

# The Old Catholic view on scripture and tradition : a short study of a theological organism

Autor(en): **Smit, Peter-Ben**

Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **Internationale kirchliche Zeitschrift : neue Folge der Revue internationale de théologie**

Band (Jahr): **97 (2007)**

Heft 2

PDF erstellt am: **22.07.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-405029>

## **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Inhalten der Zeitschriften. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern. Die auf der Plattform e-periodica veröffentlichten Dokumente stehen für nicht-kommerzielle Zwecke in Lehre und Forschung sowie für die private Nutzung frei zur Verfügung. Einzelne Dateien oder Ausdrucke aus diesem Angebot können zusammen mit diesen Nutzungsbedingungen und den korrekten Herkunftsbezeichnungen weitergegeben werden. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. Die systematische Speicherung von Teilen des elektronischen Angebots auf anderen Servern bedarf ebenfalls des schriftlichen Einverständnisses der Rechteinhaber.

## **Haftungsausschluss**

Alle Angaben erfolgen ohne Gewähr für Vollständigkeit oder Richtigkeit. Es wird keine Haftung übernommen für Schäden durch die Verwendung von Informationen aus diesem Online-Angebot oder durch das Fehlen von Informationen. Dies gilt auch für Inhalte Dritter, die über dieses Angebot zugänglich sind.

---

# The Old Catholic View on Scripture and Tradition: A Short Study of a Theological Organism<sup>1</sup>

*Peter-Ben Smit*

## 1. Introduction

The question of the role of Scripture in the life of the Church belongs without any doubt to the *loci classici* of dogmatic theology. The Old-Catholic theological tradition is no exception in this respect, though its position in the confessional landscape has necessitated a careful negotiating between ‘Protestant’ and ‘Roman-Catholic’ notions of the role Scripture would have to play in theology<sup>2</sup>. Continued reflection on this question is necessary, not least in the light of the debate on biblical interpretation which has arisen recently in and among Churches with which the Old-Catholic Churches are in full communion, those of the Anglican Communion<sup>3</sup>.

In this study, which can only consider a limited amount of sources, attention will be drawn to the position of Archbishop Andreas Rinkel, which is not widely known, due to the way his work has been published (cf. below). Rinkel developed his own position in discussion with theologians

---

<sup>1</sup> This article bases itself to a considerable extent on the thesis written in ecumenical theology for the final examinations of the Old-Catholic Seminary in Utrecht on December 20, 2003: Peter-Ben Smit, *Andreas Rinkel als oecumenisch dogmaticus*. Scriptie t.b.v. kerkelijk examen in het vak Oecumenica aan het Oud-Katholiek Seminarie te Utrecht. The thesis was supervised by prof. dr. Martien F.G. Parmentier (Old-Catholic Seminary Utrecht / University of Bern) and prof. em. dr. Jan Veenhof (Free University, Amsterdam). I am grateful to them and also to prof. em. Jan Visser for letting me use Rinkel’s copy of Bavinck’s dogmatics, which is in his private possession.

<sup>2</sup> In fact, the theological spectrum Rinkel oriented himself within is much broader than this. In his introduction he outlines his various sources of inspiration, which not only include thinkers from the Old-Catholic tradition, but also from the Roman-Catholic enlightenment theology of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, (liberal) German protestant theologians, theologians from the Anglican and Orthodox traditions, and especially also from the Reformed tradition, most significantly Barth and Bavinck. Cf. Andreas Rinkel, *Dogmatische Theologie*, vol. I: Algemene Dogmatiek en Bizardere Dogmatiek, deel I, Collegedictaat van Dr. A. Rinkel Aartsbisschop van Utrecht (stencilled edition), 1956, pp. 4–9.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. the comments in: The Lambeth Commission on Communion, *The Windsor Report 2004*, London (Anglican Communion Office) 2004, sections 52–62.

from outside and from inside his own tradition, most notably the reformed theologian Herman Bavinck. Rinkel will not be studied on his own, however, as he will be brought into conversation with later representative statements on the same subject, most notably as they can be found in the agreed statements on Old-Catholic and Orthodox theology as they were published in 1989. They use a very classical theological language, which makes them very suitable for comparison with Rinkel. In spite of the fact that the former is not a full dogmatic theology, comparing the two may nevertheless be a helpful way of teasing out emphases of Rinkel within the context of Old-Catholic theology<sup>4</sup>. Furthermore, attention will also be drawn to the work of Urs Küry in this field. Together with Rinkel, he is a representative of what may be termed Old-Catholic mainstream theology, or rather of a generation of theologians working in its context<sup>5</sup>. In his work, two options for describing the relationship between Scripture and Tradition are presented, of which only one occurs in Rinkel's work and in the agreed statements of the Orthodox-Old-Catholic dialogue. By way of this comparison, it will be shown that within Old-Catholic mainstream theology between 1889 and 1975/1981, the years in which the Orthodox-Old-Catholic agreed statements that discuss Scripture and Tradition were passed, a clear choice has been made for one particular model of describing this relationship.<sup>6</sup> This model has formed the basis for later discussions in Old-Catholicism about the hermeneutical appropriation of Scripture

---

<sup>4</sup> Another way of doing this would be by comparing Rinkel with his inspirator Bavinck, i.e. within an ecumenical context. This, however, has already been done elsewhere. Cf. Jan Visser, 'De dogmatisch theoloog', in: Wietse B. van der Velde, Fred Smit, Peter J. Maan, M.J.IJ.W. Roosjen, Jan Visser (eds.), *Adjutorio Redemptoris*, Amersfoort (Centraal Oud-Katholiek Boekhuis) 1987, pp. 207–221; Peter-Ben Smit, 'De oud-katholieke recepte van Bavincks *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*: Rinkels *Dogmatische Theologie*', in: George Harinck, Gerrit Neven (eds.), *Ontmoetingen met Bavinck* (ADChartasreeks 9), Barneveld (Vuurbaak) 2006, pp. 87–105.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. e.g. Urs von Arx, 'The Old-Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht', in: Paul Avis (ed.), *The Christian Church. An Introduction to the Major Traditions*, London (SPCK) 2002, pp. 157–185, 160–161.

<sup>6</sup> Even though the 1889 Bishops' Declaration did comment on Scripture and Tradition and the 1874 Bonn Reunion Conference outlined a particular understanding of Scripture and Tradition in its ninth thesis, discussion about the relationship between the two only emerged in the late 1930. Cf. Urs Küry, 'Die Internationalen altkatholischen Theologentagungen von 1950 bis 1971', *IKZ* 67 (1977), pp. 106–124, 140–184, 224–251; 68 (1978), pp. 83–122; observations made by Kurt Stalder are referred to in: *IKZ* 68 (1978), pp. 84–86. For the two documents of 1889 and 1874, cf. Urs von Arx / Maja Weyermann (eds.), *Statut der Internationalen Altkatholischen Bischofskonferenz*

and Tradition. These discussions began in the early 1980s and fall outside the scope of this paper,<sup>7</sup> as it is only concerned with the relationship between Scripture and Tradition.

When discussing Rinkel's work, it is probably best to concentrate on his full dogmatic theology, as it is not only a work he has been working on continuously since his appointment to the chair of systematic theology at the Seminary in Amersfoort, but also a work which will be regarded as a conclusive statement of his theology.<sup>8</sup> This also applies to the question of Scripture and Tradition.<sup>9</sup> In this way, it is possible to give a balanced account of an Old-Catholic view of Scripture (and Tradition) and to hear simultaneously the theological voice of Rinkel individually.

---

(*IBK*). *Offizielle Ausgabe in fünf Sprachen*, Beiheft zu *IKZ* 91 (2001), pp. 25–27; Urs Küry, *Die altkatholische Kirche. Ihre Geschichte, ihre Lehre, ihr Anliegen*, revised edition ed. by Christian Oeyen, Stuttgart (EVD) <sup>2</sup>1978 = <sup>3</sup>1982, p. 463; see also note 74 below. After the Second World War the theme was taken up briefly at the 1951 Old Catholic Theologians' Conference of Bonn in the context of an exchange of views between Dutch and Swiss Old Catholics on the influence of the dialectic theology on the Swiss Old Catholic Church, but no agreed statement was made, cf. Küry, 'Theologentagungen', *IKZ* 67 (1977), p. 151.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. e.g. 'Erklärung der Internationalen Altkatholischen Theologentagung 1981', *IKZ* 73 (1983), pp. 65–69, at p. 68 note 8: 'Die immer wieder erfolgende Berufung altkatholischer Kirchen und Theologen auf die Tradition der "ungeteilten Kirche des 1. Jahrhunderts" wird heute oft als unbegreiflich und unmöglich betrachtet'. Kurt Stalder is the author of this remark according to Angela Berlis, 'Die Berufung auf die Alte Kirche als Hilfe auf dem Weg in die Zukunft – Einführung in das Thema der Internationalen Altkatholischen Theologenkonferenz', *IKZ* 86 (1996), pp. 16–25, at p. 16 note 2.

<sup>8</sup> Visser, 'Theoloog' (see note 4), pp. 215–219, refers to a number of shifts in Rinkel's theology due to his ecumenical commitment: away from a primary interest in the Sacraments and towards questions of Scripture and Tradition as well as Church, Orders and the Sacraments. However, little of this is documented in publications of Rinkel after 1956 and it may be assumed that most of it is reflected in his *Dogmatische Theologie*.

<sup>9</sup> Significant moments in Rinkel's development of his thinking about Scripture included not only the reflection on his own theological tradition and that of the Roman-Catholic and Anglican (to a lesser extent the Eastern Orthodox) traditions, but also the consideration of the emerging theology of Karl Barth, which issued in a heavy debate with the Swiss Old-Catholic (Barthian) scholar Arnold Gilg at the Old Catholic Theologians' Conference in Zürich 1938. Cf. Visser, 'Theoloog' (see note 4), pp. 213–214, and esp. the following publications: Arnold Gilg, 'Zum altkirchlichen Traditions-gedanken', *IKZ* 29 (1939), pp. 28–49 and Andreas Rinkel, 'Wort Gottes und Tradition in der altkatholischen Kirche unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Utrechter Konvention', *IKZ* 29 (1939), pp. 51–61, idem, 'Die Kirche Christi und das Wort Gottes', *IKZ* 27 (1937), pp. 85–91.

## 2. A Current Old-Catholic View: The Agreed Statements of the Orthodox-Old-Catholic Dialogue

Before turning to Rinkel, attention has to be paid to the current Old-Catholic theological situation. Without exaggeration, the present state of affairs can be described as a marriage between a dogmatic theological position akin to that of Eastern Orthodox Churches with modern (and post-modern) exegetical methods and hermeneutical models as they have become part of the canon of the universities and seminaries where Old-Catholic clergy is trained<sup>10</sup>. One may illustrate the former by the following passages from the agreed statements of the Orthodox-Old Catholic dialogue, where the discussion of the significance of Scripture has found its place within the chapter on the 'Doctrine of God', and in this context within the paragraph on 'Divine Revelation and its Transmission.' It states the following:

‘4. This supernatural revelation in Christ is communicated in the Tradition of the Holy Apostles, which was handed on in written form in the Scriptures inspired by God and in oral form by the living voice of the Church. The oral tradition is preserved, on the one hand, in the Creed and other definitions and canons of the seven Ecumenical Councils and local synods, in the writings of the Holy Fathers and in the holy liturgy and generally in the Church’s liturgical practice, and, on the other hand, finds expression in the continued official teaching of the Church.

5. Scripture and tradition are not different expressions of the divine revelation but distinct ways of expressing one and the same Apostolic tradition. Nor does any question arise, therefore, of the precedence of one over the other: “both have the same force in relation to true religion” (Basil the Great, *Spir.* 272 – PG 32.188). “Scripture is understood within the tradition, but the tradition preserves its purity and the criterion of its truth through Scripture and from the content of Scripture.” (Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Commission for the Holy and Great Synod, 16th to 28th July, Chambésy 1973, p. 110). The Apostolic Tradition is preserved and handed on unadulterated by the Church in the Holy Spirit.’<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Peter-Ben Smit, ‘Biblische Hermeneutik im Spannungsfeld persönlicher und kirchlicher Identität’, *IKZ* 96 (2006), pp. 135–151.

<sup>11</sup> Urs von Arx (ed.), *Koinonia auf altkirchlicher Basis. Deutsche Gesamtausgabe der gemeinsamen Texte des orthodox-altkatholischen Dialogs 1975–1987 mit französischer und englischer Übersetzung*, Beiheft *IKZ* 79 (1989), pp. 174–175. This statement was agreed on in 1975.

A second significant discussion of Scripture and Tradition appears in the agreed statement on ‘Authority of the Church and in the Church’:

‘A continuous task of the Church is the interpretation of Holy Scripture. Holy Scripture does not stand above the Church; it came into being in it. As the Church lives in the light of the witness of Holy Revelation, so Holy Scripture is also understood and interpreted in connection with living tradition in the Church and with its decisions regarding issues of faith. That is why only that doctrine is true – beyond the difficulty of expression bound to specific time and conditioned by language – that agrees in its essence with Holy Scripture and holy tradition. In expressing its authority in dogmatic decisions, the Church always rests on both, that is on Holy Scripture and holy tradition, by preserving the testimony of both and deepening their understanding.’<sup>12</sup>

With these two lengthy quotations a representative impression has been given of the way in which Old-Catholic theology – expressed in a classical theological language as also used by Rinkel – treats the subject of Scripture and Tradition.

### 3. The view of Urs Küry

Urs Küry has presented his view on the relationship between Scripture and Tradition in the context of a theology which sought to situate itself over against contemporary Roman-Catholic theology<sup>13</sup>. He offers two succinct models, both taking their starting point in the communication of divine revelation, which are worth quoting in full here. The first of these models is, as Küry indicates himself in its context as well, inspired by the theology of Karl Barth and runs as follows: revelation takes place as:

‘1. geschichtliche Offenbarung in Gottes Wort und Tat; 2. biblische Offenbarung in Schrift und apostolische Urtradition; 3. vergegenwärtigende Offenbarung (nach dem eigentlichen Offenbarungszeitalter) in Predigt und Sakrament.’<sup>14</sup>

The second model is, as Küry indicates in its context, similar to models found in Eastern Orthodox theology. The overarching principle in this model is that of tradition, in which revelation is communicated in three ways:

---

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp. 194–195. This statement was agreed on in 1981.

<sup>13</sup> Küry, *Kirche* (see note 6), pp. 132–133.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 135.

‘1. geschichtliche Offenbarung; 2. die Schrift als Ausschnitt aus dem Überlieferungsstrom der Offenbarung; 3. die kirchliche Tradition in ihrer bewahrenden und vergegenwärtigenden Funktion.’<sup>15</sup>

In the end, however, Küry has his reservations about the second model.<sup>16</sup> In a clarifying section about Holy Scripture, Küry underlines in this context therefore the mysterious fact<sup>17</sup> of the divine origins of the biblical canon and subordinates ecclesial tradition, which seems to be more in harmony with the first than with the second model of describing the transmission of divine revelation (and in that context the relationship between Scripture and Tradition).

#### 4. Andreas Rinkel’s Dogmatic Theology

Archbishop Andreas Rinkel of Utrecht (1889–1979) was without doubt one of the main theological innovators in the Old-Catholic Church of the Netherlands of the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>18</sup>. This becomes apparent in his early essay on the theology of the sacraments<sup>19</sup>, his early and enduring commitment to the nascent ecumenical movement<sup>20</sup>, but also in his dogmatic theology, which was published for the internal use of the Old-Catholic Seminary<sup>21</sup>.

When turning to the question of the place of Scripture with Rinkel, a first place to stop are his own theological principles, as he laid them out in the preface to his dogmatic theology<sup>22</sup>. Here a certain tradition within Old-

---

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., pp. 135–136.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., pp. 135–136.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 136.

<sup>18</sup> A full biography remains a desideratum, but see: Fred Smit, ‘Andreas Rinkel (1889–1979)’, in: Van der Velde et al. (eds.), *Adjutorio* (see note 4), pp. 3–197.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Andreas Rinkel, ‘Das Hauptstück: “De Sacramentis in Genere”’, *IKZ* 6 (1916), pp. 79–91.215–231, idem, *De Zeven Sacramenten. I. Inleidende Gedachten*, Zaandam (OKOF) 1915.

<sup>20</sup> Peter J. Maan, ‘Rinkel tussen oost en west’, in: van der Velde et al. (eds.), *Adjutorio* (see note 4), pp. 222–231.

<sup>21</sup> Rinkel, *Theologie I* (see note 2), pp. 9–11.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Rinkel, *Theologie I* (see note 2), pp. 5–9. These principles include the following: Catholic theologians should proceed from the revelation and do their own study of Holy Scripture, Church history, liturgy and canon law, in continuous exchange with specialists in these fields and with a strong focus on the ecclesial tradition. An ecumenical outlook in this respect is indispensable, as is the exchange with others, since the goal of true Catholic theology is to find the true Catholic doctrine in such a way that it becomes communicable for the present time.

Catholic theology of an emphasis of one's own study of Scripture is noted, with which Rinkel agrees<sup>23</sup>. When noting the many references (including quotations) and exegetical excursuses that his dogmatic theology contains, one certainly gains the impression that Rinkel remained true to these principles. Strikingly, the amount of explicitly exegetical work in his dogmatic theology is significantly larger than in Bavinck's work. In spite of this statistical observation, it still remains to be asked what this means theologically speaking. One may find a first answer to this question in Rinkel's discussion of the method of dogmatic theology, which he discusses as part of the introductory section to the first volume of his dogmatic theology (the "general dogmatics"). Here Rinkel, drawing heavily on his main inspirator Bavinck<sup>24</sup>, in fact receives the three sources of dogmatic theology immediately from him (the passage in Rinkel's copy of Bavinck's book is underlined). It is all about (a) Scripture, (b) the witness of the Church, and (c) the Christian consciousness<sup>25</sup>. (It may be noted that this seems to come close to the three Anglican principles of Scripture, Tradition and Reason, even if Rinkel does not refer to this explicitly. As a member of the 1931 commission, which drew up the Bonn-Agreement, Rinkel must have been well aware of this connection, however<sup>26</sup>.)

To see how this view of Rinkel's materializes in his dogmatic theology, it is probably most helpful to turn to Rinkel's answer first, and then to review the road upon which he reached it. The answer is, when focussing on the relationship between Scripture and Tradition, the following:

'Thus, the relationship (between Scripture and Tradition) remains characterized best by the word *charter*. As a charter Scripture derives its significance on the one hand from that what it focuses on, while it guarantees its reliability on the other hand. Therefore it moves at the same speed as the revelation and it ends as soon as the objective revelation is ended. Then the Holy Spirit begins its work, making the objective revelation the subjective possession of human beings, whereby the Church is the sacramental principle, renewing the human

---

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. pp. 5–6.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 26–31, Herman Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek I*, Kampen (Kok) <sup>3</sup>1918, p. 82. Rinkel's notes and underlining in his copy in this section of Bavinck's work suggest that he has read it intensively.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Rinkel, *Theologie I* (see note 2), 26; Bavinck, *Dogmatiek I* (see note 24), p. 42.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Visser, 'Theoloog' (see note 4), pp. 212–213.



being in its “being,” and Scripture the enlightening principle, renewing human beings in their consciousness.’<sup>27</sup>

Rinkel’s paragraph on Holy Scripture (Heilige Schriftuur)<sup>28</sup> is part of the third section of the first main part of his dogmatic theology, the “general dogmatics”. In this third section, the “foundations of the dogma” are discussed<sup>29</sup>. This takes place in three subsections, a first one on the epistemology<sup>30</sup>, a second one on revelation in the objective sense of the word<sup>31</sup>, and a final one on revelation in the subjective sense of the word<sup>32</sup>. The paragraph on Holy Scripture is part of the second of these subsections, in which it follows upon a more general discussion of revelation<sup>33</sup>, which builds up on the epistemological section, and is followed by a discussion of Tradition<sup>34</sup>. In the twelve pages of the paragraph, two main issues are addressed: the relationship between Holy Scripture and revelation (143–145) and subsequently its inspiration (146–155). Strikingly, more space is devoted to the latter than the former. One reason might be the amount of attention the subject receives in Bavinck’s work, as Bavinck developed his own concept of scriptural inspiration, which Rinkel followed<sup>35</sup>.

When discussing the relationship between Scripture and revelation, Rinkel’s starting point is the question as to how the contents of the revela-

---

<sup>27</sup> Vgl. Rinkel, *Theologie I* (see note 2), p. 145 (all translations are, unless indicated otherwise, by the author): ‘Zo blijft de verhouding het best getekend door het woord *oorkonde*. Als oorkonde ontleent de Schriftuur enerzijds haar gewicht aan hetgeen zij fixeerte, terwijl zij anderzijds de betrouwbaarheid daarvan weer waarborgt. Daarom houdt zij gelijke tred met de openbaring en eindigt zij, zodra de objectieve openbaring voltooid is. Dan vangt de H. Geest zijn werk aan, die de objectieve openbaring tot subjectief bezit van de mens maakt, waarbij de kerk het sacramenteel princip is, de mens vernieuwend in zijn “zijn”, de Schriftuur het illuminerend princip, de mens vernieuwend in zijn bewust-zijn.’

<sup>28</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 143–155.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93 (“De grondslagen van het dogma”).

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 93–115.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 117–175.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 176–199.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 117–142.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 157–175.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Bavinck, *Dogmatiek I* (see note 24), pp. 406–476, and further Dirk van Keulen, *Bijbel en dogmatiek. Schriftbeschouwing en schriftgebruik in het dogmatisch werk van A. Kuyper, H. Bavinck en G.C. Berkouwer*, Kampen (Kok) 2003, pp. 68–175, esp. pp. 99 ff.; Jan Veenhof, *Inspiratie en revelatie*, Amsterdam (Buijten & Schipperheijn) 1968, pp. 416–477.

tion, as discussed and defined in the preceding paragraph<sup>36</sup>, can be known<sup>37</sup>. The immediate answer is that this takes place *through tradition* on the basis of the observation that the revelation in Christ is historical and must therefore be handed on through history: ‘Revelation *is* history, that is: to the extent that it takes place *within* and *as* history. Christ is a historical personality. God’s revelation in Christ is the entering of the eternal into time.’<sup>38</sup>

Subsequently, Rinkel recognizes that revelation takes place in word and deed, noting, however, that in order to be handed down the generations, it has to become part of the process of tradition, which itself is a linguistic process. In the context of the latter, *writing* is then the way to record things in a durable way, which leads Rinkel to suggest that revelation more or less demands its scriptural fixation<sup>39</sup>. From here, it is only a small step to the statement that the written form of revelation, i.e. Scripture, is the pre-eminent and best tradition of revelation. Or, put differently: ‘the tradition of revelation refers us to Scripture as its best source of knowledge.’<sup>40</sup> As the *written* witness of revelation, Scripture is the primary source of knowledge of revelation, which is the ecumenical tradition in this respect<sup>41</sup>. From this role of Scripture as the primary witness to divine revelation, which itself is God’s revelation in Christ and as such the

---

<sup>36</sup> Rinkel, *Theologie I* (see note 2), p. 122: ‘Openbaring is dus van goddelijke oorsprong, manifestatie van God, maar gericht op ‘s mensen religieuze aanleg, die zij bereikt langs de psychologische weg van inspiratie of illuminatie. Openbaring in schriftuurlijke zin is zelfmededeling, zelfbekendmaking Gods, aan de mens, waardoor deze als “ad Deum creatus”, zich ook werkelijk tot God richten zal en met Hem in gemeenschap zal treden.’

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 143: ‘Hoe komt de inhoud der openbaring ter onzer kennis? Hoe wordt de revelation objectiva een revelatio subjectiva? Door welke media appelleert het principium cognoscendi externum op het principium cognoscendi internum? Praktisch en concreet: hoe krijgen wij kennis van de christelijke heilswaarheid; waar vinden wij haar?’

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 143: ‘De openbaring *is* geschiedenis, nl. in zoverre zij in de geschiedenis en als geschiedenis plaats grijpt. Christus is een historische persoonlijkheid. Gods openbaring in Christus is een ingaan van het eeuwige in de tijd.’ Rinkel supports this with references to John 17:5; 1:14, resp. 8:58; 1:14.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 143: ‘Zo vraagt als vanzelf ook de openbaring om vastgelegd te worden in schrift.’

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 143: ‘De traditie der openbaring verwijst ons naar de Schriftuur als haar beste kenbron.’

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 143.

foundation and norm of Christian faith, its foundational and regulating role derives. Even so the scriptural witness itself becomes part of the “*historia revelationis*”<sup>42</sup>. In this sense, Scripture is the authentic charter of God’s revelation. It is in its entirety intended to be the source of knowledge of this revelation as if it were the original source (i.e. Christ)<sup>43</sup>.

Having come to the conclusion that Scripture is the charter of divine revelation, Rinkel states that the right relationship between revelation and Scripture has also been indicated<sup>44</sup>. Still, it is in need of some elaboration in view of the identification of the two in earlier theology<sup>45</sup>. In fact, Rinkel aims at steering between (a) the Scylla of an ‘orthodox intellectualism’ (he) found in protestant theology, which identified Scripture and revelation in such a way that all human cooperation was blotted out and revelation reduced to verbal revelation, an approach which also leads to an opposition of Scripture and Tradition, and (b) the Charybdis of too strong a separation of the revelation and Scripture in modern theology, overemphasizing the human side of the biblical writings and neglecting their inspiration, thus leading either to a kind of rationalism or mysticism, forgetting that revelation only becomes known from Scripture<sup>46</sup>. Thus, Rinkel arrives at his own proposal: revelation and inspiration should neither be separated from each other, nor should they be identified with each other; rather, Scripture and revelation should be seen as interrelated by means of an inspired process of the verbal fixation of the latter. This verbal form of revelation, Scripture, becomes a factor of revelation itself, about which can be said that it is the ‘*medium quo revelatio immediata mediata facta inque libros relata est*’<sup>47</sup>. In turn, these considerations lead to a number of further statements. Firstly and strikingly, Rinkel notes that the expression “Word of God” can when referring to the Bible only be used in a figurative, relative and edifying way. Revelation (i.e. the actual self-communication of God) is older than Scripture and also exists without the latter, while, conversely, certainly not everything contained in Scripture is fruit of the revelation<sup>48</sup>. This notwithstanding, Scripture is still in a very special

---

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., pp. 143–144.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 144.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 144.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 144.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 144.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 144.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., pp. 144–145. Rinkel does not elaborate on the latter point.

sense the interpreter<sup>49</sup> of revelation; while it received its content from revelation and owes its coming into existence to the bearers of tradition, Scripture is still the medium that brings revelation to the knowledge of all generation, itself emerging from the *viva vox* of the proclamation, it is also the *norma et regula* for this *viva vox* in later generations<sup>50</sup>.

With this, Rinkel's argument in favour of the suitability of the concept of Scripture as "charter" of the revelation has been outlined. Rinkel, however, states what he means once more and elaborates it in yet another direction. To begin with, he paraphrases what has gone before by stating again why the concept of a charter is so helpful: 'As a charter, Scripture derives its weight on the one hand from that what it fixated, while, on the other hand, it also guarantees its reliability.'<sup>51</sup> From this follows that Scripture has the same place as revelation and ends as soon as the objective revelation has been completed, which happens when the Holy Spirit begins his work turning the objective revelation into the subjective property of human beings; in this context the Church is the sacramental principle, renewing humans in their being, while Scripture is the illuminating principle, renewing human beings in their consciousness<sup>52</sup>, since Scripture is never a dead letter, but always a living witness (cf. Rom. 15:4).

Thus, most of what is needed to be said about the character of Scripture has indeed been said. In Rinkel's view, however, two issues have to be examined in a more elaborate way. These are the inspiration of Scripture and, as has been already noted above, the issue of tradition: in spite of Rinkel's tight connection of Scripture and tradition – or in fact the integration of Scripture into tradition as its innate norm –, he does treat it in a separate paragraph, set apart from his discussion of Scripture<sup>53</sup>.

When turning to the issue of the inspiration of Scripture first<sup>54</sup>, it is for the purposes of this paper probably most helpful to concentrate on Rinkel's own synthesis rather than the journey through the history of dogma

---

<sup>49</sup> Dutch 'talk'.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 145.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 145.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 145. In Dutch the Church deals with the 'zijn' (being) of human beings and Scripture with their 'bewustzijn' (consciousness).

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., pp. 156–175.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., pp. 146–155.

he undertakes to reach it<sup>55</sup>. This synthesis consists mainly of two parts: a short discussion of the kind of authority and the position of authority ('gezagshouding') Scripture holds<sup>56</sup>, and a longer discussion of the organic view of scriptural inspiration<sup>57</sup>. Both have to be discussed in the order in which Rinkel presents them.

In significant contrast to his inspirator Bavinck, Rinkel's first statement in his discussion of the authority of Scripture is that the (in his view) circular argument based on 2 Tim. 3:26 (2 Petr. 1:21) is not very helpful in terms of establishing authority, inspiration or credibility of Scripture. Rather, he brings forth the consideration that the reader of Scripture is struck by the authority with which Scripture acts and is moved by her suggestive power<sup>58</sup>. This process, that the reader is moved by Scripture is part of its character as an (effective) charter of revelation. In other words, Scripture establishes itself as the reliable word of God on its own. *Mutatis mutandis* this observation also applies to the process of canonization: 'canonicity came into being of its own volition, it roots in the existence and the character of the writings (...). All writings have "suo iure" authority.'<sup>59</sup>

This being said, and also having moved through the various relevant witnesses to scriptural inspiration, Rinkel turns to the variant of scriptural inspiration he prefers: organic inspiration. He begins the discussion of this view with the lapidary statement that 'Scripture does not provide one with a formulated dogma of inspiration, but witnesses in all respects to its inspiration'<sup>60</sup>. With this, of course, the problem is not necessarily solved. Therefore Rinkel states with reference to Mt. 1:22 and 2 Petr. 1:19–21 that the primary author of Scripture is the Spirit, whereby the human authors are the secondary ones. With this as a basis, it may indeed follow that 'the character of inspiration is therefore determined by the right insight into the relationship between the primary author and the secondary authors'<sup>61</sup>. He

---

<sup>55</sup> This journey includes: the witness of the Old Testament about itself (pp. 146–147), the witness of the New Testament about the Old Testament (p. 147), the witness of the New Testament about itself (pp. 147–148), the witness of the Fathers (pp. 148–149), the witness of medieval-roman theology (pp. 149–150), and protestant voices (pp. 150–151).

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 151–155.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 151.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 152.

himself does this by means of the word ‘organic’ (rather than ‘dynamic’, which would refer to a state of inspiration that an author would enter into every now and then), that is to say: the secondary authors are God’s ‘organs’ (i.e. agencies). This description secures both God’s primary guidance as well as the secondary self-efficacy of the human authors. In other words, the human authors as such (not only their writing hand) are led by the Spirit. This also explains the different characters and styles, as well as various degrees of πληροφορία (cf. 1 Thess. 1:15 – Paul proclaims the Gospel with authority, in the Spirit and with certainty) or ‘theopneustie’ of their writings (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16). With this Rinkel in fact relocates Bavinck’s ‘theopneustie’ from the written word to the writing author<sup>62</sup>. It seems that this view aims at doing justice to both the Church and its Bible as theandric realities: analogous to Christ (fully human and fully divine) they are both incarnations of God’s self-revelation. This becomes clear from the following quotation:

‘Their (the human authors’) inspiration is not merely an “impulsum ad scribendum,” but they write, because they are “inspirati” and while writing they remain entirely themselves, choosing and using their own means, sources, experiences and expressions. All this is therefore not the mechanical product of the working of the Spirit, who randomly gets the one to write in this way and the other in another way, but it is the *organic* entering and permeating of the Holy Spirit into the entire person of the author, in which way Scripture is both fully the work of the Holy Spirit and simultaneously fully the work of the human authors.’<sup>63</sup>

A little further on, when discussing objections against the inspiration, Rinkel deepens this view even more when he calls Scripture the ‘human garment of Gods thoughts’, which means that the whole of human existence with both its light and dark sides has been called into the service of the revelatory work of God, which is the ultimate content of Scripture. Thus he arrives at a fundamentally theologically oriented approach to Scripture. This also applies to – for example – historical parts of the canon, taking both its divine and its human side fully seriously: ‘de Deo homo dixit, et quidem inspiratus a Deo, sed tamen homo.’<sup>64</sup>

---

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 152.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 152. To this Rinkel adds a remark about the fact that this view of inspiration also forbids the atomization of Scripture (e.g. proof-texting), as this would rip apart the organic whole of the various writings and of Scripture as a whole.

<sup>64</sup> Augustin, *In Joannis Evangelium* 1,1. Rinkel, *Theologie I* (see note 2), p. 155.

When turning to Rinkel's discussion of tradition, it is best for the purpose of this paper to concentrate on his initial and fundamental statement of his view as well as on his discussion of Scripture and tradition. Rinkel begins his discussion by clarifying the theological problem of tradition, which concentrates on the distinction between *traditio tradens* and *traditio tradita*, whereby the difficulty consists in balancing the former, as a vital function of the Church<sup>65</sup>, and the latter, as that what has been received and what has to be handed on authentically. Neglecting either of these is theologically highly damaging, and leads in the case of *traditio tradita* either to overemphasizing it as a second source of revelation (as the 'Roman' theology does in Rinkel's view) or to viewing it as an archive of errors (as protestant theology tends to do)<sup>66</sup>. In order to bring some clarity to these matters, Rinkel first considers the *traditio tradens*, i.e. the essence of tradition, and then the *traditio tradita*.

As usual, Rinkel does so by referring to various theological positions, this time especially to the Roman-Catholic and protestant ones<sup>67</sup>, before turning to what he self-consciously calls 'the Catholic view'. He lays out his position as follows:

'Wishing to prove a tradition to be a "fons revelationis iuxta scripturam" from Scripture is a senseless undertaking. It is even more useless, however, to want to prove that Scripture only exists "iuxta traditionem".'<sup>68</sup>

This is followed by the thesis that within the New Testament traditions (*παράδοσεις*) are identical with the Gospel, and that even if the New Testament occasionally refers to unwritten things, what is written should still be regarded as sufficient – no truth can therefore be missing in the New Testament<sup>69</sup>. Nevertheless the Gospel itself proceeds from the *viva vox* of the proclamation, of which the New Testament is the account, and it remains in this respect also the living voice of the revelation which passes on the revelation of Scripture. In other words, the Gospel has to be understood as the living power of God, which comes to us through the ages in the Spirit's work of guiding and teaching the Church in truth<sup>70</sup>. At

---

<sup>65</sup> Cf. esp. Rinkel, *Theologie I* (see note 2), pp. 166–167.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 157.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 159–161.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 163.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 163.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 163.

this point, Rinkel also makes clear how he intends to steer between Reformation and Rome, i.e. between an identification of Gospel and Scripture on the one hand and the identification of Gospel and Tradition on the other. He takes his starting point in the fact that the Gospel has always been *proclaimed* and that this proclamation has remained a primary point of reference in the first centuries, i.e. the *depositum fidei* is thus handed on, and it is mistaken to suggest that it is not fully contained in Scripture (Rome) or that the process of tradition (i.e. of ‘tradere’) stops as soon as the New Testament canon has been established (the Reformation). The Church fulfills its task through the ages, both before and after the canonization of the New Testament, i.e. the passing on of the message of Christ<sup>71</sup>.

This, naturally, calls for deepened reflection on the precise role of Scripture in view of tradition. Rinkel turns to this after having considered the witness of the early Church<sup>72</sup>. On the latter basis he is able to state that the ‘Patres’ usually teach two things: that nothing can be added or subtracted from the authentic *depositum fidei*, and that every new witness the faith sheds new light on the old truth. This consideration leads to the statement that tradition is the healthy and natural development of the dogma (‘*profectus fidei, non permutatio*’, Vincentius of Lerins, *Comm.* 23). This makes it not so much a source of faith, but rather a source of knowledge about faith. On this basis, Rinkel can define the *traditio tradens* as ‘the faith of the Church which continuously bethinks Scripture’ and *traditio tradita* can in this light be defined as the product of this bethinking.<sup>73</sup> This is identical with what the Reunion Conference at Bonn in 1874 said in one of its theses, which is quoted in full agreement by Rinkel.

‘9. a. The Holy Scriptures being recognized as the primary rule of Faith, we agree, that the genuine tradition. i. e. the unbroken transmission, partly oral, partly in writing, of the doctrine delivered by Christ and the Apostles, is an authoritative source of teaching for all successive generations of Christians. This tradition is partly to be found in the consensus of the great ecclesiastical bodies standing in historical continuity with the primitive Church, partly to be gathered by scientific method from the written documents of all centuries.

---

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., pp. 163–164.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., pp. 164–165.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 165.



Während die heilige Schrift anerkanntermassen die primäre Regel des Glaubens ist, erkennen wir an, dass die echte Tradition, d. i. die ununterbrochene, theils mündliche, theils schriftliche Überlieferung der von Christus und den Aposteln zuerst vorgetragenen Lehre eine autoritative (gottgewollte) Erkenntnisquelle für alle auf einander folgenden Generationen von Christen ist. Diese Tradition wird theils erkannt aus dem Consensus der grossen in historischer Continuität mit der ursprünglichen Kirche stehenden Kirchenkörper, theils wird sie auf wissenschaftlichem Wege ermittelt aus den schriftlichen Denkmälern aller Jahrhunderte.’<sup>74</sup>

## 5. Conclusions

When turning to a comparison between Rinkel’s view and the Old-Catholic-Orthodox view, the first impression is one of striking agreement and theological continuity. Most significant in this respect is the very organic concept of the relationship between Scripture, Tradition, Revelation and Church. None of these entities are placed in opposition to each other, but rather, Scripture is placed within the Church as part of the tradition of divine revelation – more specifically: as its critical norm –, which constitutes the very life of the Church, itself in turn the work of the Spirit. Apparently, it is in this respect indeed possible to speak of an Old-Catholic mainstream<sup>75</sup>, which does not lead to quick results, but at least to a sound view on Scripture and Tradition. This mainstream, however, as is evident from the comparison of the two models offered by Küry and presented earlier with the lines of thought represented by Rinkel and as found in the agreed statements of the Orthodox-Old-Catholic dialogue, also has developed clearly in the direction of a more Eastern Orthodox rather than a Barthian way of thinking. Küry’s preferred model does not seem to have been received as well as his second model, which agrees much more with Rinkel and the agreed statements of the Orthodox-Old-Catholic dialogue. Some differences in emphasis between Rinkel and the agreed statements of the Orthodox-Old-Catholic dialogue can also be observed. This, how-

---

<sup>74</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 165–166. The quotation in English and German is taken from the reprint of the two Bonn Reunion Conferences: Heinrich Reusch (ed.), *Bericht über die 1874 und 1875 zu Bonn gehaltenen Unions-Conferenzen*, Bonn (Alt-Katholischer Bistumsverlag) 2002, pp. 33. 50.

<sup>75</sup> One has to look relatively hard to discover it, however. One wonders to what extent a new handbook in Old-Catholic theology is needed.

ever, may have to do with the fact that the statement of the Old-Catholic-Orthodox commission is not a full dogmatic theology.

Firstly, there is an agreement in that for both Rinkel and the agreed statements of the Orthodox-Old-Catholic dialogue the overarching issue is the tradition (*traditio tradens*) of the divine revelation in Christ. This rules out from the start any opposition of Scripture and tradition. Nevertheless, Rinkel spends considerably more effort in outlining and underlining the special character of Scripture within the tradition. This is a consequence of his elaboration of the character of Scripture as the *charter* of divine revelation. The agreed statements of the Orthodox-Old-Catholic dialogue suggest that there is much less order (τάξις) in the tradition than Rinkel does, not least in his reference to the Bonn Reunion Conference of 1874.

Secondly and closely related to the previous point, Rinkel – referring both to Vincentius of Lerins and the Bonn Conference – is much clearer about how tradition should (and should not) be received, even when he acknowledges the same places where authentic tradition can be found as the agreed statements of the Orthodox-Old-Catholic dialogue do. There seems to be more of a critical impetus here, even if the agreed statements of the Orthodox-Old-Catholic dialogue refer to the preservation of tradition's purity and truth 'through Scripture and from the content of Scripture' as well as to the fact that only the doctrine that agrees 'in its essence with Holy scripture and holy tradition' can be true<sup>76</sup>.

Thirdly, Rinkel is very strong on Scripture as a *theandric* reality of Scripture when discussing its inspiration (even if not using this word) from the point of view of an organic concept of Scriptural inspiration. This is an aspect which would fit Orthodox theology well<sup>77</sup>, which does not really surface in the agreed statements of the Orthodox-Old-Catholic dialogue either, but constitutes a valuable avenue for understanding the divine and human aspects of Scripture, thus also opening up in a profoundly theological way of dealing with for precisely the human sides of Scripture,

---

<sup>76</sup> Cf. von Arx (ed.), *Koinonia* (see note 9), pp. 175. 195

<sup>77</sup> Cf. e.g. the representative view of Vasile Mihoc, 'Basic Principles of Orthodox Hermeneutics', in: Moisés Mayordomo (ed.), *Die prägende Kraft der Texte. Hermeneutik und Wirkungsgeschichte des Neuen Testaments* (Ein Symposium zu Ehren von Ulrich Luz) (SBS 199), Stuttgart (KBW) 2005, pp. 38–64, esp. 50–51, 59–61 (on 60: 'Christ *theanthropos* ist the foundation and the norm of the Fathers' exegesis.').

which is in the agreed statements of the Orthodox-Old-Catholic dialogue only hinted at by referring to the contextuality of the biblical writings<sup>78</sup>.

All these, however, are relatively minor points. More important is the high degree of convergence between the documents discussed here, which shows what a responsible and ecumenically fruitful (Old-)Catholic theological view on Scripture there is and how it has developed in one respect in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

*The Revd Dr Peter-Ben Smit (born 1979 at Rotterdam, NL) is presently doing post-doctoral work at the General Theological Seminary in New York. He read theology at Amsterdam, Utrecht, Sheffield and Bern (Dr. theol. 2005).*

*Address: The General Theological Seminary, 175 Ninth Avenue, New York, NY 10011, USA.*

### *Deutsche Zusammenfassung*

Der theologiegeschichtliche Aufsatz zeigt auf, wie in der altkatholischen Theologie in der Mitte des vergangenen Jahrhunderts eine von der ganzen Utrechter Union akzeptierte Position zur Frage des Verhältnisses von Schrift und Tradition erarbeitet wurde. Obwohl die altkatholische Bewegung sich stets auf den Glauben der frühen Kirche berief, war es lange Zeit nie zu einer genaueren Verhältnisbestimmung der beiden Grössen Schrift und Tradition gekommen. Dies änderte sich ab den späten dreissiger Jahren des 20. Jahrhunderts: Nunmehr begann sich der Entwurf des Verhältnisses von Schrift und Tradition, wie er von dem damaligen Erzbischof von Utrecht, Andreas Rinkel, in seiner Tätigkeit als Dogmatiker am altkatholischen Priesterseminar in Amersfoort, in Auseinandersetzung mit römisch-katholischen und protestantischen Theologen (vor allem Herman Bavinck), entwickelt worden war, auch auf der Ebene der Utrechter Union durchzusetzen. Andere Modelle, z.B. das des schweizerischen Bischofs und Dogmatikers Urs Küry, der den Primat der Schrift stärker betonte als Rinkel, konnten sich dabei nicht als "altkatholischer *mainstream*" etablieren. Eine Bestätigung dafür, dass Rinkels Entwurf jetzt tatsächlich zur altkatholischen Position geworden ist, findet sich in den gemeinsamen Texten des orthodox-altkatholischen Dialogs.

---

<sup>78</sup> Cf. von Arx (ed.), *Koinonia* (see note 9), p. 194.