

HOLY SCRIPTURE AND THE SCIENCE OF FAITH

~: Romano Guardini ~:

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Translator's note: Romano Guardini's "Heilige Schrift und Glaubenswissenschaft" was originally published in the little-known German review, *Die Schildgenossen* 8 (1928): 24–57. The essay, translated into Italian and in an abridged form in French, played an influential role in Catholic discussions of biblical interpretation and theology in the years prior to the Second Vatican Council. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, cited the importance of this essay in his classic 1988 Erasmus Lecture, "Biblical Interpretation in Crisis."¹ This marks the first time Guardini's text has been translated into English. In the text that follows, all footnotes are from the original publication, with slight amendments made for style.

The New Testament consists of numerous texts brought together in a canon—a word meaning "order" or official collection. These are the four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, the letters of the Apostles Paul, Peter, Jude, James, and John, and the Letter to the Hebrews, and the Book of Revelation. In what way can these texts be sources of knowledge for a science, theology? They present themselves as historical documents—as reports of events, messages of teachings, ordinances, or commands; the aftermath of religious occurrences. The most obvious thing would be to treat them simply as historical sources, just as we would do to other sources as well. If we were to do that, would we do them justice?²

We stand here before a fundamental question concerning the teaching regarding knowledge in general and religious knowledge of the Christian sort in

1 For background on Guardini's "Heilige Schrift und Glaubenswissenschaft," see "Biblical Interpretation in Crisis: On the Question of the Foundations and Approaches of Exegesis Today," in *The Essential Pope Benedict XVI: His Central Writings and Speeches*, ed. John F. Thornton and Susan B. Varenne (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 243–258, at 254; 438–439, n. 25. See also the long appreciation by Ignace de la Potterie, "Biblical Exegesis: A Science of Faith," in *Opening Up the Scriptures: Joseph Ratzinger and the Foundations of Biblical Interpretation*, ed. José Granados, Carlos Granados, and Luis Sanchez-Navarro (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 30–64.

2 The present essay appears in the first instance to concern only the theologian. Nevertheless, the editorial staff believes it ought to be included here. There is today a double danger: on the one hand, that theology ends up falling outside the context of concrete, religious living and its accompanying experiences; on the other, that concrete, religious living declares itself to be disinterested in theology and deteriorates into mere praxis—of feeling, or method, or any sort of experiment. This essay is concerned, under particular aspects, to present the essence of the properly theological, beginning from the first realities. In this way, it will perhaps be able to make the meaning of the properly theological perceptible also to the non-specialist. Because it takes as its point of departure not the specialist but the common way of thinking and speaking about the things of faith today, although this thinking and speaking is very blurred, we hope the essay will be excused for going into more details or making more repetitions than might appear necessary to some readers. — The Editors of *Die Schildgenossen*.

particular. The question touching upon the theory of knowledge contains first of all a general problem: what does that act which we designate as "knowing" mean? What does it mean, not according to its psychological process but according to its content, its signification? This particular act claims to apprehend "objects"; is this correct? What are these objects? How are they related to the apprehending subject? What limits are placed upon this apprehension? The general question of the theory of knowledge deals then with the specific relation that obtains between the bearer of knowledge and the object of knowledge in the act of knowing in general.

But then the question reaches further: Is this relation universally the same? Or does it signify a difference, when in one instance it has to do with comprehending a chemical process, whereas in another instance it tries to understand the motives that led Charlemagne in his political policies against the Saxons? Thinking is not law-giving formation of the object through spontaneous categories, as Kant and the school of Idealism would assert, if we simplify the problem. Thinking apprehends, rather, reality existing in itself and in a determined way, and it must do so as this reality demands to be apprehended.

But this apprehension does not mean a simple mirroring of reality. Cognition is not a dead mirror that reflects an object. It is not an apparatus of logical forms that are brought to a unity in the subject, nor does it receive every object that comes "before the lens." Cognition is a living motion of the real man to the object; it is an encounter between man and object. But in this movement and encounter, there emerges a meaning valid beyond the concrete event: "truth."³ If that becomes clear to us, then we can no longer suppose that it happens as a matter of course, the way a mechanical apparatus functions. Rather, a concrete interplay of powers is carried out, a living happening and encountering, and we must ask: when does it come to pass?

The emergence of the content of validity, the truth, depends on that concrete act of knowing of the living man coming to pass. What are the—not abstract, but living—preconditions of its coming to pass? In the concrete act of knowing, I am not concerned with "subject in general," but with the living subject; not with "object in general," but with the "concrete object." What does this mean for the act of knowing?

Being is in itself not homogenous, but qualitatively diverse. It is diverse according to great realms of being, and within these realms it is once again diverse according to types, subtypes, all the way down to the fullness of individual determinations. Let us remain with the realms of being and let us further distinguish these realms with very rough delineations: the realm of the mechanical-dead; that

3 Thus, the idealistic understanding is here fundamentally denied. This understanding separates cognition into the concrete process and the ideal frame of reference; the former really and the latter effectively. In truth, there is only living cognition in which, being concretely one, the ideal frame of reference stands in the real act, and the essence of which lies precisely in this concreteness.

of the biological and psychic-living; of the spiritual-personal; of the pneumatological-supernatural. Finally, not in the same category, God.⁴ These realms are qualitatively diverse, not deriving from one another even if they stand at the same time in a certain relation to each other.⁵ The qualitative diversity now also relates to their knowability, to how it becomes a reality for the knower.

There is no singular, sweeping, superficial cognition for the whole world, no knowing that could be directed in a uniform way upon a chemical reaction, a mechanical apparatus, the growth process of a plant, the development of an animal, a human stirring of emotion, the formation of a concept, an ethical decision, a philosophical problem of essence, the religious phenomenon of prayer. A largely dominant way of thinking thinks so. But such a knowledge simply does not exist! The supposition is false as such and to tolerate it at all reveals a spiritual feebleness!

In the face of such a will to know, precisely the essential element within the various realms of objects closes itself off. If this essential dimension is to be apprehended, then knowing must be living. The ontological particularity of things must correspond to a noetic particularity of the act of knowing; the specific sort of object must be apprehended within the appropriate specific categories.

What is Knowledge and How is it Acquired?

Let us sharpen the question: Cognition is a special way that the concrete subject apprehends through a living movement the real thing—in its being, in its essence, in its meaning; for itself and in its relation to other things; in its concrete uniqueness, as well as according to its general characteristics.

This cognition is a living, concrete act. Certainly, it has a general “meaning” that goes beyond this uniqueness. The generality of the meaning of knowledge becomes, however, an empty specter if it does not remain related to the living act. It is not in the generality of meaning alone that the essence of knowledge lies, but rather in the fact that this generality radiates in an individual act, as the knowledge belonging to this man. Furthermore, the object of this act is the concrete thing, which contains a validity that exceeds its singularity, an intelligible concept, a norm, a law, a meaning.

Once again, however, this general validity must not be taken detached and in itself, otherwise it becomes an empty specter. It must remain related to the concrete thing. The meaning of knowledge is not found in an intelligible concept, value, or law; it is found in the general to the extent that it is something general from something concrete. Is all of this mechanically apprehended? Does it force

4 On this point, see Guardini, “Gedanken über das Verhältnis von Christentum und Kultur” [“Thoughts Concerning the Relation Between Christianity and Culture”], *Die Schildgenossen* 6 (1926): 281–315.

5 See Guardini, “Gedanken,” for more concerning this and also the relation of analogy, order, expression, etc.

itself of its very nature upon the one knowing, as things placed before a camera's lens impress themselves onto the camera's film?

Let us follow then the act of knowing in its endeavor to reach the various contents of objectivity. Here is reality as such. The real existence of a thing appears to be a simple, readily graspable matter. That this thing is right here seems to impose itself on us. But let us think perhaps of the phenomenon of attentiveness. Some things we grasp keenly and clearly. Others we have undoubtedly seen one time, then later, at some other opportunity, they come to mind; but in the very act of seeing, we failed to notice them at all; conscious attentiveness was not directed toward them. Between both extremes of grasping reality—from absolutely nothing to complete clarity—there are an infinite number of intermediate forms.

Such a gradation of perceiving reality can come into play even with very clear consciousness. For certain natures, the world has something peculiarly unreal, dreamlike. Perhaps each person experiences such times in the age of development, or at certain hours of the day, or given certain interior conditions. There also appear to be periods in history where this becomes generally stronger; consider, for example, the Romantic period. On the other hand, for other natures, things have a great intensity of actual existence; so much so that they nearly invade the mind and can engender an angst before things and the world. What is here distinctive is that the Platonic type of philosophical thinking adopts a gradation of reality, degrees of the real. Just as this model adopts this gradation based on original experience, the antithetical inductive-analytical model rejects it. Clearly then, the apprehension of reality is in no way an automatic thing.

Even less so is the apprehension of quality, the grasping of the intelligible notion in the multiplicity of its determinations and the unity of its structure. It ought to be seen: this thing is such and such; it is different from other things. Wholeness and particularities should be discovered, associated, penetrated. The final result will be the completely grasped, distinguished, understood concept. This does not, however, happen easily. How could it otherwise have come to pass that materialism—and not only the primitive sort but also the scholarly variety—understood “life” as a function of chemical and physical powers? That it was capable of stating that the brain secretes thoughts as the bodily excretory organ the waste product of metabolism? That was a crude example; but innumerable others, and of a more refined sort, can convey the point.

Before such misperceptions, we first of all raise the technical objection: this and that fact stand against it, the assertion is provably false, and the like. If we regard the matter precisely, we will note that with this objection something else resonates. We not only sense that the assertion is erroneous but say also: something is not right here, something is blind. And indeed, it is a blindness that we make into a reproach against the thinker. He is not allowed to have this blindness! To mix up the qualitative realm in this way is not only untrue, it is impermissible; and the impermissibility can go so far that we basically render a judgment of a certain

insignificance. Thus, the task of formation, indeed the ethical task, touches upon knowing—just as, by the way, the problems of attentiveness in the widest sense, the difficulties of order or purifying of the relation to reality, are not only noetic issues but also pedagogical and ethical ones.

If we observe ourselves, then we shall see how easily we mix up the qualitative realms! How intractably inclined we are to grasp living things with the categories of physical thinking, psychic things with those of the biological, spiritual things with those of the psychological; how often we jumble up ethical, political, and economic determinations. If standing before reality it is necessary to have a sensitivity toward the encounter with it, so also, standing before quality it is necessary to have an attentiveness toward this specific property. These things, however, encompass a whole series of theoretical and practical questions that we will take up below.

Apprehending the object becomes even less self-evident as soon as values and norms are concerned. There are dispositions whose certain values become a reality for the knower basically not at all, or only very imperfectly. We probably have all regretfully noticed how inaccessible for us, in contrast to others, the beauty of an artwork was, or even the beauty of an entire branch of the fine arts. Or we were receptive for such things at certain times and not at others; or the receptivity to these things changed according to the mood of the moment. But all of this determines our cognitive judgment.

The meaning of our daily work or our relations with other people were sometimes living and clear; at other times, fluctuating, or everything could be twisted toward the obnoxious. But this had once again an influence on our value judgment. There are times of indifference, when everything loses its meaning for our perception. If we know ourselves well, we then take care in such moments not to render a judgment or make a decision. Moral obligations—of fidelity, gratitude, responsibility—are clear when a living and open disposition allows them to clearly become apparent. But they can also recede and become nebulous. Indeed, they can appear to our sensibilities as loathsome, so that the whole vigilance of conscience is required in order to fulfill such obligations with consistency of judgment and faithfulness of character.

Along these lines there would be much to say. It is possible, looking to someone's disposition, to point out a plain model of his way of viewing the world and his values; an unconscious technique of interpreting, of attenuating and emphasizing, of transforming meanings, even of falsifying norms and values due to the influence of mood, passion, situation and environment, mannerism and habit, the results of which, supported by reasons and theories, then present themselves in the apparently objective form of a judgment.

Even what appears to be the most exact moment of apprehending an object—finding a thing's measure in the widest sense of the word, its size, weight, intensity, need, and urgency—is subjected to subjective presuppositions. The psychology of estimation and deception reveals how little a false estimation can be traced back

only to the poor workings of eye or ear; rather, it is to be traced back to the fact that psychological impulses mislead us. The whole system of the senses functions wrongly—because it is meant to function wrongly, because subconscious interests have an effect on the process of apprehending an object and thus falsify matters of fact.

The Knowing Subject and the Objects of Knowledge

The adequate apprehension of a thing in its essence is therefore anything but self-evident. It sets up rather certain prerequisites, which are often fulfilled either not at all or only imperfectly. And this is the case not only because man's powers are not up to the demands of the object, but also because an inner will is at work, a will that, with a delicate game of selecting, weakening, sharpening, and transforming influences, does not let the objects become a reality for the knower as they are, but as they are wished to be, thus making them to be an atmosphere in which the individual feels confirmed in his self-desire and borne along by it.

The world of objects divides into a multitude of qualitatively distinguished realms. Coming to know them sets up, however, certain presuppositions in the knowing disposition. There is not only the general problem of epistemology, but also the difficulty of a knowledge differentiated according to its proper object as well as its preconditions. The latter extend from the realm of the psychological to the most deeply held moral convictions; from questions of attentiveness to difficulties regarding the formation of knowledge. In this regard, I will try to point out a few aspects.

Here we find above all the qualitative adequation of the knowing power to the object. Cognition is not a stiff apparatus but a living and pliable power of that spiritual and corporeal unity that we call "man." "I perceive" means that in that special, fundamental, receptive disposition, one that cannot be traced further back, I direct "myself" toward the object. The entirety of this act calls into play many powers of apprehension: powers of eyes, hands, ears; of imagination, distinction, comparison; of insight and understanding; of combining and judgment.

In the movement of cognition, the living act of knowing transcends itself—intentionally—toward the object standing in itself; it conforms to its specifying characteristic, inspects it, takes it up, takes hold of it, enables it to give witness to its own identity. If this self-conforming of the knowing subject is not present, the object fails to become a reality for the subject. It is discarded. To the extent that I approach the object without being "receptive," actively receptive, I discard it from the horizon of my perception.

This self-assimilation of the knowing power to the object becomes possible through the fact that all the contents of the world are given along with the living existence of man. Here, the old theory of microcosmic nature is pertinent. Man is in fact the living abbreviation of Being. Every knowing means a simultaneous self-actuation. In the knowledge of an object, something in man corresponding to

this object rises up and enters into the living act. Throughout the whole history of epistemology, the awareness of this issue is traceable, though often misconstrued in an actualistic or monistic manner.

This self-conforming of the knower to the object may not be pushed as far as the assertion: "I know only what I myself am." I need not concretely be an animal in order to understand an animal. The content of the act of knowing as such is not real, but represented. In order that something can become the content of awareness, can become "known," it is not demanded that it be concretely a component of the knower's very reality.

To this extent "to have knowledge about" is precisely not "to be." But the act of knowing, since its content comes to be something of our consciousness, is not the merely logical act of an abstract logical subject, but rather the real act of a living subject. This subject stands in the act with everything it is. In this way, a mobilization of an existing power proportioned to the object is required if this object is really to be known.

In stating this, however, certain questions result: On what does this ability to come to actuality and conformity depend? How does correct cognition depend on the condition of the whole subject? In what way does it depend on the subject's integrity, acuteness, spiritualization, or even his personal perfection? To what extent are certain sorts of objects and certain levels in every realm of the object bound up with certain presuppositions of moral, spiritual, personal "formation"?

And still the question leads deeper: that qualitative conformity cannot take place in indifference. The matter at hand is not the functioning of a machine but a living act. "Act," however, signifies that it is "performed" by the living subject. Knowledge does not mean a mechanical reflection of the object by a rigid surface; it means, rather, the living reception of the object in the interiority of the person. An object becomes truly known when, in the act of knowing, it actualizes this interiority, and this in a specific way: through the fact that this object is taken into this interiority, and that in the knower a realm of this inner life corresponding to the object is called up or introduced. A life filled with interiority realizes itself only in objects; and here we mean in knowing them.

Objects, for their part, arrive at being known—they stand before us in the inner sphere of living consciousness—only by this consciousness actualizing itself as a living process. And, importantly, this does not happen in a general way, directed toward some "object in general"; instead it regards this particular object. Diverse objects demand the realization not only of a different measure, but also of a qualitatively different sort of content belonging to man's living interiority. The objects establish a certain hierarchy characterized by the fact that the individual things require to an ever-increasing degree coming close, being received. But this means simultaneously that there comes about each time the introduction of a new, qualitative interior realm. And only when the knower in this way welcomes the objects and takes them into himself—thereby committing himself to the very

knowledge of these objects—only then will they really be known. Otherwise such objects are not known, but merely “registered.”

Every object—even the dead, mechanical sort—necessitates a certain degree of earnest consideration. I consider something in earnest when I allow it to impact me. Otherwise I see it without its qualitative force. The moment I truly approach a thing to know it, I simultaneously commit myself to it somehow; I thereby also admit that, for me, “this object matters.” This is not only a matter of objective “correctness”—a purely objective, unconcerned disposition toward the object remains barren.

Only that disposition bears fruit which enacts the earnestness of committing oneself to the object. Every being is intrinsically valuable, every existing thing is ranked among things worthwhile. But values are not dead existents: they have power over the one feeling, and this power is the power of values. When the subject perceiving values admits them into his lived experience, then it portends a threat to his world of values closed in upon itself. But this happens only to the extent that he is receptive, committed, and earnest in knowing. This “crisis” can produce an expansion, provoke an explosion, promote a bending and buckling within the subject. The subject reacts, struggles. Here the battle of the living thing for self-assertion acquires metaphysical significance.

This involvement of the subject with the object through the subject’s self-commitment grows ever more demanding in proportion to the ascending hierarchical order of objects. Standing before a human being considered as object, it attains to a very high level. I can understand something about man by way of feeling along with the mechanical aspects, as I can with a dead object. For other things, a vital resonance will suffice. But everything having to do with character, personality, personal life, heart, and interiority—these I only know to the extent that I am really involved with it. I have to become active in a particular sense of the word; I have to live *with* the life happening before my eyes; I have to let it penetrate me. And this means a new self-commitment. I am put under the active power of the other’s personality, under the dynamism of his character and the force of his destiny. But this is necessary, otherwise I do not understand him.

The notion that the person is in no way an object but is always only realized in action is false. A person is not only the shining point of the act, but also an abiding countenance, a lasting form. However, a person is all this as something interior, and I can only know him when I “take” him as something interior, which is something I can do by participating in his life and experience. Precisely in this way do I take this person into my own interior life and expose my interiority to the power of a foreign form.

“Lived Faithfulness” and “Knowing” God

Indeed, the cognition of ultimate, personal values makes still further demands. Let us take an example: faithfulness, as the essential relation of one person to

another, as a value and a task. The salvation of a person depends upon his being faithful. Now, how can I acquire knowledge of "faithfulness"? Through manifold observations, I can discover the generally recurring psychological fact of a relation characterized by faithfulness; I can purify it conceptually, and then through observation and analysis, through an intuition of the essence as well as the work of logic, I can extract the general phenomenon of "faithfulness."

The result, however, would still not do justice to the object. Faithfulness is not a way of acting that applies to "person in general"; rather, it is a way of acting that applies to a specific person in relation to another specific person. If we talk about a "power of soul," for example, then it is of no concern who has it—a "power of soul" is something that follows upon the general species, in relation to which the individual developing this power is only accidental. In contrast to this, the essential aspect of faithfulness is not given in the general phenomenon. It is not a property of the general species, which is realized in the individual as a bearer of the species; instead, it is a property, or more precisely a characteristic of the person as such. A person, however, only exists as "this person." In regard to person, there is a general notion only in a very provisional sense, because in a very essential way it only exists as this unique person.

What we call "personal" constitutes an objective order of its own sort.⁶ For this reason, the problem of "faithfulness" is truly the problem of "the faithfulness of this human being with respect to this other human being." In this way, I can then do what we have already discussed: grasp the faithfulness of a specific person by means of a sympathetic involvement; experience with the other how someone holding to faithfulness roots himself in his personal worth, or how a different person, who does not live out faithfulness, falls into misery. Would this then mean that our task would be solved? Not yet.

When I say "faithfulness" meaning the process serving as the foundation of salvation, is it—in this context and according to the deepest sense of our task—a matter of indifference whose "salvation" is meant, when it has to do with only a particular one? I think not. As soon as I say "salvation" without any further qualification, then at the heart of the matter, it is my salvation that is meant. As soon as I say "person," then at the heart of the matter, it is my person that is meant. Here we reach the point where the theoretical task of knowing the object is anchored in the practical task of becoming sanctified. And at this point, we must say that being "objective" is no longer of value; it is, rather, an uprooting.

This does not mean that the general problem of personal salvation is of no concern for me; or that the question could not be put forward and answered. It also does not mean a sort of pragmatism that would assert that truth consists in how something concerns me. Nor does it mean that the problem of another person's

6 Here, see Guardini, "Über Sozialwissenschaften und Ordnung unter Personen" ["On Social Science and Order Among Persons"], *Die Schildgenossen* 6 (1926).

salvation is inaccessible for me. All of this is a concern for me, is accessible, and is of great value. But the essential form of the question concerning salvation is the question regarding the salvation of myself. Only from this point begins the way to the salvation of the other.⁷ In this way, the question, "What is faithfulness?" becomes in its ultimate form the question, "What is my faithfulness?" But this means again, the faithfulness that I live out. Not as a person in general, but as myself, who I am. And not as faithfulness toward a person in general, but toward this person. And, finally, not faithfulness in general, but in this moment, and then in the next, and then again in the next.

What this means, then, is that I cannot construct this faithfulness *a priori* [prior to any experience]. I cannot deduce it from observations and general psychic data, nor can I win it from an awareness of how I otherwise am. Rather, I have to live faithfulness. In its formal constitution, which is in fact personal, faithfulness is simply not present until I live it. What faithfulness means in this strictest sense of the phenomenon is something that becomes a reality for me only when I practice it.

This is the existential way of thinking, as Kierkegaard demanded it with such tremendous intensity in response to an objectivistic, noncommittal way of thinking. Kierkegaard showed—admittedly in "catastrophic" exaggeration that exploded every possibility—that there are things, including of course things spiritual such as the ethical and religious realm, which cannot be swallowed, so to speak, in a purely objective way without any inner involvement. Instead, such things only become realities at the moment they are personally realized, lived out. There are ultimate things that are only given to me in such a way that I can only *know* them when I *do* them. Kierkegaard overextends this thought—even in these questions there is also objective reality. But he is certainly right in one point: the essential aspect of the problem of salvation is only noticed in its personal realization.

To this extent, the measure of my knowing depends upon the measure of my doing. The more intensively I act, the more I act from a pure disposition, the more I do this from a greater passion—that much clearer and complete will be the result of my knowledge. "Do what I tell you, and you will notice that it is from the truth." What is said here is certainly not to be expressed in general terms; it is precisely the un-general, the personal and particular. But it flows into general notions and gives to them their credibility and binding force.

To these objects belong all the beings, realities, relations, values, and claims that have to do with the salvation of the person. This means first of all the relation of the person to himself, those things such as: interiority, purity, and character. It also means the relation to another person: faithfulness, love, marriage, friendship, fellowship, mastership, and discipleship. Then there is the relation to worth and to responsibility; the whole world of moral values, relations, and attitudes; the

7 Herein lies an important approach to the words of Christ: "You should love your neighbor as yourself."

world of religious values and realities. They are all valid in themselves; they are not created by us; they are not constituted only through our experience or through categorical determination. About such things as well can a wealth of general statements be made.

All efforts toward an objective teaching of values, an objective ethics, a philosophy of religion, theology—these are all correct and meaningful. It is only the very last realm of the problem, the personal connection to salvation, that becomes a reality for the subject in an existential way of thinking, not an objective one. This happens in living execution, in a living disposition, in doing. *In doing*—or at least in the real readiness to act, a readiness that already anticipates something of this doing.

Everything stated here holds in the highest way with respect to God. By many and various means, I can come to know many things of great significance about God: through a serious wanting to see, accompanied by clear thinking; through observing the world and its characteristics; through the recollection and openness brought about by participating in religious acts. But this is not the final word. God is not like a tree, about which one can say all sorts of things and just leave it at that. God addresses himself to me in a demanding way. My salvation depends entirely upon him. If there is a God, then his being and essence signify a living and absolute claim on me. On me, and not on the other.

God is, in the first moment, a matter of salvation. As the Greek Fathers hold, he is not given to me as *Theos pros heauton*, “God for himself.” As such, he is his own sanctuary. He is given to me only as *Theos pros hemas*, “God for us.” I have no claim on him, and he does not need me; but in his existence, he makes a claim on me, and I need him. Thus, only when I take God as the salvation of my person does he enter into the reality that is possible, full, and decisive for me. Not when I say “God”; but only when I say, “My God.” And then he becomes a reality for me—to the extent that I deal with him seriously; to the degree that I, in ever deeper interiority, take him seriously; to the measure that I realize the “my” in the expression “my God.” But this means: to the extent that I “accomplish his will.”

The New Testament as a “Pneumatic” Text

What does all of this mean for our question?

With the New Testament, we stand before texts. Thus it is first of all a literary object. Such an object wants to be grasped from a disposition different from, for example, a natural process or a sociological event. The one considering has to open himself to the peculiarities of the spiritual event of its creation. Then he will see its character and from this character he will shape concepts and words. He will recognize the mechanisms of a psychological or sociological type that are moreover contained in the object; only they receive from the unique particular their actual meaning: they are mechanisms within a human, creative, spiritual, personal event.

Literary works, for their part, must always be considered according to their specific, literary character. The histories of Thucydides are historical sources: they relate events. Justice is done to them when they are taken as such, when the tidings of former happenings are drawn from them. Or the Homeric epics can also be taken as historical sources and considered with the whole historical apparatus. In this way, one will make meaningful historical discoveries. The essence, however, the poetry, remains mute if one does not draw closer to it with the disposition demanded by it, with the aesthetic disposition. Without this, all historical research remains a fragment. Within the realm of literary objects, therefore, the diverse genres require diverse dispositions of knowledge, and this precisely according to the measure of true science.

At the same time, the fundamental laws of methodical research remain universally the same. But these laws are not mechanical, and the sovereign stipulation of scientific method holds that an object is grasped not with a "general method" but rather with the "method corresponding to the object." This has nothing to do with something mysterious or fanciful; it has rather to do with the problem of attentiveness, with the question of apprehending quality, with the limits of the field of perception, and with the processes of selection, revision, and accentuation of what is understood rightly or wrongly. It is, to say it once more, a matter of our thinking being a process, in which a very different measure of power can be applied in each case; a process which is confronted with the various qualities of the object not in a mechanically uniform way but in living reaction, and in which different qualitative realms of living being can become actualized.

In the New Testament it is a matter first of all of historical sources, that is, of earlier developments; it is a matter of reports, letters, and records. Thus, they must be taken and excavated as such. The result would be the history of those segments of time and those events related by these texts.

Would that be enough for them? What if we would treat them as perhaps the annals of Tacitus, the epistles of Seneca, the visions of Virgil? In so doing, we would have gained very much. We would have heard of the environment in which the texts emerged, of their historical presuppositions, of parallel appearances, and so forth. But still we would not have touched upon the essential element. What is that?

The New Testament is a holy text, the aftermath of a religious event, the expression of revelation. That it is precisely this is presupposed. All the facts from which we gain the conviction that God speaks here, and which justify it if we bind ourselves to it in faith, are here presupposed. "The New Testament," according to its literary character is a collection of chronicles concerning personalities, teachings, and happenings; it is a collection of letters and prophetic texts; it is not a manifestation of a purely natural sort. Rather, it traces back to an event of revelation. It is carried by the power of that event, filled by its contents, and supported by its worth and validity.

God spoke here into history. This he did not only in some general sense according to which everything that comes to pass essentially reaches into eternity somehow; rather, asserting that God spoke in history means that a special, free, and personal self-revelation of God took place. This is the context out of which these texts arose. They emerged out of the *pneuma*, the Holy Spirit, through whom revelation occurs and becomes understandable; the Spirit who interiorizes Christ within man, who works such that man takes hold of, makes his very own, recognizes, and lives out Christ and what has been opened up in Christ.

Scripture is the work of Christ's *pneuma*; it is inspired. It is a pneumatic text, a holy text. Thus, this text forms over and above its purely literary determination a particular realm for a special sort of object. It therefore also demands a specific disposition corresponding to the text: a disposition capable of grasping its qualitative specificity; of characterizing as its own the categories that do justice to the text's essence; of saying in what way the "givens" of other points of departure (historical, psychological) are applicable to it.

It is possible to treat the gospels as any other source that claims to put forth history—the histories of Thucydides, for example—and according to this method the gain would be invaluable. The only question is whether the text, according to its proper character, belongs in the same class of objects as Thucydides. It is a dogma, and a false one, to suppose *a priori* that each text speaking of what has transpired must be treated as Thucydides.

In reality, the gospels are reports of events which are certainly historical, but which happen in a wholly different manner than the Peloponnesian War. Their coming to pass stems from God; they are salvific events, pneumatic happenings. They are accounts that work "with ink and paper"; they employ the usual words and grammatical structures of the time; they contain the then-current views; they are built into a concrete social and historical milieu; all of this is just as other narratives. Nevertheless, it is a particular sort of reporting grounded in the pneumatic, in men who themselves stand in the experience of revelation and speak from it. These accounts, therefore, are completely and objectively something other than the histories of Thucydides. The events are of a special sort; the points of view, purposes, and standards are different; the existential layers of man and things present in this narrative are other; and above all, the fundamental reality presented here is a supernatural reality: God and his holy action constitutive of our salvation. It is a matter of sacred history—and that may not, despite every analogy, be taken simply as profane history.

The Pauline letters can be treated as ancient treatises concerning moral objects, like those of Seneca, Epictetus, or Marcus Aurelius, and in this way much will be gained. But in essence these letters have to do with something else. They have to do with the breaking through of a supernatural way of life for the individual and the community. This is not about ethics, but about leading a Christian, holy life. And if the disposition of the one studying is living, then he must notice

that he will come no further with a purely humanistic method of formulating his questions.

What then is the particular disposition corresponding to the holy text that must be had if the text is to become clear in its specific meaning? Evidently, a religious disposition. But this remains insufficient if one understands this as only a general religious openness. Such a disposition is also a prerequisite for the speech of Buddha and the sayings of Lao Tzu. Christianity is—presupposing what was earlier taken as presupposed—not only “a religion”; it is, rather, the positive revelation of the living God, the Father, in his incarnate Son. It is unique and binding. With this we step out of the domain of general religiousness. This demand is immense and even—from the perspective of the contemporary conception of history—absurd. It is “an offense and a folly.”⁸ Christianity itself knows this but maintains the demand. Thus, this particular object corresponds to a particular, positive, religious disposition: Christian faith.

The Cognitive Disposition for Knowing the Believing Word

Faith is the cognitive disposition proportioned to revelation. The New Testament is the word of God in a particular, positive sense. This word only becomes perceptible in its actual meaning when it is taken as what it is—that is, as a believing word. Only when I approach it in a believing way do I open myself for its specific content, for the supernatural and holy that is in it, for the holy event, the holy way and form of life, the reality of God expressing itself in the holy and supernatural.

What is faith? Above all, an event creating a point of departure and a new horizon. It cannot be traced back to other acts. It establishes a beginning. Sense perception cannot be traced back to something else; it too establishes a beginning—the one perceiving stands face-to-face with the thing perceived. Aesthetic experience establishes a beginning: the one aesthetically experiencing stands face-to-face with the work of art; it is a relation that in its very essence and meaning cannot be derived from psychological presuppositions, but instead arises in a primordial way from the aesthetic act itself. So also in this case, faith is not an antecedent or derivative of thinking; it is not the result of intuiting, of the power of symbol, of an interpretation of the world, or anything of this sort. Faith is rather an act of a unique character with which a new relation to a new level emerges: the believing man stands face-to-face with revelation.

This relation has its own particular, irreducible content. The standing face-to-face of the sensing perceiver and the perceived has its own content: the perception of the thing. The aesthetic experience has its particular content as well: the experience of an expression of an essence. So also does the standing face-to-face

8 It is, by the way, a whole problem unto itself what significance the moment of the “absurd” has in its position toward Christianity and in the motive of the act that takes a stand in faith.

of the believer and revelation have its proper content: the perception of the divine Word.

What happens in faith? Let us take the more simply constructed case in which a person, who earlier did not believe, comes later to the faith. What happens in this step? This person has a collection of facts confronting him—historical witnesses, historical events, personages, thoughts handed down across generations, and other such things. He has gained insights, acquired experiences, perceived values, seen goals. He immerses himself in all of that; he tests and weighs to the point where in all of this he grasps—more or less quickly, with more or less certainty—a reality implied by these appearances, values, forms, events; a reality that finds expression in these things; a reality that expresses itself “in the world” and yet, as becomes clear, is not “from the world”; the God who lives and speaks to us.

The one searching recognizes this reality, scoops it up, secures it, emphasizes it. He acknowledges that it exists, confesses it as normative for his life; he professes himself to it and, through a personal act of loyal joining, binds himself to this personal reality through a personal act of pledged faithfulness. He knows that a realm of his personality is called, one that lies deeper than anything else that otherwise could be called. This realm, the religious core, relates to that reality. He receives in some sense a participation in the otherness of that reality. He steps toward God and stands together with him, facing him, on a level altogether different from the material, the psychological, the natural-personal. On this level, a new life now arises—a new set of acts, contexts, and orders, all with new contents.

The event appears to be most fittingly compared with a bond of a definitive, personal sort. A man gets to know another person, establishes contact with the other until he is confronted by the actual spiritual person, the self which emerges from the various physical and spiritual realities and yet lies beyond all of them. He grasps this out of all the residual aspects, recognizes it, establishes a bond to it. He experiences that something stands out in this I-you relation: a deeper reality, a deeper level of something coming to pass. Based on this relation, a new life, a new way of life becomes possible: friendship, work-partnerships, marriage, each with their own particular content.

In faith, what was demanded above for a new grasping of the object comes to pass. The self-constitutes itself in a new and indeed definitive way. The reality here at hand is that which quite simply constitutes salvation—it is the absolute salvation, eternal life through the love of God. The act that grasps it is, according to its meaning, an absolute participation. I can only believe in my God, in my Savior, in my Father.⁹ An objectivity that does not participate is not possible here. Faith is essentially the appropriation of salvation, fundamentally the “gifting of the soul.” Faith exists to the extent that I, in my innermost self, am involved; to the

9 Which of course in no way means subjectivism. The “my” indicates the participation in contrast to mere contact with an object.

degree that this reality is accepted and taken into my own life: "I live; no longer I, but Christ lives in me." That means, however, being shaken up: "The new wine in the old wine skins"; the "taking off of the old man"; the "passing away of the former man"; the cross.

The content of faith and the act of faith are grace; they are gifted to us. And precisely in this grace is man's innermost actualized, that innermost of innermosts and soul of souls. It is clearly something different than the self-actualization discussed earlier. Revelation does not belong to the "world" in such a way that some aspect of man's essence would correspond to it in a microcosmic way. It is also not the case of a purely natural knowledge of God: there the actualized in man would be his being in the image of God. Revelation is not only transcendent, but also supernatural. At the same time, something lives within man that anticipates it. That is what St. Augustine means when he says, the soul is "Christian by nature;" what Bl. John Duns Scotus, St. Francis de Sales, and Matthias Scheeben mean when they say that God would have become man even had there been no sin, in order to lead creation to the communion of grace. This something—which human thought, in trying to determine it more precisely, easily winds up distorting the mystery of grace—this something that awakes actualizes itself in faith, as the human bearer of the grace of faith.

That reality apprehended in faith, that relation in which the believer stands to this reality, is higher than the psychological realm, loftier than the natural-personal realm. It cannot be derived from them. It also cannot be judged by them. It lives in the awareness of being sovereign with respect to these realms. Faith in its relation to life knows itself to be so much higher than everything natural that it judges only from itself and not from logical and psychological presuppositions: the essence of faith itself can, once again, only be believed; its tasks, its crises, and all such things can only be assessed from faith itself. And still more: after faith is constituted, it defends itself against the threats coming from the soul's store of experiences, from theoretical objections and ethical crises; this it does no longer on the level of those experiences, objections, and crises, but purely from itself, in the form of resistance.

In the final analysis, faith does not discuss at all—it asserts itself in fidelity to itself. Here we find the justification for the Church's conviction, so disconcerting at first, that doubt is a sin and that therefore a real and serious occasion of doubt is not at all allowed. Is this not a circle? If I assert that the reality of God, the reality of Christ cannot be deduced from natural phenomena, is this not a circle? Not "deduced," I say, though certainly "shown, manifested, evidenced." It is otherworldly, supernatural, grasped through an act given by God himself and in the end only judged by this same act itself. It has been repeatedly asserted that this constitutes a circle. But in so doing two fundamentally different things are confused: "circle" and "beginning." It is not a circle, but it *is* a beginning of life.

From exterior and interior experience, I am able to discover a plethora of indications and evidences for realities lying beyond the natural realm and I can pursue them in the form of intellectual considerations, experiences of value, or grasping certain expressions; but all of this is not yet faith. Faith does not originate from all of this, as something like a psychological process originating from another or a logical conclusion from its premises. All of that certainly justifies faith in the face of intellectual and ethical conscience; but faith itself arises spontaneously from a more profound center of action, which is itself only actualized in the act of faith.¹⁰ When faith comes to be, then an eruption of new life emerges out of its own beginning. In the foreground, this is certainly carried out in psychological acts of thinking, deciding, etcetera. But still, there is the consciousness that behind all of this stands something more. This “more”—this center, the proper subject of faith—is “the new man,” the one born anew, the child of God, who is only created through grace.

The act of faith as well as the relation arising with it can express themselves in a logical and psychological way. But still they know themselves to be something that in the final analysis is independent of all of that. The stronger faith becomes, the more purely and decisively it rejects legitimizing itself through natural presuppositions; the stronger it grows, the more there emerges what, understood falsely, looks like a circle: faith’s being a beginning. And still more! Standing against the indications and proofs of the faith are inhibitions, objections, value conflicts, and insoluble riddles of the most diverse sort.

Were faith as such qualitatively founded upon natural presuppositions it would then need to remain in doubt until such difficulties would be clarified. But this is not the case. The logical, psychological, historical scope of the problem is only the field upon which faith appears. These aspects have a certain meaning for faith, since faith should be able to justify itself—at least to some extent—on an intellectual basis, an ethical basis, and other bases of value. (Consider the demand in 1 Pet. 3:15, to “always be ready to give an explanation. . . .”) But still faith does not found itself upon these bases and therefore, when it has become a living faith, it is also able to overcome the most difficult theoretical and practical burdens. As Ven. John Henry Newman says: “Faith means being able to bear doubt.”

Perhaps the example drawn above can clarify what is meant here. The act of binding oneself in faith, out of which a relation of genuine love arises, is prepared by psychological processes. A plethora of reasons and motivations can be offered for this act. But the act itself is not derived from them. A love that can be traced back to psychological presuppositions is indeed only a psychic process that may

10 This is said in a human way. In itself, the act of faith is in no way a purely human act. In a fundamental way, the act of faith is executed through the power of grace, through the “infused divine virtue”—which is itself, of course, a *credendum* [something to be believed]. Here we are speaking of the human “incarnation” of this grace; we are touching upon the observable material of a human act, in which grace is operative.

find itself extinguished once again by the same psychic causes that gave rise to it. A properly personal love cannot be derived, rather it arises in the very midst of various preparatory dimensions from a deeper core. It establishes a beginning. It lives from itself, it is able to overcome all psychic fluctuations, and—always presupposing that it is truly love—it alone is able to judge itself.

But the final word is still to come. If the object of faith is God, understood through his Word, his appearance, his becoming man in time, then God and his appearance can never be coextensive—the divine content and the perceptible word can never be entirely correlative. For God is certainly the archetype of all finitude and thus related; but nevertheless as the Absolute he is finally incommensurable with it. In this way, his relation to the world is allegorical, enigmatic, and insoluble from the world's perspective. Given this situation, carrying out the act of faith involves an irresolvable problem: how can what is beyond this world and wholly "other" be grasped beginning from natural realities? How can what is incommensurable and divine be understood beginning from the finite? It is the moment that despite every analogy is always perceived in Christian consciousness as a "dare." To put it in an extreme way we could say, as a paradox or as the moment of the "absurd." To put it in an antagonistic way, as an "annoyance and foolishness."

In this way, faith is a beginning, the being born of a new life. It is a similar situation between faith and waking up. The condition of consciousness in the morning, when I can perceive, make up my mind, and act—this condition is not derivable from the physical and psychological process of sleeping and its lightening. Rather, it emerges as something new that lives from itself. It is newly present. It is somehow a repetition of being born. So also, analogously, is faith.

And in regard to those thoughts or experiences that menace faith, faith acts as a living thing among the living: it does not discuss how it would come about that at the same level one argument would win out over another. Instead, it asserts itself through its living power. Where there is true faith it cannot be refuted, only challenged. It cannot be proven false; it can only sicken and perish.

Subordinate Dispositions for the Critical Study of Scripture

Faith is the specific cognitive disposition that corresponds to the Word of God. In holding to this formulation, the other cognitive dispositions are not abolished—the psychological, the historical-critical, that of the humanities, the philosophical. The philological-historical disposition need not be abrogated as soon as I take the *Iliad* as what it essentially is, as poetry; such a disposition, however, will be subordinated to another way of understanding, namely, the aesthetic. In a corresponding way this is also the case in our question: all of those dispositions and results retain their full weight when it comes to holy Scripture. They are simply subordinated to that which is here specifically responsible, namely, the one believing.

Reality constitutes a highly differentiated order and within this order each realm must first be seen from its specific particular significance. When that happens, when what is proper to it is certain not to be confused and when the essential notions and categories are gained from it, then the question is justified: to what extent are the other realms of being found in the object under consideration and what can be applied from those realms to this one? But then they will not be applied “univocally” but rather “analogously.” The essence of a living thing can only be determined from the perspective of one who lives, with categories taken from himself. When that takes place, then we can ask how the chemical and mechanical processes of inanimate things are rediscovered in the realm of the living. They will find themselves within this inquiry, but analogously; that is, they will retain their particular meaning in the perspective of the specific categories of the living. This applies in a corresponding way to the realm of the personal with respect to the vital and psychic.

The correspondence applies also to the case at hand. The proper essence of the holy text remains cut off, in the strictest sense of the word, as long as the adequate disposition is not present—that is, faith. The one considering the holy text in a merely historical way does not see the proper object at all. He sees only the external appearances, psychological contexts, and philological and cultural meanings of the word. One can conceive the word of revelation, “grace,” from the perspective of the history of religion, in a religio-psychological way, a philosophical way, or whatever. In this way, one would arrive at psychological or religio-philosophical concepts while at the same time completely missing the fact that the word “grace” in its proper sense does not have meaning at all in the categories of psychology or philosophy of religion. Rather, it is a name for something unique—that something that broke out into the open in Jesus and in his vicinity; that something that Paul and John indicated when they used the word and its synonyms. But that only opens up when one believes—or at least has an inner readiness and openness to the faith.

Our language used in the science of religion is teeming with secularized holy words, with words not accepted in faith but somehow taken in a general way. And today, the task is plainly given to the faithful individual to do away with these words and their meanings, and instead to listen to them anew in their original meaning based on the matter at hand, revelation. Holy Scripture itself knows of this difficulty. Over and over again in Scripture, words appear, such as the unveiling of the eyes and the opening up of the heart, beginning from the psalms and prophets. Christ speaks of “hearing and not understanding”; he speaks of “unlocking the text.” Paul talks of “the spiritual that can only be spiritually understood” and of the pneumatic man “who himself judges the others, but he cannot be judged.”

Indeed, the “pneumatic gospel” of St. John is full of the fact that what comes “from above” cannot be understood by that which comes “from below”; or again, Christ and his word cannot be grasped by the merely natural man. The great shock in the life of the apostle, which still causes shivers to run through his gospel

and letters, was certainly that the Light came into the world, ready to illuminate the darkness, and yet the darkness did not understand it. This line of thought is carried forward by the Fathers and theologians. Augustine knows that only he who has love understands the world of love. St. Anselm of Canterbury teaches whoever does not experience what is revealed in a spiritual way, cannot grasp it rationally; but whoever does not believe cannot experience things in a spiritual way.¹¹ Bonaventure goes as far as saying, one must be holy in order to be a theologian. The mystics teach that there is a stepladder of spiritual objects which, if they are to be understood, presuppose a hierarchy of spiritual degrees realized in a living way.

All of these things are realities that have long since been forgotten, breaking down at the same time as the great order of being and living established in the Middle Ages. (I do not speak pessimistically. There will be a new one, but so far none has arisen since that of the Middle Ages. And the task of once again bringing into a new order the individual taken out of the old order is a task that remains absolutely unaccomplished!) Everything is leveled into a general schema of intellectualistic cognition, in which an abstract, homogenous cognitive apparatus, the subject, stands before an object, which is just as homogenous in its abstract objectivity, whether we are dealing with a stone or a plant or a person. And this disposition has been dogmatized in the name of being scientific according to that science which stems from comprehending mechanical things.

Theology, a Science of Reality

We confront the New Testament as the Word of God, as a pneumatic text that speaks from the spiritually-filled disposition of the hagiographer to address the "spiritual," the supernatural. We understand it through faith. Faith is not the last link of a syllogism, a link that must have a rational character just as the syllogism does; it is not the final stage of a psychological process, a stage that would then be just as psychological as any other. Rather, faith is a new beginning. The act of faith may as always be supported by the rational and the psychological; but when the proper act is carried out, then it constitutes something new. In and through this act, a new aspect of reality and a new qualitative realm enters into the solid world of reality.

The contents of holy Scripture can, as the Word of God, only be grasped in faith. Indeed, even this characteristic and dignity itself, the fact that it is the Word of God, can as such only be comprehended by faith. Before this point, all the explanations of reason and feelings serve only as preparations, *praeambula* [preambles], pre-steps. They belong to a qualitatively different order of reality, the natural order. Only the act of faith corresponds adequately and qualitatively to the Word of God as such. The act does not emerge from those natural preparations; they prepare the way for it. It arises from the free center of the living, redeemed spirit; it is generated

11 See Guardini, *Auf dem Wege* [On the Way] (Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald, 1923), 37.

by the grace that creates a higher life. It is a divine, infused "virtue." Despite this, or in fact in virtue of this, it is the act of man that is most his very own—here is the paradox of God's action, that it makes the creature acted upon freer to perform its own proper act in proportion to the intensity of God's acting upon it.

Precisely how this act arises is not something that can be resolved or even observed, just as little as I can observe or explain how I wake up or how I am born. It is a process through which I appear as one living in a new reality of life, in a new degree of life. One cannot know it but can only experience it.

Then, when it is present, one can try to penetrate into the act itself or into the realities that appear in virtue of the act and thereby come to a steadily deeper knowledge: the knowledge of faith, Christian *gnosis* [knowledge]. Of course, it will always remain but a penetration and never attain to comprehension, because what is revealed is not merely partially, but is essentially mystery. Faith will always remain the presupposition, never to be superseded by knowledge, for faith establishes the level at which this mystery is given.

As soon as that penetration happens in a methodical way, with a critical consciousness of judgment and systematic order of procedure, it becomes the science of faith, theology. Belonging to the objects and sources of this science are the text and its contents as the Word of God. Theology has the task of determining on the basis of faith the essence and content of God's Word, and to shape words and concepts based thereupon. Theology accepts as help everything placed into its hands by the historical, psychological, and philological methods of examination. But theology does not transfer it all directly or univocally but rather analogously; it orders everything under the specific categories of the sacred and supernatural.

But theology remains always carried by faith. Presupposing that even the most distinguished theologian should truly lose his faith, he will also lose his object. He would not even understand his own earlier writings. He would be vexed by his own elucidations. Just as the teachings of Jesus cannot be separated from his mouth and just as there is no "essence of Christianity" apart from the person of Christ—in the same way there is no theology detached from faith. (This is not meant in a subjectivistic way in the least, but rather it is much more meant in an eminently objective way.) It then also follows that the intensity and breadth of theological understanding—scholarly competence assumed—grows and diminishes with the liveliness of faith.

Theological understanding depends upon the life of faith, upon prayer, upon Christian deeds, and upon holiness. In the New Testament itself this is self-evident. Also in the earliest period of Christianity. And in the Middle Ages, for Anselm, St. Bonaventure, St. Thomas Aquinas—not even to mention the mystical schools. Thus it has basically remained until this historical hour. But coming to predominate over this basic relationship was in fact another one. The autonomism of modern, methodological science—with its fiction of a detached, objectivistic understanding operating from and for itself—transferred itself more or less into

theology also. With this shift, however, not only do Christian life and theological thought diverge so that practically speaking they run alongside each other to the great harm of both; but theological science in itself is also endangered, since it threatens to take away the given act and with that the specific object of the science.

When Thomas Aquinas states that he carried out his *Summa theologiae* on his knees, it is not a pious remark but rather a methodological principle valid for every genuine theology. It indicates not only that a theologian must be pious and ask for God's assistance; all of this would only have personal consequences. Even more so, it means that the living act of faith and its concrete activity, in prayer and Christian deeds, are together the methodological foundation of theological thought—just as the perception of a work of art is the basis for every possible aesthetic science. It is not at all accidental that the truly great theologians were saints—men of prayer. This was not incidental but rather essential. And it is here that the properly creative theological forces originate primarily—only secondarily in the historical, psychological, and the like. Here, the theologian stands before Christian realities; here, he seeks the living face of God; here, he perceives the real demands placed upon time by the Father governing his kingdom—and at this point I certainly need not mention that I have in mind not only the individual life of religiosity but also, and even more, that the reality of the Church be lived, and this in a religious way, with man's inner being, with living self-commitment, all the while believing, loving, and carrying it in heart and conscience. . . .

Theology is a science of reality. This reality is the living, triune God, as he works in the Church and in souls. The man of faith and faith-filled deeds approaches this reality through meditation and liturgy, through actively supporting the Church, through actions and overcoming challenges. . . . In all of this he grasps that reality which constitutes the matter of theology, what theology works through conceptually—here, of course, dogma and the magisterium of the Church play the role of giving to the object of faith its guaranteed form and to the act of faith its law. This also belongs to the foundations of theological method and should be explicitly noted in order that what is stated is not misunderstood in the sense of an experimenting subjectivity (more on this point later). Here it comes down to one thing for us: that theology is a science of realities, given in faith and in the fullness of the life of faith—not a piece of literary history or conceptual analysis.

Theology thus determined can encounter difficulties from the findings of purely natural science. Holy Scripture belongs to the spheres of both faith and experience. Thus, observations arriving from different points of departure collide within Scripture, and the results of faith's consideration and those of an inductive-historical judgment can stand opposed to each other. We take this possibility into account from the very outset. It is, in fact, given with the divine-human structure of holy Scripture, as well as with the supernatural-natural structure of the believer.

As soon as such a difficulty enters the scene we will resist it. We will not seek to solve it rashly, prematurely. We will neither weaken the perspective of faith nor

accommodate the historical judgment. We will test both. Regarding the first, we will test whether or not it is also one of faith's components, truly and correctly seen. It is indeed possible to make a mistake in this regard, and clearly there have been occasions where a later time rectified what an earlier time put forward. Regarding the second, we will test whether or not it is really a matter of a scientific insight. And similarly here, a later time—often only a decade later, or sometimes even shorter—has seen something change which has been put down with emphasis as scientifically certain. Particularly scientific research—carried out by real men, not their ideology—is indeed prejudiced, and apart from that there also exists the strange thing of scientific fashion.

By testing in this way, apparent contradictions will be resolved. Should, however, a situation present itself in which a proposition of faith and a scientific result truly stand in opposition to each other, then we will have the courage to let it go at *non liquet* [it is not clear]. We will be convinced that the tension does not arise from a real contradiction, since truth cannot contradict truth, but from the fact that we do not yet have a sufficiently broad standpoint to behold as a unity what at a lower level appears to be a contradiction but at a higher level is truly consistent and not merely through some appearance.

The Word of God, Grasped in History and in Faith

We took as our point of departure the proposition that holy Scripture is the Word of God and demands a corresponding cognitive disposition. It leads us even further. Scripture confronts us first of all as a text of historical genesis. It is a collection of reports written in a particular time, letters that arose from assignable circumstances of time and place, prophetic utterances made by particular persons. All of this is attached to a specific historical environment and the fundamental principle is valid that one must understand a historical expression from within its own presuppositions. If one wants to understand the Word of God in accord with this principle then he must ask: when was it written? From which human author? What did the words used by the text mean in the time they were written? Which circumstances does it bear upon? What spiritual conditions does it presuppose?

In this way, the Word of God could only be understood through proper historical inquiry—of course always under the directive categories of the holy text and from the governing fundamental disposition of faith. Our way to it went into the past. We reached the text and its sense only by going backwards along the path upon which the text came to us, through the various forms of historical mediation. That this is, indeed, the case is clear. It results from what was said about the historical way of treating the holy text. But this cannot exhaust the relation to Scripture as a holy text. For the questions—which is the assured form of the text; at which time it arose; how the individual elements are related to each other; what is the historical meaning of its vocabulary; what the fundamental historical circumstances are and with that the particular meaning of persons, relationships,

and conditions it speaks of—for all of this and similar things, the historical mode of questioning is responsible.

The Word of God is a historical word. So it must also be historically grasped as such. But with no need for further consideration it is clear that this cannot be the only way to the Word of God as such; indeed seen at the most essential level, it cannot even be the most important. Let us call to mind the number of problems that arise here, as well as the amount of work and knowledge, and moreover the rarely met presuppositions that are required—all of this must be addressed if the questions are to be answered in an adequate way. Thus we see immediately that concerning these points, only a very few people are capable. And all the fewer the more seriously the question of historical critique is taken up. It is good when there are such men who fulfill this task in the great working group of humanity. But this cannot be the only or even just the normal way of the believer to the text as Word of God.

I will try to state more precisely this thought so that it is not misunderstood. What is certainly not meant is that in addition to the historical conception of Scripture as the truly serious way productive of science, we ought to admit another more tentative, more arbitrary, practically oriented way. So much effort would not have been necessary to say that. Instead, the moment we take as our point of departure the first presupposition—that holy Scripture is the Word of God, a holy text presenting a clearly determined genus of spiritual entities—then it demands accordingly a proportionate way of cognition, so that it can become a reality for us and be grasped according to its properly essential content, and not only its edifying, practical effect; only when it becomes a reality for us can a science be established upon it.

If all of this is so, then the way to Scripture cannot be only the historical way; indeed, this cannot even be the primary way. Otherwise, it would be reserved to very few and moreover on the basis of natural talent and social grace; it would be a privilege of the learned. If this were the case, then this would run counter to the essence of a revealed text. Revelation is directed to humanity. Thus, the way to understanding it must be one open for humanity.

Thus, the matter at hand is not one of granting permission for the practical, religious consideration of Scripture; rather, it is a matter of the fundamental precondition for the understanding of faith and the science of faith at all. Faith's understanding is itself still not "science," as little as aesthetic experience is science. It is a form of a vital grasping of the object. There is, however, a science built upon the aesthetic grasping of objects, in that it treats of these acts and their results in a conceptually critical way. Similarly, there is a science of the understanding of faith; a methodically ordered, critically circumspect treatment of the act of faith and its contents: this is theology. If aesthetics as a science is to become possible, then aesthetic experience must be a prerequisite. If theology is to become possible, then

faith's cognition must be presupposed, as it takes place among other things, in the cognitive grasping of Scripture as the product of revelation.

Scripture as the Word of God is therefore something completely different than a document relating a governing deed of Charlemagne. This deed presents a purely historical happening, determined by that day and in that environment. If I want to understand it, then I must try to come as close as possible to that time and those circumstances; this is to say, I have to tread the historical way.¹² Holy Scripture, however, arises from revelation, from that paragon of personalities, events, deeds, through which God spoke and worked in time. This incident certainly bears first upon particular people; but according to its proper sense, it is not restricted to that time and person it immediately concerns but is directed toward all men and all times. An event from the life of Charlemagne relates to me primarily through the mediation of reports telling of it, as well as through the chain of historical consequences running from it to me. Thus, if I want to reach it, I must go back along that path of mediation—unless its general understandability allows for an immediate relation. Revelation, on the contrary, aims essentially and fundamentally at every time, including my own. Thus it relates immediately to me and my time.

As a message of salvation for humanity, as the Word of God historically spoken but nevertheless transcending history to address all men, myself included—it is precisely as such that revelation, also in its written expression, is grasped in faith. This, then, is exactly what the science of faith is about, the Word of God grasped in faith.

Let us reach deeper still. Revelation is an event originating from eternity but bearing upon time. Here the eternal God, who is simply and perfectly one, his whole being and action an “eternal now,” speaks his Word into time. This Word lies in the revelation event, in the person and life of Christ, in what he did and what was done to him, what he spoke and instituted. As the Word of the eternal God, it does not remain trapped within the years between Jesus's proclamation and departure; rather, it coexists in all times. God is eternal, timeless; but he carries time, fulfills it. He coexists in every time. He who stands in *aeternitas* [eternity] fulfills the *aevum* [time], is *aeviternal*. Every time can come to him without needing to go back to some “way back then,” for example the primordial beginning when he created the world. No, every time can go to him as this time, as today. It is the same with his Word. It was spoken in a particular time, but it was uttered as the Word of God. Thus it coexists in every time. And if my time or I myself in this very moment want to come to God's Word, then I need not return to some “way back

12 Even here the situation is not only historical, since that document is written by man and has to do with the things of men. Given that, it has therefore a certain super-historical and general aspect. This becomes greater the more significant the man who wrote it is, the more humanly comprehensive the object concerned is, the more strongly fundamental human circumstances are expressed in it.

then," the time at which it was historically written, I need not possess a disposition of historical understanding; rather I can as a man of today and from within my contemporary situation go to his Word as if to a word spoken into my today.

It has always been a part of Christian consciousness that the individual man in his own time relates differently to the living Word of God, to Christ, his life and words, to the event of salvation and revelation, than he does to any other historical event. The understanding has always been that he stands in an immediate relation to Christ and his Word. Of course Christ did exist at that time, as a real, historical figure. He is not an idea, a myth, a projection of a religious or metaphysical experience into the historical past. He is history, he *happened* back then. But he simultaneously coexists in every time, since he is the living Son of God, the essential Word of God, coming from eternity and existing as eternal life.

Historicism and the "Today" of the Word

Today Christ is born. Today he lives and acts and speaks. Today he dies and goes home to the Father. Today the Holy Spirit arrives. This happens either today also, or never. If the faith were a matter of a savior who happened to be only historical, only "back then," then it would have nothing to accomplish. All of this, however, does not mean a merely religious experience, a literary or dialectical affair; it means reality. A form of reality of a particular sort, of course—namely a form that in the language of the Church is called mystical. It is the form in reality of the Christ encountered by faith, the Christ who once was, but simultaneously is, "always with us." It is a pneumatic reality. If we want to feel this reality in all of its force then we must consequently read the letters of St. Paul, paying attention especially to those passages in which the discussion of Christ's being "in us" surfaces or man's being, living, and acting "in Christ"¹³ comes to the fore.

Now, holy Scripture is a part of the revelation event. That the apostles wrote these texts is—according to time, occasion, power, validity, and content—a part of a revelation that happens in history, while emerging from eternity, taking aim at and therefore coexisting with every time period. Thus, the objective constitution of holy Scripture corresponds to the subjective aspect of faith. Faith sets out from its particular *now* and heads in the direction of eternity. This it does through the form of revelation, a form in which eternity directs itself toward every *now*.

In this way, the Word of God orients itself toward every time and asks for faith. This includes our time, and it includes me. And each person has the right, indeed the corresponding task, to examine the faith directly from his own time, from the historical understanding of his own condition and environment. The Word of God in Scripture is "pan-historical" and the whole of history is charged with extracting its meaning. Within this general mission, each time period has its particular task.

13 See on this point Guardini, "Das liturgische Mysterium" [The Liturgical Mystery], *Die Schildgenossen* (1925).

Naturally the Word of God is materially determined by the concrete situation in which it was written. Nevertheless, it has something indeterminate in itself, an indeterminate meaning that awaits the impression of its particular character by each time period. This is not in the least meant in a relativistic way, or in a way that would weaken the objective clarity of revelation. Rather, the Word of God is a message and every message perfects itself only from the heart of the one hearing it.

The Word of God is a living, generative power—generative truth that achieves a new fullness in each time period. It is not only a mere statement or a logical message from this or that person; it is rather a living Word striving to enter into life and to generate life. And if it is believed, then this does not mean some sort of mechanical consent, but rather that it is accepted into life and there it bears fruit. Christian consciousness has never thought in any way other than this way—the dominant empirical turn of the academic world to the contrary—and it has confidently acted in accord with this way of thinking.

This is once again important for the correct conception of the essence of theology. Our biblical scholarship falls by and large into historicism. Understanding holy Scripture in a scholarly way is largely equivalent with understanding it historically. Prescinding entirely from the danger of historical relativization, the consequence of this is ominous—the properly theological threatens to slip away; so too the sacred, the pneumatic. And the threat extends further still to the reading, unlocking, and drawing from the Word of God, which is absolute and eternal. The divine authority of the holy text is also under the threat of losing what is to be understood in adoration. And, in a rarer but profoundly more reasonable correspondence to this, there is the danger of losing the present-ness, the *today* in which theologians stand as listeners.

Historicism loses in its *yesterday* the *eternal* and also the *now*. Thus, it becomes irrelevant, academic. The Word of God, however, is not only in pastoral “usage,” but also essentially practical. It is essentially God’s call from out of eternity and into time—not time in general, but the time of today. Thus, it is also not properly theologically understood if it is not understood from its temporal immediacy. That which essentially belongs to the Word falls out of sight: the “hearer of the Word,” for he is the hearer of today. In precisely this way, theology becomes a matter of indifference.

Thus, the theological matter at hand is a deep, comprehensive penetration of the holy text, one that welcomes working carefully through historical findings but still arises fundamentally from the consciousness that this text calls out to our daily *now*. It is a message from God’s eternity to our present.

Then the living and religious question, our question concerning the Word of God, raises itself wholly on its own accord: “Lord, what should we do?” And the question will call out the answer. Then the countenance of God will disclose its

features, including those features he intended precisely for our own time, and out of the matter and events of our time—a time certainly also included in the plan of Providence—he who is eternal will “prepare that praise” of knowledge and of deed which can only be prepared from time.

The Living Divine Word as an Object of Science

When someone advancing in his best abilities and in accord with his present understanding tries to penetrate Scripture; when he uses that which a historical understanding offers to him; at that point still, there is more that must happen. All of this expresses only the empirical side of the process. The essential process of examining the Word of God and coming to understand Scripture is a spiritual one. Scripture itself often speaks of this. Over and over we find thoughts such as these: that Scripture must be opened up if one is to understand what he reads; that man is sluggish when it comes to understanding everything the prophets said and for this reason the prophets’ meaning must be opened up for him; that our eyes must be opened, our view unveiled, our soul moved, our innermost enflamed.

Scripture is the living, divine Word, the power of truth hovering and ready to beget. Its meaning and intention is realized by an interior event that involves becoming clear, understood, illuminated, enflamed, and fructified. This is so because whenever God approaches the soul—to elaborate upon the thoughts of a friend—he does not bring about finished results and perfect circumstances; instead, it happens in the manner of a seed, which operates only slowly and is only scarcely perceived at the beginning. It is a matter of God’s action and has to do with an opening of self, an assimilation, a decision, and a cooperation arising from the deepest part of the soul. It is an event of grace.

It follows from this that one cannot willfully force this particular perception of the text, this specific understanding of Scripture. The only thing one can do is to stand ready, to prepare oneself. In the life of faith, what can be wished for and practiced is to “watch and pray,” to direct a living discipline and attentiveness toward God. Beyond this, all those things are good and necessary which aid the penetration of the work of reason and of the heart.

From a scholarly perspective, the question naturally follows: can something that depends upon such conditions be an object of science? Is not science in its essence the sort of investigation of realities which renders at all times a rational account of what it does and accepts, and which can present at any time its process by way of repetition?

This would hold true the moment we understand “science” as the limited activity of dealing with concepts. If, however, we understand it as the rational handling of the great insights, then it does not hold. The great insight of natural science, history, and philosophy is never only a matter of logical exertion. Rather, it is a process encompassing a person’s entirety, an interior realization; things become lucid, the soul is moved, the senses highly attuned, and a flourishing fruitfulness

results. It is a process which is always perceived as a gift by those who participate in it. Preparations can be undertaken for it, but it can never be forced. Once the first view is gained, however, then begins the conceptual work that understands the process and its finding. This work can be presented again at any time. But it too always appeals in some way to the fact that this living insight is constantly thought through and comprehended anew, lest it come up empty.

If we have perceived the whole process in its pure form with the great thinkers, then we easily see that something comparable happens with us also. Our truly living insights are not rationally coerced, but instead just “happen.” The whole of our living knowledge depends ultimately on those insights that come to us as gifts. And incidentally, it also depends on that form of vital knowing that does not allow itself to be determined by specific acts of knowing, but rather plays out in a gradual clarification, deepening, increasing, and unfolding drawn from the whole of life’s experience.

Thus, our viewpoint here. The proper process of apprehending Scripture is a religious one. It cannot be forced. The work of reasoning leans on this process and tries to render an account of it and its contents. Of course the result of this is the consequence discussed earlier: the measure of the scientific apprehension of Scripture as the Word of God depends on the power and depth of the individual’s religious understanding. Yes, that is in fact how the situation stands. For the one understanding Scripture scientifically, for the theologian, his scientific measure—taking “scientific” in the strictest sense—is determined first of all by the power of the believing perception of revelation, and only secondarily by the power of conceptual apprehension, explanation, and processing. This is an evident truth for all truly religious thinking. Accordingly, a hierarchy is established in which it is fitting that he who is more humble has reverence before he who is greater. Religious cognition and its science are not mechanical matters in which, to state it fundamentally, everything is accessible for everyone. Rather, they are carried out in a hierarchy of persons, and only reverence and discipleship lead beyond the proper measure, the reverence and discipleship that think along with the insight of the higher one and thus participate in it.

The Church, the Individual, and the Address of the Word

But having said this, we are then led to a last question: to what extent is the individual responsible? Is not the Word of God handed over to the subjective experience of the individual if we found the scientific treatment of Scripture upon the religious relation? That would admittedly happen if the foregoing were exhaustive.

The Word of Scripture, as revelation in general, is not a private word. It is not directed to the individual as such. Accordingly, perceiving this Word of God is not a private concern, not a concern of the individual as such. Certainly, knowledge of Scripture is a concern of the person. The Word of God is directed “to me, and not to another.” It is a matter of my salvation, of my relation to God, which no

one can take away from me. I am involved in all of this with the uniqueness, irrepresentability, irreplaceability of my person. But it is not my concern as a sheer individual, as someone isolated from every context. The Word is rather directed to man, who is "private" and "public" at the same time. There is no such thing as an isolated individual. Such an individual is only a limit case, a construct for fighting and defending against a certain stereotyping of man. What exists in truth is the person, standing in itself but simultaneously in relation to the whole. This is the one to whom the Word of God is directed.

The man whom Christ addresses is the individual in his irreplaceable uniqueness, but ordered to the whole. But in saying "to the whole," what is meant is the whole as it subsists in personal individuals. In itself, revelation would also be thinkable as private. In fact, this has also taken place: think, for example, of the revelations of the mystics. These revelations, however, take a wholly different direction of meaning; they are characterized as private. In contrast, revelation proper, the one we designate as "Christian" is directed toward the living, variously connected order of the whole and the individual. Thus, it can only be properly understood from within this order and its tension; it can only be correctly grasped from the Christian individual who is integrated into the Christian whole, that is, the Church.

It is a Catholic conviction that holy Scripture is entrusted to the Church and that the individual can examine and understand Scripture only from within the living connection with the Church. One who thinks individualistically has an "anti-Churchly disposition," which makes him perceive such a claim of the Church as placing pressure upon religious freedom, as a socialization of the personal religious sphere. But this claim of the Church does not spring from a disdain for the person and religious interiority. Rather, it springs from the fact that the person standing entirely on his own does not exist; it arises from the realization that the conception of such a person is not an ontic concept [one rooted in reality] but a dialectical concept [one fashioned wholly by the mind] and through this unreal concept the person is not valued higher in reality, but brought into an impossible situation. The event of revelation is directed toward the real person. In this way, it addresses itself from the outset to the individual standing in the Church and to the Church standing in individuals.

In regard to this point, the Church, as the Christian whole, as the objective instantiation, has, according to its essence, primacy over the individual. It is not a primacy of value but of representation, authority, function, guidance, and leadership. "Whoever does not listen to the Church let him be to you as a Gentile and a public sinner." "Whoever hears you, hears me."

No one believes only on their own private account; rather, the believer believes as a member of the Kingdom of God. As little as I can pray, "Thy kingdom come to me" when it ought to be "to us," just as little can I think of revelation as being entrusted to my personal interpretation. The religious "we" stands at the heart

of being Christian. And this "we" is meant not only in the sense of a freely flowing, subjectively bound community, nor again only in the sense of a community resting in the similarity or identity of a way of life; no, it is meant in the sense of the formed whole of the Church, a whole that stands in its own right. "Church" belongs just as profoundly in the center of what it is to be a Christian as does "person."

In this way, the Church also stands essentially within faith's act of knowledge. An exclusively individual knowledge of the faith does not exist. This sort of knowledge is a limit case. What actually exists is the individual's knowledge of the faith but stemming from the Church's consciousness of the faith as it bears upon its surroundings, in the synchronic relations of the present Church community as well as the diachronic relations of Church history as it runs through the ages. Indeed the individual's knowledge of the faith springs from the Church in its last consequence: as representative and authoritative wholeness, as magisterium and Tradition.

The act of faith arises from the insight, decision, and responsibility of the individual; it does so simultaneously, however, from obedience and self-enlargement of the individual disposition into the disposition of the Church. And both are not related as if hanging next to each other nor as if one is only the corrective of the other. Rather, they are as a living unity, in which one moment cannot in any way be separated from another. The individual decision is from the very outset determined by the Church. From the very outset, the essence of the act of faith is personally determined to the Church and obedience. Once again, however, not in the sense of a synthesis. There is nothing here that can be synthesized. Instead, it is a primordial, unified act, indeed the Christian-Catholic religious act that realizes itself essentially in the tension of these two poles.¹⁴

In the particular person, the fact of the Church can of course affect his individual Christian life in an inhibiting way. It can do the same for a critical examination, for the historical or psychological analysis and commentary. In view of the whole, however, the influence of the Church is a positive one, and this in three ways: First, it makes it possible for the individual to elevate himself above psychological determinations arising from aptitude, heredity, environment, course of education, and the like. This determination runs very deep and is often recognizable in one's thoughts and views, which appear along with the demand for strict objectivity. Often, theoretical judgment and practical assessment are determined through and through by precisely such aspects of psychological aptitude. The supposed truth

14 Today, thoughts regarding personal decision are very strongly emphasized. This is understandable given the relativistic flowing together of qualities, forms, and values. It is understandable given the chaos of the turning point and it stands historically under the influence of spirits that likewise wanted a clarification of thought and deed to come out of a chaos of thought and deed. This will to decide is not allowed to create a spell that wants to decree away the foundational fact of life's tension lying in the concrete. It may combat the relativistic disposition, but it may not forget that it is necessarily confronted by the will to see the concrete being and therein the inexistence of the contrary moments. This is just as much ethically assigned as is "decision."

of judgment is often a function of existence, indeed often enough of subconscious desires. The Word of God, however, demands freedom. It seeks to be examined from the perspective of an at least relative surmounting of individual determination of essence.

Herein lies the liberating action of the Church. Presenting a tremendous integration of typical, human possibilities and standing within a history measured in millennia, the Church possesses a certain objective general form, which might not come to the fore so clearly in the individual case but in the general direction is unmistakable for whoever opens himself to it. Participating in this relative surmounting of individual determination is the believer. His act of faith undergoes a purification and enlargement that goes beyond the individual.

Second, the Church's influence safeguards the individual from letting the interpretation of Scripture degenerate into the currently reigning trends of a cultural and academic sort. It makes it possible for the individual to hear the Word of God coming from eternity with a certain timeless disposition.

Third, it is certain that the greatest danger of an individual understanding of Scripture consists in its being seen in only a natural way, where the supernatural and Christian element slips away into what is purely historical, psychological, and philosophical. If we hold before our eyes the disposition of the Church regarding the individual, with all of its narrowness, hardships, and intolerance, then considering the matter rather superficially we will admittedly see very often that the Church has set herself against scientific progress. But considered more profoundly, the situation is rather that the Christian and supernatural substance of the faith is safeguarded against the danger of being made into something merely natural, and thus the proper and qualified science of God's Word attains to the object with which it stands and falls.

In this way, the Church is ultimately the atmosphere and order in which the eye of the individual fully sees its object, beholds revelation.

Having said this, those questions arising from the whole relation of Church and individual are not forgotten. The task remains to surmount them ever anew. Moreover, given that these questions arise from the fact that both the Church and the individual are human, they must be treated accordingly.