the same group as those who fight against that church’s *canonization* of the Scripture (1967: 11). Historically and theologically the Bible is the Church’s book. The teaching office is, therefore, the guarantee of the preservation of the true deposit of faith or *regula fidei*.

Scripture does not interpret itself, claims Newman (1967: 11). The Bible does not contain a complete secular history, why it should contain complete account of religious truth (1967: 10-11). The Church tradition, therefore, must supplement that content of religious truth. According to Newman, if one denies the authority of the Church as a divine institution the Bible would be given up as well as the Church (1967: 13). Only the Catholic Church has a divine authority to validate and interpret the Scriptures. For him, the Bible and tradition are “joint rule of faith”, and paradoxically speaking the Bible is interpreted by tradition which was again verified by Scripture (1967: 15). Though Scripture is the Church’s book it always can measure the authenticity and truthfulness of Church’s doctrine and practice. This dynamic mutual validation and interpretation of the Word of God and the Church is perhaps an original thought in Newman’s theological vision. Evidently, he did not want to enter into a perennial debate over the historical/canonical primacy of “chicken/egg”. Paradoxically, both Scripture and the Church assess, validate and interpret each other. His concept of the private criticism of the traditional interpretations of the Church was probably based on his defence of “the rights of individual conscience in the church, if that conscience was rightly formed” (Hollerich, 2009: 428). Robert A. O’Donnell, in his recent article “The Two Worlds of John Henry Newman” (2011), also

recognizes that this possibility of the assessments of the Church by Scripture can also be traced in his early development as an *evangelical* scholar who probably retained something of his *sola scriptura* belief even in his later Catholic scholarship (O'Donnell, 2011: 37).

For Newman, the universal magisterium of the church, hence, is not infallible. Only if the teaching is evident and clear should it become the obligation for faith (Newman, 1967: 34). Newman undoubtedly confirms that Scripture should be the ultimate Word of God (1967: 41). The central revealed message of Scripture, that for which it is inspired, ought to be emphasized (1967: 69). “The truth of Scripture is defined with *relation* to its purpose, but not *restricted* in its material extent”, concludes Newman (1967: 90). The purpose of Christ-centeredness, therefore, determines the authority and hermeneutics of the Bible.

The hermeneutical method of John Henry Newman is based on the fact that “the spiritual truth is often preserved, so to say, within a historical falsehood” (1967: 74). This means that even Scripture is not infallible. According to Newman, if one applies this principle, discrepancies in the Gospels might be solved by simply allegorizing the narratives (1967: 74). Allegorization remains, for him, a valid method of interpretation. In regard to the authority of the teaching office Newman asserts that the Church and, therefore, the Pope is the *interpreter* of the Scriptures. This is the second important dogma of the Catholic religion (1967: 112) by which *sui ipsius interpret* becomes oxymoron. Newman concludes with the idea that the Bible is not liable to criticism of any kind, and that no good Catholic can think otherwise (1967: 134). The authority of the Scriptures as the Word of God is upheld, but only within the historical wisdom of the “mind of the Church”.

In summation, John Cardinal Henry Newman remains faithful to the traditional Catholic interpretation of the Scripture principle. The *sola scriptura* principle is untenable and unsound since the Church is a custodian of God' Word and its valid interpreter and commentator. In ecumenical terms, though, Newman opens the possibility for the critical approach toward the Church's tradition by the Holy Scriptures. Ultimately, the magisterium might not be infallible in its elucidation of the historical deposit of faith. This difficulty in Catholic approach to the dynamic relationship between scriptural authority and the authority of magisterium will be taken over by progressive Catholic theologians, especially by Joseph Ratzinger (Benedict XVI).

4.5 Conclusion

According to traditional Catholic understanding of revelation based on decrees of the councils (Trent and Vatican I), papal documents between 1890 and 1950 and the traditional theological opinions (*theologumena*), God revealed himself in both the written Holy Scriptures and unwritten Tradition (*partim/partim*). The Word of God, in its comprehensive nature, however, might be one wellspring of revelation. Vatican II has its historical background in the development of this doctrine. In regard to biblical defence of dogmas of the church it seems that the exegetical task is possible, but it has to be done within the boundaries of Tradition. *Prima scriptura* or self-interpretation of the Bible in Augustine's and Aquinas' theology means that the Bible is a norm for all other historical teachings including even those of the church fathers. Nevertheless, this is done only *by* the teaching office of the Church and *within* the historical horizon of the "mind of the Church" which is the guarantor of the proper hermeneutical task, unlike hundreds of different interpretations offered by Protestants.

The hermeneutics of traditional Roman Catholicism is based on the literal meaning of the text and the additional layers of meaning based on the general assumption of *sensus plenior*. The purpose of every interpretation is always Christ-centeredness. It is widely accepted, though, that this hermeneutical task is borrowed, with its presuppositions and methodology, from pagan sources of Neoplatonism (Augustine) or Aristotle (Aquinas). Having this in mind the doctrine of *prima scriptura* becomes an impossible teaching. In the late scholasticism William of Ockham, as a precursor of the Reformation, endorsed the *sola scriptura* principle but only in opposition to dogmatic abuses by the Pope. In the modern Catholic interpretation of the self-sufficiency of the Scriptures some theologians speak about mutual validation and criticism of the Church and the Bible. Infallibility of the teaching office has been put into question and openness to the testimony of the Scriptures has been reintroduced, but still within the historical consciousness or "mind of the Church". It appears that the biblical hermeneutical principle of "the mind of Christ" is circumscribed by the historical deposit of faith expressed through the mind of the Church.

Traditional Roman Catholic teachings about the Bible, therefore, ultimately affirm the primacy of the authority of the Church/tradition *over* the individual assent of the Bible or public testimony of Scripture. This is the reason why the evangelical principle of *sola*

scriptura cannot be juxtaposed and reconciled with the *traditional* Catholic dogma of the Bible. The contemporary Catholic vision of the Word of God, as a broader principle and “one wellspring” of revelation, looks much more promising in its ecumenical dialogue and reconciliation with contemporary evangelical theology.

In the following chapter some of the recent developments in Catholic understanding of revelation and the self-sufficiency of the Bible will be explored, starting with Vatican II’s *Dei Verbum*, continuing with contemporary papal documents on Scripture and the teachings of the most recent Catechism and Vatican II’s theologians, and concluding with the extensive and all-encompassing presentation of the theology of the Word of God that goes “beyond what is merely written” by Benedict XVI. These new hermeneutical horizons may contribute considerably to an ecumenical understanding and possibly an ecumenical joint statement about the Scripture principle.

5.0 SOLA SCRIPTURA AND BENEDICT XVI

5.1 Introduction

The main objective of this chapter is to make a portrait of Benedict XVI's concept of the Word of God within the context of the contemporary and progressive Catholic understanding of the Scripture principle. First, the *Dei Verbum* document, promulgated at Vatican II as a foundational document in the modern Catholic theology and ecumenical dialogue with Protestants, will be closely examined. Papal documents of the contemporary Catholic doctrine of the Scripture, following Vatican II, will be analysed in this context as well. Second, the doctrine of the Bible in the New Catechism of Church will be presented. In formation of this important document Joseph Ratzinger played a pivotal role as a key theological figure. Third, as precursors of Benedict's biblical theology, ideas of revelation and Scripture of some notable Catholic theologians of the twentieth century will be considered. Finally, the highpoint of this chapter will be a comprehensive presentation of and conversation with Benedict XVI's theology of the Word of God.

Moreover, the goal of this research is to present the extensive contemporary Catholic teaching of the Holy Scripture in order to juxtapose and compare its features with the progressive Evangelical position (Chapter 3) resulting in a feasible ecumenical joint statement (Chapter 7).

5.2 Vatican II and the Holy Scriptures

Benedict XVI once said that Vatican II (1962-65) was upheld by the same authority as Vatican I and the Council of Trent; it is impossible to take a position *for* or *against* Vatican II (Ratzinger quoted in Hemming, 2005: 111). Though the authority of Vatican II is still questioned by some opposing Catholic circles like Lefebvrists, who remain unbending in their claim that Vatican II created a "new church" (see the most recent reaction in Argan, 2012), the Church still stands behind every promulgated document as authoritative for the Church. The historical-theological background of the Council was discussed in detail in the recent debates (for further research see Schreck, 2005; O'Malley, 2008; Bokenkotter, 2002: 396-408; for Ratzinger's role at Vatican II see Allen, 2000: 51-56; Bunson, 2005: 129-

143). The immediate historical context of Vatican II is based on the renewal movements between Vatican I and Vatican II which “shared the common desire to rejuvenate theology by recovering older sources in scripture and tradition-*ressourcement*, “going back to the origin”” (Hollerich, 2009: 428). The center of this investigation of origins certainly was the issue of revelation and its relationship to Scripture and tradition in the context of the Catholic revival of biblical studies. It seems that the Church revitalized its interest in the Scriptures. Stylianopoulos, the notable Orthodox theologian, observes:

The greatest boon to the spirit of Christian unity in the twentieth century has been the biblical renewal in the Roman Catholic Church, a renewal that has impacted all aspects of its life, theology, and ministries. The virtual “rediscovery” of the Bible in Roman Catholicism is, of course, both presupposed and advanced by Vatican II (Stylianopoulos, 2005: 2).

The *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*, promulgated November 18, 1965, known by its Latin title *Dei Verbum*, hereafter DV, is the most important document in contemporary Catholic Church concerning revelation, Scripture and tradition. The central issue of DV is the relationship between Scripture and tradition and the way in which faith is related to history (Rowland, 2008: 49). As it has been already asserted, the Council of Trent described revelation as *partim/partim* (see section 4.4.1). Vatican II sought to show how these two different channels of revelation are mutually and intrinsically related to each other (Hollerich, 2009: 438). DV proclaims:

Hence there exists a close connection and communication between sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture. For both of them, *flowing from the same divine wellspring*, in a certain way merge into a unity and tend toward the same end. For Sacred Scripture is the word of God inasmuch as it is consigned to writing under the inspiration of the divine Spirit, while sacred tradition takes the word of God entrusted by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit to the Apostles, and hands it on to their successors in its full purity, so that led by the light of the Spirit of truth, they may in proclaiming it preserve this word of God faithfully, explain it, and make it more widely known. Consequently it is not from Sacred Scripture alone that the Church draws her certainty about everything which has been revealed. Therefore *both sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture are to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of loyalty and reverence* (Paul VI, 1965, DV: art. 9, italics mine).

It is evident that the Word of God represents the broader concept of revelation (“one divine wellspring”) from which Scripture and tradition derive their origin and authority. Tradition, like Scripture, is fully guarded by the Church in one deposit of faith. “Sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture form one sacred deposit of the word of God, committed to the Church” (Paul VI, 1965, DV: 10). It is widely recognized that *partim/partim* of the Council of Trent has been preserved in its theological essence. However, the relationship

between Scripture and tradition has been modified by introducing the idea of the Word of God as the broader concept of revelation.

Furthermore, “Sacred theology rests on the written word of God, together with sacred tradition, as its primary and perpetual foundation” (Paul VI, 1965, DV: 24). Theological systems are always the product of biblical studies *and* the legacy of sacred tradition. The theological task is never restricted to biblical exegesis only. The Bible is read and interpreted as the book of the Church’s tradition. Vatican II, nevertheless, highly esteemed the authority of the Bible and its study (Paul VI, 1965, DV: art. 22-25), but it has limited the deposit of faith in the Scriptures to the *partim* of God’s Word. Scripture contains the Word of God and testifies about the Word, but it is not the fullness of that Word:

By scrutinizing in the light of faith all truth stored up in the mystery of Christ, theology is most powerfully strengthened and constantly rejuvenated by that word. *For the Sacred Scriptures contain the word of God and since they are inspired really are the word of God; and so the study of the sacred page is, as it were, the soul of sacred theology.* By the same word of Scripture the ministry of the word also, that is, pastoral preaching, catechetics and all Christian instruction, in which the liturgical homily must hold the foremost place, is nourished in a healthy way and flourishes in a holy way (Paul VI, 1965, DV: art. 24, italics mine).

Undoubtedly, the origin and authority of the Scriptures is of divine nature, because it is the Word of God. However, since “sacred Scriptures [only] contain the word of God” the remaining *partim* of God’s Word (revelation) is found in sacred tradition. Therefore, the Word of God always goes beyond what is merely written. In this sense, the purpose of Vatican II is not much different from the task of the Council of Trent and Vatican I, that is, to reject the Protestant *sola scriptura* principle as untenable and unfeasible in the process of understanding of God’s revelation. According to Vatican II, the nature of the Word of God goes against the principle of Scripture only.

Regarding hermeneutical principles, Vatican II affirms the authority of the teaching office of the Church as well as its specific function:

But the task of authentically interpreting the word of God, whether written or handed on, has been *entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office of the Church*, whose authority is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ. *This teaching office is not above the word of God, but serves it*, teaching *only* what has been handed on, listening to it devoutly, guarding it scrupulously and explaining it faithfully in accord with a divine commission and with the help of the Holy Spirit, it draws from this one deposit of faith everything which it presents for belief as divinely revealed (Paul VI, 1965, DV, art. 13, italics mine).

Exclusivity of the authority of the living office of the magisterium has been assumed in the traditional Catholic theology. Vatican II, however, adds one more important observation. The teaching office has a role of a *servant* of the Word of God as it expounds its significance and meaning. It has to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the outcome of any interpretation has to be in accordance with what has been handed on. It seems evident that this deposit, interpreted and guarded by the magisterium, again includes both Scripture and tradition.

DV authorizes the critical use of literary and form criticism because “the words of God, expressed in human language, have been made like human discourse, just as the word of the eternal Father, when He took to Himself the flesh of human weakness, was in every way made like men”(Paul VI, 1965, DV: 13). The humanness of the Scriptures is the rationale for historical-critical investigation. Yet,

...since Holy Scripture must be read and interpreted in the sacred spirit in which it was written, no less serious attention must be given to the content and *unity* of the whole of Scripture if the meaning of the sacred texts is to be correctly worked out. The living tradition of the whole Church must be taken into account along with the harmony which exists between elements of the faith. It is the task of exegetes to work according to these rules toward a better understanding and explanation of the meaning of Sacred Scripture, so that through preparatory study the judgment of the Church may mature. *For all of what has been said about the way of interpreting Scripture is subject finally to the judgment of the Church, which carries out the divine commission and ministry of guarding and interpreting the word of God* (Paul VI, 1965, DV: art. 12, italics mine).

The divine meaning found in the Bible based on the *unity* and *spiritual meaning* of the Scriptures is always subjected to the final authority of the Church. Holistic biblical exegesis is plausible only if it is done in the context of Church tradition and confirmed by the living teaching office of the Church. Therefore, in practical theology Vatican II tried to be inclusive, namely to take into consideration all existing practices of tradition(s) that might be sanctioned by the theology of the broader principle of the Word of God. Tracy Rowland recognizes the ever existing dilemma:

While on the one hand Vatican II broadened the notion of Tradition when studied in the context of its relationship to Scripture to include actually existing practices, on the other hand it offered no analysis of how these lower case “t” traditions or practices might be transposed into new cultural registers. This was notwithstanding the fact that for many Catholics the jettisoning of these traditions was seen to be at the very centre of the council’s agenda (Rowland, 2008: 52).

Evangelicals might pose the question: if one broadens revelation/Word of God too much to include even those practices that clearly contradict the plain reading of the Scriptures, is it

possible then to reconcile traditions (lower case “t”) with Tradition (upper case “T”) flowing from the same wellspring as the Bible/Word of God? This predicament has been unresolved by Vatican II, and probably remains the main obstacle to complete ecumenical unity in the understanding of the Scripture principle.

In spite of these theological difficulties DV still remains essentially an ecumenical document. It should never be overlooked that Vatican II has adopted a “more open stance toward Protestants, calling them ‘separated brethren’” (Cairns, 1996: 497). Robert Murray goes even further claiming that DV satisfied even Reformed observers who believe in *sola scriptura* because of the unified principle of Tradition (Murray, 1999: 15). DV definitely and successfully fulfilled its role in the agenda of Vatican II to present the substance of the ancient deposit of faith in a new and suitable contemporary way (Hollerich, 2009: 432). It has clearly attempted to draw as close as possible to the understanding of the Word of God/revelation defined by Protestants/Evangelicals especially in the context of the interpretation of the Bible. However, the *partim/partim* structure of the Council of Trent and Vatican I has been preserved in its core. Revelation flows from one wellspring, but it is still *always* based on the written Scriptures *and* unwritten transmitted traditions/Tradition.

Apart from the conversation with contemporary Evangelicalism on the notion of the Word of God, there might be a genuine hope in ecumenical dialogue in the endorsement of DV that the teaching office (magisterium) is not above the Word of God and it might not be always infallible in its interpretation of the Word of God (John Cardinal Henry Newman). That could open the way for the self-criticism of the Church by renewing the emphasis on the biblical authority as the Word of God. Is there a muster point between Catholic emphasis on Scriptures and Evangelical recognition of the importance of tradition? It seems too early to answer the fundamental question of this research. One point is clear: Vatican II’s document DV substantially contributed to an ecumenical project.

5.3 Papal Documents after Vatican II and Holy Scripture

In this section some of the papal documents on the Scripture principle after Vatican II will be studied. This will set the stage for further development of the progressive Catholic teachings on the Scripture principle. Two popes contributed to the Scripture principle in a special way, Pope Paul VI (1963-1978) and Pope John Paul II (1978-2005).

Brian W. Harrison, in his doctoral thesis “Pope Paul VI and the Truth of Sacred Scripture” (1997), recognized the basic rationale for Paul VI’s special interest in the Scripture principle. He expresses the Pope’s concerns:

*There is a rupture between Bible and Church, between Scripture and Tradition. In the name of science, many exegetes no longer wish to interpret Scripture in the light of faith, and the end result is that doubt is cast on essential truths of faith such as the divinity of Christ and his virginal conception in the womb of Mary, the salvific and redeeming value of Christ's death, the reality of his Resurrection and of his institution of the Church. The results of this so-called scientific exegesis are being diffused in seminaries, [theological] faculties and universities, and even among the faithful, also by means of catechesis and sometimes even in preaching. *Dei Verbum* recommended scientific exegesis, but within the bounds of the faith, since the historical-scientific method alone is not sufficient in this field (Harrison B., 1997, italics mine).*

Paul VI’s pontificate covers the period of the Church’s history when scientific study of the Scriptures was at its zenith. This is the reason the Pope calls Catholic scholars back to the spiritual and theological interpretation of the Bible. The most important document issued by Paul VI is probably the “Address to the Members of the Pontifical Biblical Commission: On the Ecclesial Role of Biblical Studies” (March 14, 1974), hereafter ERB. The Pope affirms that the sacred Scriptures are created *within* the community of the people of God, and that the apostles just transmitted the oral tradition of Jesus’ personality and his actions. He continues with the observation that though the Word of God established the Church, the Church also has become *the matrix* of the sacred scriptures (Paul VI, 1974, ERB: par. 2). Therefore, the Bible must be read *in medio ecclesiae* (Paul VI, 1974, ERB: par. 5). This task belongs to the exegetes and the biblical commission (magisterium) of the Church (Paul VI, 1974, ERB: par 5). Paul VI, affirms the essential elements of the Catholic theology of the Scripture. The Church’s tradition and the Bible are inseparable revelations of the Word of God and this Word can be read and interpreted *only* within the Church by its magisterium. He also calls for the realization of the hoped-for ecumenical unity based on the biblical testimony of Christ (Paul VI, 1974, ERB: par. 9). The Bible becomes the source and the element of ecumenical unification. His ecumenical emphasis, however, is

more on the experiential aspect of the biblical testimony than on the theological grounds of *sola scriptura*.

John Paul II seems to be the more prolific theologian when it comes to theology of the Bible and the Scripture principle. At the start of his pontificate, in his Apostolic Constitution *Scripturarum Thesaurus* (April 25, 1979), hereafter ST, he clearly highlighted the importance of the Sacred Scripture in the liturgical life of the church:

The Treasure of the Scriptures, in which is contained the message of salvation given by God to the human race for Saint Augustine rightly says: "from that country, whence we are sojourning, letters have come to us: they themselves are the ones... which exhort to live well" (*Enarr. in Ps. 90*, s. 2, 1; PL 37, 1159) ... has always been deservedly held by the Church in the highest honor and has been guarded with special care. Indeed from her very beginnings she never ceased to make sure that *the Christian people might enjoy the fullest possible opportunity of receiving the word of God, especially in the sacred Liturgy, in the celebration of which "the importance of Sacred Scripture is very great"* (Conc. Vat. II, Const. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 24) (John Paul II, 1979a, ST: par. 1).

The rest of the constitution praises the new development in Catholic biblical scholarship, and the ready New Vulgate translation that will also serve the ecumenical purposes of Vatican II. Obviously, John Paul II continues the Vatican II agenda of rejuvenated emphasis on the Holy Scriptures. In his "Address to the Members of the Pontifical Biblical Commission: On the Biblical Sciences and the Teaching Office of the Church" (April 26, 1979), John Paul II clearly emphasized the balance between recognition of the human authorship of the Bible and the need for a scientific study of the Book with the implication of cultural adaptability of the message and the revelatory role of Scripture based on the permanent value of the Word of God (John Paul II, 1979b: art. 8). This principle has become extremely important in this contemporary age. John Paul II clearly stressed the eternal principles of the Word of God in the Holy Scriptures as a foundation for the Church's theology and practice. Catholic theology in its Thomistic inclination, however, is always based on revelation *and* reason. The Bible is important but only in the context of cultural reasonable accommodation of its message. In his "Address to a Conference of Biblical Language and Media" (Sept 28, 1998) he underlined the same idea:

It should immediately be noted that the nature of Sacred Scripture has two basic features which differ from one another but are closely connected. They are, on the one hand, the absolutely transcendent dimension of God's Word, and, on the other, the equally important dimension of its inculturation. Because of the first characteristic, the Bible cannot be reduced to human words alone and, therefore, to a mere cultural product. However, because of the second characteristic, it inevitably and profoundly shares in human history and reflects its cultural co-ordinates (John Paul II, 1998: art. 2).

Since the appropriation of this principle contemporary Catholic theology never denies the value of the historical-critical approach to the Scriptures, but identifies it only in the context of the supernatural element of God's revelation to the contemporary community of faith based on the historical consciousness of the Church. However, only the magisterium can judge the final interpretation of the Word. The Scriptures are given to the Church, not for private judgment of the specialists; the spiritual function of the interpretation is given to the community of faith by Christ himself, concludes John Paul II (1979a, ST: par. 1).

The most comprehensive and the most important document for this research seems to be John Paul II's *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (April 15, 1993), hereafter IBC, presented by the Pontifical Biblical Commission to Pope John Paul II on April 23, 1993 and published in *Origins*, January 6, 1994. Only the basic elements of the Scripture principle will be addressed here. Speaking about the origins of the Scriptures the Pope observes:

The texts of the Bible are the expression of religious traditions which existed before them. The mode of their connection with these traditions is different in each case, with the creativity of the authors shown in various degrees. *In the course of time, multiple traditions have flowed together little by little to form one great common tradition. The Bible is a privileged expression of this process:* It has itself contributed to the process and continues to have controlling influence upon it (John Paul II, 1993, IBC, Characteristics of Catholic Interpretation: art A, italics mine; cf. James Barr [section 3.3.7]).

The Scriptures, therefore, are the results of the dynamic historical tradition of the Church. The written Word is the *partim* of the broader principle of God's revelation in the history of the Church's tradition.

Since the ICB document speaks more specifically about the *methods* of interpretation of Scripture, John Paul II's hermeneutical principles follow. First, he reveals the flaws of the historical-critical method:

No scientific method for the study of the Bible is fully adequate to comprehend the biblical texts in all their richness. For all its overall validity, the historical-critical method cannot claim to be totally sufficient in this respect. It necessarily has to leave aside many aspects of the writings which it studies. It is not surprising, then, that at the present time other methods and approaches are proposed which serve to explore more profoundly other aspects worthy of attention (John Paul II, 1993, ICB, Methods and Approaches: art. B).

Of all contemporary hermeneutical approaches, the Pope seems to prefer the *canonical approach* (John Paul II, 1993, ICB, Methods and Approaches: art. C1). He explains the method:

...it interprets each biblical text in the light of the canon of Scriptures, that is to say, of the Bible as received as the norm of faith by a community of believers. It seeks to situate each text within the single plan of God, the goal being to arrive at a presentation of Scripture truly valid for our time. The method does not claim to be a substitute for the historical-critical method; the hope is, rather, to complete it (John Paul II, 1993, ICB, Methods and Approaches: art. C1, italics mine).

Whereas other types of historical-critical method focus on the origins, structure and history of the text, canonical criticism looks at the meaning the text in its *final form* has for the community which uses it (see Voderholzer, 2008: 109-112; Verweyen, 2007: 89-90). Brevard S. Childs (1923-2007), the pioneer of the canonical approach, in his *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (1979), determines the meaning of the canon of the Bible for the contemporary believing community. Scholars follow his principle that this approach should replace the historical-critical method altogether. Childs argues that “canonical criticism”, a term with which he is not happy, is not another historical critical technique. “Rather, the issue at stake in relation to the canon turns on establishing a stance from which the Bible can be read as sacred scripture” concludes Childs (1979: 82).

In regard to this research a canonical approach or exegesis might undermine the Protestant principle of *sola scriptura* because every “thus saith the Lord” would be contingent upon the historical consciousness of the believing community. Contemporary Catholic hermeneutics is never devoid of the “mind of the Church” and community based experience based on the canonical unity of the Word of God. There will be more discussion on Benedict XVI’s assumption about this hermeneutical/exegetical method later (see section 5.6.3.3).

Canonical exegesis was endorsed in the theology of John Paul II because he considered the Bible as the unity and the whole. He says: “The fathers look upon the Bible above all as the Book of God, *the single work of a single author*. This does not mean, however, that they reduce the human authors to nothing more than passive instruments; they are quite capable, also, of according to a particular book its own specific purpose” (John Paul II, 1993, ICB, Methods and Approaches: art. B2, italics mine). This divine-human origin and nature of the Bible is a presupposition for moderate use of the historical-critical method, still within the context of the unity of the canonical Scriptures as they impact the community of faith.

In regard to different meanings of the Scriptures John Paul II elaborates:

In a word, one might think of the “fuller sense” as another way of indicating the spiritual sense of a biblical text in the case where the spiritual sense is distinct from the literal sense.

It has its foundation in the fact that the Holy Spirit, principal author of the Bible, can guide human authors in the choice of expressions in such a way that the latter will express a truth the fullest depths of which the authors themselves do not perceive. This deeper truth will be more fully revealed in the course of time--on the one hand, through further divine interventions which clarify the meaning of texts and, on the other, through the insertion of texts into the canon of Scripture. *In these ways there is created a new context, which brings out fresh possibilities of meaning that had lain hidden in the original context* (John Paul II, 1993, ICB, Hermeneutical Questions: art. B3).

It should be noted here that “fresh possibilities of meaning” as an outcome of the basic *sensus plenior* concept, affirms both the traditional Catholic teaching of *quadriga* with its spiritual allegorical meaning (John Paul II, 1993, ICB, Hermeneutical questions: art. A and B), as well as modern-day hermeneutics of alternative meanings based on the influence of contemporary philosophical hermeneutics. Catholic theology always was traditional and relevant at the same time. The Pope claims that a “dynamic pattern of interpretation” calls for a new hermeneutics in which “Catholic exegetes approach the biblical text with *a pre-understanding which holds closely together modern scientific culture and the religious tradition* emanating from Israel and from the early Christian community” (John Paul II, 1993, ICB, Characteristics of Catholic Interpretation: Foreword, italics mine). In fact, John Paul II was one of the dominant figures in this regard.

The multiplicity of meanings of Scripture flows from another important principle in the modern Catholic exegesis, that exegesis is never neutral. John Paul II clarifies:

Faith traditions formed the living context for the literary activity of the authors of sacred Scripture. Their insertion into this context also involved a sharing in both the liturgical and external life of the communities, in their intellectual world, in their culture and in the ups and downs of their shared history. *In like manner, the interpretation of sacred Scripture requires full participation on the part of exegetes in the life and faith of the believing community of their own time* (John Paul II, 1993, ICB, Hermeneutical Questions: A3, italics mine).

Therefore, there is no private, neutral and subjective interpretation endorsed partially by the Protestants and Evangelicals. *Sola scriptura* is untenable since every reading of Scripture is contingent upon tradition either of the interpreter and/or the Church. The spiritual tradition of the interpreter is crucial in the understanding of the text. The Bible, after all, is the Church’s book.

As a final point, John Paul II reminds Catholic exegetes and theologians that they have to work closely together:

Exegetes can help systematic theologians avoid two extremes: on the one hand, a dualism, which would completely separate a doctrinal truth from its linguistic expression, as though the latter were of no importance; on the other hand, a fundamentalism, which, confusing the

human and the divine, would consider even the contingent features of human discourse to be revealed truth (John Paul II, 1993, ICB, Characteristics of Catholic Interpretation: art. D2).

In other words, the middle way would be the dogmatic expression and theological interpretation of the Bible as a whole based on the proper exegetical task. This is, in other words, the unity of tradition (theological and historical heritage) and Scripture that always represented “one wellspring” of divine revelation as the substance and object of the theological task.

To sum up, Paul VI and John Paul II, following *Dei Verbum*, confirmed the Catholic position on the Scripture principle as both traditional and contemporary. Scripture is the Church’s Book and it cannot be read and interpreted outside of the Church community. Yet, there is a place for the contemporary canonical exegetical method that transcends the weaknesses of the historical-critical approach and calls for a new theological interpretation of the Word of God. Any self-sufficiency or self-validation of the Bible is excluded on the basis of the complex and dynamic nature of the Word of God and its revelation, as well as the experiential and liturgical manifestation of the Word. Thus, Paul VI and John Paul II precipitated more mature ecumenical expression of the Scripture principle of Benedict XVI. (For other papal documents see Dean P. Béchard, *The Scripture Documents: An Anthology of Official Catholic Teachings* [2002]). Prior to the extensive study of Benedict XVI, the doctrine of the Scriptures in the new Catechism and the contemporary Catholic theology will be observed.

5.4 The New Catechism of the Catholic Church and the Bible

The New Catechism of the Catholic Church, translated from Latin to English in 1994, (United States Catholic Conference, 1994) is a result of the work of post-Vatican II theologians especially Joseph Ratzinger, the Head of the Commission that drafted the text, whose *Imprimi Potest* is on the front page. The Catechism is a final result of John Paul II’s invitation through *Fidei Depositum*, an apostolic constitution of 11 October, 1992, by which he ordered the publication of the Catechism.

On the subject of the nature and authority of *fidei depositum*, namely, Scripture and Tradition, the first objective of the Catechism is to define the concept of revelation

(Catholic Catechism of the Church, hereafter CCC, par 51-73). Though God can be known “with certainty” on the basis of his works in nature, there is another order to which man cannot arrive by natural reason, i.e., “the order of divine Revelation” (CCC, par 50). Christ, as the perfect Word of God, is, of course, everything that can be said of God’s revelation, and “there will be no other word than this one” (CCC, par 65). The Christ-centeredness of God’s revelation is clearly presented in the Catechism (CCC, par 67). The deposit of faith, revealed to the Church, furthermore, does not include “private” revelations, neither those of non-Christian religions nor Christian sects that base themselves on such revelations (CCC, par 67). The central content of God’s revelation, the Gospel, has been transmitted both orally and in writing (CCC, par 76). Quoting *Dei Verbum*, paragraph 7 of the Catechism clearly affirms the *partim/partim* of the Council of Trent and Vatican I. Tradition is called “the living transmission” (CCC, par 78). It is the continuing presence of the Word of God in the community of faith. It is also in dynamic relationship with the written Word. The Catechism explains: “... it is distinct from Sacred Scripture, though closely connected to it” (CCC, par 78). For example, sayings of the “holy Fathers” represent the testimony of this living Tradition of the Church (CCC, par 78). *Dei Verbum* has been quoted affirming that Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture “are bound closely together and *communicate one with the other*. For both of them, flowing from the *same divine well-spring*, come together in some fashion to form one thing and move towards the same goal” (CCC, par 80, italics mine). Therefore, both Scripture and Tradition must be “honoured with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence” (CCC, par 82). Tradition is, furthermore, distinguished from various local traditions, which may be modified or abandoned by the Church’s magisterium (CCC, par 83). The broader concept of the Word of God has been recognized as the divine revelation whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition (CCC, par 85). The Catechism even makes a distinction between the oral transmission of the Gospel by the apostles and the written Gospels (CCC, par 126). This distinction will be crucial in understanding Benedict XVI’s emphasis on the revealed oral Gospel as the Word of God, and the secondary role of the written Gospels as a witness to the oral proclamation of the gospel.

Sacred Scripture, however, has the authority of the Word of God since God speaks “one single Word” and through the Word he expresses himself fully (CCC, par 102). The Church venerates the Word as it venerates the Lord’s Body (CCC, par 103). Scripture is

based on Christ, because “all divine Scripture speaks of Christ, and all divine Scripture is fulfilled in Christ... Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ” (CCC, par 134, 133). Study of the Scriptures is “the very soul of sacred theology” (CCC, par 132). In theological investigation, however, there is a hierarchy of truths, “since they vary in their relation to the foundation of the Christian faith” (CCC, par 90). The Gospels, after all, are the heart of the Scriptures (CCC, par 125).

The hermeneutical method of the Catechism evidently rejects the self-sufficiency of the Holy Scripture. The task of the interpretation of the Word of God has been entrusted to the teaching office of the Church *alone* (CCC, par 85). The magisterium guides the people of God to understand and apply God’s revelation more fully (CCC, par 93). The manner of the interpretation is subjected to the judgment of the Church which “exercises the divinely conferred commission and ministry of watching over and interpreting the Word of God” (CCC, par 119). The Catechism concludes:

The task of interpreting the Word of God authentically has been entrusted *solely* to the Magisterium of the Church, that is, to the Pope and to the bishops in communion with him (CCC, par 100, italics mine).

This exclusivity in the process of biblical interpretation leaves no room for an ecumenical dialogue with Evangelicals. The Catechism becomes the public triumph of the Catholic dogmatic expression. The methods of this interpretation are continually based on the fact that the Bible is also a human book, and the readers must be aware of what is the intention of the human author (CCC, par 109). Positive aspects of historical-critical method have been affirmed (CCC, par 110). Nevertheless, “God is the author of Sacred Scripture because he inspired its human authors” (CCC, par 136). Vatican II, as it is fully endorsed in the Catechism, especially emphasized three aspects of the hermeneutical task: (1) Be attentive to the unity and the content of the Scriptures, (2) read Scripture within “the living Tradition of the whole Church”, and (3) be attentive to the analogy of faith (coherence of truths within the whole plan of Revelation) (CCC, par 112-114).

In regard to spiritual meaning the Bible has *two senses*: literal and spiritual, “the latter being subdivided into the allegorical, moral and anagogical sense” (CCC, par 115). The typological interpretation is also accepted as a valid interpretation of the “dynamic movement toward the fulfilment of the divine plan” (CCC, par 130).

According to the New Catechism of the Catholic Church, revelation is expressed *partim/partim* but always as one divine well-spring of God’s Word. Christ, as

personification of this Word, is the focus of God's revelation and the Bible. Scripture has divine authority but not self-sufficiency. In the full spirit of Vatican II, the Catechism affirms the guiding and leading pastoral and doctrinal role of the magisterium in the hermeneutical process of interpretation of the Bible and Tradition/traditions. The Catechism is, therefore, the full ratification of the Vatican II *Dei Verbum* document and the authentic demonstration of the dogmatic victory of Ratzinger's theology of the widening of the Word of God that goes beyond what is merely written (*sola scriptura*).

Benedict XVI's theology of the Word of God did not arise in the theological vacuum. Apart from the dogmatic expression of DV and CCC, there is also a significant development of theology of Scripture in the contemporary Catholic theology.

5.5 Theology of Scripture in the Contemporary Catholic Theology

In his volume *Catholicism at the Dawn of the Third Millennium* (1996) Thomas Rausch claims that, for contemporary Catholic theology, Scripture is still just one of the expressions of the living tradition of the church, others are creeds, liturgy, sacraments, and the doctrine of the teaching office, that is, the magisterium (Rausch, 1996: 67). The Scriptures, therefore, are the product of Tradition. As a Catholic theologian Rausch asserts:

As a primary *witness* to God's revelation to Israel and in Jesus, the Scriptures are *normative* for the faith of the Christian community today and continue to be interpreted *within the living tradition* of the Church (1996: 68, italics mine).

Though the Bible is a God-authorized norm of the Church's theology and practice it still cannot be equated with revelation. In Barthian terms, modern Catholicism claims that it is only a *witness* to God's revelation. It remains the Word as long as it points to the revelation's focal point, namely, personality of Christ.

Tradition, furthermore, remains the broader principle of God's revelation which encompasses even the written Word. The hermeneutical task is possible only within the living community of faith. In the spirit of Vatican II this summary of the present-day Catholic Scripture principle represents the foundation of biblical theology of some of the contemporary and ecumenical Catholic theologians. One of the most notable ones is certainly Hans Küng.

5.5.1 Hans Küng and the ecumenical Scripture principle

Hans Küng (1928-) is a Swiss Catholic priest, a professor of ecumenical theology at the University of Tübingen, a prolific writer and a controversial figure in Catholic dogmatics. In his volume *Theology for the Third Millennium* (1988) he makes an attempt to present the concept of revelation, Tradition and Scripture in contemporary ecumenical terms.

Regarding the authority of the Scriptures in the Reformation and Protestantism he warns: “In many cases did not the infallibility of the bishop of Rome or ecumenical council give way to the infallibility of a ‘paper pope’?” (Küng, 1988: 51) Though he proposes an ecumenical agenda he is still not ready to affirm the self-sufficiency of the Bible. Ecumenical agreement, for Küng, starts with mutual acceptance of the truth of inspiration or the divine-human nature of the Bible (1988: 55). Both Reformers and the Council of Trent confirm this foundational truth. Küng says that the Reformers did not accept the infallibility of the Scriptures, they criticized the text (1988: 51). It seems that Luther and Calvin were using extra-biblical sources to validate their theology, and moreover, Luther criticized the canon itself. Küng is almost completely Barthian because he believes that “Scripture is not revelation, it attests to revelation. It is “witness-to-revelation” (1988: 56). Barthian interpretation of the relationship between revelation and the Holy Scriptures might represent the ecumenical linkage between contemporary Catholicism and Evangelicalism. Moreover, even Benedict XVI founded his theology of revelation on the interpretation of Karl Barth (see section 5.6.2) (for ecumenical Catholic dialogue with Karl Barth see Hans Urs Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth* [1992]).

In his endeavour to create an ecumenical theology of Scripture Hans Küng presents a structure of comparisons to avoid some extremes in theological understanding of revelation. First, he affirms an emphatic “Yes” to the Bible, but “No” to biblicism (1988: 60). He denies the “bibliolatry” that affirm only the literal meaning of the text. This would be a partial rejection of Lutheranism. Second, he asserts “Yes” to Tradition, but “No” to traditionalism. He opens some vistas for the possible assessment of traditions and a critical standpoint toward them. Tradition, says Küng, would be purified and strengthened through this criticism (1988: 61). Finally, he supports the authority of the Church but not authoritarianism (1988: 61). The infallibility of the Pope has to be interpreted in an

evangelical way, not in the historic dogmatic and authoritarian Catholic way. After all, for Küng, the Bible is *norma normans non normata* (the norm of norms which cannot be normed) (1988: 64). God's Word norms the Church, not vice versa. The Scriptures should be the norm of any theological thinking. However, the Word of Scripture is only a witness to revelation, and this idea goes against fundamentalism and biblicism/bibliolatry. Küng is quite an evangelical.

In this brief presentation of Küng's position on the Scripture it is apparent that he is one of the unique ecumenical theologians who would like to see the ecumenical agenda applied to the Scripture principle. For him, the Bible is the church's book and it is an integral part of Tradition. However, tradition itself might be re-evaluated and re-assessed by the Word of God. Traditionalism in the Catholic Church may completely eradicate the true meaning of Tradition. Though Küng does not belong to the conservative circles of the Church he is still a theologian of Vatican II and he supports the agenda of the Council. On the other hand, Küng clearly disapproves of the Protestant *sola scriptura* principle with its emphasis on the self-sufficiency of the Word; he disapproves also of highlighting solely the *sensus literalis* because this is a form of fundamentalism and biblicism or even bibliolatry. In ecumenical terms, in order to include both Evangelical and Catholic positions, he is using the Barthian principle of the primacy of the Word as a witness to a broader reality of revelation/Word of God. Consequently, Hans Küng, as a Vatican II theologian, created one of the closest possible ecumenical projects.

5.5.2 Henri de Lubac and Scripture in Tradition

Henri-Marie de Lubac, SJ, (1896-1991) was a Cardinal of the Church whose writings shaped twentieth century Catholicism. He played one of the pivotal roles at Vatican II. His volume *Scripture in the Tradition* (2000) represents very important collection of essays on the Scripture principle.

De Lubac speaks about the impossibility of literal understanding of Scripture only because pure literalism is bound with pure history. This would mean that the biblical data equals the exact historical data of an actual history. He calls, however, for spiritual understanding based on biblical realities and interpretation of these realities within the Christian idea of truth (De Lubac, 2000: 5-6). Actual history, for De Lubac, is not the

medium of revelation and salvation because “historical events bring us no increase in supernatural revelation” (De Lubac, *Le Revelation Divine* quoted in Rowland, 2010: 65). Therefore, the concept of “pure” history is untenable, and the Scriptures would be only an interpretation of spiritual realities. Consequently, together with Hans Küng, De Lubac rejects Protestant biblicism. On the other hand he asserts:

Now it is true that everything *is*, in some sense, contained within the letter, for that which lacks foundation in the letter must be something which has been added to the text, and is therefore arbitrary (2000: 14).

De Lubac affirms this belief in the writings of Hans Urs von Balthasar and Thomas Aquinas. Interpretation of the spiritual meaning is full of ambiguity, claims De Lubac, because the *sensus literalis* is also spiritual (2000: 19). The Word in its essence is spiritual and the spiritual meaning is always an addition to the valid literal meaning. The spiritual meaning, according to De Lubac, is more likely a typology (2000: 15). This deeper meaning or *sensus plenior* would be a religious meaning of the text and this meaning is never separated from historical meaning (2000: 25). Yet, historical meaning is not based on actual history. Speaking about the ecumenical attempt to reconcile the Protestant and Catholic perspectives De Lubac explains:

From an objective point of view what is different between catholic exegetes and protestants is the relation between interpretation of Scripture and liturgical experience based not on the letter but the new spirit, spirit of Jesus. From a subjective point of view what separates Catholics from protestants is reading of Scriptures and its mode, individual or ecclesial (2000: 75).

Therefore, if theologians want to bridge the gap between the Protestant and Catholic perspectives on Scripture, they should speak more about the Bible in *liturgical* terms based on experience with Christ, the living Tradition. Catholics insist on *ecclesial* reading of the Bible because it denotes the reading within the living Tradition of the Church (see section 7.3.1.3). Private, individual and subjective reading of the Scriptures by Protestants has been debarred by De Lubac.

Disagreements, however, should not be exaggerated because “portions of our common heritage are returning to us today from Protestant hands”, claims De Lubac (2000: 77). These “portions of our common heritage” might be the Barthian Protestant/Lutheran tradition in which contemporary Catholicism expresses its Scripture principle and evidently communicates with Evangelicals today (see Urs Von Balthasar, 1992). If Scripture is interpreted correctly it is the living experience under the guidance of the living

magisterium, concludes De Lubac (2000: 234). The teaching office, as a living organism with a hermeneutical task, is still the guarantor of interpretation that is faithful to the living Tradition of the Church.

The only real possibility for ecumenical reconciliation on the *sola scriptura* principle, according to Henri de Lubac, would be, therefore, the Barthian broader concept of the Word of God/revelation expressing itself in Scripture as its primary Witness and Tradition. Since Evangelicals recently recognized the value of the living tradition (see especially Williams D. H., 1999; Mathison, 2001: 345; Allert, 2004: 348; Shea, 1996) ecumenical reconciliation becomes promising.

5.5.3 Karl Rahner and Hans Urs von Balthasar

Apart from De Lubac's significant contribution to the ecumenical understanding of Scripture, without thorough investigation of the primary sources, two more pillars of the contemporary Catholic theology of the Word will be mentioned here.

According to Avery Cardinal Dulles' study "Vatican II on the Interpretation of Scripture" (2006), the biblical hermeneutics of Karl Rahner (1904-1984), SJ, German theologian and one of the most influential Roman Catholic theologians of the 20th century, does not differ from the contemporary Vatican II Catholic thinkers. Dulles observes:

The interpretation of Scripture, according to Rahner, is the work of the church. Possessing an innate affinity with the God who is revealed in Scripture, the church is able to perceive what God is saying through the canonical books to the questions of the day. Since the church is the community of God's definitive (or eschatological) revelation, it has the power and the responsibility to protect the Scriptures from any corruption that would confuse or obscure their meaning. *The infallibility of the church in interpreting comes to expression through the ecclesiastical magisterium, which has the task of formulating the public faith of the church. In its formulations of the faith, however, the church remains permanently dependent on its apostolic origins, and hence on the Scriptures as the normative objectification of the apostolic faith* (Dulles, 1980: 11, italics mine).

This theological position is a balanced presentation of the circular validation of the Church and the Scriptures. On the one hand, according to Rahner, the Church remains the custodian of the Bible and its valid interpreter. On the other hand, the Church is contingent on *norma normans* of the Word of God and the apostolic testimony. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, SJ, in his work *Scripture, the Soul of Theology* (1994), interprets *Dei Verbum* rightly on this point:

Scripture may be regarded as the *norma normans non normata*, the norm that norms (but is) not normed, because it is unmanipulable (*unverfuegbar*) by either the Tradition or the magisterium . . . Tradition, however, is the *norma normata* (the normed norm), i.e., it is normed by Scripture. Thus related to Tradition, Scripture is the source of the life of faith in the Christian community, and hence the wellspring of theology (Fitzmyer, 1994: 79-80).

Dulles confirms this by the following interpretation of Rahner:

The church, meditating on the total import of the Bible in the light of new situations, can at times grasp implications not deducible from any particular statements in the Bible. But any Christian doctrine must in some way be radiated in the apostolic faith as attested by the Bible (Dulles, 1980: 12).

It seems that Rahner has become a very significant figure for progressive Catholic views on Scripture. Dulles recognized:

For Catholics, Rahner's theory functioned in a way similar to Barth's for many Protestants. It enabled them to accept and profit from modern exegetical advances without compromising their biblical faith. Barth and Rahner, ably seconded by many less celebrated theologians, prepared the way for the Protestant-Catholic convergences of the 1960s (Dulles, 1980: 12).

Similar to the project of Hans Küng, Karl Rahner borrowed the Barthian perspective to explain the nature of revelation/Word of God. The contemporary exegetical task has been endorsed without rejecting the inspiration and full authority of the Scriptures. The concept of the Word of God has been broadened to include the contemporary expressions of *kerygma* as well as the written Word of the Bible. It seems that Vatican II theologians reformulated and sanctioned the Barthian theology of the Word. This again became the avenue of ecumenical reconciliation with the Protestant Scripture principle.

Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-1988), a Swiss theologian nominated for the position of a cardinal is one of the most influential Catholic thinkers of the 20th century. In terms similar to Rahner's he explicitly endorsed the theology of Karl Barth as a possible focal point of ecumenical dialogue with Evangelicals. Rodney A. Howsare in his *Hans Urs von Balthasar and Protestantism: The Ecumenical Implications of His Theological Style* (2005) rightly presents the Barthian or even Lutheran Balthasar. Balthasar, though firmly grounded in Catholic dogma, believed that Scripture only *testifies* to God's Word in Christ. Though revelation has a propositional nature it is also incomprehensible [more dynamic], and it is a mystery beyond rationalization [dogmatic theology] that serves only to counterattack false rationalization [heresies] (Urs von Balthasar in Howsare, 2005: 30). The neo-orthodox notion of the encounter, as a non-propositional revelation of God, is

clearly appropriated within the context of the mystical and sacramental theology of the Church.

Therefore, both Rahner and Balthasar brilliantly recognized the prominence of Barth's theology of the Word in the ecumenical dialogue with Evangelicals. Of course, they reject the principle *sola scriptura* on these same grounds. This reinterpretation of the Catholic concept of tradition calls for evangelical recognition of Barth as an ecumenical theologian of Scripture (see sections 7.3.1.1 & 7.3.2.1).

Joseph Ratzinger, another theologian of Vatican II, perfected this concept of the Word of God and made it perhaps more ecumenical and acceptable for the Protestant proponents of *sola scriptura*. This presentation of his particular theology of the Scriptures will be assessed in detail in the following sections of this research. Prior to that eventual task, some of the contemporary/general Catholic expressions of faith regarding the Bible and Tradition, the nature of the Word of God and its interpretation will be considered first. This will represent a suitable immediate background for the study of Benedict XVI's theology of the Word of God.

5.5.4 The Contemporary Catholic Theology and Scripture

A particular relationship between the Scriptures and Tradition is the foundational model of the Scripture principle in the contemporary Catholic theology. The authority of Scripture is never devoid from the authority of Tradition.

Alan Schreck and Christoph Cardinal Schönborn, in *The Essential Catholic Catechism* (2000), first argue that the revelation of God is anchored in the personality of Christ. They claim that Jesus is the "golden mine" and the full revelation of God. Christ is the fullness of tradition. The Word of God is *revealed* fully in him but now *transmitted* in Sacred Scripture and Tradition (Schreck and Schönborn, 2000: 16-17). Therefore, God's revealed Word is *both* Scripture and Tradition (2000: 17). Moreover, no element of sacred tradition can contradict the teaching of the Scripture since both are expressions of one truth of God (2000: 18). It seems that this bold theological statement of Schreck and Schönborn affirm the contemporary Evangelical principle of *prima scriptura* as they affirm *norma normans* of the Bible. Tradition is based on Scripture but Scripture is also the expression

of Tradition and the source of theology. Mutual authentication and validation of the Bible and tradition seems to be one of the key theological ideas of contemporary Catholicism.

Liturgically speaking, furthermore, we receive Jesus as the Word of God *and* the body of Christ at the table of the Eucharist (Schreck and Schönborn, 2000: 21). The Scripture principle, therefore, according to Schreck and Schönborn include: (1) the unity of Scripture; (2) reading the Scriptures within Tradition, and (3) the analogy of faith (2000: 21). This is the expression of faith expanded in the New Catechism as well (see section 5.4). For modern Catholicism, Scripture is the Church's book and the revelation of the Bible is inseparable from the historical Tradition of the Church. The Catholic position remains always faithful to the fact that God has spoken through Scripture but he also speaks through the continuity of the tradition of the church; in other words the Holy Spirit did not "write the Bible and then return to heaven" (Mansfield, 2005: 117), but it continues to speak through the magisterium of the church.

In similar terms, Matthew F. Kohmescher, in his *Catholicism Today: A Survey of Catholic Belief and Practice* (1999), writes that Jesus Christ is equalled with *tradition* that is lived (living Tradition) and passed on to the next generation (Kohmescher, 1999: 31). The Christ-centeredness of revelation in contemporary Catholicism, thus, is always related to the broadening of the Word of God principle. Revelation, therefore, is only *partially* revealed in the Holy Scripture, says Kohmescher (1999: 33). The *partim/partim* of the Council of Trent is a recurring theological structure even in contemporary Catholic theology; though in modern Catholicism *one* wellspring of revelation is always highlighted.

Speaking about the authority of Scripture in the Catholic Church Avery Cardinal Dulles summarizes:

In the Catholic understanding, *the Bible is not self-sufficient. It does not determine its own contents, vouch for its own inspiration, or interpret itself.* The Bible is God's gift to the Church, which is its custodian and authoritative interpreter. The Councils of Trent and Vatican I clearly made these points. In summary fashion Vatican II declared that tradition, Scripture, and the magisterium "are so linked and joined together that one cannot stand without the others" (Paul VI, 1965, DV: 10). In other words, *nothing is believed on the authority of tradition alone, Scripture alone, or the magisterium alone.* (Dulles, 2006: 17-26, italics mine).

Evidently, Dulles builds up the authority of Scripture within a *trilateral* structure of authority. Scripture, Tradition and the teaching office are mutually validated and contingent on each other. Consequently, contemporary Catholicism rejects *sola scriptura* on these grounds. Catholic thinker Luke Timothy Johnson goes even further and develops a

quadrilateral interpretation in theology (Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience) from John Wesley. He says that “this method fits well with his sense of properly Catholic framework” (Johnson, 2007: 65; see also Thorsen, 2006: 7-27). Scripture is always in “dialogical relationship with the other three” (2007: 65). Therefore,

Tradition encompasses all the authentic realizations of Christian life based in Scripture and all the profound interpretations of Christian life by theologians grounded in the interpretation of Scripture (Johnson, 2007: 65).

In its dynamic relationship with Scripture, Tradition, then, would be the sum of all saintly living based on the Word and the historical deposit of different living interpretations of that same Word. Johnson’s insight is very helpful in the ecumenical dialogue since he borrows the concept from Wesley.

In regard to the authority of Scripture, Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, a renowned Roman Catholic scholar from Harvard Divinity School, in his article “The Crisis of Scriptural Authority” (1990), argues that there are two basic approaches to the problem of the authority of the Bible: (1) a functional approach which stresses the normative role of the Scriptures within the community of faith, and (2) a canonical approach which starts out from the canonical formation of Scripture. In the latter approach Fiorenza explains that Scripture gives a specific identity to the community of faith, and that identity “is related to the integrity of reinterpretation of the originating and continuing traditions” (Fiorenza, 1990: 362). He concludes:

Such an approach underscores that the authority of the Scriptures does not rest on a single meaning that is received and then interpreted, but rather that the meaning of the Scriptures is construed in relation to the integrity of the events and traditions expressed in the Scriptures along with the ongoing process of reception of these interpretations (Fiorenza, 1990: 367).

The conceptual renewal of tradition is based, therefore, on the fact of the possibility of varying and different interpretations of the Bible and their reception in the community of faith. It might be assumed that, for Fiorenza, the authority of the Church as a living organism determines and authenticates these interpretations and the manner of their reception. By saving the normative authority of the Bible, Fiorenza makes an innovative endeavour to explain the prominence and relevance of the Church’s tradition.

Lawrence S. Cunningham, a notable American Catholic theologian, in *The Catholic Faith: An Introduction* (1987) concludes:

The Catholic Church accepts the Scriptures as the Word of God but sees the Scriptures within the living Church, which produced the Scripture, accepted those which it considers inspired of God, and serves as protector of its integrity (Cunningham, 1987: 27).

Scripture is always the Church's Book, therefore. Tradition as the Church's expression of faith is the guarantor of producing and validating of the Scriptures.

In more contemporary and ecumenical terms, Peter Stravinskias, in his article "What is Catholicism's Official Doctrine on Scripture and Tradition?" (1988) avows:

Scripture comes alive only in the life of the community that gave it birth and has ever since preached and proclaimed it. To remove the Scripture from its moorings in the Church is to deny its genuine vitality. *Scripture provides Tradition with a written record against which to judge its fidelity and thus serves as a safeguard.* In the "balance of powers" (to have recourse again to governmental analogy), *Tradition is a defense against an unhealthy individualism that distorts the Bible through private interpretation at odds with the constant Tradition of the Church* (Stravinskias, 1997: 388, italics mine).

This is a significant summary of the up-to-date and ecumenical Catholic position on the Scripture principle. On the one hand, it is faithful to basic tenets of the Council of Trent and Vatican I. On the other hand, its mutual validation/authentication and potentially critical approach of Scripture to Tradition represents the novelty of the Vatican II or even post-Vatican II theology of the Word of God.

The contemporary hermeneutical task of Catholic theologians is based on its understanding of the authority of Scripture. Since the Bible is the Church's Book and it owes its existence and validation to the Church, the teaching office is the custodian of the veracious interpretation of Scripture. The concept of Tradition is closely related to biblical interpretation. Therefore, in ecumenical terms:

Hermeneutical theology reminds us that our current situation has been shaped by the tradition of reception. This contributes to positive (ecumenical) significance of tradition (Pierce, 2006: 22).

An ecumenical understanding of the Bible, therefore, is always based on the unity of historical interpretations. Tradition plays the pivotal role in the hermeneutical task. Having in mind that the community of faith and tradition have a crucial role in understanding the Scriptures still there are some limits:

Contemporary Catholic theology confirms Lutheran emphasis of the perspicuity of the Scriptures, however, it does not mean that interpretative community (Schillebeeckx) has no obstacles in complexities of the interpretation (Elliot, 2006: 94).

Catholic hermeneutics, therefore, faces the same obstacle as Protestant hermeneutics. As evangelical hermeneutics faces the challenge of multiple interpretations without the

authority of the teaching office authority, the Catholic interpretative task faces the challenge of multiple historical traditions that might contradict each other. Regarding the multiplicity of interpretations within the historical Tradition, Fretheim and Froehlich in *The Bible as Word of God: In a Postmodern Age* (1998) recognized:

Theological tradition is not handed down in the form of a specific language of its own but remains an ever-present *task* for each generation—the task of scrutinizing, verifying, weighing, updating all the other forms of expression that faith experience is creating in the church, with a view toward making them understandable in the framework of contemporary culture (Fretheim & Froehlich, 1998: 44).

Though this statement observes the difficulties of linguistic expressions this seems primarily to be an ecumenical approach to the hermeneutical task. Each generation of believers should and must create a new “tradition” of interpretation. Freitheim and Froehlich recognize the absence of one scriptural meaning, as Fiorenza does. There is an “assumption that the present crisis has less to do with the authority of the Bible as such and more with the authority of differing *interpretations* of certain biblical texts and themes” (Fretheim & Froehlich, 1998: 81). In postmodern hermeneutical terms both text and the reader belong to the community of faith. Therefore, multiple beliefs are present in the community and they shape our understanding before we approach the text (Fretheim & Froehlich, 1998: 91).

In regard to criticism of this hermeneutical approach, Christopher D. Spinks, in his work *The Bible and the Crisis of Meaning* (2007), diagnose that this postmodern interpretation of the text (with participation of the reader), though it seems like an opportunity for a variety of rich meanings, loses the very concept of determinate meaning (Spinks, 2007:26; for influence of postmodern hermeneutics on Catholic methods of interpretation see Peter Williamson, *Catholicism and the Bible: An Interview with Albert Vanhoye*, Jan 14, 1997). Evidently, the Catholic contemporary exegesis of the biblical text is also based on presuppositions of Tradition. Evangelical theologian, therefore, warns:

We need to recognize that hermeneutical concerns are not only exegetical but also presuppositional. Even if Roman Catholic scholars agree with Protestant scholars on the exegesis of texts, their authoritative hermeneutics and the use to which texts are put is of concern. The effect of those influences leading to the Romanist ecclesiology is to change the whole understanding of the way the Bible functions in the church (Goldsworthy, 2007:111).

Therefore, although Catholic contemporary theology makes an attempt to approach the text in ecumenical or at least postmodern terms, ecclesiological presuppositions of the

historical consciousness of Tradition still limit substantially the exegetical task and the normative function of Scripture. *Sola scriptura* is repudiated on these grounds. Some progressive Catholic scholars would object in Gadamerian terms, however, that Tradition as a presupposition is not a *limit* for understanding the truth of Scripture but the *condition* for it. This debate belongs to some other more extensive research. This is also an obstacle to ecumenical dialogue and it will be addressed again in Chapter 7.

In the finalization of this chapter the objective is to find out how Benedict XVI copes with this particular problem, as well as his ecumenical agenda in the understanding of *sola scriptura*.

5.6 Benedict XVI and the Scripture Principle

In his homily presented in Rome May 7, 2005, following his election as 265th and current Pope in April 16-17, 2005, Joseph Ratzinger (Benedict XVI) specified:

The pope must not proclaim his own ideas, but ever link himself and the Church to obedience to the Word of God, when faced with all attempts of adaptation or of watering down, as with opportunism... The ministry of the pope is the guarantor of the obedience toward Christ and His Word (quoted in Mansfield, 2005: 165).

During his ministry to the Catholic Church Joseph Ratzinger (Benedict XVI), paradoxically at the same time the Pope of the hope for reconciliation and peace (Bokenkotter, 2002: 531), and the combatant who confronts the “dictatorship of relativism” (Corkery, 2009: 93-108), the spiritual leader who deeply loves the Church (Bunson, 2005: 206), and one of the world’s “finest theological minds” in biblical theology since Gregory the Great (Hanh, 2009: 13) indeed made every effort to absorb the meaning of the Word of God/revelation and to immerse himself wholly into the task of understanding and the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures more than probably any of his predecessors. The Pope always repeated that the Church is first the listening Church and only then the teaching Church (Nichols, 2007: 284). Obedience to the Word of God gives the Church its identity and power. It seems that he himself made every effort to become the living role model in this crucial task for spiritual leaders in the Church as well as for the Church community (for all Ratzinger’s roles see the biography of Allen, 2000).

What can be said about Ratzinger's teaching of the *sola scriptura* principle? Having in mind the approaches of the Scripture principle that were used for the Protestant, Evangelical, traditional Catholic and contemporary Catholic understandings in this research, the thought of Benedict XVI will be explored in precisely the same mode. First, his position on the relationship between the authority of Scripture and tradition will be presented. Second, the essential discussion on the dynamic nature of the Word of God follows. Third, the Pope's hermeneutical vision in regard to current ecumenical and postmodern approaches to biblical interpretation will be thoroughly investigated. Finally, in the conclusion some underpinnings of Benedict XVI's ecumenical vision, in the context of the doctrine of Scripture, will be portrayed.

5.6.1 The Bible and Tradition (the authority of Scripture)

In regard to the relationship between the authority of the Holy Scriptures and the Church tradition Joseph Ratzinger has written perhaps only one specific work or treatise on this subject, that is, *God's Word: Scripture-Tradition-Office* (2008). However, in his works one may trace his fundamental position on this tension that troubled the Church for millennia even before the challenges of the Reformation. In fact, the Pope has conversed ecumenically primarily with the Reformer's challenging position.

Scripture and tradition, claims Ratzinger, are inseparable in the Catholic view. For Luther, Scripture is an *independent* measure of church and tradition, but problems remain with the canonicity and unity of Scripture (Ratzinger, 2010a: 54). Benedict XVI, therefore, does not accept the self-regulating authority of the Scriptures that authenticates the authority of the Church and tradition. He rightly recognizes that in the jointly published Lutheran-Catholic commentary Lutheran exegetes have a tendency to rely on their "fathers" (Luther, Calvin) and to include them as "discussants" in the attempt to find the meaning of the Scripture (2010a: 49). The Reformation reads Scripture within the conception of traditional faith of the creeds as well, adds Ratzinger (2010a: 7). For him, Luther altered the relationship between the Church as a community and the individual and between the Church and the Bible. He says: "Luther could no longer share that certainty which recognizes in the church *a community consciousness superior to private reflection and interpretation*" (1985: 158, italics mine). Private and subjective interpretations,

Ratzinger emphasizes, are based on “anti-ecclesial interpretations of the Scriptures” (Ratzinger, 2010b: art. 146). Community consciousness, furthermore, is the consciousness of one Catholic Church since the Bible is always “catholic”; there is no Lutheran Bible (1985: 164-65), concludes Benedict XVI.

In his very important volume, *God’s Word: Scripture-Tradition-Office* (2008), the Pope clearly emphasized that in the process of canonization “before the New Testament itself became Scripture, it was faith that expounded Scripture (that is, the Old Testament)” (2008a: 37). The Christian primitive and apostolic “rule of faith” produced Scripture, and the Church orally transmitted doctrine even before the canon of the New Testament (2008a: 36, 37). Tradition, therefore, precedes Scripture.

According to Ratzinger’s observation Catholics have to emphasize tradition more than before only because Protestants teach *sola scriptura*. Ratzinger, nevertheless, believes that tradition teaches the primacy of Scripture (*prima scriptura*) (Hahn, 1999: 13-15). Ratzinger reminds us that people today [Evangelicals] have begun to rediscover the necessity of a tradition “without which the Bible hangs in the air as one old book among many” (1985: 159). The Bible is, therefore, *traditioned*, so to say. Ratzinger remains completely faithful to Vatican II’s vision about the necessity of affirming *one* tradition as a “rule of faith” whose primary *part* is Scripture:

The Church lives in the certainty that her Lord, who spoke in the past, continues today to communicate his word in her living Tradition and in sacred Scripture. Indeed, the word of God is given to us in sacred Scripture as an inspired testimony to revelation; together with the Church’s living Tradition, it constitutes the supreme rule of faith (Ratzinger, 2010b: par. 65).

Ratzinger always highlights his contention that Scripture cannot exist without the church. The Bible is the Church’s Book. Cyril O’Regan from Notre Dame University, as he was interviewed by me, emphasized that Ratzinger’s position never deviates from the Catholic perspective that reading the Bible is possible only within the living tradition of the church; tradition is always tradition of the reading and interpretation of the Scripture (O’Regan, 2010). It is noteworthy that the Pope asserts that the relation between Scripture and tradition in the context of the current ecumenical debate is actually relation between Scripture and the magisterium or teaching office (Ratzinger, 2010a: 51). By this, he confirms the authority of the Church to validate, guard and interpret the Scriptures. The Bible is inseparable from the historical experience of the people of God. Ratzinger summarizes his concept of this relationship:

Certainly, Scripture carries God's thoughts within it: that makes it unique and constitutes it an "authority". Yet it is transmitted by a human history. It carries within it the life and thought of a historical society that we call the "People of God", because they are brought together, and held together, by the coming of the divine Word. *There is a reciprocal relationship: This society is the essential condition for the origin and the growth of the biblical Word; and, conversely, this Word gives the society its identity and its continuity.* Thus, the analysis of the structure of the biblical Word has brought to light an interwoven relationship between Church and Bible, between the People of God and the Word of God, which we had actually always known, somehow, in a theoretical way but had never before had so vividly set before us (Ratzinger, 2005a: 33, italics mine).

Again, with a renewed language and insight, the Pope confirms mutual interdependence and validation of Scripture and tradition. Regarding Benedict XVI's explicit definition of tradition he claims that tradition is the *memoria Ecclesiae*, the memory of the Church as the living voice (*viva vox*) of the Word, which bears the memory of God's saving acts in history, most decisively the event of Christ's descent from heaven and entrance into history. He says: "The whole of Scripture is nothing other than Tradition" (Quoted in Hahn, 1999: 21). The Bible, therefore, is *traditioned*. In the spirit of Thomas Aquinas, the "traditioning" of the Scripture or *tradition sacrae scripturae* means that Scripture itself is transmitted by tradition (Nichols, 2002: 30). Tradition represents the fulfillment of Christ's promise to be with His Church in the Spirit until the end of the age (Mt 28:20). Stated in another way, tradition is Christ's living, saving, and *interpretive* presence in the Church (Hahn, 1999). Aidan Nichols, in his volume *The Thought of Pope Benedict XVI: An Introduction to the Theology of Joseph Ratzinger* (2007), interpreting Benedict XVI's position on tradition claims that it is the perpetuation of everything church believes and is. There is no space for criticism of specific points in tradition (Nichols, 2007: 60). However, it becomes indispensable to draw a line of distinction between Tradition and traditions. While the Council of Trent uses the concept of *traditions* (plural), Vatican II uses the concept of *tradition* (singular) based on 2 Thess 2: 15 (Rowland, 2008: 52). It seems evident that Ratzinger supports the Vatican II position. His organic and total use of the term "tradition" is not the one of the Council of Trent (2008: 59). This comprehensive use of the concept of tradition is the legacy of Ratzinger's active participation at Vatican II in drafting *Dei Verbum*. This has also been a constant for Benedict throughout his career (Rausch, 2009: 81).

Benedict's theology, furthermore, is shaped by the tradition of the interpretation of the Bible: the Church Fathers and the Scholastics (Hemming, 2005: 137). Augustine, for example, represents the key figure of Benedict's theologizing (Corkery, 2009: 24).

Ratzinger was fascinated with Augustine and wrote and defended his doctoral dissertation on Augustine's doctrine of the Church (Allen, 2000: 35). Benedict XVI emphasized that Augustine's reading of the Bible as the Word of God impressed him to believe the Word of God and to know it, and gave his theology a biblical character (Ratzinger, 1997: 66). Ratzinger, obviously, never made a sharp distinction between pure biblical exegesis and the understanding of the Bible in the Church's tradition. This might be one of the reasons for his obsession with Augustine. In the Pope's theology, therefore, Scripture and tradition represent the inseparable unity of God's immeasurable gift to the Church. In his *Benedict XVI: Fellow Worker for the Truth: An Introduction to His Life and Thought* (2005) Laurence Paul Hemming highlights: "The Church's own history of interpretation is this tradition" (2005: 132-33). Ratzinger always affirmed that beside the Bible there is another source of historical knowledge, oral tradition that has been rejected by historical criticism but has run alongside Scripture (2005: 132-33). Tradition becomes the essential part of revelation, and it represents the *interpretation* of the Christ-event, the true revelation (Ratzinger, 2008a: 61, 107). It is also the interpretation "according to the Scriptures", says Ratzinger (2008a: 66). The spiritual link between revelation, Christ, tradition and Scripture becomes the dynamic realization of God's Word. Tradition, for Benedict XVI in his volume *God's Word*, and as it is expounded at the Council of Trent, has four strata: (1) the inscription of revelation (= the gospel) not only in the Bible, but in hearts; (2) the speaking of the Holy Spirit throughout the whole age of the Church; (3) the conciliar activity of the Church; and (4) the liturgical tradition and the whole of the tradition of the Church's life (Ratzinger, 2008a: 82). This is the reality of the Christian present (2008a: 82). Scripture is a central element of the Tradition, but by no means the sole element (2008a: 82). *Sola scriptura* is excluded on the basis of its rejection of the indispensable tradition of the Church. The authority of the Bible is conditioned by the living tradition of the community of faith.

The fourth element of God's Word, says Ratzinger (2008a: 82), as the *liturgical* tradition is also an element of the *sacramental* life of the church because the Word is always calling to worship and adoration (Hahn, 2009: 54). In one of his general audiences Benedict XVI explains in simple words what he means by reading the Scripture within the liturgical community of faith:

This dialogue with Scripture must always have two dimensions: on the one hand, it must be a truly personal dialogue because God speaks with each one of us through Sacred Scripture

and it has a message for each one. We must not read Sacred Scripture as a word of the past but as the Word of God that is also addressed to us, and we must try to understand what it is that the Lord wants to tell us. However, to avoid falling into individualism, we must bear in mind that the Word of God has been given to us precisely in order to build communion and to join forces in the truth on our journey towards God. Thus, although it is always a personal Word, it is also a Word that builds community, that builds the Church. *We must therefore read it in communion with the living Church. The privileged place for reading and listening to the Word of God is the liturgy, in which, celebrating the Word and making Christ's Body present in the Sacrament, we actualize the Word in our lives and make it present among us* (Ratzinger, 2007b, italics mine; see also Ratzinger, 2010b, art. 181-187).

As a part of Church's tradition liturgy is, therefore, the "home of the Word" (Ratzinger, 2010b: art. 181). In "liturgy, the word of God is proclaimed, heard and explained to the faithful", concludes the Pope (2010b: art. 55). Within these parameters Ratzinger continues with his explanation of the liturgical and the sacramental role of the Scriptures:

The relationship between word and sacramental gesture is the liturgical expression of God's activity in the history of salvation through the *performative character* of the word itself. In salvation history there is no separation between what God *says* and what he *does*. His word appears as alive and active (cf. *Heb* 4:12), as the Hebrew term *dabar* itself makes clear. In the liturgical action too, we encounter his word which accomplishes what it says. *By educating the People of God to discover the performative character of God's word in the liturgy, we will help them to recognize his activity in salvation history and in their individual lives* (Ratzinger, 2010b: art. 191, italics mine; see also art. 191-200).

Therefore, without the living and communal experience of Christ at the liturgy (as a part of the tradition of the Church) there is no proper reception, reading and interpretation of the Word revealed by God through the testimony of the Scriptures. Lutheran private and subjective approach to the Word is repudiated on the account of the historical consciousness of the Church's tradition.

On the other hand, it seems that Joseph Ratzinger supports the idea that Tradition, though with a capital T, still needs to be received and practiced *critically*, as Tracey Rowland recognizes in his *Ratzinger's Faith: The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI* (2008: 53, 55). The same author, in his *Benedict XVI: The Guide for the Perplexed* (2010), by quoting *History and Dogma* by Maurice Blondel, investigates closely the problem of *fixisme* or a static concept of tradition as mechanical and perfectly handed down by all the recipients (Rowland, 2010: 52). This dynamic structure of new concept of tradition transcends the historical interpretations (see Kohler, 2006). Tradition is not merely a material transmission but "the effective presence" of Christ (Rowland, 2010: 53). Ratzinger has become critical of the static concept of tradition and he rejected Lerins' principle of *quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus* (what [has been taught]

everywhere, always, and by all) (Rowland, 2010: 54). This is the reason why Scripture remains the criterion for the *indispensable criticism* of tradition (Rowland, 2008: 55). Notice that Rowland does not describe the Bible as an *indispensible criterion*. This looks like denial of *sola scriptura* and endorsement of the *prima scriptura* principle. Tradition, in conclusion, ought *naturally* to relate to both history and the living community (Rowland, 2008: 61). Tradition becomes the necessary substratum for the life of a Christian in the community of faith.

To sum up, Benedict XVI's understanding of the relationship between scriptural authority and the Church's authority and/or the authority of tradition is always based on the traditional assumptions of the Bible as being the Church's Book. In his *Address to the Participants in the International Congress Organized to Commemorate the 40th Anniversary of the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation "Dei Verbum"* Benedict XVI clearly summarized: "The Church and the Word of God are inseparably linked. The Church lives on the Word of God and the Word of God echoes through the Church, in her teaching and throughout her life" (Ratzinger, 2005b: 1). Nevertheless, though the Scriptures are always guarded and interpreted by the Church they still remain a principle of critical assessment of the Church's tradition (*prima scriptura*). The *sola scriptura* principle, is untenable, however, not just on the basis of the need for and authority of tradition and its historical interpretation of Scripture but even more on the basis of the dynamic nature of revelation of God/Word of God.

5.6.2 Revelation and the Nature of the Word of God

In the thought of Benedict XVI revelation represents God's self-disclosure, and it definitely precedes Scripture and becomes embodied in it. Unlike Karl Rahner, who believed in universal revelation discernable in human nature, for Ratzinger this can never be the end of Christianity and its essence. Scripture must be read in the church (Rausch, 2009: 68). For the Pope, revelation of God is much greater than only words, it consists of words and signs. The sacramental nature of the Word of God has a prominent position in the church within the opus of Benedict XVI's writings (Rowland, 2008: 50).

Ratzinger grounded the revelation of God principally in history. Unlike the Koran the Bible is mediated to us through history (Ratzinger, 2002: 151). Scripture is the Word of

God only in relation to the unity of God's history (2002: 153). Since the revelation of God is a historical event the Bible has meaning only in relation to that historical revelation. The Bible is not a textbook about God and religious matters. It is the historical development of images about God (2002: 152). It points to the historical revelation of God. The written Word only bears witness to this revelation.

The revelation of God is, therefore, a much broader principle than only the written Word. In *God's Word* Ratzinger claims:

Then we can see that we have to reach beyond the positive sources of Scripture and tradition, to their inner source: *the revelation, the living word of God, from which Scripture and tradition both spring and without which neither can be grasped in the importance they have for faith.* The question of "Scripture and tradition" remains insoluble so long as it is not expanded to a question of "revelation and tradition" and thereby inserted into the larger context in which it belongs (Ratzinger, 2008a: 55, italics mine).

It is clear that the Pope endorses a theory that "revelation goes beyond Scripture, then, to the same extent as reality goes beyond information about it" (2008a: 56). In his *Milestones* (1998) Ratzinger expresses the same idea in other words: "Revelation precedes Scripture and becomes deposited in Scripture but it is not simply identical with it" (Ratzinger, 1998: 108). Going beyond or preceding Scripture revelation is much more than only a written evidence of God's acts in history. Benedict acclaims that "the Christian faith is not a 'religion of the book'": Christianity is the "religion of the word of God", not of "a written and mute word, but of the incarnate and living Word" (Ratzinger, 2010b: art. 19). Scripture is not enough if one wants to experience fully the encounter with the Word of God. Revelation, thus, is never realized by the individual reading of Scripture, but human beings truly receive revelation only by faith in the living understanding of Scripture *within the Church* (Ratzinger, *St. Bonaventure*, 66-68 quoted in Hahn, 2009: 110).

Ratzinger, apparently, describes the nature of the Word of God in Barthian terms. He says that patristic and medieval theology never referred to the Bible as revelation (2002:153). Revelation stands behind what is merely written. In Benedict XVI's words:

The biblical word bears witness to the revelation but does not contain it in such a way that a revelation is completely absorbed in it and could now be put in your pocket like an object (Ratzinger, 2008a: 122-123).

Scripture bears witness to the reality of Christ as the Word (2008a: 61). Based on this Barthian theology of the Christ-centered Word of God and focus on the Christology of the Word (Ratzinger, 2010b: art. 32-40) Ratzinger's theology is fundamentally neo-orthodox though profoundly Catholic because it includes the dimension of the revelation within the

Church *only*. Palpable neo-orthodox influence is also visible in the following expression of Ratzinger's faith: "Revelation is a dynamic process between God and man, which consistently becomes reality *only in an encounter... The Bible bears witness to the revelation*, and yet the concept of revelation as such goes beyond that" (2008a: 109, italics mine). The Pope, therefore, does not believe in the conceptual, objective or propositional nature of revelation, and he expresses his idea of the transcendental side of revelation in the dialogue with Karl Barth (Ratzinger and Rahner, 1966: 17-18). Contemporary scholars of Benedict's biblical theology indeed recognized that Ratzinger was under the influence of the theology of Barth. He praised the opinions of Karl Barth (Allen, 2000: 70), and his criticism of secularism reflected similar Barthian ideas (Rowland, 2010: 63). It is true that John Paul II mentioned once, perhaps more in a liturgical sense, that "the Bible presents to us the inexhaustible treasures of *God's revelation* and of his love for humanity" (John Paul II, 2004: par. 3). There might be a Lutheran paradox of distinction/equality of the Word/revelation and Scripture present in contemporary Catholicism, but it is not so apparent in the theology of Benedict XVI.

Because the Word in the Scriptures is not the Word of God *per se* but only a witness to revelation of the Word of God (Christ) it has its human limits and weaknesses. The following statement of Ratzinger's, though perplexing for some contemporary Catholic theologians and the public, reveals this fundamental principle:

It is another thing to see the Bible as a whole as the Word of God, in which everything relates to everything else, and everything is disclosed as you go on. It follows straightaway that neither the criterion of inspiration nor that of infallibility can be applied mechanically. *It is quite impossible to pick out one single sentence and say, right, you find this sentence in God's great book, so it must simply be true in itself* (Ratzinger, 2002: 153, italics mine).

The possible explanation of this challenging proposition is that for the Pope, the Bible is not a scientific book. For Ratzinger Scripture should be read in the spirit in which it was written, spirit from Christ (2002: 155). Benedict always highlighted that the Bible exists for the people of God, not only for scholars (2002: 155-156). He emphasized that holy Scripture is the word of God in human words with all its limitations. Scripture is not just an oracle of God (Ratzinger, 2002: 159); there is a spiritual understanding of the Word based on the historical revelation of Christ. Scripture just points to and witnesses to this revelation. Scott Hahn, in his *Covenant and Communion: The Biblical Theology of Pope Benedict XVI* (2009), acclaims the Word-centeredness of Benedict XVI's theological and hermeneutical vision (2009: 56). Nevertheless, Hahn identifies Ratzinger's insistence that

the Word is always more than the written word pointing us back to the people of God (2009: 56). In Ratzinger's own words:

The fundamental postulate of Scripture's unambiguousness has had to be dropped, on account of both the structure of the Word and the concrete experiences of scriptural interpretation. *It is untenable on the basis of the objective structure of the Word, on account of its own dynamic, which points beyond what is written. Scripture, the Word we have been given, with which theology concerns itself, does not, on the basis of its own nature, exist as a book alone.* Its human author, the People of God, is alive and through all the ages has its own consistent identity (Ratzinger, 2005a: 33-34, italics mine).

The dynamic structure of the Word of God/revelation points beyond what is merely written, therefore. This spiritual reality is revealed in the dynamic and historical community of believers, and it is the ever fresh and renewed demonstration of God's presence. This is the reason the Scriptures cannot be termed and defined as the revelation of God, and the ultimate reason for elimination of *sola scriptura*. Benedict XVI, therefore, ultimately denies the Lutheran paradox of distinction/equality of the Word of God and the Holy Scriptures. In contemporary neo-orthodox terms he transforms the traditional Catholic approach to the Scriptures. The revelation of God or the Word of God always points beyond what is merely written. The dynamic nature of the Word within the historical experience of the community of faith considers the *sola scriptura* principle untenable and unsustainable.

What is the nature of Benedict XVI's principles of biblical interpretation and its relation to the fundamental principle of *Scripture only*?

5.6.3 The Hermeneutics of Benedict XVI

5.6.3.1 Introduction

One of the crucial elements of the *sola scriptura* principle is that Scripture interprets itself (*sui ipsius interpres*). In its perfectionistic form this principle claims that Scripture is self-sufficient and it interprets itself as a divine Word of God that does not need external content and/or methodology. Benedict XVI, in his hermeneutical vision, made every effort to prove that this principle is not acceptable even by contemporary Evangelicals because the hermeneutical task has been substantially changed in recent decades on account of the influence of philosophical hermeneutics. Joseph Ratzinger speaks a lot about this

transformation and applies the contemporary hermeneutical principles in order to explain the mystery of Christ in the Word of God.

The question of biblical interpretation along with the questions of creation, salvation and the nature of humanity is one of the key concepts in the theology of Joseph Ratzinger (Corkery, 2009: 28). First of all, Ratzinger stresses the foundational principle of the hermeneutical task. The biblical interpretation must be done in the appropriate spirit. The Bible, says the Pope, can be *neutralized* if not interpreted in the right spirit (Ratzinger, 2004a: 186). Only in the spirit of denial of selfishness and openness to another can we understand salvation history and the Holy Scriptures (Ratzinger, 2006c: 56). Therefore, the clarity of the Scripture can be recognized only by the right attitude of the open mind and heart. This is an imperative throughout Benedict XVI's career-long exploration of biblical interpretation. The principle itself reminds one of the Lutheran *claritas*.

Ultimately, Ratzinger's hermeneutical mission was rediscovering the Word of God, which is always timely and never out-of-date. The Church, according to the Pope, might rejuvenate herself and experience a new springtime by listening and obeying the Word (Holden, 2009).

5.6.3.2 *Scripture is interpreted by the Church/Tradition*

One of the key presuppositions of Ratzinger's hermeneutical task is that biblical interpretation is never devoid of a historical consciousness of the mind of the Church. He elaborates on this problem:

Scripture, the Word we have been given, with which theology concerns itself, does not, on the basis of its own nature, exist as a book alone. Its human author, the People of God, is alive and through all the ages has its own consistent identity. The home it has made for itself and that supports it is its own interpretation, which is inseparable from itself. *Without this surviving and living agent, the Church, Scripture would not be contemporary with us; it could then no longer combine, as is its true nature, synchronic and diachronic existence, history and the present day*, but would fall back into a past that cannot be recalled; it would become literature that one interpreted in the way one can interpret literature. And with that, theology itself would decline into literary history and the history of past times, on one hand, and into the philosophy of religion and religious studies in general, on the other (Ratzinger, 2005a: 34).

Evidently, Benedict XVI calls for theological and contemporary *interpretation* of the Holy Scriptures because the community of faith has ever new experience in its pilgrimage. For him, the Bible is not a dead book locked in the past but the expression of the living tradition

of the living community of faith. Hermeneutics, therefore, cannot be based only on the exegetical task or method; it has to become a theological and/or spiritual interpretation relevant for the present and the future. Revealing the rationale for this approach Benedict XVI argues:

The history of exegesis is a history of contradictions; the daring constructions of many modern exegetes, right up to the materialistic interpretation of the Bible, show that the Word, if left alone as a book, is a helpless prey to manipulation through pre-existing desires and opinions (Ratzinger, 2005a: 34).

If this statement is correctly understood, within the framework of contemporary Catholic dogmatic, the only presuppositions that might be valid in biblical interpretation are those of the historical consciousness of the tradition of the Church. An influence of the contemporary philosophical hermeneutics of Hans Georg Gadamer may be identified here. Gadamer claimed that people had *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein* (historically affected consciousness), and that the final task of hermeneutics is a *fusion of horizons* between the historical text and the background of the author (Gadamer, 2004: xv). Has not Benedict XVI applied this principle of the “new hermeneutics” when he says that the ultimate meaning of the Scriptures is always dependent on the “historical consciousness” of the Church’s tradition? The influence of philosophical hermeneutics on Catholic hermeneutics was recognized by his predecessor John Paul II as well (1993, IBC, Hermeneutical Questions: art. A). The influence of Gadamer on Ratzinger’s thought has been indeed recognized in contemporary scholarship (Rowland, 2010: 60). O’Regan comments that Benedict XVI recognizes specific culturally different readings of biblical texts as valid readings. Though there is no *full* hermeneutics of suspicion similar to Paul Ricoeur (O’Regan, 2010), still the hermeneutical task includes the necessity of prejudices and presuppositions of the historical consciousness. Ratzinger explains that every individual belongs to a certain social context and lives within a tradition, and that the inspired reading of the Scripture with all its interpretation and selectivity plays an important role in the mutual dialogue and presence of the text and the reader(s) (Ratzinger in Rowland, 2010: 59). This incontestably points to Gadamer.

Benedict XVI, furthermore, claims that the Bible was the result of individual inspired authors. However, the Word is also the product of the collective “deeper author” of the People of God (2007: xxi). In his *Covenant and Communion: The Biblical Theology*

of Pope Benedict XVI (2009) Scott Hahn properly recognizes the foundations of Ratzinger's hermeneutics:

Reading Scripture is a dialogue in faith with the God who speaks to us from the living experience of his people, the Church. The Scriptures cannot be read apart from the Church, for the Church is the subject that God's Word continually addresses. And the Scriptures cannot be understood without taking into account the faith that the Word of God seeks from its readers (Hahn, 2009: 46).

Thus, the exegete never has a neutral position (Rowland, 2010: 60), and by asserting this important note Benedict XVI "is actually much closer to the postmoderns than the moderns since he rejects the idea that there can be a neutral view from somewhere external to tradition," concludes Tracey Rowland (2010: 65).

Therefore, progressive Catholic hermeneutics is nothing else than a fusion of horizons of the biblical text and the historical background (tradition) of the interpreter (historical community of faith). The Church's tradition, therefore, is the only predisposition or the pre-existing idea welcomed in the hermeneutical task. Others lead only to unresolved contradiction and, if one must add, it would create innumerable diverse interpretations of such as can be seen in different Protestant denominations. This stands as one of the key elements of the critique of the *sola scriptura* principle.

The Bible is, therefore, the Book of the Church. *Scripture never interprets itself*, claims Benedict XVI, and he points to a fundamental principle of biblical interpretation:

Here we can point to a fundamental criterion of biblical hermeneutics: *the primary setting for scriptural interpretation is the life of the Church*. This is not to uphold the ecclesial context as an extrinsic rule to which exegetes must submit, but rather is something demanded by the very nature of the Scriptures and the way they gradually came into being (Ratzinger, 2010b: art. 85).

This is the foundation of the traditional and progressive Catholic hermeneutics (O'Regan, 2010: INT). It has been already noticed that Benedict XVI, though accepting Luther's principle of *perspicuitas*, speaks about the perspicuity that is possible only within the proper understanding of the Bible by the historical *viva vox* or the people of God that becomes the guarantor of the true interpretation (Ratzinger, 2005a: 35). The Pope explains:

For Jerome, an authentic interpretation of the Bible must always be in harmonious accord with the faith of the Catholic Church. *It is not a question of an exegesis imposed on this Book from without*; the Book is really the voice of the pilgrim People of God and only in the faith of this People are we "correctly attuned" to understand Sacred Scripture (Ratzinger, 2007c, italics mine).

In *Verbum Domini* (2010), in the same terms, he declares:

... *the ecclesial dimension of biblical interpretation is not a requirement imposed from without: the Book is the very voice of the pilgrim People of God*, and only within the faith of this People are we, so to speak, attuned to understand sacred Scripture. An authentic interpretation of the Bible must always be in harmony with the faith of the Catholic Church (Ratzinger, 2010b: art. 91, italics mine).

The tradition of the living People of God *naturally* becomes an indispensable condition for the understanding of Scripture. The horizon of the historical community of pilgrimage becomes necessary. Apart from and together with individual biblical authors, the community of faith represents the collective subject, the “deeper author” of the Scriptures. The Pope says: “The People of God – the Church – is the living subject of the Scripture; it is in the Church that the words of the Bible are always in the present” (Ratzinger, 2007a: xxi). The Church, therefore, participates mysteriously in the authorship of the Scriptures as it lives the living Word of God. The Bible is not a novel or a textbook, it is an echo of the history of God’s people (Ratzinger, 1995: 8-9). Thus, in striking contrast to Lutheranism, Ratzinger asserts it is untenable to believe in *sola scriptura* on the basis of the objective structure of the Word with the participation of the People of God as “deeper author”, and on account of the Word’s own dynamic, which points beyond what is written (Ratzinger, 2005a: 33-34).

The dynamic of the Word of God calls, therefore, for the biblical interpretation that will take into consideration the living tradition of the Church and its dogmatic theology within its historical consciousness of the Church. Scripture left to itself is void of contemporary theological meaning and application. Exegetes, hence, do not stand in some neutral area, above or outside the history of the Church; rather the faith of the Church is a form of *sympathia* without which the Bible remains a closed book (Ratzinger, 1989; see also Rowland, 2008: 57). The connection between the theological dogmatic and historical interpretation of the Church and direct exegetical interpretation of the Bible is luminously presented in the following quote of Ratzinger:

I am personally persuaded that a careful reading of the *entire* text of *Dei Verbum* can yield the essential elements for a synthesis between historical method and theological hermeneutics, but this connection is not easily comprehensible. For this reason the post-conciliar reception has practically dismissed the theological parts of its statements as a

concession to the past and has taken the text simply as an unqualified official confirmation of the historical-critical method. One may reckon such a one-sided reception of the Council in the profit column of the ledger insofar as the confessional differences between Catholic and Protestant exegesis virtually disappeared after the Council. The debit aspect of this event consists in the fact that by now the breach between exegesis and dogma in the Catholic realm has become total and that even for Catholics Scripture has become a word from the past, which every individual tries to transport into the present in his own way, without being able to put all too much trust in the raft on which he sets himself. Faith then sinks into a kind of philosophy of life that the individual seeks to distil from the Bible as best he can. *Dogma, no longer able to rest on the ground of Scripture, loses its solidity. The Bible, which has cut itself loose from dogma, has become a document of the past and itself belongs to the past* (Ratzinger, 1989: 20-21, italics mine).

On some other occasion the Pope concludes in the same spirit:

When biblical exegesis is divorced from the living, breathing community of faith that is in the Church, exegesis is reduced to historiography and nothing more. The hermeneutic of faith disappears. We reduce everything to human sources and can simply explain everything away. Ultimately, we deny the One about whom the Scriptures speak, the one whose living presence lies underneath the words. When exegesis is divorced from theology, then Scripture will not be the soul of theology (Ratzinger quoted in Rosica, 2008: 1, italics mine).

According to Benedict XVI, *sacra scriptura sui ipsius interpres*, for that reason, is an unsound, invalid and unsustainable hermeneutical principle since the exegetical task can never be separated from the historical-theological dogmatic consciousness of the people of God.

5.6.3.3 *Canonical Exegesis, Spiritual Meaning and the Role of the Magisterium*

Ratzinger concludes that dogmatic theology and exegesis always need each other. The exegetical task becomes the primary methodological mission in Ratzinger's hermeneutics. "Exegesis has always remained for me the centre of my theological work" (Ratzinger quoted in Hemming, 2005: 131). For Benedict XVI exegetical interpretation of the biblical text is a true theology (Hahn, 1999: 13-15).

The unique exegetical approach of Joseph Ratzinger is based, first of all, on his *criticism of the traditional historical-critical method*. His theology follows the principle that the historical-critical method and other modern scientific methods are important for an understanding of Holy Scripture and Tradition. Their value, however, depends on the hermeneutical (philosophical) context in which they are applied. Basic flaws that the Pope recognized in the historical-critical approach, expounded in Marcus Holden's article

“Beyond Historical Criticism: Pope Benedict XVI and the Reform of Biblical Exegesis” (2009) are: (1) *the evolutionary model of theology*: “the more theologically considered and sophisticated a text is, the more recent it is, and the simpler something is, the easier it is to reckon its original;” (2) *the hermeneutics of suspicion*: in the art of interpretation many attempt to study biblical texts as a scientist would dissect a cadaver in the lab; the texts are studied in isolation from their original ecclesial and liturgical context; and (3) “*self-limitation of reason*” in the philosophy of the German Enlightenment thinker Immanuel Kant; the result is an “amputated reason” that limits our rationality to simple reflection on how the things must work (Holden, 2009). Ratzinger claims that “the place of Scripture in the life of the Church has been part of the ‘crisis’ of the Church of which he has spoken” (Hemming, 2005: 131) because the Scriptures are subordinated to purely scientific understanding (2005: 132). Benedict’s critique of the scientific historical-critical method of Dibelius and Bultmann is based on rejection of rationalistic presuppositions in the contemporary exegesis (see also Ratzinger’s lecture, *Biblical Interpretation in Crisis: On the Question of the Foundations and Approaches of Exegesis Today*, 1989). For the Pope the Bible is not a scientific book only (Rausch, 2009: 71). He affirms that

the science alone cannot provide us with a definitive and binding interpretation... A greater mandate is necessary for this, which cannot derive from human abilities alone. The voice of the living Church is essential for this, of the Church entrusted until the end of time to Peter and the college of the apostles (Ratzinger, 2005b: 1).

Holden, furthermore, perceives the solutions that Joseph Ratzinger offers as well. First of all, one should make a balance between faith and reason. The supernatural nature of the Scriptures must always be retained, and at the same time scholars must be sensitive to historical investigation. A purified historical critical method can, according to Ratzinger, be open to and work with a truly *theological* understanding of Scripture. This openness is akin to the receptivity of reason before faith. “But this act of faith is based upon reason--historical reason--and so makes it possible to see the internal unity of Scripture” (Ratzinger quoted in Holden, 2009).

The best example of this principle is the Pope’s bestseller *Jesus of Nazareth* (2007). In this book the historical treasure of the Church’s tradition is presented as indispensable in the interpretation of the Gospels. Theological interpretation of Christ’s personality is always based on the historical consciousness of the Church. This calls for elucidation of “new” hermeneutics of the Pope. Benedict XVI tirelessly reminds Catholic exegetes and

Christians in general that if, under the influence of historical-critical scholarship, they lose the historical point of reference “intimate friendship with Jesus, on which everything depends, is in danger of clutching at thin air” (Ratzinger, 2007a: xii). The Pope regards Jesus “in the light of his communion with the Father” (2007a: xiv). This becomes the *theological* reference point of the interpretation of the Gospels. The historical-critical method is still an indispensable tool (2007: xvi), but it is insufficient on account of belief in divine inspiration. Ratzinger, in fact, claims that we need a “critique of criticism” (Hahn, 2009: 27). Purification of the historical-critical method is necessary (2009: 27). Hence, the Pope clearly states that “there is no such thing as a pure historical method; it is always carried on in a hermeneutical or philosophical context, even when people are not aware of it or expressly deny it” (Ratzinger, *Pierced*, 43 quoted in Hahn, 2009: 27; for more on limitations of the historical-critical method see Hahn, 2009: 32-40).

Jesus of Nazareth elaborates more on the Pope’s contemporary *theological interpretation* (Ratzinger, 2007a: xxiii). How could one describe this method of interpretation? Ratzinger praises new attempts in American Catholic exegesis that goes beyond the scientific; it becomes *canonical exegesis*, reading the Bible as a *whole* or as a *unity* (Ratzinger, 2008a: 109; 2010b: art. 128-130; also see Rausch, 2009: 73). The Pope claims that canonical exegesis is “to read individual texts within the totality of the one Scripture which then sheds new light on all the individual texts” (Ratzinger, 2007a: xviii). Unity of Scripture is based on faith but it is also based on “historical reason” (2007a: xix) that recognizes “Christological hermeneutic”--Jesus Christ as the key to the whole (2007a: xix). Ratzinger claims that the historical-critical method apparently forgets this “deeper value” (2007a: xx) that represents words that matured in the course of faith-history (2007a: xx). Faith-history, however, is not made equal to the actual history, because the past is always uncertain and one has to be aware of the limits of the historical uncertainties (2007a: xvii), argues the Pope. “Concrete history is never revelation history pure and simple”, affirms Ratzinger (1966: 17; cf. 2000: 168).

The Bible, consequently, is not an “immediate historical datum” (2007a: xvii), it is a “theological datum” (2007a: xviii). Consequently, the hermeneutics of Ratzinger is called the “hermeneutic of faith” based on Christ of faith (Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 272 quoted in Hahn, 2009: 45). Unambiguously, this is the influence of neo-orthodox theology. The Word of incarnation and proclamation is based on the witness of the Word written, but the

written Word has no actual historical data that may become the steady source of theology. Theology has become the transcendental task based on the *unity* of the Word of God that belongs to the Church. Interestingly, Ratzinger always speaks about the Word instead of the words of God (2010b: art. 128-130). “Interior movement of the Word” or “the Word within the words” is a unity of the Scriptures and spiritual interpretation and final understanding of the Bible (Ratzinger quoted in Hahn, 2009: 189).

Benedict XVI meticulously tries to save the spiritual element of the Scriptures by rejecting the historical-critical method, but at the same time, he retains some of the basic elements of that method, historical uncertainty and ambiguity of the historical account. Canonical exegesis does not contradict historical-critical approach, but “carries it forward in an organic form toward becoming theology in its proper sense”, concludes the Pope (2007a: xix).

Hence, Benedict XVI borrows this unique contemporary hermeneutical principle in order to prove the importance of theological interpretation of the Bible as a whole (with its historical uncertainty) and to confirm the contemporary spiritual meaning for the community of faith never divorced from the historical consciousness of the Church based on Christ. Therefore, historical critical interpretation has opened many possibilities for a better understanding, but “Benedict has argued that the dangers of the contemporary understanding of Scripture are that only the exegetical expert may comment on the meaning of sacred texts-to the detriment even of the theologian who is not himself an exegete” (Hemming, 2005: 136). Benedict XVI’s alternative is a canonical exegesis or *theological* interpretation based on unity of the Bible. In *God’s Word* Ratzinger concludes:

Finally, the exegete must recognize that he does not stand on neutral ground above or outside history and the Church. Such a supposed direct apprehension of the purely historical can only lead to mistaken conclusions. *The first requisite for any exegesis is that of taking the Bible as one book.* If this is done, then exegesis has already taken up a position that cannot follow from purely literary considerations. It has recognized this literature to be the product of a coherent history and this history to be the proper place for an understanding of it. *If exegesis wishes to be theology, it must go a step farther: it must recognize that the faith of the Church is the kind of sympathy without which the text remains a closed book* (Ratzinger, 2008a: 111, italics mine).

The Pope, furthermore, brilliantly connects this theological interpretation or canonical approach as a first step in the hermeneutical task with the search for the *spiritual meaning* as the following step:

I would very much like to see theologians learn to interpret and love Scripture as the Council desired, in accordance with *Dei Verbum*: may they experience the inner unity of

Scripture - something that today is helped by 'canonical exegesis' (still to be found, of course, in its timid first stages) - and *then make a spiritual interpretation of it that is not externally edifying but rather an inner immersion into the presence of the Word*. It seems to me a very important task to do something in this regard, to contribute to providing an introduction to living Scripture as an up-to-date Word of God, beside, with and in historical-critical exegesis (Ratzinger, 2006b: 5.10, italics mine).

Therefore, “inner immersion into the presence of the Word” becomes what Ratzinger calls the “mystical meaning” or as it came to be called the *spiritual sense of Scripture*. It was practiced in homilies, commentaries, theological tomes and in the teaching of catechumens. This exegetical method was bequeathed to later centuries as the common inheritance of East and West and was at the heart of theology throughout the medieval period (Holden, 2009). The Pope clearly endorses the principle:

In rediscovering the interplay between the different senses of Scripture it thus becomes essential to grasp the *passage from letter to spirit*. This is not an automatic, spontaneous passage; rather, the letter needs to be transcended: “the word of God can never simply be equated with the letter of the text. To attain to it involves a progression and a process of understanding guided by the inner movement of the whole corpus, and hence it also has to become a vital process”. Here we see the reason why an authentic process of interpretation is never purely an intellectual process but also a lived one, demanding full engagement in the life of the Church, which is life “according to the Spirit” (*Gal 5:16*) (Ratzinger, 2010b: art. 124-125).

Benedict XVI, thus, remains faithful to the hermeneutical recognition of the deeper sense or *sensus plenior*. As he says, unless one penetrates beyond the literal meaning the beauty of the spiritual meaning of the Bible will never be seen. To clarify the problem of the literal meaning in his theology: it seems that Ratzinger does not believe in the literal reading of the Bible based on actual historical data. He notices the tension in interpretation: on the one hand only what is in Scripture can justify what the church believes, on the other hand “scriptural writers can no longer be trusted” if the rules for historical accuracy, one assumes today, are applied (Hemming, 2005: 135). Consequently, for example, denying the historical accuracy of the biblical Genesis account the Pope accepts the symbolic meaning of the creation story account and theistic evolution: “The Christian picture of the world is this, that the world in its details is the product of a long process of evolution but that at the most profound level it comes from the Logos” (Ratzinger, 2002: 139; see confirmation of theistic evolution dogma in John Paul II, *Truth Cannot Contradict Truth*, Pontifical Academy of Sciences Address, Oct 22, 1996). Benedict, for example, believes in the paradox of compatibility between the statements that science and the Bible speak about

different realms and the statement about their convergence or unity (Ratzinger, 2006c: 9). The only rationale lies in his suspicion of the historical accuracy of some biblical accounts.

The symbolic meaning of the literal account of biblical creation provides not only the evidence for contemporary Catholic teaching of theistic evolution but also the ground for Ratzinger's overall belief that the literal sense of the Scriptures must be penetrated and if necessary reconsidered if one wants to grasp the deeper meaning of the Word of God. The past is uncertain because "we simply cannot bring the past into the present" (Ratzinger, 2007a: xvii). The Pope affirms that in the hermeneutical challenge sometimes one "can never go beyond the domain of hypotheses" (2007a: xvii). Obviously, he praises at least some elements of the historical-critical method. Spiritual meaning is based not on historical data but the "historical consciousness" of the Church (tradition) and modern theological interpretation.

Deeper meaning of the Word of God is also searched for through the monastic practice of *lectio divina*, contemplative reading of Scripture based on the practice of the Church Fathers (Ratzinger, 2005c). John Paul II defined *lectio divina* as "a reading, on an individual or communal level, of a more or less lengthy passage of Scripture, received as the word of God and leading, at the prompting of the Spirit, to meditation, prayer and contemplation" (John Paul II, 1993, C2). Benedict adds that this reading of "*the sacred text must always be approached in the communion of the Church*" (Ratzinger, 2010b: art. 294, italics mine; on *lectio divina* see art. 290-301). Therefore, meaning is again contingent on theological tradition of the Church. This practice has undergone some contemporary transformation due to the influence of the new hermeneutics (see Monergism.com, 2009: Hermeneutical Theory).

In regard to Benedict's possible use of *quadriga* he finally confirms:

It is necessary, however, to remember that in patristic and medieval times every form of exegesis, including the literal form, was carried out on the basis of faith, without there necessarily being any distinction between the *literal sense* and the *spiritual sense* (Ratzinger, 2010b: art. 122).

Between literal and spiritual sense there is a close *unity* and *interrelation* (2010b: art. 123). By this Benedict XVI accepted Augustine's symbolic and analogical interpretation of the Scripture (Hemming, 2005: 138). God is so incomprehensible in his theology that poetry and allusions are necessary in interpretation; one should think beyond the literal meaning, the present meaning is crucial, meaning in the daily prayer of the church (Hemming, 2005:

139). Could Benedict's interpretation of Scripture be compared with his anthropology when he speaks about the human being as the visible/invisible image of God? (Ratzinger quoted in Corkery, 2009: 70). The conclusion would be, as Cardinal Walter Kasper recognized, that Ratzinger's starting point in theology is *platonic*, that is, he distinguished between the world of senses and the world above senses (2009: 70). Ratzinger seems to be faithful to Augustinian and Thomistic hermeneutics that distinguish between visible words/signs and hidden meanings of the text.

Speaking about the deeper spiritual meaning of the Scripture, seemingly, in the spirit of the Reformers and especially of Karl Barth, Benedict XVI deals with the Christ-centered purpose of the biblical revelation. Ratzinger's theology in general is aware that the authentic interpretation of Scripture in the Church does not come from *within* Scripture alone, but from the *end* to which the Church is destined (Hemming, 2005: 140). Christ-centeredness in this particular sense is a denial of the *sola scriptura* principle, since it is not derived from the Scripture alone. This does not sound Lutheran, evangelical or ecumenical. Though Ratzinger affirms that the whole of the Bible derives its meaning from its end-Christ (Ratzinger, 1995: 9) and that the Bible is *inscripturated* and that, therefore, key for understanding the Scripture is *incarnation* (Ratzinger, 1994: 50) still he calls for "theological interpretation" of Scripture centered in Jesus Christ (Hahn, 1999: 14). This theological interpretation is always faithful to the historical mind of the Church and its dogmatic understanding of Christ in the tradition of the Church. Therefore, Scripture is Christ-centered revelation in so far as it represents the witness to broader revelation or the Word of God (Jesus) incarnated in history and grasped by the historical community of faith. The Christ of the Bible is revealed and understood only within the Church. Ratzinger's theology plainly teaches that there is no pure Christ of the Scriptures apart of the Christ of the Church's tradition.

Lastly, Benedict XVI denies the principle of *sola scriptura* on the ground of the authority of the magisterium to interpret the Scriptures. However, in the progressive Catholic vision, starting with John Henry Newman (see section 4.4.2.4), Ratzinger confirms that the role of theologians in forming doctrines (*theologumena*) is not totally limited by the magisterium. For the Pope the magisterium has also a *democratic* character as it defends the *common* faith and makes no distinction between the learned and the simple (Corkery, 2009: 84). The teaching office of the Catholic Church, therefore, might be

contingent upon the communal faith of the believers. Theologians are free to think but, according to Benedict XVI, they should never forget that they are also members of the people of God and that their freedom is the part of

...a rational discipline, whose object is given in revelation, *handed on and interpreted by the Church under the authority of the Magisterium*, and received by faith. These givens have the force of principles. To eliminate them would mean to cease doing theology (Ratzinger quoted in Bunson, 2005: 168, italics mine).

The magisterium is the final arbiter of theological truth. Ratzinger reminds us that it protects the faith of the People of God and defends the right of that People to receive the message of the Church in its purity (Ratzinger, 2005a: 169; see also Bunson, 2005: 154). The hermeneutics of Benedict XVI affirms that the sacred hierarchy of the interpretive community of faith guards the transmission of revelation from one generation to another (Rowland, 2010: 68). The power of the magisterium also comes from its sacramental nature. Ratzinger also rightly acknowledges that the teaching office in Protestantism comes from the community but it is not a sacrament, it is only a function (Ratzinger, 1997: 199). In Roman Catholicism, though, it is related to community; it becomes a sacrament. The sacrament is always a gift for the benefit of the people of God. The magisterium and theological exegesis should never be separated. Ratzinger explains:

Magisterium and exegesis, therefore, are no longer opposed as worlds closed in on themselves. Faith itself is a way of knowing. Wanting to set it aside does not produce pure objectivity, but comprises a point of view which excludes a particular perspective while not wanting to take into account the accompanying conditions of the chosen point of view. If one takes into account, however, that the Sacred Scriptures come from God through a subject which lives continually - the pilgrim people of God - then it becomes clear rationally as well that this subject has something to say about the understanding of the book (Ratzinger, 2003: par. 38).

The *viva vox* of the Church, therefore, speaks through the magisterium. The magisterium also recognizes that doctrines are implicit in Scripture but they are also explicit by the church's own practice and history of interpretation of Scripture as confirmed by Henri de Lubac as well (Hemming, 2005: 140-41).

To sum up, Benedict's position on hermeneutical principles in his own words, following *Dei Verbum*, the Pope concludes:

the Dogmatic Constitution indicates three fundamental criteria for an appreciation of the divine dimension of the Bible: 1) the text must be interpreted with attention to *the unity of the whole of Scripture*; nowadays this is called canonical exegesis; 2) account is to be taken of *the living Tradition of the whole Church*; and, finally, 3) respect must be shown for *the analogy of faith*. Only where both methodological levels, the historical-critical and the

theological, are respected, can one speak of a theological exegesis, an exegesis worthy of this book (Ratzinger, 2010b: art. 107).

Canonical exegesis, deeper spiritual meaning, Word/Christ-centered reading of Scripture within the tradition of the Church, and the indispensable role of the magisterium in biblical interpretation remain the foundational tenets of Ratzinger's hermeneutics.

What follows is the completion of the task of expanding the Benedict XVI's theology of Scripture. His special emphasis on ecumenical vision must not be overlooked.

5.6.4 The Ecumenical Vision of Benedict XVI and *sola scriptura*

Joseph Ratzinger (Benedict XVI) represents the contemporary Catholic theology of the Scripture principle after Vatican II. According to his theology the Bible is always read and interpreted within the community of faith. There is no direct and individualistic approach to the Word of God either theologically or spiritually. The historical consciousness of the Church determines the meaning and the dynamic relevant application of the Word. The Word of God, moreover, is "one wellspring" of revelation of God beyond what is merely written. The tradition of the Church in all its strata expresses itself in the written revelation and the oral proclamation of faith. Tradition, for Ratzinger, is "nothing less than Christ's living and saving and *interpretive* presence in the Church" (Hahn, 2009: 51). The Bible is understood in Barthian terms as a witness to that Christ-centered revelation through contemporary *canonical* exegesis based on *theological* understanding within the boundaries of the living experience of the people of God. This approach, though critical towards the historical-critical method, is still under the influence of the contemporary philosophical hermeneutics that affirms fusion of horizons of the biblical text and the living interpreter of the Church and magisterium through their historical mind. The Bible has layers of meaning including the spiritual and allegorical deeper meaning that ultimately resides in Christ, the historical revelation of God that gives meaning to the Scriptures as a whole. Benedict XVI's theology of the Word of God bears witness to the utmost importance of God's revelation:

We must never forget that all authentic and living Christian spirituality is based on *the word of God proclaimed, accepted, celebrated and meditated upon in the Church*. This deepening relationship with the divine word will take place with even greater enthusiasm if we are conscious that, in Scripture and the Church's living Tradition, we stand before God's definitive word on the cosmos and on history (Ratzinger, 2010b: art. 383).

Compared to the traditional Catholic theology how ecumenical is this vision of Benedict XVI's understanding of the Scripture? Benedict claims that the main cause of reformation is the double life of the mediaeval Church or the inconsistency between belief and practice (Ratzinger, 1997: 198). For the contemporary interpretation of the Reformation that would mean that theological and dogmatic elements were not crucial and that the Church continues to be based on mediaeval theological principles in spite of the Reformation. The Church today, he continues, has become more diverse culturally, but there is still unity of dogma because everyone reads the same Bible (Ratzinger, 1997: 130). According to his vision the success of ecumenism lies in emphasizing "essentials" and "the core of faith" and common witness to the world. Though confessional unity is still far off (Ratzinger, 1997: 243), Benedict XVI insists that Christians should have a "foretaste of a worldwide fellowship of people gathered for worship in a way that has somehow gone around the difficulties of doctrinal definitions" (Ratzinger quoted in Bunson, 2005: 193). The purpose of dialogue, for Ratzinger, is always conversion to this unity (Rowland, 2010: 64).

What implications does this ecumenical statement have for biblical authority and interpretation? One thing seems clear to him: the *sola scriptura* principle, in its original formulation, is untenable if one desires to create a new ecumenical vision of the Church. He explicitly accentuates:

Revelation is always something greater than what is merely written down. And this again means that there can be no such thing as pure *sola scriptura* ('by Scripture alone'), because an essential element of Scripture is the Church as understanding subject, and with this the fundamental sense of tradition is always given (Ratzinger, 1998: 108-9).

In addition, the Pope rejects the principle of *sola scriptura* as the principle of reformation because the Reformers defended the thesis that Roman Catholic religion was an amalgamation of Christianity and Pagan Roman or Greek culture (Ratzinger, 2004a: 90). Ratzinger, however, claims that the first encounter between paganism and God's religion was not in the first century but with Moses (in his contextualization of the message) (2004a: 92). Amalgamation is, therefore, permissible if the oral tradition confirms the historical revelation of Christ. Tradition becomes the indispensable element in God's revelation. Ultimately, "*grunddifferenz* for Benedict, however, between Catholicism and Protestantism is that for Catholic thought the canon of the Bible arose in the church, therefore faith is with the church and with the apostolic teaching office of the bishop which

interprets revelation in a binding manner” (Meyer, 2009: 46). However, *Scripture only* is not a principle which speaks merely of authority, but also of the perspicuity of Scripture (O’Regan, 2010). This background might be a unique hope for ecumenical reconciliation.

Benedict XVI still believes, that all Catholic dogmas could derive their origin and meaning from the Scriptures. In many ways Benedict comes close to Protestant reverence for Scripture as God’s inspired Word at a time when many theologians, both Catholic and Protestant, are treating it more as a historical source of theology (Rausch, 2009: 82). What is perhaps paradoxical about his approach to Scripture is that he, who has been careful to define contemporary Catholic theology over against Protestant theology in his own work, comes close to a classical Protestant *sola scriptura* position, though from a decidedly Catholic perspective (2009: 65). Though this seems like an exaggeration, the new perspective could be a *canonical* approach to the Scripture with its theological meaning based on historical consciousness of the Church’s tradition. Ecumenical vision cannot and will never sacrifice this unique principle of his theology, but it can demonstrate the probability of his support for the *prima scriptura* principle.

It seems appropriate here to conclude with the summary of Benedict XVI’s theological vision of Scripture by Vincent Twomey in his *Pope Benedict XVI: The Conscience of Our Age* (2007):

Theology [of Benedict XVI] is given its definitive form by its attempt to hear and interpret God’s revelation of himself in Jesus Christ, that is, his design for mankind entrusted to the Church and testified to by Scripture read in the light of the history of dogma... Ratzinger’s entire theological opus is rooted in Scripture, the ultimate norm of all theology, judiciously interpreted using the findings of modern exegesis (Twomey, 2007: 39, 54).

Undoubtedly, the biblical religion and spirituality of Benedict XVI tries to avoid speculative theology, which in elaborating on what is found in Scripture has moved far away from Scripture and lost itself in purely philosophical speculation (Ratzinger, 2004b: 380). It also provides the underpinning for an ecumenical dialogue with evangelical theology. Moreover, the Pope calls for an ecumenical approach to the Word of God by the following exhortation:

Listening together to the word of God, engaging in biblical *lectio divina*, letting ourselves be struck by the inexhaustible freshness of God’s word which never grows old, overcoming our deafness to those words that do not fit our own opinions or prejudices, listening and studying within the communion of the believers of every age: all these things represent a way of coming to unity in faith as a response to hearing the word of God (Ratzinger, 2010b: art. 154).

The Pope openly calls for an ecumenical study of the Bible with the authentic prayer for unity. His vision for an ecumenical Scripture principle, based on the historical interpretation, opens some liturgical and ecumenical aspects of *sola scriptura*. In Chapter 7 this dream of an ecumenical joint statement of the Scripture principle will be further pursued.

5.7 Summary

The progressive Catholic Scripture principle goes beyond the traditional Catholic understanding of the Bible in several aspects. These features are more or less established by all the contemporary expressions of the Catholic deposit of faith (Vatican II's *Dei Verbum*, papal documents after Vatican II, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the contemporary Catholic theologians of Scripture/revelation, and ultimately in the biblical-ecumenical theology of Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI).

The progressive Catholic theology of the Word of God becomes much more sensitive to the Scriptures compared to the traditional approach. The ecumenical tendencies of Roman Catholicism are based primarily on the theology of the dynamic Word of God expanded by Karl Barth. Barthian theology of the Word of God that goes beyond only the written Scriptures is the underpinning for the Catholic emphasis on the broader concept of the Word or God's revelation that naturally has to abolish the *sola scriptura* principle. Secondly, the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur with its special emphasis on fusion of horizons, represents the foundation for an understanding of the dynamic fusion of the horizons of the authors of Scripture and the Church's magisterium. Canonical exegesis, with its accent on the unified canonical writings as a testimony of God that belongs to the community of faith, provides the justification for the Catholic belief in the Bible as primarily the Book of the Church tradition. Benedict XVI's concept of the people of God as a deeper author and the locus of biblical interpretation confirms that Scripture is never separated from the living voice of the community of faith. The liturgical or ecclesial use of the Bible opens some vistas for the ecumenical reading of the Bible in spite of some dogmatic and historical differences. In regard to ecumenical understanding of Scripture the greatest contribution of progressive Catholicism might be in the mutual authentication or validation of the magisterium

(teaching office) and the biblical testimony. The Word of God is guarded and interpreted by the teaching office, but at the same time the magisterium and the Church is under constant scrutiny of the living Word of God testified by the canonical writings of Scripture. Consequently, the *prima scriptura* principle becomes one of the key tenets of the ecumenical unified expression of the doctrine of Scripture.

In the next chapter of this research some biblical arguments for defence or dismissal of the *sola scriptura* principle by both Evangelicals and Roman Catholics will be assessed. Since both groups of theologians and ministers claim that Scripture is an indispensable authoritative Word of God, the biblical data have to be used in Chapter 6 to draw some important additional inferences for the ecumenical vision of the Scripture principle in Chapter 7.

6.0 SOLA SCRIPTURA AND THE BIBLE

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter the major task is to juxtapose the biblical arguments *for* (Evangelical) and *against* (Catholic) the principle of *sola scriptura*. The historical-dogmatic approach, already used in Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5, will be avoided by making an attempt to present primarily biblical arguments of both sides. Sources that are used are different from the previous ones since what is used here belongs more to the current public and contemporary debates on *sola scriptura*.

The Scripture principle or the *sola scriptura* principle, if tenable, ought to be clearly verified by the testimony of the Word of God. Otherwise, it may fall into the category of solely philosophical-dogmatic discussion which both Evangelicals and Catholics try to circumvent. The second reason why one needs to examine the *sola scriptura* principle from the biblical text itself is simply because the Bible either testifies about its self-sufficiency (the Protestant and Evangelical position) or it points to an additional source of God's revelation which, nonetheless, is attested and validated by the testimony of Scripture (the probability of the *prima scriptura* principle, the contemporary Catholic position). Therefore, in this investigation the primary discussion will be based on the Evangelical and Catholic use of the Bible and plain logic to prove or discard the Scripture Only principle. The list of arguments or biblical texts used in this debate is not, of course, exhaustive, though an effort has been made to find as many as possible both traditional and contemporary views. Moreover, this chapter will not make an attempt to do thorough exegesis of the biblical texts, unless it is a requisite for some critical interpretative points. Finally, extra-biblical arguments of employing common sense and plain reason will be used as well.

What are Protestant/Evangelical arguments in defence of *sola scriptura*?

6.2 Evangelical Biblical Arguments for *sola scriptura*

6.2.1 *Sola scriptura* is a Biblical Teaching

Norman L. Geisler and Ralph E. MacKenzie in their volume *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals: Agreements and Differences* (1995) offered an extensive list of the biblical arguments that support the principle of the *sola scriptura*. Some of their arguments, along with others, will be offered in this section of research without much critical examination at this point. Their presentation starts with the Catholic side, and the response of Evangelical theology follows. Here the chapter intentionally starts with Evangelical arguments since this is the structure of the research that has been followed in Chapters 2 to 5.

Evangelicals affirm that the Bible, though not “explicitly and formally”, still teaches the *sola scriptura* principle “implicitly and logically” (Geisler & MacKenzie, 1995: 184). The evangelical theology confirms that Scripture, as the inspired Word of God, is the final arbiter of *everything* Church needs to know about God’s revelation (2 Tim 3:16-17). If this is the characteristic *only* of the Bible, and not extra biblical sources, then it is (or becomes) the Word of God that validates and evaluates everything else, and the authority of that Word is expressed by the *sola scriptura* principle. Derek W. H. Thomas, in his article *The Authority of Scripture* (2009), comments on 2 Tim 3:16-17 and argues that, since the Word is inspired, its “authority is comprehensive and total, down to the very words themselves. This is the view the Bible claims of itself” (Thomas, 2009: 60). The self-validation of the Scriptures is based on the fact of its plenary inspiration and authority. Gary W. Crampton in his *By Scripture Alone: The Sufficiency of Scripture* (2002) where he elaborates on the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) claims that *sola scriptura*, taught by the Protestants, is “everywhere assumed in the Bible” (Crampton, 2002: 52). *Sola scriptura* in fact does not need proofs, it is an axiom because “the Bible does indeed claim for itself a systematic monopoly on truth” (Crampton, 2002: 149-150; this is a response to Robert A. Sungenis’ *Not by Scripture Alone*).

It is also recognized, mainly in the traditional Evangelical circles, that apart from the Old Testament which is explicitly called the Word of God (2 Tim 3:15), the New Testament bears this authority of “scripture” as well (see 2 Pet 3:15-16; 1 Tim 5:18 which

quotes Luke 10: 7; see also the discussion in Wenham, 1997: 125-6). It is noteworthy here that Benedict XVI denies that the New Testament has ever been called Scripture:

It is well known, and should not be overlooked, that the New Testament does not anywhere understand itself as “Scripture”; “Scripture” is, for the New Testament, simply the Old Testament, while the message about Christ is precisely “spirit”, which teaches us how to understand Scripture (Ratzinger, 2005: 41).

The Catholic rationale for this denial is based on the Church’s hermeneutics which attempts to demonstrate the efficacy of the contemporary tradition/magisterium in the task of the ever new interpretation. The Church’s tradition becomes the “spirit” and authoritative interpretation on the same level as Jesus’ or apostolic interpretation of the Old Testament. Evangelical theology, however, denies this principle. It is widely accepted that 2 Pet 3:15-16 speaks about New Testament writings as Scripture, but not yet as the Word of God. Nevertheless, it seems that this Word is *sufficient* to teach, guide, instruct, save, and produces belief in Christ.

Moreover, in regard to the relationship between the broad revelation of the Word of God and the specific testimony of Scripture, the Word of God or revelation of God *equals* Scripture (γραφῆ) (see Gal 1:12; 2:1-2). John Wenham, as a conservative Evangelical scholar, in his *Christ and the Bible* (1997), indicates that the Hebrew expression, translated to Greek as λέγει (it says), is not always impersonal (that is, only the authority of sacred Scripture). It is an appeal to the authority of the *personal* “living voice of God” as well. Quoting B. B. Warfield, Wenham affirms that “it says” equals “Scripture says” and, that is, “God says” (Wenham, 1997: 95, 127). The apostle Paul undeniably refers to the Old Testament writings as “the oracles of God” (Rom 3:2). Rom 9:17 says the Scripture speaks to Pharaoh clearly indicating that it is God Himself who spoke to Pharaoh (see also Gal 3:8; Matt 19:4-5). In contrast to the Catholic contemporary dogmatic expressions some Evangelicals claim that:

Jesus never exalts Scripture for their own sake, yet he never allows a wedge to be driven between the Scriptures and the message of Scripture. *What Scripture says is the word of God* (Wenham, 1997: 34, italics mine).

The equality between the Word of God and the written account of the Holy Scripture has been recently attested by Dutch reformed theologians J. Van Genderen and W. H. Velema (2008: 58; see section 3.3.4). Donald C. Stamp, in addition, in his article “The Word of God” (2003), confirms that “*the word of God is the written record* of what the prophets,

apostles and Jesus have spoken—i.e., the Scriptures. In the NT, whether a writer used the phrase “Moses said”, or “David said”, “the Holy Spirit said”, or “God says” made no difference (see Ac 3:22; Rom 10:5, 19; Heb 3:7; 4:7)” (Stamp, 2003a: 1072, italics mine). Stamp, of course, recognized the importance of the apostolic oral preaching as the Word of God, but such preaching “must never stand independent of the written Word of God” (2003a: 1072). There is no major religious authority in revelation that goes beyond what is merely written, Evangelicals affirm.

Therefore, according to Evangelical theology, the Scripture of both the Old and the New Testament represents the Word of God, that is, the revelation of God. This argument, as it has been demonstrated in Chapter 3, is not upheld by some progressive Evangelicals but it is very useful as an evidence of *sola scriptura*, since *only* Scripture in its wholeness and unity can be called “the Word of God”. It is the most essential, central and unique revelation of God. This means that other inspired writings, oracles and testimonies may have a spiritual value of God’s given wisdom and insight, but they can never be equal to the inscribed Word of God. *Sola scriptura* claims that this Word judges everything else, and that there is no authority (or tradition) equal to this. The Word of God indeed has a broader nature than only the written account of the Word, as is rightly recognized by contemporary Evangelical and Catholic theology of Scripture. However, if there is no equation between the Word of God and the Holy Scriptures one cannot speak about the Bible as the authoritative arbiter of truth and the *only* measure of the truthfulness of the revelation of God (see discussion in Sproul, 2005: 128-129). The Lutheran paradox of distinction/equation of the Word of God with Scripture once again becomes a requisite for the full support of the *sola scriptura* principle.

Furthermore, as an argument that supports the *sola scriptura* principle, Evangelicals argue that the apostle Paul communicated that apart from the Word there are no writings with apostolic authority (Geisler & MacKenzie, 1995: 184). Though it is true that 2 Tim 3:16-17 does not use the word “sufficient”, there is no need for Church tradition since the God-breathed writings are *sufficient* for the salvation and spiritual life of the individual and the community of faith (1995: 185). According to the Evangelical Scripture principle Jesus Himself always appealed to the Scriptures as “the final court of appeal” (Wenham, 1997). He refuted Satan’s arguments by “it is written” (Matt 4:4, 7, 10), and advocated the authority of the *inscribed* revelation of God beyond tradition (Matt 5: 22, 28). Roman

Catholicism claims that this is the evidence of ever new revelation of the interpretation of God given to the magisterium, as it was given to Jesus or Paul, but the Evangelicals, rejecting the dogma of the apostolic succession, believe that the apostolic legitimate testimony ceased with the death of the last apostle (Geisler & MacKenzie, 1995: 185). Subsequent oral revelation, therefore, would have no priority over the written one. Jesus, furthermore, claimed that Scripture has authority *over* tradition (Matt 15: 3, 6), and this statement, as noticed above, must implicitly include the New Testament as well. He explained that tradition which abrogates the Word of God could not be kept by His followers. Jesus confirmed “the unbreakable nature of what is written in Scripture”, says Thomas Derek in his *Authority of Scripture* (2009: 67). According to Evangelicals, of course, Jesus does not reject all tradition but only tradition that is in open conflict with the *clear* testimony of the Bible (Geisler & MacKenzie, 1995: 185). Defining the *clear* and precise testimony of Scripture perhaps calls for the establishment of the teaching office, and some Evangelicals who affirm the necessity of tradition become aware of this. The necessity of the teaching office becomes an ecumenical requirement as well.

Beyond these solid arguments Evangelicals also recognized that the Scriptures themselves testify that we should not go “beyond what is written”. The text in 1 Cor. 4:6 has been cited as an example (MacArthur, 2009: 81; Godfrey, 2009: 15; King, 2001: 127).

Now, brothers and sisters, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, “Do not go beyond what is written” (Μὴ ὑπὲρ ἃ γέγραπται). Then you will not be puffed up in being a follower of one of us over against the other (1 Cor. 4:6 NIV).

Though the context does not speak primarily about the dogmatic principle of *sola scriptura* as an idea, it seems that Paul is calling the Corinthians not to go beyond the already existing apostolic testimony in the written form about the particular issue of the sectarian leadership in the Church. There are some explicit evidences in the Bible that the Church should not add to nor subtract from the already given deposit of revelation of God in Scripture (see Deut 4:2; Prov 30:5-6; Rev 22:18-19). Interpretation of Scripture may be legitimate but it cannot be identical with the written norm; “if they are equated through negligence or presumption, the warning of Deuteronomy and Revelation has been ignored” says Keith Mathison in his *Shape of Sola Scriptura* (2001: 174). This appears to be one the most important arguments that unequivocally support the *sola scriptura* principle (Geisler & MacKenzie, 1995: 186) and the sure basis of critique of the Catholic additions to

the Word of God (Crampton, 2002: 57). Commenting on the same texts of the Bible, John MacArthur concludes:

Scripture is therefore the perfect and only standard of spiritual truth, revealing infallibly all that we must believe in order to be saved and all that we must do in order to glorify God. That—no more, no less—is what *sola Scriptura* means (MacArthur, 2009: 80).

Finally, the Evangelical theology claims that apostolic testimony given in Scripture is the final *authority of truth*. The church fathers, according to Geisler and MacKenzie, generally supported this principle (1995: 187). The pillars of the traditional Catholic theology of Scripture, St Augustine and St Thomas Aquinas, confirm this belief (see sections 4.4.2.1 & 4.4.2.2). Oral and written testimony of the apostles becomes the criterion of the Gospel truth (Acts 2:42; Eph 2:20; 1 Cor 9:1; Heb 2: 3-4). Every oral proclamation of the apostles becomes infallible only if it is inscripturated, namely, inspired and written down (Geisler & MacKenzie, 1995: 188). This argument goes against the Catholic claim of the infallibility of the teaching office in the interpretation of Scripture. Proclamation of the ever new doctrines does not have this authority since only the written testimony of God's revelation becomes infallible.

According to the Evangelical arguments, therefore, the Bible itself implicitly teaches the *sola scriptura* principle by ascribing the unique authority and the purpose of the written Word of God to the inspired sacred writings of Scripture (for further research on similar biblical arguments see King, 2001). The next argument is based on the hermeneutical question: Does Scripture really interpret itself, as the Reformers claimed?

6.2.2 The Bible Is Self-sufficient in Its Self-understanding

The clarity of Scripture is one of the foundational Lutheran preconditions for biblical interpretation. The *claritas* of the Bible, Evangelicals say, does not mean that everything in Scripture is *absolutely* clear (Geisler and MacKenzie, 1995: 190). The perspicuity of Scripture is the focus of an essential argument against the necessity for any kind of interpretative aid through tradition. The Bible is clear enough for salvation and practice of the faithful. Catholics do affirm the *material* sufficiency of the Bible, namely that the content of revelation is in the Scriptures alone (Geisler and MacKenzie, 1995: 190; Peters, 1999: 20), though this dogmatic expression is becoming disputable, not only in traditional, but especially in progressive Catholicism (see Chapter 5). However, Evangelicals claim

that the Bible also has *formal* sufficiency, namely “that one needs nothing else to *interpret* Scripture” (Geisler and MacKenzie, 1995: 190, italics mine). Of course, Protestants/Evangelicals can use auxiliary materials in biblical interpretation, but they do not use them in the magisterial way; the Protestant scholarship does not play the role of the magisterium (1995: 190; MacArthur, 2009: 89). *Sola scriptura* means that one can read the Bible and understand it without the need for assistance from external forms of tradition.

The Bible, hence, supports the principle of its self-sufficiency on the basis of the *spiritual* manner of its interpretation. Jesus Himself (through the presence of the Spirit) *interpreted* his mission to the disciples:

He said to them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.” *Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.* He told them, “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high (Luke 24:44-49, NIV, italics mine).

Christ, obviously, needed only the power of the Spirit to interpret spiritual realities in Scripture about His messianic role. Though aware of the traditions of his times, he never based his teachings on these traditional teachings. His interpretative task did not include the authority of tradition, but only scriptural authority based on the spiritual understanding of salvation history. Speaking about understanding of the Word of God, Jesus also enlightened his disciples that the Spirit only would give them a special insight: “But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come” (John 16, 13; italics mine). It seems that this revelation supports both material and formal sufficiency of Scripture. The Bible is the only source of divine authoritative truth and it is interpreted only by the Holy Spirit without the specific aid of the teaching office in the magisterial or sacramental sense. Keith Mathison, of course, rightly recognizes that the Spirit-inspired Word of God can never be separated from the Spirit-indwelt people of God (Mathison, 2001: 253). The Holy Spirit does not seem enough because “if this approach were a valid one, we would be left with one group of Protestants which had rightly interpreted the Scriptures” (Whiteford, 1996: 25). Francis R. Beattie, the Reformed theologian in the spirit of Calvin’s *testimonium spiritus sancti internum* (for explanation of this principle see Sproul, 2005: 91-117), recently has confirmed the principle of the spiritual self-sufficiency

of Scripture in his “The Presbyterian Standards: An Exposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms” (2010):

...the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scriptures is the judge, whose sentence is to determine all matters of religion, alike for the church and the individual. The decrees of church councils, the opinions of good men, and the impressions of private spirits are all to be guided and formed by the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scriptures. *Thus it appears that the Holy Spirit is the final exegete, as well as the invincible apologete, of the sacred Scriptures. The infallible rule for the interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself, and the supreme judge in matters of religion is the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scriptures* (Beattie, 2010: art. 3, italics mine).

Beattie recognizes that the teaching office must be “guided” by the Spirit. Though this might call for the establishment of the important role of the magisterium, it is clear, nevertheless, that, because of the unique and sole testimony of the Spirit, the Word of God remains self-sufficient in its self-understanding, as claimed by Evangelical theology. John MacArthur clearly demonstrates that tradition has an illegitimate superior authority if it is *necessary* to explain “the Bible’s true meaning” (MacArthur, 2009: 76). Godfrey, another Evangelical scholar, adds that Bereans in Acts 17:10-12 did not need the special authoritative magisterium of the apostles when they wanted to check whether what Paul was saying was according to Scripture (Godfrey, 2009: 14-15). Keith Mathison agrees and argues that “Paul’s message *is* the apostolic revelation” based on the Old Testament *Scriptures* (Mathison, 2001: 162, italics mine). His oral proclamation has become the Word of God based on Scripture *only*. Thus, the Bible is completely self-sufficient in its interpretation, according to the Evangelical theology.

So far, some of the Evangelical biblical arguments for *sola scriptura* (nature, authority and self-sufficiency of Scripture) have been expounded. The following three arguments are based on Evangelical position on tradition and its place in the Christian church. Plain reason and the biblical testimony are again used in the argumentation process.

6.2.3 The Biblical Testimony and Oral Tradition (Importance/Unreliability of Tradition)

The importance of tradition in contemporary Evangelical circles is based on the historical value of tradition recognized first by the Reformers. Keith Mathison in his *Shape of Sola Scriptura* (2001) clearly indicates:

The reformers did not reject tradition; they rejected one particular concept of tradition in favor of another concept of tradition. The Reformation debate was originally between adherents of two different concepts of tradition. One concept, which had its origins in the first centuries of the Church, defined Scripture as the sole source of revelation and the only final and infallible standard. The other concept of tradition, which was not hinted at until the fourth century and which was not clearly expounded until the late Middle Ages, defined Scripture and tradition as two separate and complementary sources of revelation. (Mathison, 2001: 345, italics mine)

Mathison (2001: 161), furthermore, makes an important distinction between Tradition 0 (“*solo scriptura*”) objectionable view of the complete absence of tradition advocated by some traditional Evangelicals), Tradition I (the *authentic sola scriptura* principle recognized by mainstream and progressive Evangelicals) and Tradition II (Catholic Church’s additional tradition that is not based on Scripture; this is an insupportable position for Evangelicals).

In similar terms Andrew Pierce, the Catholic scholar, observes:

Despite the robust rhetoric of the contemporary appeal to *sola scriptura*, it is evident that Luther—and the other magisterial Reformers—operated with *deep reverence for the apostolic tradition, and with profound aversion to pretensions to apostolicity*. Protestant theology thus developed a theological distinction between tradition that was apostolic (and therefore revelatory), and that which was post-apostolic, and which therefore needed to be judged by a revealed, apostolic, criterion. This distinction permitted the Reformers to accept the creeds of early church tradition as representing truthful interpretations of Scripture (Pierce, 2006: 20-21, italics mine).

In addition, Craig D. Allert, in his article “What Are We Trying to Conserve?: Evangelicalism and *Sola Scriptura*” (2004), says that the contemporary Evangelical believer is often called to hold a version of *sola scriptura* that was not, in fact the version of Luther or Calvin. He shows that these Reformers did not reject the apostolic tradition *in favor* of the Bible alone. If one wants to accept *sola scriptura* as Evangelical principle it has to be understood within this proper historical context (Allert, 2004: 348). In addition, D.H. Williams, in his *Retrieving the Tradition and Renewing Evangelicalism: A Primer for Suspicious Protestants* (1999) concludes that “*sola scriptura* cannot be rightly and responsibly handled without the reference to the historic Tradition of the church” (Williams D. H., 1999: 234). Finally, only by rediscovering “Catholic” tradition can one become the “completed Evangelical”, says Mark P. Shea in his *By What Authority: An Evangelical Discovers Catholic Tradition* (1996: 175).

Mathison, Pierce, Allert, Williams and Shea, with their emphasis on the indispensability of the historic tradition, properly recognized some of the misinterpretations

of the Reformers' *sola scriptura* principle. It seems that the early Church tradition, as also in the case of St. Augustine, supported the *sola scriptura* principle as well (see further Daniel H. Williams, "The Search for the *Sola Scriptura* in the Early Church" [1998] or James White, "*Sola Scriptura* and the Early Church" [2009]). After all, Mathison (2001: 161) clearly indicates that the Tradition II standpoint (of some Catholic apologists who contend for the oral tradition) cannot overturn the Tradition I standpoint of the authentic *sola scriptura*.

However, the question remains: how valuable and reliable are oral tradition(s) apart from Scripture? Though Evangelicals recognize the value of tradition the typical Evangelical disapproval of unreliable tradition(s) always includes the fact that Scripture is both the Word/words of God as "thus saith the Lord" as well as the unique theological *message*. Donald C. Stamp summarizes this criticism of tradition by the Scriptures:

All doctrines, commentaries, interpretations, explanations and traditions must be judged and legitimized by the words and message of Scripture itself (Stamp, 2003b: 1930, italics mine).

As the father of the Reformation, Martin Luther, exclaimed: "The true rule is this: God's Word shall establish articles of faith, and no one else, not even an angel can do so" (Luther, 2008: 2.15). Therefore, Evangelicals reject extra biblical tradition not only on the basis of the obvious discrepancy between the clear testimony of the Bible and a certain tradition, but also on the ground of inconsistency between the general theological message of the Scriptures and some extra-biblical doctrines and interpretations. "Whenever tradition is elevated to such a high level of authority, it inevitably becomes detrimental to the authority of Scripture", says John MacArthur in his article *The Sufficiency of the Written Word* (2009). Evangelical theology does not deny the value of tradition. However, Evangelicals affirm the *selective* use and authority of tradition. This is what *sola scriptura* means. They have to recognize the uncertainty and unreliability of the Church's tradition.

Their theological and biblical argument is given in four related formulations: (1) Written revelation has precedence over oral tradition; (2) oral tradition is unreliable and full of myths and legends (see Jesus' testimony in Matt 22:29; 15:3; 5:21); (3) there are contradictory traditions (an example is a division over the belief of *sola scriptura* in the tradition of the Church fathers); and (4) confusion over the authority of specific tradition (there is no clarity over the choice of the authoritative tradition) (Geisler & MacKenzie, 1995: 194-198).

Recently some Evangelical scholars have recognized that the progressive Catholic theology has more fully detected the gap between biblical exegesis (the expounded Word of God) and the teachings of Tradition. Sinclair Ferguson, for example, in his “Scripture and Tradition: The Bible and Tradition in Roman Catholicism,” (2009) expands the argument alluding to the contemporary Catholic situation:

Roman Catholic scholars discover themselves, looking over their shoulders at the Roman Catholic traditionalists who do not hide their anxiety, that *such open distancing between Scripture and Tradition will be the downfall of the Church*. Consequently their characteristic refrain is that the difference between the content of Scripture and the content of the Tradition does not involve contradiction but only development. *What becomes clearer than ever, however, is that the principle of sola Scriptura remains a watershed*. As Cardinal Ratzinger as much as admitted in his reaction to Geiselmann, there are major Roman doctrines which are simply not found in the Scriptures (Ferguson, 2009: 108, italics mine).

Ferguson continues to enlist all suspicious traditions that are in contradiction with the plain testimony of Scripture:

There are important teachings in the Tradition which are not only additional to, *but different from and contradictory to, the teaching of Sacred Scripture*. These include the very doctrines which were the centrepiece of the Reformation struggle: the nature of justification; the importance of the principle of sola fide; the number of the sacraments; the sufficiency of the work of Christ, the effect of baptism, the presence of Christ at the Supper, the priesthood of all believers, the celibacy of the priesthood, the character and role of Mary, and much else. *The more that Scripture is exegeted on its own terms the more it will become clear that in these areas Sacred Tradition does not merely add to Sacred Scripture, it contradicts it. And if it does, can it any longer be "sacred"?* (Ferguson, 2009: 109, italics mine).

According to the Evangelical theology, therefore, the *sola scriptura* principle has been moderately endorsed even by the Roman Catholic progressive theology, though never separated from the “one wellspring” of revelation that includes Tradition as well. At least, some of the progressive Catholic thinkers accepted that not all tradition(s) may be based on Scripture. Besides, Evangelicals doubt unbiblical tradition and uphold the principle of *sola scriptura* as a guard against confusing and contradictory tradition(s). Oral tradition indeed has its unique place. However, once it is written in the scriptural deposit of faith, every tradition has become subject to the scrutiny of the sacred writings. John MacArthur, Jr. in his “The Sufficiency of the Written Word: Answering the Modern Roman Catholic Apologists” (2009) concludes:

Scripture, however, which is God-breathed, never speaks of any other God-breathed authority; it never authorizes us to view tradition on an equal or superior plane of authority; and while it makes the claim of inerrancy for itself, it never acknowledges any other

infallible source of authority. Word-of-mouth tradition is never said to be *theopneustos*, God-breathed, or infallible (MacArthur, 2009: 83).

This is what *sola scriptura* means.

6.2.4 The Principle of Causality and *Sola Scriptura*

Unlike Catholics, the Evangelical theology affirms that God Himself is a determining factor of biblical canonization. God, not the Church, is *the cause* of the canonical process. The church simply *discovered* which books God determined to put into canon (1995: 192).

F.F. Bruce explains:

One thing must be emphatically stated. The New Testament books did not become authoritative for the Church because they were formally included in a canonical list; on the contrary, the Church included them in her canon because she already regarded them as divinely inspired (Bruce, 1960: 27).

In regard to causality, the Word of God in Scripture precedes the authority of the community of faith. As John Wenham correctly recognized, there has to be a balance between the subjective authenticity of the Word of God and the objective determination by the Church:

Grounds of canonicity are to be found in an interplay of subjective and objective factors over-ruled by Divine Providence (Wenham, 1997: 131).

This providence is a mysterious substratum of the authenticity of the sacred and inspired writings. R.C. Sproul, in his article “The Establishment of Scripture” (2009), unequivocally states that our optimism about the normative function of the Bible is “grounded in our conviction of the providence of God. *It was by His singular providence that the Bible was given under His superintendence and by His inspiration*” (Sproul, 2009: 57, italics mine). Sproul confirms the role of the Church in this process but he also identifies the crucial role of God’s providence or, as it is called in the Reformed tradition, *providentia specialissima* (special providence) (2009: 57).

Since God is the author and primary originator of Scripture, he himself, not the Church is the “principle of causality” behind it (King, 2001: 130). Evangelicals always believed that the Word first belongs to God and only secondarily to the Church. For them, the inspiration of God, consequently, becomes not only a theological doctrine about Scripture but also an indispensable criterion for upholding the primacy of Scripture over the Church (*sola scriptura*).

6.2.5 Rejection of Tradition, Private Interpretations and Denominationalism

Evangelicals contend that private and subjective reading of Scripture and the rejection of the infallible Church's tradition does not necessarily lead to the scandal of denominationalism (Geisler & McKenzie, 1995: 193). It is not indispensable to belong to the same Church structure, but to love each other according to Jesus' exhortation (1995: 193). The Evangelical theologians recognize that even Roman Catholics differ since there are many different orders, theological opinions (*theologumena*) etc. Charles Powell, furthermore, observes:

The supposition that *sola Scriptura* is unworkable because different denominations do not agree on all doctrinal matters is overstated. *Doctrinal unity (or certainty) in every detail is not the purpose of Scripture*. The demand for certainty in doctrine suggests the real purpose of this book [Not by Scripture Alone] is to defend the infallibility of tradition and the Magisterium (Powell, 2002: 373, italics mine).

In similar terms, W. Robert Godfrey recognizes that “while Rome is united organizationally, it is just as divided theologically as is Protestantism broadly understood. The institution of an infallible pope has not created theological unity in the Roman Church” (Godfrey, 2009: 13). Keith Mathison brings out the fact that the Church had already been split before the sixteenth century; surely Orthodox and Catholics cannot condemn Evangelicals for the same kind of schism (Mathison, 2001: 306). Evangelicals, furthermore, claim that “the doctrinal differences that exist today are not the result of *sola Scriptura*, but rather rejection of it” (King, 2001: 264). The Bible always teaches unity in Christ, both in doctrine and practice.

Denominationalism, therefore, is not a problem *per se*. The additional rationale for this Evangelical belief probably lies in the fact that their theology is based on some “core beliefs”. Denominationalism might be the historical outcome of the variety of noble desires of Christians to probe more deeply into the Word and find out the ultimate meaning of every revelation of God. Some churches deny some of the marginal aspects of faith not because they want intentionally to keep the ancient unbiblical tradition(s) while at the same time they uphold *sola scriptura*, but for the providential historical-political reasons (for example, Puritanism in England).

6.2.6 Summary

To sum up, the Evangelical support for the *sola scriptura* principle is based on some implicit biblical arguments. They claim that the Bible is self-sufficient in its interpretation because the authority of the Holy Spirit plays the decisive role of the teaching office. All tradition(s) must be judged by the biblical testimony. The Providence of God is the originator and the cause of the sacred process of the canonization and not *primarily* the authority of the Church. Finally, denominationalism and variety of beliefs as a consequence of the rejection of the authority of one Church's tradition might not be a scandalous reality *per se* but demonstrates the richness of honest human attempts to drink from the sources of God's Word.

In comparison, what are the Catholic arguments against the *sola scriptura* principle?

6.3 Catholic Biblical Arguments against *sola scriptura*

Catholic arguments will be expounded in such a way that they may be easier juxtaposed with the Evangelical arguments. Some of these arguments are defensive, and others take an offensive stance. In the recent debates it is not always clear who is apologetic and who is invasive.

6.3.1 *Sola Scriptura* is Not a Biblical Teaching

The Catholic apologist Peter Kreeft openly asserts that “if we believe only what the Scripture teaches, we will not believe *sola Scriptura*, for Scripture does not teach *sola Scriptura*” (Kreeft, 1988: 274-75, also quoted in Geisler & McKenzie, 1995: 183). Catholic popular apologetics claim: “Perhaps the most striking reason for rejecting this doctrine is that *there is not one verse anywhere in the Bible* in which it is taught, and it therefore becomes a self-refuting doctrine” (Joel Peters quoted in Rafe, 2012).

One of the most important recent Catholic volumes that represents the comprehensive criticism of the principle *sola scriptura* is *Not by Scripture Alone: A Catholic Critique of the Protestant Doctrine of Sola Scriptura* (1997), edited by Robert A. Sungenis. It has around six hundred pages of different articles that deal with the critique of

different aspects of the Evangelical presentation of *sola scriptura*. It is noticeable that most of the recent Evangelical sources on defending the *sola scriptura* principle (Crampton, 2002; King, 2001; Kistler, 2009) refer to Sungenis as the main representative of the contemporary Catholic apologetics of the Scripture only principle.

According to Sungenis' article "Does Scripture Teach Sola Scriptura?" and his interpretation of 2 Tim 3: 16-17: "All scripture, inspired of God, is profitable to teach, to reprove, to correct, to instruct in justice, that the man of God may be perfect, furnished to every good work", Scripture represents only "the raw data" that help the man of God to do every good work (Sungenis, 1997a: 115). Sungenis brings out that Paul admonished believers to live a Christian life in the context of his message in 2 Tim 2-3. Christians, apart from Scripture, *also* need trustworthy teachers, oral tradition, infallible guidance of the Holy Spirit, saintly models, prayers, and meditation (1997a: 116; see Peters, 1999: 6). Paul was not preaching the Scriptures only (2 Tim 1:13; 2:2). Thus, the Apostle rejected the *sola scriptura* principle (Sungenis, 1997a: 126). Sungenis rejects, furthermore, on the basis of meticulous exegetical method, Acts 17:11 and 1 Cor 4:6 as proof texts for *sola scriptura*. In conclusion he says:

Just as Jesus, being only one witness, calls on the witness of the Father, so Scripture is dependent on the witness of Tradition. All in all, Mark 7 is teaching that it is damnable to deliberately set aside Scripture with man-made traditions, not that Scripture and Tradition cannot exist side by side (Sungenis, 1997a: 167).

The Catholic apologetic is supported by, for example, Joel Peters' claim in *21 Reasons to Reject Sola Scriptura* (1999) that 2 Timothy 3:16-17 has some serious considerations which undermine *sola scriptura*: (1) there is no word "sufficient" in the text. Scripture is *useful* but it is not the only source of Christian doctrine; (2) if the doctrine of *sola scriptura* were true, then, based on Greek *πασα* (meaning *all* but also *every*) in verse 16, each and every book of the Bible could stand on its own as the sole rule of faith, a position which is obviously absurd; (3) finally, Catholics recognize that this text includes *only* the Old Testament. It means that the Old Testament would be the sole rule of faith for a Christian, since the New Testament was in the process of writing. This would be unacceptable concludes Peters (1999: 4-5). The Orthodox theologian, John Whiteford, an Evangelical who converted to Orthodoxy, published the booklet *Sola Scriptura: An Orthodox Analysis of the Cornerstone of Reformation Theology* (1996). Commenting on 2 Tim 3: 16 he states that in the same chapter Paul uses a reference to oral tradition (3:8) referring to Jannes and

Jambres, persons who opposed Moses, but whose names are not found in the Old Testament (Whiteford, 1996: 11). Scripture for him is not sufficient as a complete source of God's truth. By the way, Whiteford asks: "Why do Protestants write so many books on doctrine and the Christian life in general, if indeed all that is necessary is the Bible?" (1996: 15). Obviously, Protestants do not believe in the all-sufficiency of the Scriptures.

The Evangelical scholar David T. King, in his volume *A Biblical Defense of the Reformation Principle of Sola Scriptura* (2001), replies to Sungenis (Gallegos, 1997: 389-485) and other Catholic apologists. The Church fathers taught, he argues, that according to 2 Tim 3: 15-17 "Scripture is *sufficient* to make the man of God perfect and equipped for every good work" (King, 2001: 86-89, italics mine). Sungenis, Gallegos and Peters, obviously, repudiate this argument.

In regard to "additions" mentioned in Rev 22:18-19 Peters rightly recognizes that the context indeed speaks only about the book of Revelation and not about the entire Bible *versus* Tradition (Peters, 1999: 8). The argument correctly states:

In defense of their interpretation of these verses, Protestants will often contend that God knew in advance what the canon of Scripture would be, with Revelation being the last book of the Bible, and thus He 'sealed' that canon with the words of verses 18-19. But this interpretation involves reading a meaning into the text (1999: 8).

Therefore,

Protestants will assert that the Bible itself teaches Sola Scriptura and therefore that the doctrine had its roots back with Jesus Christ. However, as we have seen above, the Bible teaches no such things. The claim that the Bible teaches this doctrine is nothing more than a repeated effort to retroject this belief back into the pages of Scripture (Peters, 1999: 40).

Other biblical arguments used by Catholic apologists will be used in the discussion about the value of oral tradition in the following sections.

6.3.2 The Bible cannot Be Interpreted Without Tradition

This argument is extensively discussed by Rafe, a Catholic apologist:

When we ask someone "What does the book say?" we do not always want them to simply quote the words to us – we want them to tell us what the words mean. That is a person's interpretation. If we are not given a person's interpretation, we have to provide our own – or choose someone else's. *We have no way of reading a book without an interpretation – it is just impossible. That interpretation is external to the book – and is external to the Bible.* As Christians we can either choose to go with our own interpretation (which is wrong as is made clear in II Peter 1:20) or we can choose someone else's. The only person who has the

authority to determine what is the correct interpretation of Scripture is the Catholic Church. (Rafe, 2012: 1n, italics mine).

Evidently, the Catholic hermeneutics does not believe in the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit as the primary agent of biblical interpretation. By this it rejects one of the pillars of the Protestant hermeneutics (see Sproul, 2005: 91-117). For Catholics, Scripture necessitates the external body or magisterium. Catholic theology emphasizes at least two reasons for this.

First, Scripture is not so clear that we can all read it and come to exactly the same conclusion (Rose, 2011: 149). Evangelicals may reply with *sui ipsius interpres* but Catholics clearly express doubt over the final interpretation of the verses we are using to explain some other verses (Rose, 2011: 150; see Sungenis, 1997b: 224). The interpretation of Scripture left to itself, based on difference of various interpretations, is rejected in Catholic thought (Rose, 2011: 156).

Second, the necessity of magisterial interpretation is based on the interpretation of 2 Pet 1:20: “Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the *prophet’s own interpretation of things*”. Catholics even claim that Peter maybe foresaw the rise of Protestantism as he condemns an “every man for himself” approach to the Bible (Madrid, 1997: 18-19). Catholic theology needs the magisterium because Peter condemns *individual* interpretations. It seems evident that 2 Pet 1:21 speaks about the authority of the Holy Spirit to originate and interpret the Holy Scriptures, and not the community of faith or magisterium *per se*. However, Vatican II’s *Dei Verbum* clearly states that the same Holy Spirit who spoke through prophets and apostles speaks today through the magisterium or the teaching office of the Church (Paul VI, 1965, DV: art. 5, 7, 8). This might be the only point of reconciliation between the contextual message of Peter and the contemporary role of the magisterium. Mathison correctly notices that the text does not speak about the *interpretation* of Scripture but about the *origins* of the Bible (Mathison, 2001: 169). However, Catholics still maintain the position of the interpretation.

Catholic theology also points to 2 Pet 3:16: “He (Paul) writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort (στρεβλουσιν), as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction” (NIV). Peter warns against those who “distort” the meaning of Scripture. If this distortion is to be avoided, the Church has to interpret the Scriptures, concludes Peters (1999: 19).

In Catholic apologetics there is also a claim that the Lutheran principle *sui ipsius interpretes* has never been taught by the Church fathers:

Not a single Church Father interpreted Sacred Scripture in isolation from the traditional faith of the Church; rather, the Fathers applied Tradition as a rule to interpret Scripture. The only ancient teachers who interpreted Scripture apart from Tradition were the early heretics... The early testimony is clear—if one fails to interpret Scripture within the milieu of Tradition and replace it with a private reading of Scripture then one can come up with about anything. *If one wishes to find adherents to the principle of sola scriptura, one need look no further than the proponents of the early heresies* (Gallegos, 1997; see also Peters, 1999: 29-30, italics mine).

So far, such a strong statement of the rejection of *sola scriptura* has not been mentioned in this research. There are indications that some Church fathers indeed interpreted Scripture within the existing tradition. Rufinus in his *Church History* (1997) says: “Putting aside all Greek literature, they [St. Basil and St. Gregory] are said to have passed thirteen years together in studying the *Scriptures alone*, and followed out their sense, *not from their private opinions, but by the writings and authority of the Fathers*” (Rufinus, 1997: 2.9, italics mine; see also Peters, 1999: 29). For its own interpretation, Scripture, therefore, *always* needed tradition. As Catholic apologist Kreeft puts it Scripture and the tradition of the Church are not rival horses in the race, the rider is the Church, and the horse is Scripture (Kreeft, 1988: 274-75, see also the discussion in Geisler & McKenzie, 1995: 183). The self-sufficiency of Scripture (*sola scriptura*) in its understanding is, therefore, an incongruous principle. Moreover, if the Scripture can interpret itself without the determined and final decision of the teaching office, there is no definite and final interpretation of any biblical teaching (Peters, 1999: 52-55).

Catholic popular apologetics explains why Scripture needs an interpretation by the unified testimony of the Church’s tradition:

Sola Scriptura is a very dangerous dogma because it says that each individual is inspired by the Holy Spirit in the reading of Scripture. In other words *it says that each person is infallible*. So how does one explain the contradictions within Protestant, and other non-Catholic Christian, Biblical interpretations, as well as between individuals? *Would the Holy Spirit contradict Himself?* *Sola Scriptura* opens up the possibility of incorrect understanding of Scripture and, placed in the hands of charlatans and the ignorant, interpretations can be made which are harmful. Interpretations can be made and twisted to suit anybody’s wishes and preconceived notions (Anon, 2011, italics mine).

In reply, the Evangelical scholar Sinclair Ferguson expresses concern over the excessive authority of tradition in the Catholic church. He discovers a problem with the position that the tradition of the Church must interpret Scripture:

This position obviously emasculates Scripture. That is why the Catholic stance against *Sola Scriptura* has always posed a major problem for Roman Catholic apologists. On one hand faced with the task of defending Catholic doctrine, and on the other hand desiring to affirm what Scripture says about itself, they find themselves on the horns of a dilemma. They cannot affirm the authority of Scripture apart from the caveat that tradition is necessary to explain the Bible's true meaning. *Quite plainly, that makes tradition a superior authority. Moreover, in effect it renders Scripture superfluous, for if Catholic tradition inerrantly encompasses and explains all the truth of Scripture, then the Bible is simply redundant.* Understandably, *sola Scriptura* has therefore always been a highly effective argument for defenders of the Reformation (Ferguson, 2009: art. 3, italics mine).

Evidently, the Catholic scholars would never deny that tradition(s) have to be assessed and evaluated by Scripture, but Scripture itself remains only a *partim* of a broad revelation of Tradition. Catholics indeed insist that there are no contradictions between the two.

Catholic apologist Patrick Madrid, who engaged in numerous public debates with Protestants and claimed to show that *sola scriptura* is indefensible (Madrid, 1997: 29), in his article *Sola Scriptura: A Blueprint for Anarchy* (1997) clearly explains the Catholic position on the relationship between Scripture, tradition and the magisterium:

Scriptura is the object of the Church's interpretation; *Traditio* is the Church's lived interpretation of Scripture; and *Magisterium* is the authority of the Church that does the interpreting. Historically, the Catholic model, not *sola scriptura*, is the one we see the Church using, even from its earliest years (Madrid, 1997: 20).

The Bible, therefore, can never be interpreted without the tradition of the church and its teaching office. By its nature the book calls for its interpretation by the authoritative body of the Church. In addition, there is also an Orthodox model of tradition that rejects the infallibility of the pope and many other changes; the Orthodox believe that Evangelicals attack tradition because they have a distorted view of this concept (Whiteford, 1996: 18). There is no space here for this discussion in detail.

After all, what is the value of *oral* tradition for the Catholic exegetes?

6.3.3 Value of Oral Tradition and Its Preference Over the Written Testimony

Joseph Fitzmyer, the progressive Catholic theologian of the Scripture principle, claims that the New Testament was born of an oral "pre-existent Christian Tradition" based on the Old Testament (Fitzmyer, 1994: 79). Tradition precedes Scripture. The New Testament, nevertheless, as "the written Word of God, does stand over the dogmatic Tradition that springs from it and over Church's magisterium" (1994: 79). Fitzmyer, in ecumenical terms, recognizes that Jesus "denies a normative role to human tradition" (1994: 75).

The Catholic theology, he says, is aware of the fact that the biblical data about the relationship of Scripture and Tradition are not numerous (Fitzmyer, 1994: 76). Passing on of authoritative tradition is mentioned, for example, in 2 Thess. 2: 15: “So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the *teachings* (παραδόσεις) we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter”. It is true that contemporary Catholic theology claims that this tradition (teachings) has been transmitted and “developed in consonance with the Hebrew Scriptures, with the written Word of God of old” (Fitzmyer, 1994: 77). However, tradition had a normative role in the apostolic church, and a good example is 1 Cor 11:23 (1994: 75). What Paul *received* he also *passed on*. παραδόσεις (traditions) and παραδιδόναι (to hand on) are found in the New Testament but not in the LXX (1994: 73). This argument is used within the Catholic theology as evidence that the New Testament is primarily oral proclamation of Scripture of the Old Testament, and not Scripture itself. On the other hand, Evangelicals claim that Thessalonians believed in παραδόσεις *only* as what they heard directly from Paul’s lips (MacArthur, 2009: 87, 89). David King, for example, states that tradition, “in connection with the transmission of the apostolic message and identified, is understood to be that which was transmitted according to Scripture” (King, 2001: 113). Catholics do not make such a close connection between the oral teaching of the apostles and the written testimony of the New Testament. Oral tradition has a separate status.

The separate status of revelation through tradition, a separate *partim*, is always validated and authenticated by Scripture, the teaching office and the Pope. The Catholic theologians, therefore, are not suspicious of extra-biblical tradition that has the authority of the oral transmission by the apostles of the Church. 1 Cor 11:2, 2 Thess 2:15 and 3:16 seem to give explicit instructions to follow tradition(s) which were passed on. This is an oral tradition. Evangelicals, of course, deny the separate validity of some oral teachings and claim that tradition is only unwritten apostolic teachings (MacArthur, 2009: 85; Mathison, 2001: 181). Evangelicals also quote Matt 15:3, Mark 7:9 or Colossians 2:8 which reject false tradition, but Catholics say this refers to the *man-made* traditions damaging to the Christian deposit of faith. Tradition remains a part of divine revelation.

Oral tradition is also based on the fact that, for example, John 21:25 teaches that the Bible does not record everything that Jesus said and did. In Acts 20:35 Paul writes about a saying of Christ found nowhere in the Gospels. Catholic apologists ask:

Why would he refer to this saying if he did not expect his readers to accept the fact that sayings of Christ not recorded in the Gospels can be used (the very opposite of *sola scriptura*)? In Matthew 28:20 Christ commands us to obey all His commands – how can we obey all His commands without going outside the Bible if not everything He taught is in the Bible? (Rafe, 2012).

According to Catholics, all oral apostolic preaching (1 Peter 1:25; 2 Tim 2:2) takes precedence over the written Scripture because it is the broader principle of the Word of God. One of the examples is 3 John 13-14: “I have much to write you, but I do not want to do so with pen and ink. I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face.” Catholic apologists quote this example as evidence that oral proclamation is of higher value and magnitude than written testimony. *Sola scriptura* is foreign to the Catholic understanding of divine revelation; “*sola scriptura* is to Catholicism what a small meteor is to the sun” (Gray, 2011: viii). Revelation is so broad that Scripture becomes only an integral written part of it.

Tradition, in the light of Vatican II, has a dual nature in the Catholic Church. Joel Peters argues:

Of course one must differentiate between Tradition (upper-case “T”) that is part of divine Revelation, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, Church traditions (lower-case “t”) that, although good, have developed in the Church later and are not part of the Deposit of Faith. An example of something that is part of Tradition would be infant Baptism; an example of a Church tradition would be the Church’s calendar of feast days of Saints. *Anything that is part of Tradition is of divine origin and hence unchangeable, while Church traditions are changeable by the Church* (Peters, 1999: 13, italics mine).

Though it is true that Catholics claim that Tradition is a living thing and not a static reality (Rose, 2011: 135), this does not mean, however, that there are some doctrines in tradition that are not supported by Scripture. “All the doctrines of the Church derive from Scriptures” (Kreeft, 1988: 275). Thomas Aquinas identified *sacra doctrina* with *sacra scriptura*, the revelation of Scripture (Kreeft, 1998: 275; see also Nichols, 2002: 31). Catholic theology applies this principle even to Mariology (Kreeft, 1988: 275-6). Tradition is an indispensable *partim* in the deposit of faith attested by the Scriptures.

To sum up, though progressive Evangelicals recognize the value of Tradition, Catholic confusion over the authority and divine origin of at least certain traditions represents the major obstacle to full appropriation of Tradition to which traditional Evangelicals consistently point. The overall impression is that oral tradition still takes precedence over the written testimony of Scripture.

6.3.4 Church Precedes Scripture

This argument primarily addresses the process of canonization. Peter Kreeft in his *Fundamentals of the Faith: Essays in Christian Apologetics* (1988) explains the causal argument against *sola scriptura*:

...the effect cannot be greater than its cause. The Church (the apostles) wrote Scripture and the successors of the apostles, the bishops of the Church, decided on the canon, the list of books to be declared scriptural and infallible. If Scripture is infallible, then its cause, the Church, must also be infallible (Kreeft, 1988: 275).

The Catholic dogma regarding Scripture clearly indicates that the process of the canonization of the sacred writings was led, guarded and determined by the Church. The logic of Kreeft seems to be flawless. The infallible Scripture demands the infallible Church.

However, what Evangelicals recognize is the dynamic interplay between this objective element of the Church's authority and the subjective testimony of the Holy Spirit's authority that determines the list of the canonical books. It is true that the canonization process was complete only around the fourth century (Peters, 1999: 34), and that the process was produced and guarded by the Church (1999: 28), but Evangelicals claim that the infallibility belongs to the Church inasmuch as the Church declares the infallibility of the Spirit who guided the process of the canonization and determined the canon through *God's providence*. The Church has no automatic infallibility. By the way, either the Church or the Bible is infallible and ultimate (see Madrid & Jones, 1996; Sungenis, 1997c: 569-570; for an Evangelical reply see David T. King's *Sola Scriptura or Sola Ecclesia* (2001) or Crampton, 2002: 147-217). Nevertheless, for Catholics, the Church is the primary *cause* of the origin, preservation, canonization and interpretation of the Bible.

Joel Peters defends the Catholic position:

Since God's one Revelation is twofold in form, to deny the authority of one form would be to deny the authority of the other form as well. The forms of God's Word are complementary, not competitive. *Thus, if there is a need for the Scriptures, there is also a need for the teaching authority which produced them* (Peters, 1999: 28, italics mine).

Therefore, the Church precedes Scripture both in historical sense as its originator and in the theological sense as its guardian and interpreter. On the historical ground in the process of canonization, Catholics also reject the *self-authentication* of the Scriptures based on some

doubts over disputable books of the canon (Peters, 1999: 29). For Catholics, the self-authenticated canon of Scripture is a great myth (Rose, 2011: 75). Catholic dogma also asserts that Christ himself was instructing his disciples to submit to the authority of the Church and its infallible interpretation of Scripture (Peters, 1999: 18-19).

6.3.5 Denominationalism as a Consequence of Rejection of Tradition

As a consequence of rejection of the unifying historical principle of tradition, Protestants/Evangelicals are separated in hundreds, if not thousands of denominations. According to Catholic dogmatics this becomes the “intolerable scandal” in contemporary Evangelicalism (Kreeft, 1988: 275). The biblical arguments that are used here are based on John 17:20-23 and 1 Cor 1:10-17 that speak about disunity in God’s people. Catholic theology points to the fact of disintegration of the Protestant/Evangelical churches and claims that this must be the outcome of the private, subjective and biased reading and interpretation of the same Scripture we all have. The Orthodox Patriarch Jeremias II called these biased formulations “a multitude of rationalizations” (Jeremias II quoted in Whiteford, 1996: 22). Taken from its context of Tradition,

...the solid rock of Scripture becomes a mere ball of clay, to be molded into whatever shape its handlers wish. It is no honor to the Scriptures to misuse and twist them, even if this is done in the name of exalting their authority (Whiteford, 1996: 45).

For Catholic apologist David L. Gray, the fruits of *sola scriptura* are: too many inauthentic interpretations and inauthentic interpreters, extreme Christian individualism and finally Christian relativism (Gray, 2011: 70-82). Gray, in his volume *Dead on Arrival: The Seven Fatal Errors of Sola Scriptura* (2011), rightly identifies the problem:

Because *sola scriptura* empowers its adherents to discover the truth according to their own light, the truth of sacred Scripture remains elusive to them and it proves to be the gateway to Christian secularism and the rejection of the authority of sacred Scriptures all together (Gray, 2011: 77).

Some Church organizations lack authoritative and definite source of truth, and they end up being secular institutions (2011: 77). Catholics also claim that there is a big difference between Protestant and Catholic disunity. Philip Blosser, in his article *What are the Philosophical and Practical Problems with Sola Scriptura?* (1997), avows:

The problem of disunity on the Protestant side is the disunity between the *official* teaching of different denominations, not, as on the Catholic side, the disunity between official

Church teaching and the *views* of various dissidents who happen to also be (at least nominally) church members (Blosser, 1997: 96).

Joel Peters mentions that these official teachings that separate Protestants are the Eucharist and the justification/sanctification debate (Peters, 1999: 51). This statement does not sound completely convincing—these teachings might be considered to be still marginal aspects of the core of Evangelical faith.

Some of the biblical arguments offered here may point to disintegration and fragmentation due to the lack of love, spirituality and piety, and not primarily due to the lack of full doctrinal unity. Denominationalism might not be such a scandal because the Evangelical principle of *sola scriptura* actually never calls for a full organic and organizational unity in all doctrinal statements. *Sola scriptura* is not necessarily responsible for “every breach of ecclesiastical unity” (King, 2001: 264).

6.3.6 Summary

To sum up, the Catholic doctrine of Scripture rejects the *sola scriptura* principle on the ground of the biblical teaching itself, the lack of scriptural self-sufficiency for its interpretation, the value and necessity of oral tradition in Scripture, the causal argument in the process of canonization and the scandal of denominationalism as a consequence of the repudiation of the Church’s tradition.

Finally, if something can be added to these general biblical arguments against *sola scriptura* the Catholics also question the truthfulness of the divine influence on Martin Luther. They seem to assert that his personal experience, insight and even emotional problems were the causes of his wrong theology:

An honest inquirer must ask, then, whether Luther’s doctrine of "Scripture alone" was a genuine restoration of a Biblical truth or rather the promulgation of an individual’s personal views on Christian authority. Luther was clearly passionate about his beliefs, and he was successful in spreading them, but these facts in and of themselves do not guarantee that what he taught was correct. Since one’s spiritual well-being, and even one’s eternal destiny, is at stake, the Christian believer needs to be absolutely sure in this matter (Peters, 1999: 3, 61-63).

How can one be “absolutely sure” whose arguments are adequately used in the debate over *sola scriptura*? Are the results of biblical exegesis the final arbiter in this decision? Some clarifications in regard to this matter have to be presented in the conclusion.

6.4 Summary and Conclusion

If one wished to juxtapose all arguments expounded in this discussion and draw a final conclusion that would not be an easy task. In the biblical arguments for and against the teaching of *sola scriptura* (its unique role/authority and self-sufficiency) both Evangelicals and Catholics use the exegetical method of searching for the ultimate meaning of major texts about the Scripture principle. The value of tradition is endorsed by both sides and recognized in Scripture, but the Evangelicals claim that it has to be assessed by the *only* source of divine unequivocal revelation: the Word of God in Scripture. The causal argument in the process of canonization is one of the main obstacles to an ecumenical appreciation of the *sola scriptura* principle. Catholics insist on the magisterial and authoritative role of the Church in this process, while Evangelicals maintain the authority of Scripture itself as the self-authenticating Word of God within the process of God's providence. Finally, Evangelicals do not view denominationalism, a consequence of the denial of historical tradition(s), as a shameful stain on the history of God's Church, but Catholics consider it as a scandal because the Church has to be ultimately unified.

In regard to weighing the biblical arguments and the arguments of plain and simple reason, in both Evangelical and Catholic position on *sola scriptura*, exist some common misrepresentations of the principle of *sola scriptura* (see for example King, 2001: 257-269). These distortions must be clarified and explained before an assumption of an ecumenical position on the Scripture principle.

Furthermore, certain fundamental presuppositions that permeate the argumentation of both sides must be addressed. On the one hand, the Evangelical theology has a preconception regarding the final, sole and unique authority of Scripture, whilst overlooking the authority and the role of the Church as the divinely established institution that preserves and guards the sacred writings. Consequently, Evangelicals continue to overemphasize, as indispensable, assessment or evaluation of the Church's tradition(s) and practice *only* by the Scriptures. This excludes, of course, the *prima scriptura* principle that might play an ecumenical role. There is also a limitation of the role of Church's tradition and the living experience of the community of faith in the interpretation of the Bible.

On the other hand, the Catholic theology of Scripture, unconscious of its tendency to overstress the authority of the Church, and its tradition over the Bible, is perhaps biased when it rejects the self-sufficiency of Scripture based on, for them, the indispensable

interpretation of Scripture *only* by and within the community of faith. This looks like a limitation of the role of the divine agency of the Holy Spirit who speaks and interprets the deposit of faith according to his divine preference and authority.

This theological tension between Evangelicals and Catholics calls for an attempt at an ecumenical reconciliation with regard to the Scripture principle. Hence, in the concluding Chapter, the question raised in the introduction of the study: how feasible is the ecumenical definition of *sola scriptura*, has to be answered. In that regard some renewed avenues for a potential joint statement on scriptural authority, its nature and interpretation will be presented. This task must be done by taking into consideration (1) the above-mentioned prejudices and the theological tension as a primary underpinning for the final ecumenical declaration, and (2) the results of the investigations in Chapters 2 to 6 as necessary illuminating and instructive elements that will support one or another position on *sola scriptura*.

7.0 TOWARD A JOINT ECUMENICAL STATEMENT ON *SOLA SCRIPTURA*

7.1 Introduction

In this final chapter the central objective is to make an attempt to create a potential ecumenical joint statement based on the research done in Chapters 2 to 6.

First, a comprehensive and official ecumenical document entitled *Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium* (1994), hereafter ECT, will be analysed. The document represents a thoughtful endeavour to reconcile Evangelical and Catholic theological positions, including those relating to views of Scripture, and to overcome some of the main obstacles to theological accord in the ecumenical dialogue. The outcomes of the investigation of this document, though a bit out-dated, will play the role of an essential and at the same time challenging primer for the concluding ecumenical remarks and statements in this chapter.

As it has been indicated in the conclusion of Chapter 6, both Evangelicals and Catholics have to become mindful of some fundamental presuppositions of their theological framework. In that regard, identification of some strategic requirements for both Evangelicals and Catholics becomes a necessary task, if both sides really aspire to generate a thoughtful theological dialogue and make a joint statement on *sola scriptura*. These requirements will consist of two fundamental theological propositions that will be buoyed and expanded by the essential elements necessary for the construction of the ecumenical proclamation about the Holy Scriptures. Had both Evangelicals and Catholics earnestly and deeply considered these theological requirements with their crucial elements, the ecumenical joint statement of *sola scriptura* might have been an auspicious actuality some time ago. Ecumenical course is, however, always an on-going process.

Finally, this research will be closed with a proposal of an actual ecumenical joint statement that might serve forthcoming generations of both Evangelical and Catholic theologians to bridge the theological breach between their respective historical, theological or hermeneutical positions on *sola scriptura*.

7.2 *Evangelicals and Catholics Together* (ECT Document)

The document ECT (Colson *et al.*, 1994), signed by some leading Evangelical and Catholic theologians and scholars in the United States, is an exceptional ecumenical document. The purpose of the document has been the ecumenical mutual recognition of the doctrinal and ecclesial similarities and dissimilarities of Evangelicals and Catholics. It has been divided in five subsections, excluding the introduction (art. 1) and conclusion (art. 7): (1) we affirm together (art. 2); (2) we hope together (art. 3); (3) we search together (art. 4); (4) we contend together (art. 5), and (5) we witness together (art. 6). This division eases the investigation of the document. The objective of this section is a quest for the key theological principles that might demonstrate how far the ecumenical efforts have gone in creating the joint ecumenical statement on the Scripture principle.

The Introduction of the document, after asserting the goodwill and reality of a long desired reconciliation between the Evangelical and Catholic communities of faith, concludes:

*We reject any appearance of harmony that is purchased at the price of truth. Our common resolve is made imperative by obedience to the truth of God revealed in the Word of God, the Holy Scriptures, and by trust in the promise of the Holy Spirit's guidance until Our Lord returns in glory to judge the living and the dead. The mission that we embrace together is the necessary consequence of the faith that we affirm together (ETC [Colson *et al.*, 1994], art. 1, italics mine).*

The document itself, therefore, makes an effort to come to some solid theological conclusions without sacrificing the straightforward doctrine of the Word of God. It is conspicuous here that the view of Scripture is very high; it is unquestionably equalled with the Word of God. Both sides hope that their *common expression of faith* will be based on the scriptural authority and the guiding and interpreting presence of the Holy Spirit. The document is not only a search for spiritual unity and harmony but an endeavour to make serious theological statements including the one on Scripture.

In the article “We Affirm Together” (art. 2) again the statement underscores the equality of the Scriptures with the *infallible* Word of God, by a special endorsement that the obedience to the Word and Christ’s teachings *in Scripture* leads to the truth and salvation. ECT proclaims:

We affirm together that Christians are to teach and live in obedience to the divinely inspired Scriptures, which are the infallible Word of God. We further affirm together that Christ has promised to his church the gift of the Holy Spirit who will lead us into all truth in discerning and declaring the teaching of Scripture. (John 16) (ECT [Colson et al., 1994], art. 2, italics mine).

It is obvious, therefore, that disagreements and discrepancies between the two communities of faith ought to be resolved “on the basis of God’s Word” as ECT observes:

We do not deny but clearly assert that there are disagreements between us. Misunderstandings, misrepresentations, and caricatures of one another, however, are not disagreements. These distortions must be cleared away if we are to search through our honest differences in a manner consistent with what we affirm and hope together *on the basis of God’s Word* (ECT [Colson et al., 1994], art. 3, italics mine).

Remarkably, both Evangelicals and Catholics affirm that the Bible is God’s Word and that in all theological disputations and debates one must search for the common expression of faith based on Scripture. Both Evangelicals and Catholics quest for unity by relying on the revelation of Christ and “the sure testimony of Holy Scriptures” (ECT [Colson et al., 1994], art. 4). The search for truth in the communal ecumenical effort is based on the Bible.

The ECT document, however, does not ignore the differences in the understanding of the Scripture principle. One of the key points of division, expressed in the document, is specifically about *sola scriptura*. The division is defined as: “the sole authority of Scripture (*sola scriptura*) or Scripture as authoritatively interpreted in the church” (ECT [Colson et al., 1994], art. 4). This dividing statement is exactly what the conclusion of Chapter 6 of this research has already recognized. Both sides equally expressed their dogmatic statement based on the historical assumptions of either the unique and sole authority of the Bible (Evangelicals) or the understanding of revelation as a broader principle of Christian realities that includes authoritative Tradition as the interpreting mediator (Catholics). The document explicates more of this theological rift:

On these questions, and other questions implied by them, Evangelicals hold that *the Catholic Church has gone beyond Scripture*, adding teachings and practices that detract from or compromise the Gospel of God’s saving grace in Christ. Catholics, in turn, hold that such teachings and practices are grounded in Scripture and belong to the fullness of God’s revelation. *Their rejection, Catholics say, results in a truncated and reduced understanding of the Christian reality* (ECT [Colson et al., 1994], art. 4, italics mine).

Undoubtedly, both parties remain entrenched within their own respective historical-dogmatic position. Evangelicals insist the tradition has to be adjudged by the testimony of Scripture and the truth of the Gospel, while Catholics reply that the limited understanding

of the broader concept of revelation is the main cause of establishment of *sola scriptura* and rejection of the Church's tradition.

To sum up, even though both Evangelicals and Catholics affirm the divine origin, authority and nature of Scripture as the Word of God, including its spiritual understanding by the Holy Spirit, the ecumenical efforts in the ECT document are still hindered by a theological gap between them on the essential point of the *sola scriptura* principle.

Within the ecumenical purpose, how can one better understand the Christian realities on which this Scripture principle is based? In order to answer this question in the following section ecumenical *requirements* for both Evangelicals and Catholics will be presented. Perhaps in these requirements lies a hope of the ultimate ecumenical joint statement of the *sola scriptura* principle.

The "holy grail" of the ecumenical Scripture principle has been searched for by some recent projects, for example, Michael J. Gorman's *Scripture: An Ecumenical Introduction to the Bible and Its Interpretation* (2005). This volume is a collection of different articles written about the canonization process, the authority and the interpretation of the Bible with the ecumenical purpose in mind. Part I presents the *Bible* itself: its library-like character; its history, geography, and archaeology; the books of each Testament; important non-canonical books; the Bible's various Jewish and Christian forms; and its transmission and translation. Part II elaborates more on the *interpretation* of the Bible at various traditions, in various times, and for various causes: in the premodern period and in the modern and postmodern eras, including recent critical, theological, and ideological approaches; in Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, and African-American Churches; and for spiritual growth, social justice, and Christian unity. The book is written by variety of Christian scholars and represents the ecumenical work *par excellence* (see content and reviews at amazon.com).

The modest contribution of a brief debate in the following section, regarding the ecumenical prerequisites for a joint statement, with its specific methodology, will be an addition to all of the quests of the ecumenical approach to Holy Scripture (see also Hedegard, 1964; Anon A., 1965; Hagen, 1998; West, 2002; Ketcherside, 2009).

7.3 Ecumenical Requirements for a Joint Statement on the *Sola Scriptura* Principle

Thomas Rausch, in his *Catholicism at the Dawn of the Third Millennium* (1996), published just two years after the ECT document, brilliantly summarizes the present ecumenical situation in regard to *sola scriptura*:

In ecumenical terms today both sides (Catholic and Protestant) are much closer. Most Protestants believe that the Bible is an expression of tradition and is always interpreted within a given community of faith. Catholics believe the Bible remains the primary norm for the Church's faith and doctrine (Rausch, 1996: 69).

The crucial requirements for the ecumenical joint statement that will be offered here include precisely these two theological agendas or directions existing for several decades now. On the one hand, Evangelicals have to become more and more aware that Scripture and its interpretation cannot be separated from the tradition of the community of faith. On the other hand, Catholic dogmatic has to become more and more sensible to the ultimate and unique authority of the Word of God in the Bible that ought to weigh, estimate and assess all traditions and teachings of the Church.

These two general requirements, in the following sections, will have to be reinforced and clarified with additional theological components of the Scripture principle already explained in the previous chapters of this research.

7.3.1 Scripture Interpreted Within the Community of Faith (for Evangelicals)

The basic requirement for the ecumenical joint statement on Scripture for Evangelicals is the recognition of Scripture as the Church's book. The Bible originated *in*, was produced *by* and is interpreted *within* the Church community. There are at least three elements of the *sola scriptura* principle already discussed in this research that might support this requirement: acknowledgment of the ecumenical nature of the Scripture Only principle in the works of two grand "ecumenical" theologians of the Bible (St Augustine and Karl Barth), the canonical exegetical method and Benedict XVI's theory of the people of God as "deeper author", and perhaps the liturgical/ecclesial nature of the Holy Scriptures.

7.3.1.1 Ecumenical Theologians of Scripture

In Chapter 4 St Augustine has already been recognized as one of the key Church fathers who upheld *both* the authority of Scripture as the measuring rod of all Christian doctrine *and* the authority of ecclesial structure that guards and protects the orthodoxy of Christian doctrine. This paradoxical *both/and* might be used as a powerful tool for Evangelicals in order to identify the importance of the Church's authority/tradition without sacrificing the *sola scriptura* principle. The genius of St Augustine may be essential in the creation of the joint statement of *sola scriptura*. His statements on *sola scriptura* include generally theological propositions that support the authority of Scripture *over* tradition (see section 4.4.2.1). However, at the same time he indisputably upholds the Church's tradition (Geisler & MacKenzie, 1995: 200). The authority of the Catholic (universal) Church prompted his belief in the holy Gospel. Whatever is a context of Augustine's well-known theological expression, Evangelicals have to be aware that it is conceivable to affirm *both* the authority of Scripture *and* the authority of the Church at the same time. Scripture, as God's Word, becomes the Church's book as well. Augustine insisted not on metaphysical priority of the Church, like medieval scholars (Mathison, 2001: 42), but on practical priority in the defence against heresies. The evangelical acknowledgment of ecclesiastical authority is one of the indispensable preconditions for any ecumenical dialogue on Scripture (see Mathison, 2001: 267-270).

Moreover, in the recent debates Karl Barth as an evangelical scholar has been recognized as an ecumenical theologian as well (see Hans Urs von Balthasar's *Theology of Karl Barth* [1992]; see also section). Evangelicals should be more mindful of the broader concept of the Word of God/revelation as a fundamental theological contribution of Barth. Catholics accept this Barthian principle (Hans Küng, Karl Rahner, Joseph Ratzinger and others; see Chapter 5), by pointing to his theology of non-propositional revelation through that Word that goes beyond only written Scripture. Evangelicals should appropriate more of this Barthian theology in order to recognize the wide-ranging nature of the Word and its function in the salvation process. In fact, progressive evangelicalism has already done so.

Evangelicals, hence, ought to realize that Scripture still belongs to the Church and its historical tradition (Augustine), but that it is not sufficient as the *only* authoritative

revelation of God since it belongs to the broader Christian reality of God's Word/revelation (Barth).

7.3.1.2 Canonical Exegesis and Deeper Author

Most progressive Evangelicals claim that Scripture is interpreted by and within the Church. The second ecumenical requirement for Evangelicals comes from the insightful and relevant theology of Benedict XVI (section 5.6). The Pope, with his unique contribution to the ecumenical conversation about Scripture, reminds us that the exegetical task based on the scientific exploration of Scripture never suffices. A theological understanding of the wholeness of the Word as a *unit* and a *theological datum*, within the given community of faith, is the canonical exegetical condition for its full understanding. In this approach to hermeneutics Scripture still has a full authority, it is a source of revelation, it is inspired and infallible, and it is the supreme normative standard, but Scripture does not exist in a vacuum. "It was and is given to the Church within the doctrinal context of the apostolic gospel," confirms Mathison (2001: 259). By "Church" here we should understand the catholic (small c) church as a whole. It also has to be interpreted according to *regula fidei* (the rule of faith), that is, tradition (2001: 273, 275) in order to avoid "hermeneutical chaos" (2001: 274). The Bible cannot be read by itself and preached by itself; the term "sufficient" has to be reinterpreted (2001: 259). Evangelicals, thus, should become aware of this principle of canonical exegesis and theological interpretation as they exegete a particular text or formulate a certain doctrine.

Moreover, Benedict XVI recognized that the living community of faith, the *viva vox* of the people of God, denotes the "deeper author" of Scripture as it participates in its living interpretation and application of God's Word. Evangelicals must not forget that the particular community of faith offers a definite interpretation of the Word, sometimes different from other ecclesial communities, because it participates in the "authorship of the Word" in a different manner with all its particular historic prejudices and presuppositions. Scripture is given and interpreted within the "historical consciousness" of the Church. The Word's dynamic theological interpretation transcends pure scientific exegesis and calls for the participation of the living people of God in this process. "Deeper author", as a living

historical organism, may also contribute to better conception of the deeper meaning (*sensus plenior*) of the sacred Scriptures.

This involvement of the Church in the experiential understanding and interpretation of Scripture, furthermore, is best understood within the Christian reality of worship.

7.3.1.3 *The Liturgical/Ecclesial Character and Use of Scripture*

The Orthodox theologian, Theodore G. Stylianopoulos, explains the ecclesial use of the Bible:

By “ecclesial” I mean communal, that is, issuing from the life of the Church, belonging to the Church, and thus both attesting to and promoting the well-being and unity of the Church. When the faith of community is perceived as a living organism nourished and guided by God’s Spirit and not merely as an institution of laws, customs, and councils, then the full significance of the ecclesial character of Scripture is clearly seen as part of the work of the Spirit and the charismatic life of God’s people (Stylianopoulos, 2005:4).

The ecclesial role of the Holy Scriptures, therefore, is not only bound to the interpretation of the Word of God within the Church by its magisterium. The ecclesial nature of Scripture is also related to the living presence of the Spirit at the liturgy. Recent Catholic contributions remind us that Scripture belongs to the Church in the sense of its *liturgical* community or tradition. In this particular sense, and not in a metaphysical sense, the Church has the authority to guard the Scriptures. Even the Reformers, unlike modern Evangelicals, held a high view of the authority of the Church and its liturgy, and recognized this authority as an instrument “through which God makes the truth of his Word known” (Mathison, 2001: 268). Evangelicals should be reminded that the Church is not just a teaching, preaching and interpreting community of faith. It is also a living organism that hears and applies the biblical teachings in its daily and weekly life of worship and at the Lord’s Table. Both John Paul II and Benedict XVI expressed the historical Christian belief that the liturgy or worship is the “home of the Word” of God (Ratzinger, 2008: 82; 2010b: art. 181, 191; see section 4.6.1). Ronald D. Witherup, in his article “The Interpretation of the Bible in Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches” (2005), argues that, in the Orthodox tradition, the Bible is “a verbal icon of God” (Witherup, 2005: 210). All liturgical life of the Catholic and Orthodox Churches is rooted in the biblical readings that make God present. Evangelicals, therefore, should not forget that the dogmatic expression of faith in the Scripture principle is fully realized only in the act of worship of the community. *Lectio*

divina is a crucial element of the spiritual growth recognized in the ecumenical approach to Scripture today (Fosarelli and Gorman, 2005: 229-238). Thus, not only is Scripture *interpreted* within the given community of faith, it is also *lived* in its liturgical life.

Above-mentioned ecumenical requirements for Evangelicals, which point to Scripture as the Church's Book, are summarized in the following section.

7.3.1.4 Summary

Keith Mathison, in his *Shape of Sola Scriptura* (2001) explains the correct understanding of the *sola scriptura* principle:

The modern Evangelical doctrine of Scripture—*sola scriptura*—is self-contradictory and fundamentally absurd. If applied consistently it is fatal for Christianity. A growing number of Evangelicals are realizing this, and because they have been told that *sola scriptura* is the Reformation and Protestant doctrine, they are flocking to Rome and to Constantinople in an attempt to maintain a coherent faith... Instead of advocating chaos, the Evangelical church must regain an understanding of the Reformation doctrine of *sola scriptura* which is essentially nothing more than the early Church's doctrine of Scripture and tradition framed within a different historical context... The Church must affirm that Scripture is to be interpreted in and by the communion of saints within the theological context of the rule of faith (Mathison, 2001: 346-47).

Evangelicals, therefore, should be constantly aware that Scripture is never really *alone*.

Three theological elements of the ecumenical expression of the *sola scriptura* principle might help Evangelicals to come closer to a joint ecumenical statement on the Scripture principle: (1) recognition of the contribution of the ecumenical theologians of Scripture (St Augustine and Karl Barth) who upheld the authority of the Church and the dynamic nature of God's revelation, (2) the canonical exegesis that expounds the unity of the canonical writings within a given community of faith as a participating community, and (3) the ecclesial and liturgical use of the "living" Scriptures.

In Stephen Dray's article "Evangelical Tradition", some supplementary elements are rightfully mentioned: Evangelicals have to be highly sensitive to their spiritual and theological sub-culture; they have to be aware that the personal element is never separated from the interpretation of Scripture and the life of the community; only God's Word is infallible; the Spirit has been guiding the Church for more than 2000 years; apart from the dangers we need to explore the benefits of the participation of the interpretative community; Evangelicals should be more humble and recognize self-contradictions in their

theological systems (Dray, 2007: 1-2). Finally, the author's closing experiential remarks may be used here as a conclusion of this section:

I am an unashamed Protestant. I am committed to *Sola Scriptura*. I am a 'Word' man. I am sceptical of all human authorities . . . including my own. But I am also aware that access to the meaning of Scripture (and its application) is a complicated business and that it is invariably accessed only through listening to the fragile explanations of fallible people who, at the same time, have prayerfully sought the Spirit of God to guide them into a measure of his truth and have found him not to fail. In fellowship with them, I prayerfully listen to Scripture and (I trust) have so grasped the truth (or been grasped by Truth) that, fallible though I am, I have heard his voice and have shared something of what he has said to me with those who listen! And, of course, *when I am persuaded that I have heard him, I will be bold, yet humble, to declare what has been said . . . whatever the opinion of others. That is what Sola Scriptura means for me!* (2007: 2, italics mine).

7.3.2 The Community of Faith Measured by Scripture (for Catholics)

Francis Beckwith, in his recent publication *Return to Rome: Confessions of an Evangelical Catholic* (2009), observes a simple but important formula for ecumenical success in regard to the Scripture principle:

Post-Vatican II Catholicism is more sensitive to Scripture; post-Vatican II Evangelicalism is more sensitive to tradition (Beckwith, 2009: 127).

It has been already concluded that some progressive Evangelicals have already recognized this principle. They should also be more conscious of ecclesial tradition and the ecclesial nature of Scripture. But on the other hand, what about the Catholic sensitivity to Scripture? Has Catholic theology reached a point of ecumenical convergence with Evangelicals on the Scripture principle by sufficiently redefining some of the fundamental traditional theological aspects of the Scripture doctrine? In order to make a serious and complete contribution to a joint statement of faith in *sola scriptura* Catholic theologians should be mindful of the fact that Scripture has to be the measuring rod of every ecclesial tradition, *norma normans non normata* (the norming norm not normed).

7.3.2.1 Scripture as Norma Normans (St Augustine and Karl Barth)

St Augustine once stated:

In the innumerable books that have been written latterly we may sometimes find the same truth as in Scripture, but *there is not the same authority. Scripture has a sacredness peculiar to itself* (Augustine, *Reply to Faustus* 11.5 quoted in Geisler & MacKenzie, 1995: 200, italics mine).

For Augustine, the Bible *alone* remains the infallible authority (1995: 201). It is the *norma normans* of all ecclesiastical traditions (for detailed explanation of *norma normans* see King, 2001: 145-179). Catholics, therefore, should never overlook that, though the Church is a historical guardian of Scripture, it has no power over it and it is not infallible (2001: 261). The divine power of the Word transcends the authority of the community of faith. The Catholic Church must recognize that for Augustine the *regula fidei* was “essentially a summary of Holy Scripture” (Mathison, 2001: 40). The Church has no doctrinal authority over the Bible.

Moreover, the Barthian theology of the Word includes also the written Word of God in Scripture within, of course, the broader reality of God’s revelation. John W. Robbins’ article “Karl Barth” in the *Trinity Review* reveals this paradox in Barth’s theology. On the one hand Barth defended the *sola scriptura* principle, though the meaning of this belief is altered (Robbins, 1998: 2). On the other hand, Barth opposed and rejected *sola scriptura* and other *sola*-s (1998: 3). Robbins, in general, proposes that Barth was a controversial figure and that his beliefs were not always clear. Though Scripture is a witness to the Word, and not primarily the broader Word of God, it still deserves the title of that Word. Barth could not easily deny the foundational Reformation principle of the *sola scriptura*. He denied the equality of the Word of God and Scripture, not mainly on the ground of the testimony of Scripture, but on the basis of his fear of “fundamentalism”, concludes Robbins (1998: 2). As noticed above, even the Scriptures themselves confirm that sacred writings in the Bible may be called the Word of God. The ECT document recognized the equality of the Scriptures and the Word of God as well.

Progressive Catholicism has never fully denied this emphasis in its elucidations of the Scripture principle. The Word in Scripture, though not limited to the written account, must transcend every revelation from tradition foreign to Scripture. This is the emphasis of Karl Barth, an ecumenical theologian, sometimes forgotten in the contemporary Catholic studies of Scripture. Catholics, therefore, ought to be more cognizant of this Christian reality.

7.3.2.2 *The Fallibility of the Magisterium*

In order to create a joint statement on *sola scriptura* with Evangelicals, Catholics should also be attentive to the fallible nature of the magisterium. Everything human is fallible and cannot be faultless. Apart from the partly Evangelical but individualistic position of John Cardinal Henry Newman (see section 4.4.2.4), contemporary Catholic theology does not generally support this principle. Avery Cardinal Dulles' words might be an asset when he explicitly claims:

Vatican Council II, in its Decree on Ecumenism, pointed out that Protestants and Catholics generally differ in their understanding of the proper role of the magisterium in the interpretation of Scripture. In the Catholic view, according to the Council, "an authentic teaching office plays a special role in the explanation and proclamation of the written word of God. The difference, however, may not be unbridgeable. *In point of fact it is doubtful that the Catholic magisterium has ever issued an irreformable decision regarding the literal meaning of any given text, and thus Catholic exegetes may, with proper deference to official teaching, continue to explore exegetical questions according to their own proper methodology* (Dulles, 1983: 261, italics mine).

There are also some hints in the theology of Benedict XVI, who might give a democratic role to the magisterium (see section 5.6.3.3) as the listening institution that constantly heeds the Word. The sole divine authority of Scripture is based on the presupposition of the possibility of the fallibility of the magisterium. Protestants believe that the Church of Christ has the authority but that it is not infallible (King, 2001: 261). Keith Mathison argues that the Catholic concept of the infallibility of the Church has some serious difficulties. He points out:

Even if the Roman Catholic church or the Eastern Orthodox church had a *charism* of infallibility, it would be of no practical use since neither can say with any real degree of certainty exactly when and where it has been used in every case. Rome, for example, teaches that the pope is infallible in certain cases, but she has not ever provided an infallible and definitive list of every one of those cases. The point is simply this: a standard that is not always and everywhere infallible is not an infallible standard and cannot function as an infallible standard (Mathison, 2001: 263).

Though Mathison is right, one cannot go so far. As Powell perhaps exaggerates: "In a sense the Magisterium is irrelevant since the Roman Catholic Church claims that revelation ceased with the apostles, and the question of *sola Scriptura* is a question of sufficient revelation" (Powell, 2002: 373). However, the uncertainty of the exercise of infallibility naturally leads to the conclusion that the Catholic Church might accept the possibility of the fallibility of the magisterium (and the Pope) in exegetical interpretation of the Bible or

promulgation of a new doctrine. Some progressive Catholic thinkers have already recognized this ecumenical requirement.

While I am fully aware that the traditional Catholic belief of the infallibility of the magisterium has never officially been changed, if there is a thoughtful ecumenical joint statement on Scripture the Catholic Church has to accept that the exegetical and dogmatic role of the magisterium needs to be guided and measured by the Holy Spirit's testimony through Scripture. There is no hope for an ecumenical understanding of Scripture and its interpretation without this modified view of the magisterium's role. Catholic dogmatics should give more emphasis to this principle.

7.3.2.3 *The Reformability of Tradition*

Consequentially, if the magisterium's decision on exegesis or doctrine can be reformable, the same principle might apply to historical traditions and their contemporary interpretations by the Church. Tradition, with upper case "T", has been differentiated from traditions with lower case "t". Tracey Roland, in his interpretation of Vatican II, reminds:

While on the one hand Vatican II broadened the notion of Tradition when studied in the context of its relationship to Scripture to include actually existing practices, on the other hand it offered no analysis of how these lower case "t" traditions or practices might be transposed into new cultural registers. This was notwithstanding the fact that for many Catholics the jettisoning of these traditions was seen to be at the very centre of the council's agenda (Rowland, 2008: 52).

The readiness of contemporary Catholic theologians to re-interpret and even jettison some of the traditions of the Church might substantially contribute to a joint statement on *sola scriptura*. Since there is a distinction between Tradition and traditions, what would be the ultimate measure that could determine which tradition is acceptable and which is not suitable for the disciples of Christ, if not the sacred Scriptures, the infallible Word of God? Some Catholic theologians claim that the Bible is a "sole norm" (Mullins, 2005: 428) and a "normative source for the Church and for theology" (Dulles, 1983: 261).

It is remarkable that even Joseph Ratzinger, in his early theology around 1966, "wanted to recover the role of Scripture as a tool of assessing church teaching and practice" (Allen, 2000: 71). It might be that the Pope realized the fact that "the Church's doctrinal authority does not consist in any authority above the Word" (Mathison, 2001: 270). Later, however, he warned against the extreme tendency to "wield Scripture against the church"

(Allen, 2000: 71). In the spirit of Vatican II, Hans Küng similarly criticized “traditionalism” and upheld “tradition”. As already indicated, Küng called for an “evangelical” interpretation of the Catholic tradition claiming that tradition would be strengthened by critical assessment by the Holy Scripture (see section 5.5.1).

It is clear that the progressive Catholic theology might open the possibility of reclaiming scriptural authority as the authority of the only God-breathed book as *norma normans* (Küng, 1988: 64; Fitzmyer, 1994: 79-80) and *norma absoluta* (Mathison, 2001: 266) in the process of evaluation of tradition.

Thus, though I am totally conscious of the traditional Catholic emphasis on the infallibility of the *partim/partim* revelation of God that was never officially repudiated, Catholics should never fail to recall that there are some doubtful and unreliable traditions that must be re-evaluated, re-considered and re-interpreted by Scripture only as *norma normans*, within the community of faith always sensitive to the voice of the living God.

7.3.2.4 Summary

Can one stay a Catholic and still believe in *sola scriptura*? (Beckwith, 2009: 120). It might be thinkable to accept this principle in its ecumenical formulation only if the contemporary Catholic expression of the Scripture principle takes into serious consideration that: (1) adherence to *sola scriptura*, in its essential meaning, was adopted by St. Augustine and other Church fathers, and some more progressive ecumenical “catholic” theologians today like Karl Barth; (2) the magisterium or teaching office may be fallible in its exegetical or doctrinal interpretation, and (3) some traditions of the church ought to be reconsidered in order to fit the criterion of Tradition always based on the living Christ and supported by the teachings of Scripture only.

Having in mind both the ecumenical requirements for Evangelicals and Catholics let me venture to propose a possible ecumenical joint statement on the Scripture principle.

7.4 Toward an Ecumenical Joint Statement

Searching for a “centrist position”, as an exceptional working principle for a joint ecumenical statement on the Scripture principle, Avery Cardinal Dulles declares that the position would reject radical tendencies to subordinate the Scriptures to personal experience or political action, and it would also deny conservative tendencies which accord peremptory authority to individual texts. He continues:

The centrist positions we have examined differ from the “orthodoxy” of recent centuries and from contemporary conservative theology by insisting that the biblical texts must be read in their full historical and literary context and pondered in the light of Christian tradition and present experience. But, unlike radical theology, the centrist positions accept the Bible as a primary embodiment of the word of God and as an indispensable normative source for the church and for theology (Dulles, 1983: 261).

For Dulles, the Bible is read and interpreted in the Church but at the same time it is the *norma normans* of every belief and practice of the Church. Dulles closes:

There has been a growing ecumenical consensus to the effect that both the "two sources" theory of Counter Reformation Catholicism and the *sola Scriptura* formula of Reformation Protestantism are unsatisfactory. Against the former position it is argued that Scripture and tradition are not two distinct reservoirs, each containing a certain portion of revealed truth.. Against the latter, it is observed that Scripture is never really alone. The Christian reads it within the church, in the light of the use the church makes of it (Dulles, 1983: 261).

Cardinal Dulles seems to ground his “centrist position” primarily on the progressive view of revelation and Scripture put forward by Vatican II’s *Dei Verbum*. The “two sources” theory and the traditional form of the *sola scriptura* principle both represent outdated traditional positions of Catholic and Protestant/Evangelical theology. The attempt to create a centrist ecumenical position on the Scripture principle, therefore, remained substantially unchanged in its formulation from the time of Vatican II or immediately post-Vatican II. Is there a hope for an even more progressive way of verbalizing a new “centrist” ecumenical *sola scriptura* statement?

Taking into the consideration contributions of both open-minded Evangelicals and progressive Catholics, a feasible ecumenical joint statement of the *sola scriptura* principle will be finally offered. It has to pay special attention to the results of the research already presented. Every Evangelical and Catholic believer should feel comfortable with this expression of faith without sacrificing the truth as “the only possible basis for the Church reunion” (Kreeft, 1997: xvi). The proposed statement is this:

The Holy Scripture is the divinely inspired and self-authenticated Word of God, received, recognized, generated and compiled by the Spirit-dwelt community of faith. It is interpreted by the same Holy Spirit who spoke through the prophets and the apostles and continues to speak through the historic apostolic Tradition and the teaching office of the Church. It is rightly appropriated only by spiritual and theological interpretation, and is experienced, heeded and obeyed by the living and worshipping people of God. It is the sole and unique criterion of truth and revelation of God, the *norma normans*² of every single historical belief and practice (traditions) and all contemporary interpretations.

This is what the *sola scriptura* principle should mean.

7.5 Final Summary and Conclusion

In Chapter 2 of this research the main objective was to present the traditional Protestant teaching of the *sola scriptura* principle primarily generated by Martin Luther and John Calvin as well as other Reformers and embraced by Protestant Orthodoxy. Chapter 3 continued with the contemporary Evangelical expression of the Scripture principle that essentially became more sensitive to the concept of tradition and interpretation of Scripture within the community of faith. In Chapter 4 is presented the dynamic character of the traditional Roman Catholic “two sources” theory on the authority and nature of the Bible and the Word of God. Chapter 5 presented the contributions of the progressive Catholic theologians at and after Vatican II, as they have become more sensitive to the profoundly unique authority of Scripture. A special emphasis is given to Benedict XVI, who has become the distinctive “postmodern” ecumenical theologian and interpreter of Scripture in current Catholic thought. In chapter 6 the biblical arguments on *sola scriptura* of both Evangelicals and Catholics are juxtaposed and compared. Both sides ground their arguments on the assumptions of their respective dogmatic and theological positions. This concluding chapter has offered a hopefully unbiased and objective attempt to create a joint ecumenical statement based on the previous results of the entire research. This is done with a hope that this statement might serve the present and future generations of both Evangelical and Catholic theologians in their further reflection on this extremely important and fundamental point of Christian theology.

² *norma normans*: “the rule that rules” or “the norming norm”, that is, the standard according to which all other standards are measured.

In order to make an ultimate ecumenical formulation concerning Scripture Evangelicals must become more aware of the interpretative role of the particular community of faith based on canonical exegesis and deeper author theory and the ecclesial and worshipful character of sacred writings. Catholics, however, have a similar task; to uphold Scripture as *norma normans* and to re-consider the limits of the authority of the teaching office as well as the reformable nature of their Tradition and traditions.

Any ecumenical joint statement would not be sufficient without an appeal such as the following one, addressed to all Christian believers by one of the contemporary Catholic thinkers:

Only by *loving* and *living* Scripture can we prove to Protestants that we are brothers and therefore should not remain separated. *Ecumenism and the road to reunion begin here, with Scripture as our common road map.* How dare we know and love it any less than Protestants? It's our own book (Kreeft, 1988: 276, italics mine).

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