

What Happened to the Vulgate? An Analysis of *Divino Afflante Spiritu* and *Dei Verbum**

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And the LORD said, “Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; and nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down, and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech.”

—Genesis 11:6–7

Introduction

THIS ESSAY investigates the role of the Latin Vulgate within the Roman Catholic Church in the wake of the Second Vatican Council. More specifically, my goal is to determine whether the Vulgate retains its status as the normative scriptural text for the purpose of establishing Church doctrine. This inquiry is occasioned in part by the cryptic near-silence of *Dei Verbum* regarding the Vulgate.¹ Despite a substantial discussion on Sacred Scripture, *Dei Verbum* contains only a single, passing statement on the Vulgate, which, at the time of the Council, had served as the Church’s translation of the Bible for roughly 1200 years. The uncertainty caused by *Dei Verbum*’s silence is attributable in part to the somewhat nebulous stance of its predecessor document, the papal encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu*.² The encyclical offers

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¹ *Dei Verbum* is the Church’s dogmatic constitution on divine revelation. It was promulgated at the Second Vatican Council on November 18, 1965, under the papacy of Paul VI.

² The encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* was given by Pope Pius XII on September 30, 1943, with the stated purpose of promoting biblical studies.

a qualified affirmation of the Vulgate's authenticity, but the nature and implications of that qualification are not fully specified and thus substantial room remains for interpretation.³ In turn, the near silence of *Dei Verbum* regarding the Vulgate is all the more puzzling.

In this essay, I show that *Dei Verbum* quietly affirms the Vulgate's status as the authoritative text of Scripture for the purpose of developing and establishing doctrine, with the original-language biblical texts functioning in an indispensable but primarily confirmatory or corroborative role. I arrive at this conclusion in large part through an analysis of the conceptual relationship, as set forth in *Dei Verbum*, between Scripture and Tradition. Specifically, my investigation suggests that the continuing primacy of the Vulgate, relative to the original-language texts, results from a combination of two factors: the conversational nature of the interaction between Scripture and Tradition, and the Western Church's lengthy history of reliance on the language of Latin for both the reading of Scripture and the unfolding of Tradition. Importantly, this essay shows that the stance of *Dei Verbum* regarding the role of the Vulgate is in continuity with that of *Divino Afflante Spiritu*.

The remainder of this essay is organized into three principal sections followed by a short note and a conclusion. The first section consists of a brief exegesis of the assertions regarding the authenticity of the Vulgate that are set forth in the encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu*. The second section shows how the motif underlying the relationship between Scripture and Tradition, as set forth in *Dei Verbum*, provides the basis for an understanding of the continuing primacy of the Vulgate. The third section illustrates the conceptual continuity between *Divino Afflante Spiritu* and *Dei Verbum* and offers concrete evidence of *Dei Verbum*'s compliance with the provisions of *Divino Afflante Spiritu* regarding the authenticity of the Vulgate. Prior to the conclusion, there is a brief discussion of the New Vulgate, which was promulgated by Pope John Paul II in 1979.

The Authenticity of the Latin Vulgate

The papal encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* addresses a range of issues pertinent to biblical studies. Its emphasis is heavily concentrated, however, on the application of historical-critical and text-critical methods to original-

³ In modern parlance, the term "authenticity" is often used in the context of a determination as to whether something is genuine or real. In this setting, however, the term is more nuanced and refers to a text's degree of validity within a particular sphere of interest or activity. Its meaning will become clear as this essay progresses.

language biblical manuscripts. At roughly the midpoint of the document, the discussion diverges into a brief explanation regarding the status of the Latin Vulgate. This detour is a natural one in that the heavy-handed endorsement, self-evident throughout, of the original-language texts naturally leaves the reader wondering about the standing of the translation that, for centuries, had served as the authoritative biblical text of the Church. The encyclical's deliberation over the Vulgate culminates in the following assertion: "[A]s the Church herself testifies and affirms, [the Vulgate] may be quoted safely and without fear of error in disputations, in lectures and in preaching; and so its authenticity is not specified primarily as critical, but rather as juridical" (§21).⁴ This statement comes across to the reader in a somewhat cryptic, if not jarring, fashion, for two reasons. First, there is a clear indication of some form of qualification of the Vulgate's authenticity—a striking claim, given the long-standing tenure of the Vulgate as the sanctioned (whether *de facto* or formal) translation of the Church. Second, the precise meaning of the distinction therein is not immediately obvious, and the encyclical offers little by way of explication. These considerations, combined with the fact that the statement appears to carry some doctrinal weight, suggest the need for a clarifying analysis. In the remaining portion of this section I attempt to discern the meaning of the descriptors "critical" and "juridical" and thus shed some light on the encyclical's stance regarding the authenticity of the Vulgate.

Critical Authenticity

With regard to the forms of authenticity mentioned in the affirmatory statement of the encyclical, critical authenticity is the more complex of the two. To gain an understanding of this concept, it is helpful to consider first that one finds throughout *Divino Afflante Spiritu* references to and sustained discussions regarding the integrity of Scripture—both the text itself and the interpretations accruing to that text. Following on these concerns are exhortations towards the application of text-critical and historical-critical methods to the original-language biblical manuscripts. *Divino Afflante Spiritu* strongly embraces, for example, recent advances in

⁴ This statement obviously does not reach the level of a definition; rather, it functions to affirm, albeit with a significant distinction (i.e., critical vs. juridical), the position taken at the Council of Trent regarding the authenticity of the Vulgate. For ease of exposition, the statement will be referenced throughout the remainder of this essay as the "affirmatory statement."

All quotations from *Divino Afflante Spiritu* and *Dei Verbum* are taken from the English translations provided at the Vatican website, and all analysis herein is based on those translations.

the practice of textual criticism.⁵ The encyclical asserts that, in its current state, textual criticism “has rules so firmly established and secure, that it has become a most valuable aid to the purer and more accurate editing of the sacred text and that any abuse [due to careless or tendentious application] can easily be discovered” (§18). The goal—and, it seems, the expected result—of the application of textual criticism to the biblical texts is that they “be purified from the corruptions” (§17) introduced by copyists due to carelessness or deliberate redaction.⁶

Given that the objective behind the application of textual criticism is the recovery, to the extent possible, of the biblical texts as they were originally composed, *Divino Afflante Spiritu* naturally places a great deal of emphasis on facility with the ancient languages in which those texts were written. Such facility is obviously a prerequisite for the use of textual criticism in conjunction with the original-language texts. The encyclical, however, also considers knowledge of the original languages necessary for exegetical attentiveness to “the very least expressions” (§15) found in Scripture. Thus, there is an articulated concern not only for textual accuracy, but also for biblical interpretation that fully accounts for the details of the original-language texts, no matter how minor those details may appear.

In addition to its praise for the practices of textual criticism, *Divino Afflante Spiritu* also sees a great deal of promise in historical criticism. The encyclical extols, for example, recent advances in archeological methods and an elevated yield of artifact-based evidence generated by excavation work. Such progress has resulted in substantial new knowledge regarding “languages, letters, events, customs, and forms of worship of most ancient times,” as well as the unearthing of written documents that contain details regarding “letters and institutions, both public and private, especially of the time of Our Savior” (§11). *Divino Afflante Spiritu* further exhorts biblical scholars to avail themselves of those tools that, although prominent in secular fields of study, can be applied no less advantageously to the study of Scripture. The encyclical makes explicit mention in this regard of philology, literary criticism, and that historical knowledge which pertains to the setting, context, and occasion of the biblical text under consideration.⁷ The

⁵ Temporal terms (e.g., recent, current) are used here with respect to the state of affairs at the time the encyclical was written.

⁶ *Divino Afflante Spiritu* exudes a palpable excitement regarding the possibilities of textual criticism, indicating that it has evolved to a “high perfection” (§19). One gets the sense from the encyclical that textual criticism has the capacity to bring about a virtual recovery of the autographs.

⁷ See, for example, *Divino Afflante Spiritu* §§10, 16, and 34.

collective force of these claims is that the application of the historical-critical method to biblical texts will yield previously unavailable interpretive insights, so that the meaning of the texts may be discerned with unprecedented clarity.

Thus, textual criticism brings about a recovery of the original biblical texts, and historical criticism enables a more lucid understanding of those texts—of their content, as it is conveyed through words, idioms, expressions, and narratives. When both forms of criticism are utilized in conjunction with an understanding of the languages in which the original texts were composed, the exegete will be able “to lay hold . . . of the very least expressions which, under the inspiration of the Divine Spirit, have flowed from the pen of the sacred writer, so as to arrive at a deeper and fuller knowledge of his meaning” (§15). This quote captures well the encyclical’s view regarding the aggregate effect of textual and historical criticism. Specifically, their application to biblical manuscripts results in an approach to the word of God as it was originally received and transmitted by the original authors.⁸ Stated another way, the original-language biblical manuscripts, when subjected to the purifying effects of textual criticism, bear a divine imprint that is accessible to the exegete who is knowledgeable in the original languages and who approaches the text with the rigors of historical criticism. This, it appears, is the sense behind the encyclical’s notion of critical authenticity.

Juridical Authenticity

In contrast with the case of “critical authenticity,” whose meaning is helpfully elucidated by the recurrence of the words “critical” and “criticism” throughout the encyclical, the term “juridical” appears for the first time in the affirmatory statement and does not resurface for the remainder of the text. Nonetheless, the immediately surrounding context provides a basis for determining the meaning of the term. In the same article that contains the affirmatory statement, the encyclical notes that the stance taken by the Council of Trent—that the Vulgate should be regarded as authentic—was predicated at least in part on “its legitimate use in the Churches [*sic*] throughout so many centuries” (§21, emphasis added). Further, this prolonged use constitutes evidence that the Vulgate is free from error in matters of faith and morals, and, in turn, that “it may

⁸ The post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Verbum Domini* makes clear the multivalence inherent in the term “word of God” (see §§6–21). It is used in this instance simply to refer to those texts which the Church recognized to be divinely inspired and hence properly included in the canon of Scripture.

be quoted safely . . . in disputations, in lectures and in preaching” (§21).⁹ Importantly, the opening sentence of the article immediately subsequent to that which contains the affirmatory statement includes the following phrase: “*this* authority of the Vulgate in matters of *doctrine*” (§22, emphases added). If the antecedent to “this” is the portion of the affirmatory statement that stipulates the proper role of the Vulgate—“it may be quoted safely and without fear of error in disputations, in lectures, and in preaching”—as it appears to be, then the juridical authenticity of the Vulgate is an authenticity that exerts itself in matters of doctrine. More specifically, the Vulgate’s authenticity manifests in the functional roles of developing, establishing, or settling matters of doctrine in settings such as disputations, lectures, and preaching. Thus, juridical authenticity pertains to a legitimate function, or form of use, within the Church.

Summary

On the basis of these clarifications, it is now possible to burn off some of the fog that clouds the affirmatory statement of *Divino Afflante Spiritu*. As discussed above, the notion of critical authenticity refers to an intrinsic property of biblical texts that have been “purified” by text-critical analysis and illuminated by the tools of historical criticism. Such texts uniquely bear, in a special way, the imprint of divine revelation. Juridical authenticity, on the other hand, refers to a text’s suitability for the purpose of establishing doctrine—it pertains to a functional role within the Church. The Vulgate attains to this authenticity by virtue of its inerrancy with regard to faith and morals, as evidenced by its centuries-long role in the Church as the arbiter of scriptural truth in such matters. It is important to observe here that the descriptors “critical” and “juridical” arise out of two distinct categories. Rather than mutually exclusive or competitive measures based on a single criterion (e.g., hot vs. cold), they represent non-competitive characterizations that issue from distinct criteria. When viewed in this fashion, the affirmatory statement becomes more clear. It simply reflects a distinction regarding *types* of authenticity, as opposed to *degrees* of authenticity.

Despite this clarification, a question naturally arises at this point as to why there is any need for the Church to retain the Vulgate, even for juridical purposes. Because it locates the entirety of its justification for juridical authenticity in the notion that the Vulgate is free from error in

⁹ In other words, the validation of the Vulgate’s authenticity based on several consecutive centuries of use in such matters presumably rests, at least in part, upon the notion that it simply would not have survived for so long as an authority if it were not free from error with regard to faith and morals.

matters of faith and morals, there is a subtle sense that the encyclical is offering what might be termed a “negative” affirmation (i.e., freedom from an undesirable quality), as opposed to a “positive” affirmation (i.e., possession of a desirable quality). Stated another way, the affirmation that a particular text is free from error does not carry the same force as the affirmation that a text derives its authenticity from the presence of a divine imprint. Further, it seems obviously true that the critical authenticity possessed by the original-language texts would render them no less free from error than the Vulgate in matters of faith and morals, so that they would be fully suitable for juridical use. The article that begins immediately subsequent to the affirmatory statement appears to suggest as much, stating that “this authority of the Vulgate in matters of doctrine by no means prevents—nay rather today it almost demands—either *the corroboration and confirmation* of this same doctrine by the original texts or *the having recourse on any and every occasion to the aid of these same texts, by which the correct meaning of the Sacred Letters is everywhere daily made more clear and evident*” (§22, emphases added). Thus, the encyclical seems to indicate that the critical authenticity of the original-language texts trumps the Vulgate even in the juridical sphere in which its authenticity is affirmed. Nonetheless, the encyclical is unequivocal in asserting that the Vulgate is to be retained for juridical purposes.¹⁰ The next section of this essay will attempt to unfold this paradox primarily through an examination of the conceptual relationship between Scripture and Tradition as set forth in *Dei Verbum*.

***Dei Verbum* and the Internal Conversation of the Church**

Although *Divino Afflante Spiritu* can reasonably be understood as a predecessor document to *Dei Verbum*, the two are not identical in focus. *Divino Afflante Spiritu* is first and foremost an encyclical about biblical studies. It focuses heavily on the attributes of the biblical text itself, as well as on those technical methods that improve our access to the text. The document also discusses the legitimate approaches to exegesis and interpretation, and it addresses the proper uses of Scripture on the part of bishops, priests, and the laity. *Dei Verbum*, by contrast, addresses the entirety of divine revelation. While Scripture receives a great deal of attention, the dogmatic constitution is also substantially concerned with Sacred Tradition, and with the

¹⁰ *Divino Afflante Spiritu* explicitly affirms, in §§20–21, the validity of the decrees of the Council of Trent regarding the authenticity of the Vulgate and, as discussed above, it stipulates the authority of the Vulgate within the context of establishing doctrine. Thus, the encyclical indicates a continuing role for the translation within the Church.

interaction between Tradition and Scripture. This interaction lies at the core of the explanation set forth in this essay regarding the status of the Vulgate at the close of the Second Vatican Council.

The Inner Unity of Scripture and Tradition

One theme that surfaces at the outset of *Dei Verbum* is the notion of “inner unity.” God’s self-revelation, the constitution explains, “is realized by deeds and words having an inner unity: the deeds wrought by God in the history of salvation manifest and confirm the teaching and realities signified by the words, while the words proclaim the deeds and clarify the mystery contained in them” (§2). Thus, the words and deeds that constitute God’s intervention into the temporal order have a mutually edifying effect with regard to his self-revelation. The Council carries this motif of inner unity, albeit implicitly, into its discussion of Christ, who is identified as the unique mediator and the fullness of God’s self-revelation to humanity (§2), and who perfected God’s self-revelation in part “through His *words and deeds*” (§4, emphases added).¹¹ Intuition dictates that the words and deeds of Christ—the ultimate manifestation of God’s self-revelation—cannot contradict each other and, in fact, they must be coherent, even if that coherence is not always immediately self-evident.

The inner unity of the words and deeds that constitute God’s self-revelation serves as an important paradigm for *Dei Verbum* as a whole. In the opening paragraph of the constitution, the Council states that it “takes its direction” (§1) from the following verses of 1 John: “We announce to you the eternal life which dwelt with the Father and was made visible to us. What we have *seen* and *heard* we announce to you, so that you may have fellowship with us and our common fellowship be with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:2–3 as quoted in §1 of *Dei Verbum*, emphases added). In this quotation, we see the Church’s self-understanding regarding its obligation to pass on the divine revelation with which it has been entrusted. Within the context of the encyclical as a whole, it is evident that what the Church has *seen* is the work of Christ—his deeds—as witnessed by the Apostles. What the Church has *heard* is the teaching of Christ—his words—as it issued forth from his very lips in the audience of the Apostles.¹² The content of this self-revelation of God is what the Church is obligated to announce to the world, and because it is grounded in the deeds and words of Christ, the revelation that has been entrusted to the Church must itself possess inner unity.

¹¹ Cf. §17, which similarly states that Christ, in his incarnate state on earth, “manifested” himself and the Father “by deeds and words.”

¹² See, in particular, §7 for an explicit statement of these notions.

While God's self-revelation was conveyed to the Church by means of both the words and the deeds of Christ, *Dei Verbum* observes that the Apostles similarly preserved and handed down that revelation through a dual-faceted approach: by way of their actions—their observable deeds, formal preaching, and teaching—and by committing some of what they received to writing (§7). The result was the inception of the two modes of divine revelation that the Church safeguards and nurtures to this day: Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture. With regard to the former, the Apostles selected bishops as successors, to whom they passed on the authority to safeguard and teach what they had themselves received from Christ. In this way, “the apostolic preaching . . . was to be preserved by an unending succession of preachers until the end of time” (§8).

The Council's understanding of the role of Sacred Tradition, relative to Scripture, is central to the constitution as a whole, and to the argument regarding inner unity that is on offer in this essay. Underlying the commission given to the Apostles by Christ to preach the Gospel—a commission that was fulfilled through the combined effort of preaching and committing to writing what Christ had revealed—was God's intention that his self-revelation would “abide perpetually in its *full integrity*” (§7, emphasis added). Similarly, the purpose behind the Apostles' appointment of successors to preserve what was revealed in Christ was “to keep the Gospel forever *whole* and alive within the Church” (§7, emphasis added). Implicit in these assertions is the notion that Scripture alone constitutes an incomplete record, so that in the absence of Tradition, the Gospel that remains is no longer whole. A loss of Tradition, however, would amount to more than simply a loss of content. Specifically, it is by the Church's living Tradition that Sacred Scripture is “more profoundly understood and unceasingly made active” in the Church (§8). Thus, the inner unity between Scripture and Tradition entails an interaction such that the text of Scripture by itself, even where that text is well preserved, represents not just an incomplete revelation, but a revelation whose “full integrity” has been compromised.¹³

The Council profoundly characterizes the relationship between Scripture and Tradition with the notion that they flow “from the same divine wellspring [and] in a certain way merge into a *unity* and tend towards the same end” (§9, emphasis added). Here we see the inner unity that characterizes God's self-revelation explicitly applied to Scripture and Tradition. Just as with the case of God's self-revelation as manifested in the

¹³ This latter notion regarding a free-standing, “well-preserved” text of Scripture is purely hypothetical, since a faithfully preserved, comprehensive, and properly demarcated canon could not itself exist in the absence of the Church's Tradition.

deeds and words of Christ, the fact that Scripture and Tradition flow from the same divine wellspring implies that they cannot contradict, and further, that they must be characterized by an internal coherence, even if such coherence is not always readily apparent. There must, in other words, be an inner unity which characterizes the whole of God's self-revelation, and this *inner unity* is thus intrinsic to the relationship between Scripture and Tradition.¹⁴

The Conversation between Scripture and Tradition

Dei Verbum offers a further characterization of the relationship between Scripture and Tradition that is consonant with, but not repetitive of, the notion of inner unity. Specifically, the Council asserts that there exists a "communication" between Scripture and Tradition (§9). In light of the claims regarding the relationship between Scripture and Tradition chronicled above, this notion of communication must amount to something more than a fanciful characterization for a mere correspondence, or even a complementarity, between the two. Rather, the Council states that through the living Tradition's action upon Scripture "God, who spoke of old, uninterruptedly *converses* with the bride of His beloved Son" (§8, emphasis added). Thus, the "communication" between Scripture and Tradition is an animated and ongoing dialogue.

Following upon the arguments above regarding the inner unity of Scripture and Tradition, it is a small leap to the assertion that the conversation between Scripture and Tradition must itself be coherent. The necessity for such coherence is intuitively clear since this conversation, far from being idle in purpose, represents an unfolding of the revelation that was deposited with the Church by Christ.¹⁵ Consider further that in *Dei Verbum* the Council indicates that Scripture and Tradition together constitute "the supreme rule of faith" (§21), and that sacred theology "rests on the written word of God, together with Sacred Tradition" (§24). One can find here an implicit claim of coherence, in that it is implausible that the Council would understand either the supreme rule of faith or sacred theology to be plagued by incoherence. More significantly, in the preface to *Dei Verbum* itself, the Council states that it "wishes to set

¹⁴ The claim made earlier regarding the paradigmatic nature of the inner unity of Christ's self-revelation as manifested by his deeds and words is not meant to imply a one-to-one mapping between Christ's words and Scripture, or between Christ's deeds and Tradition. It is the inner unity itself, and its concomitant internal coherence, which is paradigmatic.

¹⁵ See, for example, §8: "the Church constantly moves forward toward the fullness of divine truth until the words of God reach their complete fulfillment in her."

forth authentic doctrine on divine revelation and how it is handed on, so that by hearing the message of salvation the whole world may believe, by believing it may hope, and by hoping it may love" (§1). Thus, much is at stake in the successful interaction between Scripture and Tradition, not the least of which is the salvation of souls. In turn, the assertion made here regarding the necessity of an internal coherence to the communication between Scripture and Tradition constitutes a modest claim, and one that comports with the logic of *Dei Verbum*.

In a generic setting, the notion of conversation implicitly entails some concept of language. In turn, a question that can be raised at this point is whether the issue of language carries any relevance for the conversation which takes place within the Church between Scripture and Tradition. *Dei Verbum* does not raise or address this matter explicitly, but it does provide some indicators which are helpful to a consideration of the question. One such indicator is found in the final article of chapter III, which addresses the divine inspiration and interpretation of Scripture. The entire article bears repeating here:

In Sacred Scripture, therefore, while the truth and holiness of God always remains [*sic*] intact, the marvelous "condescension" of eternal wisdom is clearly shown, "that we may learn the gentle kindness of God, which *words cannot express*, and how far He has gone in *adapting His language* with thoughtful concern for our weak human nature." *For the words of God, expressed in human language, have been made like human discourse*, just as the word of the eternal Father, when He took to Himself the flesh of human weakness, was in every way made like men. (§13, emphases added)¹⁶

To elaborate briefly, God, as the "author" (§11) of Scripture, condescended to convey his self-revelation in a manner that comports with the limits of human reason. The divine mode of expression that is natural to the triune Godhead—God's "language"—is unintelligible to created humanity. If God had not overcome this language barrier, his self-revelation would have simply gone undetected by humanity, or, at a minimum, it would have eluded apprehension. Thus, he condescended to express himself in the words of human language. This assertion on the part of the Council does not speak directly to the interaction between Scripture and Tradition, but it does constitute an explicit acknowledgment on the part of the Council regarding the significance of language to the feasibility of successful communication.

¹⁶ The quotation in this article is taken by the Council from Homily 17 of St. John Chrysostom's homilies on Genesis.

Some of the arguments in *Dei Verbum* that lead up to the article quoted above are helpful in fleshing out the issue. In addressing the question of the authorship of the books of the canon, for example, the Council emphasizes that, because they are written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they are free from error. At the same time, the men who actually penned Scripture are acknowledged as “true authors” (§11) by virtue of their agency in the process of transmission. The Council partially synthesizes these notions by stating that “God speaks in Sacred Scripture through men in human fashion” (§12). This statement captures the stipulation expressed above regarding the condescension of God, but it also helpfully conveys the notion that Scripture is God’s word as mediated by humans and expressed in human language. A similar claim is found in the chapter on the handing down of divine revelation (Chapter II), specifically that the living Tradition of the Church, passed on by the Apostles to their successors, develops “in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit” (§8). Here again, just as was described above regarding the transmission of Scripture, although developments in Church Tradition are somehow inspired or influenced by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit works through the successors to the Apostles—the bishops—so that the unfolding of revelation through development in the Church’s Tradition is necessarily mediated by humans and therefore necessarily expressed in human language. The straightforward implication is that, as both streams of divine revelation, which flow from the same divine wellspring, find their expression in human language, so also must the *conversation*—so asserted by the Council—between these two streams take place in human language. That communication, albeit guided by the Holy Spirit, is necessarily subject to the constraints that attend to human conversation as dictated by the roles and functions of human language.¹⁷

Latin as the Language of the Church’s Internal Conversation

The success of a human conversation generally requires that the dialogue partners speak to each other in the same language. Perhaps there are cases in which those in dialogue might successfully achieve some degree of mutual understanding by speaking similar languages, e.g., Spanish and Italian. But it requires no heroic appeal to the intuition to claim that in such cases, even when some degree of successful interchange takes place,

¹⁷ This, of course, is not to suggest a limitation on the capacity of the Holy Spirit in exercising divine influence on the conversation. Rather, the point is that the natural, ongoing progression of the conversation between Scripture and Tradition, as it has been entrusted to the full participation of human agency, will proceed in accordance with the limits inherent in human language and conversation.

the risk and likelihood of a loss of coherence is substantial. Or, to mitigate that risk, the conversation might plod at a pace that prevents meaningful progress. To offer a scenario that perhaps more closely resembles the nature of the conversation between Scripture and Tradition, consider the academician who specializes in the theology of St. Thomas Aquinas. He or she works not through a passive receptivity of the Angelic Doctor's writings, but through a reception and contemplation that ultimately leads back into that corpus, that is, there is a *dialogue* between scholar and Church Doctor. In turn, the scholar might find that a facility with Latin is necessary so as to avoid captivity to the tendencies, whims, or incompetence of a translator. As a skilled Latinist, he or she is in a position not only to receive the texts of Aquinas in an unencumbered fashion, but also to penetrate the subtleties and nuances of those texts so that a more meaningful dialogue may take place. On the other hand, such interaction will necessarily be characterized to some degree by static and dissonance, perhaps with significant consequences, if the scholar possesses no acumen with Thomas's language.

Do the claims set forth here carry any freight with regard to the conversation that takes place within the Church between Scripture and Tradition? If so, they could help explain the Church's decision to retain the Vulgate based on its juridical authenticity. Towards that end, consider that, in the West, both Scripture and Tradition have found their expression in the language of Latin for the vast majority of the Church's history. Prior to St. Jerome's completion of the Vulgate, "Old Latin" translations—compiled for those who had facility with Latin but not with the original biblical languages—were produced in piecemeal fashion during the second century. The Old Latin text is frequently quoted in patristic writings, and portions of it were eventually absorbed wholesale into the Vulgate. Hence, it wielded a good deal of influence prior to the ascendancy of the Vulgate. As for the Vulgate itself, it was completed by St. Jerome in 405 and, by no later than the eighth century, it had become the dominant biblical translation in the West.¹⁸ Jerome undertook this project at the behest of Pope Damasus, who saw the need, in light of variations in extant Old Latin texts, to establish a single authoritative Latin biblical text. The pope's request was also driven by "the realization that Latin had become the *de facto* official language of the Western Church."¹⁹ In 1546,

¹⁸ The historical details of the Old Latin and Vulgate translations are usefully summarized in L. F. Hartman, B. F. Peebles, and M. Stevenson, "Vulgate," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Second Edition, vol. 14, ed. Berard L. Marthaler (Detroit: Thomson/Gale, 2003), 591–600.

¹⁹ See J. F. Collins, "Latin (In the Church)," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 8, 362.

the Vulgate was declared “authentic” at the fourth session of the Council of Trent,²⁰ a status that was reaffirmed at the First Vatican Council in 1870.²¹ At the time that Pope Pius XII wrote *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, Latin had been the principal language of Scripture in the West for nearly 1800 years.

With regard to the Church’s Tradition, significant doctrinal treatises were being composed in Latin at least as early as the year 197, when Tertullian wrote his *Apology* in defense of Christianity.²² He was followed by other influential figures, including Cyprian, Lactantius, Hilary of Poitiers, Minucius Felix, Victorinus, and Arnobius, whose writings (in Latin) St. Jerome referred to as a “library of Christ.”²³ In the late fourth and early fifth centuries, Augustine, writing in Latin, generated a corpus that proved seminal in the history of the Church’s theological life. Contemporaneous with Augustine were the aforementioned Jerome and St. Ambrose of Milan, important Western theologians in their own right. Approximately eight centuries later, Aquinas would produce a body of work in Latin that in many respects remains normative for contemporary Church doctrine.²⁴ As for Church councils, although the canons and decrees of the early councils were composed in Greek, the texts were translated into Latin for use by those bishops in the non-Greek-speaking regions of the Church.²⁵ Beginning with the First Lateran Council (1123) and continuing through the current day, the canons and decrees of the Church’s Ecumenical Councils have been formulated and recorded in Latin. Thus, at the time of *Divino Afflante Spiritu* the Western Church had been establishing its doctrine in the language of Latin for more than 1700 years.

²⁰ *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, trans. H. J. Schroeder (1941; reprint, Rockford, IL: TAN Books and Publishers, 1978), 18.

²¹ See *Dei Filius*, Ch. 2, §6.

²² W. Le Saint, “Tertullian,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 13, 835.

²³ See J. F. Collins, “Latin (In the Church),” 363–64. With the phrase “library of Christ,” the author of the article is quoting from §10 of St. Jerome’s letter to Heliodorus (Letter LX).

²⁴ Not all of the theologians discussed here were bishops, and thus their work was not produced under the influence of the teaching charism that is unique to the successors of the apostles. Rather, it was subject to the consideration and scrutiny of the college of bishops who, by the authority passed down to them, decided what would be explicitly appropriated by the Church. Nonetheless, these theologians, as well as a multitude of others who gave formal expression to their thinking in the language of Latin, contributed in important ways to theological developments that have been incorporated into Church doctrine through the ages.

²⁵ See, for example, Percival’s discussion regarding the number of Nicene canons. Henry R. Percival, *The Seven Ecumenical Councils in The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Second Series, vol. 14, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (1899; reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 44.

When one considers the cumulative theological development that had taken place in the Western Church over the nearly 1800-year period leading up to *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, and that that development would serve as the foundation for future theological development, it is not hard to understand why, for all its exhortations regarding the original-language texts, the encyclical does not suggest that the Latin Vulgate has been rendered obsolete. Dispensing with the Vulgate would introduce a disjunction between Scripture and the Church's living Tradition and potentially destabilize the internal conversation that had been taking place in the language of Latin for nearly the entire life of the Church.

The well-documented confusion that accompanied the parallel but independent development of the doctrine of the Trinity in the East and West may helpfully illustrate the dangers inherent in theological dialogue that is dependent on translation between languages. To recap briefly, the East, primarily through the efforts of the Cappadocian fathers, conceptualized the Trinity in terms of one οὐσία (essence or substance) and three ὑποστάσεις (persons), while the West expressed the doctrine in terms of one *substantia* (substance) and three *personae* (persons). Difficulty ensued owing to the fact that the Latin translation of the Greek word ὑπόστασις is *substantia*, so that it initially appeared to the West that the East spoke of three substances, a formulation with decidedly heretical implications.²⁶ Although the confusion was ultimately overcome, the situation helps illustrate the role and significance of language in theological discourse. It is also important to note that the two Trinitarian formulations discussed above developed within separate common-language dialogues between Scripture and Tradition, and thus the illustration may not fully capture the potential for incoherence in a single two-language dialogue between Scripture and Tradition.

Summary

The argument presented in this section of the essay is grounded in the conceptual relationship between Scripture and Tradition as set forth in *Dei Verbum*. Specifically, the inner unity of God's self-revelation implies an internal coherence between the two streams of that revelation that are

²⁶ Placher asserts that one problem with the Eastern formulation of the doctrine as developed by the Cappadocian fathers is that "it depended so much on particular words that one could hardly express it in any language but Greek." He characterizes Western theologians as "horrified" upon reading Latin translations of Greek texts that appeared, to them, to characterize God as having three substances. See William C. Placher, *A History of Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Louisville/London: Westminster John Knox Press, 1983), 78–79.

safeguarded by the Church: Scripture and Tradition. Further, that coherence necessarily manifests in the conversation between Scripture and Tradition that is described by *Dei Verbum*. Because this conversation is mediated by humans, and hence takes place in human language, such coherence requires that the two dialogue partners—Scripture and Tradition—“speak” the same language. In turn, conditioned on the cumulative development of theology within the Church over the course of roughly 1800 years in the language of Latin, retention of the Vulgate is a matter of necessity. One party to a conversation, in other words, cannot unilaterally shift to a different language without substantially disrupting that conversation. This is particularly true of an ongoing conversation wherein the present attains to coherence only by way of reference, explicit or implicit, to what has been communicated in the past. Thus, the conceptual underpinnings of *Dei Verbum* help to explain why the Vulgate must be retained for juridical purposes, even when the critical authenticity of the original-language biblical manuscripts implies a juridical authenticity that exceeds that of the Latin Vulgate. The next section will provide evidence that this basis for the retention of the Vulgate does not constitute an argument that is uniquely identified with *Dei Verbum*. We shall show, rather, that the theoretical constructs of *Dei Verbum* were developed in continuity with *Divino Afflante Spiritu*.

The Continuity between *Divino Afflante Spiritu* and *Dei Verbum*

The previous section offered an explanation for the retention of the Vulgate based on an analysis of the conceptual relationship between Scripture and Tradition as set forth in *Dei Verbum*. This present section has two objectives: to demonstrate that the conceptual features of *Dei Verbum* arise not in isolation, but in continuity with *Divino Afflante Spiritu*; and to substantiate that *Dei Verbum* complies with the prescriptions of *Divino Afflante Spiritu* for the use of the Vulgate. Evidence of these two forms of continuity—theoretical and practical—will lend credibility to my argument that the notions of language and conversation are fundamental to an understanding of the Vulgate’s role within the Church. It will also help to clarify the status of the Vulgate in the wake of the Council’s promulgation of *Dei Verbum*.

Conceptual Continuity

As noted earlier, *Divino Afflante Spiritu* is focused almost exclusively on biblical exegesis, rather than on the broader issue of divine revelation. In turn, the encyclical does not devote any sustained discussion to the relationship between Scripture and Tradition. What little exists on this topic,

however, tends to be wholly consistent with *Dei Verbum*, even if it is not as thoroughly developed. Most notable is the assertion that those who are engaged in exegesis, “mindful of the fact that here there is question of a divinely inspired text, the care and *interpretation* of which have been *confided* to the Church by God Himself, should no less diligently take into account the explanations and declarations of the teaching authority of the Church, as likewise the interpretation given by the Holy Fathers” (§24, emphases added). The sentiments found in this passage include a clear, albeit tersely expressed, allusion to the deposit of faith entrusted to the Church and jointly revealed in Scripture and Tradition. The fact that not just Scripture, but also its interpretation, have been “confided” to the Church indicates that Tradition is guided by the same Spirit that inspired Scripture. Further, the specified role of Church teaching in scriptural exegesis suggests an interaction between Scripture and Tradition. Elsewhere, the encyclical asserts both that Scripture is “the most precious source of doctrine on faith and morals” (§1), and that exegesis of Scripture should be “in harmony with Catholic doctrine and the genuine current of tradition” (§42). Thus, the collective effect of the encyclical’s claims is that Scripture and Tradition should mutually condition one another. Although the encyclical as a whole devotes scant attention to the full scope of divine revelation, the characterizations that it does offer, as illustrated in the quotes above, generally adumbrate the developments and elaborations of *Dei Verbum*.

There is also evidence of continuity between *Divino Afflante Spiritu* and *Dei Verbum* regarding the issue of language. As discussed earlier, the encyclical places a heavy emphasis on the study of the biblical texts in their original languages, stating within this context that “it is the duty of the exegete to lay hold, so to speak, with the greatest care and reverence of *the very least expressions* which, under the inspiration of the Divine Spirit, have flowed from the pen of the sacred writer, so as to arrive at a deeper and fuller knowledge of his meaning” (§15, emphasis added).²⁷ The collective force of the strands of argumentation in play at this stage of the encyclical—textual criticism, original-language manuscripts, and the transmission of divine revelation into writing—suggests an interpretation of this quote whereby the substantive content of Scripture and the language in which it is written are inextricably bound together, so that for a particular expression, verse, or

²⁷ In interpreting this sentence, it is important to keep in mind that the encyclical, as noted earlier, expresses an optimism regarding the ability of textual criticism to purge biblical manuscripts of corruptions and, for all intents and purposes, to recover the autographs. Under such conditions, “the very least expressions” found in the manuscripts will be those which were expressed by the original human authors under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

passage within the Bible, the language in which it was originally expressed (i.e., Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek), in all its particularities and peculiarities, is itself a carrier of the divine revelation contained therein. The obvious implication is that the process of translation, which is inherently fraught with subjectivity and with difficulties owing to words or idioms that resist conversion into other languages, necessarily entails a substantial risk of loss of content, or, in the case of Scripture, loss of divinely inspired content.

Continuing with the theme of language, the encyclical further states that the human authors of Scripture had “certain fixed ways of expounding and narrating, certain definite idioms, . . . so-called approximations, and certain hyperbolic modes of expression, . . . even paradoxical, which even help *to impress the ideas more deeply on the mind*” (§37, emphasis added). One gets a fairly clear sense here that the function of language in the process of communication is something more than incidental. Rather, the specific language that mediates a particular communication actually becomes intrinsic to the message, so that the message and the language cannot be separated, not just with respect to the process of conveying the message, but also, as the quote above indicates, with respect to the reception of the message. All told, the explicit and implicit assertions of *Divino Afflante Spiritu* concerning the role of language—as a carrier of divine revelation and as the participatory mediator of communication between sender and recipient—accord well with the arguments of the previous section regarding the significance of language within the context of the Church’s conversation between Scripture and Tradition.

The aspects of *Divino Afflante Spiritu* discussed here admittedly do not add up to a precursor that is tightly woven together with the conceptual relationship between Scripture and Tradition as it is developed in *Dei Verbum*. Given, however, that the two documents are separated by a mere twenty-two years—little more than the blink of an eye in the history of the Church—it seems certain that the content of *Divino Afflante Spiritu* noted here with respect to language and the connection between Scripture and Tradition would have been lurking in the Council’s consciousness as it deliberated over and composed *Dei Verbum*. In turn, the conceptual continuities described herein are likely to amount to something more than incidental points of contact, even if *Dei Verbum* does not make the connections in formal or explicit fashion.

Tangible Evidence of Continuity

Up to this point, I have relied exclusively on theoretical arguments to resolve the apparent paradox in *Divino Afflante Spiritu* concerning the status of the Latin Vulgate. In closing, let us see what can be inferred about

the Vulgate's status based on the quotations of Scripture found in *Dei Verbum*. Scripture is quoted eleven times in *Dei Verbum*, and in one of the eleven cases, there is a parenthetical indication that the quotation is taken from the Greek biblical text. In the other ten instances, there is no such indication. For each of these latter ten quotations, a comparison of the scriptural quote in the Latin text of *Dei Verbum* with the corresponding text of the Vulgate indicates that the quote has been lifted, word for word, from the Vulgate. For the one quotation bearing the notation "Greek text" (a quote of 2 Tim 3:16–17 in §11), the first portion of the scriptural quote appears in *Dei Verbum* as "*omnis Scriptura divinitus inspirata et utilis ad docendum, . . .*" whereas in the Vulgate the corresponding text reads "*Omnis scriptura divinitus inspirata utilis est ad docendum, . . .*" Thus, *Dei Verbum* makes two changes to the Vulgate text: the linking verb "*est*" is suppressed, and the conjunction "*et*" is added.²⁸ These changes do, in fact, result in a tighter correspondence between the Latin text and the Greek text, the latter of which reads *πάσα γραφή θεόπνευστος και ωφέλιμος πρὸς διδασκαλίαν . . .* Note the suppression of the linking verb and both the existence and the location of the coordinating conjunction.²⁹

It seems likely that the Council Fathers, in accord with the line of argumentation at this stage of *Dei Verbum*, desired to emphasize the proposition that *all* Scripture is divinely inspired, and so in this case they favored the Greek text over the Vulgate.³⁰ The more significant point,

²⁸ *Dei Verbum* makes no changes, relative to the Vulgate, to the remaining portion of this scriptural quotation.

²⁹ There is a minor complication here in that the Greek text used by the Council is not identified (or, perhaps more accurately, it is not identified in the resources at my disposal). The critical apparatus in the 27th edition of the Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament, however, does not indicate any textual variants for the portion of the scriptural text that was revised, relative to the Vulgate text, in *Dei Verbum* (except to acknowledge the absence of the conjunction in the Old Latin and Vulgate texts). See *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27th ed., ed. Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, and Bruce M. Metzger (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993).

³⁰ In other words, the unaltered Vulgate text could plausibly be read as a claim that pertains only to that subset of Scripture which is divinely inspired, a reading which is possible but substantially less likely with the text as it has been revised in *Dei Verbum*. Thus the change is consistent with the assertion, which appears earlier in the same article, that "the books of both the Old and New Testaments *in their entirety, with all their parts*, are sacred and canonical because written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they have God as their author" (§11, emphasis added). See also §12, which states that "since Holy Scripture must be read and interpreted *in the sacred spirit in which it was written*, no less serious attention must be given to the content and unity of *the whole* of Scripture if the meaning of the sacred texts is to be correctly worked out" (emphases added).

however, is that the approach to scriptural quotation documented here offers tangible evidence regarding the Council's understanding of the role and status of the Vulgate. By way of elaboration, it may be helpful to circle back to *Divino Afflante Spiritu* and reexamine the final statement found therein on the subject of the Vulgate, which reads as follows: "Wherefore *this authority of the Vulgate in matters of doctrine* by no means prevents—nay rather today *it almost demands*—either the corroboration and confirmation of this same doctrine by the original texts or the having recourse on any and every occasion to the aid of these same texts, by which the correct meaning of the Sacred Letters is everywhere daily made more clear and evident" (§22, emphases added). In light of the evidence provided above pertaining to the Council's approach to citing Scripture in *Dei Verbum*, it seems clear that a proper understanding of the encyclical's assertion is that the role of the Vulgate in establishing and informing Church doctrine is *too important* to permit its use for that purpose without recourse to the insights available from the original-language texts.³¹ The approach taken by *Dei Verbum* is fully consonant with this understanding of *Divino Afflante Spiritu*; that is, that in using Scripture to establish doctrine, the original-language texts should serve to corroborate and confirm the content of the Vulgate, and be drawn upon as necessary, but they do not constitute a replacement for the Vulgate. The instance of reliance on the Greek text in the one scriptural quote discussed above provides evidence that the Council did, in fact, keep the original-language texts in view during the formulation of the constitution and did invoke them where necessary or appropriate. Even in this single case, however, other than the revision involving the two words "*et*" and "*est*," the quote is a word-for-word rendering of the Vulgate text. All told, the nearly exclusive use of the Vulgate in the dogmatic constitution supports the inference that, at the time of *Dei Verbum*, the Council understood the Vulgate to be the authoritative biblical text for the purpose of establishing and supporting doctrine.³²

³¹ Thus, while *Divino Afflante Spiritu* takes something of a pejorative stance with regard to the authenticity to be accorded to translations (see, for example, §16 of *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, which indicates that "the original text . . . has more authority and greater weight than . . . even the very best translation"), in the case of the Vulgate, the encyclical, rather than focusing on its deficiency relative to the original-language texts, emphasizes its authoritative status in developing and supporting Church doctrine, i.e., its juridical authenticity.

³² In addition to the eleven quotes from Scripture discussed above, *Dei Verbum* contains myriad paraphrases of and allusions to Scripture. In only three of these cases does the Council indicate that it is referencing the Greek text (all three cases are from the New Testament). Paraphrases and allusions do not lend themselves to

A Note on the New Vulgate

The term “Vulgate” is used throughout this essay in a generic sense without any specification as to the particular edition that is under consideration. There is a lengthy history behind the transmission of the Vulgate which need not be fully recounted here, but a few details are in order. More than eleven centuries after Jerome completed his work, the Council of Trent called for the production of a revised Vulgate, but that charge, at least as it appears in the formal decree, is vague as to purpose or objective.³³ The historical record of the deliberations of the Council Fathers, however, indicates three issues underlying the need for a corrected text: (1) discrepancies among the various Latin texts in circulation at the time and a lack of clarity as to whether any one text held authoritative status; (2) errors and corruptions that had been introduced into Jerome’s text over the centuries since its completion in 405; and (3) the possibility that certain words or phrases in the Vulgate text may not accurately or adequately capture the meaning of the corresponding original-language texts.³⁴

The concerns raised at Trent ultimately gave rise to the Sisto-Clementine Vulgate of 1592, and that text became the authoritative Latin Bible of the Church, a status that it retained for nearly four hundred years. It was the Latin biblical text of record, so to speak, at the time of both *Divino Afflante Spiritu* and *Dei Verbum*, and the analysis involving scriptural quotations conducted in the previous section is therefore based on this edition. Despite its authoritative status, it had become clear long before its eventual subordination that the Sisto-Clementine Vulgate was, from a

the type of analysis performed above on the quotations, but the low incidence of reliance on the Greek text in these cases suggests that the Council may well have adhered to a protocol similar to that which was apparently followed for the quotations.

³³ At the fourth session of the Council of Trent (April 8, 1546), the Council issued its Decree Concerning the Edition and Use of the Sacred Books, wherein it “decrees and ordains that in the future the Holy Scriptures, especially the old Vulgate Edition, be printed in the most correct manner possible.” *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, Schroeder, 19.

³⁴ See Jared Wicks, “Catholic Old Testament Interpretation in the Reformation and Early Confessional Eras,” in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation*, vol. 2, *From the Renaissance to the Enlightenment*, ed. Magne Sæbø (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 627–29. The three concerns identified here are obviously interrelated to some degree. With regard to the first two, once Jerome completed his translation in the year 405, dissemination of the text necessitated copying and recopying. In addition to the inevitable errors resulting from that scribal process, there were, over the centuries, deliberate attempts at improvement and correction of Jerome’s text. Cf. Hartman, Peebles and Stevenson, “Vulgate,” 594–96.

text-critical perspective, insufficient to render it an adequate response to the call issued at Trent.³⁵

In 1907, Pope Pius X set the process into motion once again by forming a commission of Benedictines charged with the task of producing a critical edition of the Vulgate as it was rendered by Jerome in the fifth century.³⁶ This endeavor was understood as a preliminary step in the production of a Vulgate text that would ultimately satisfy the concerns of the Fathers at Trent. In 1965, Pope Paul VI formed the Pontifical Commission for the New Vulgate, the task of which was the production of a new Vulgate text. The process that was initiated at Trent reached closure in 1979 when Pope John Paul II formally promulgated the New Vulgate with the Apostolic Constitution *Scripturarum Thesaurus*.³⁷ At that time, the New Vulgate thus supplanted the Sisto-Clementine edition of the Vulgate and became the Church's authoritative Latin text of Sacred Scripture.

Based, as it is, on critical editions of Jerome's text, as well as modern critical editions of the original-language texts, the New Vulgate presumably possesses an even greater fullness (relative to the Sisto-Clementine edition) of the juridical authenticity attributed to the Vulgate at the Council of Trent and acknowledged in *Divino Afflante Spiritu*. Any emendations to the Sisto-Clementine text resulting from the text-critical efforts underlying the New Vulgate cannot, however, have the effect of undermining established Church doctrine. Rather, errors in doctrine owing to textual corruptions in the Sisto-Clementine edition of 1592 (or previous editions) are precluded by virtue of the fact that *both* conversation partners in the Church's two-thousand-year, internal dialogue emanate from the *same divine wellspring*. Because the Holy Spirit is active in guiding the movement of Church Tradition, the inner unity that exists between Scripture and Tradition will not manifest in the elevation to doctrine of an erroneous teaching that derives from a corrupted biblical text.³⁸

³⁵ For a discussion of this matter, see G. D. Schlegel, "The Vulgate Bible," *Scripture* 2, no. 3 (1947): 66–67.

³⁶ The original scope of the task assigned to the Benedictines was the recovery of the entirety of Jerome's Vulgate, but the project appears to have been brought to a close with the completion of the Old Testament.

³⁷ The New Vulgate constitutes something of a "corrected" version of the Sisto-Clementine Vulgate, relying heavily on the Benedictines' critical edition of the Old Testament of Jerome's Vulgate and the Wordsworth and White critical edition of Jerome's New Testament. These texts were further checked against modern critical editions of the original-language biblical texts. See the Praenotanda of *Nova Vulgata Bibliorum Sacrorum Editio* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1986).

³⁸ In any case, the possibility discussed here is likely to be purely hypothetical. Wicks notes that the decree at Trent regarding the authenticity of the Vulgate

Conclusion

This essay represents an attempt to discern the ongoing role of the Latin Vulgate in the Roman Catholic Church in light of what initially appears to be a silence on the matter on the part of *Dei Verbum*. Based on an analysis which jointly considers both *Dei Verbum* and its predecessor document, the encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, the conclusion of this essay is that the Vulgate retains its status as the Church's authoritative biblical translation for the purpose of developing, establishing, and articulating doctrine—what *Divino Afflante Spiritu* refers to as its juridical authenticity. This conclusion is supported by the implications of *Dei Verbum*'s conceptualization of Scripture and Tradition as two streams of divine revelation that are perpetually in conversation with one another, and by the long history of the language of Latin within the Church as the mediator of both Scripture and Tradition. The analysis further supports that traces of the key conceptual considerations of *Dei Verbum* which undergird the conclusions of this essay can be found in *Divino Afflante Spiritu*; conceptual continuity between the two may thus be inferred. The final portion of the essay provides tangible evidence that, in formulating *Dei Verbum*, the Council understood the Vulgate to be the default biblical translation for the purpose of developing and promulgating doctrine. Such evidence indicates that *Dei Verbum* is not quite as silent regarding the status of the Vulgate as it might initially appear.

Some implications of these findings can be briefly enumerated. To begin, the continuing authenticity of the Vulgate means that, for Catholic biblical scholars, that text should have a voice in the process of biblical interpretation. Perhaps more significantly, the Vulgate should carry substantial weight for Catholic theologians in the explication and development of theological doctrine. Self-evidently, the heavy emphasis found in *Divino Afflante Spiritu* on proficiency with the original biblical languages would,

“rested on a conviction that the Vulgate was a trustworthy text that underlay Church teaching and had never led to heresy” (629). At the outset of the Benedictines' effort to recover the text of St. Jerome, Gasquet states, “Substantially, no doubt, the present authentic Clementine text represents that which St. Jerome produced in the fourth century, but no less certainly it, the printed text, stands in need of close examination and much correction to make it agree with the translation of St. Jerome.” See Francis Aidan Gasquet, “Revision of the Vulgate” in *Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 15, ed. Charles G. Herbermann (New York: The Encyclopedia Press, 1913), 516. Several years into the Benedictine project, Weld-Blundell similarly indicates that “[n]o changes in the [Sisto-Clementine] text are likely to be of any grave importance, but those of less importance are numerous.” See Adrian Weld-Blundell, “The Revision of the Vulgate Bible,” *Scripture* 2, no. 4 (1947): 103.

for Catholic scholars and theologians, apply with equal force to Latin. Such proficiency may also be important for bishops, who bear ultimate responsibility for the proper catechesis of the laity. Finally, the juridical authenticity of the Vulgate carries relevance for those engaged in the production, new or ongoing, of Bible translations for use by Catholics, especially when such translations include study notes which identify and expound upon the interrelationships between Scripture and Church doctrine. **N V**