

HOLY WRIT AND HOLY CHURCH

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FOR several years now one of the most frequently discussed topics in the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches has been the problem of Tradition. The kernel of this problem consists in the relations between Scripture and Tradition and between Scripture and the Church. Several important studies have been published on this theme, and it is undeniable that continental Protestantism has become sympathetic to some notion of tradition. At the same time it must be admitted that Protestant theologians today are no more able than was even so conciliating a figure as Melancthon at the period of the Reformation to get over the notion of a *separation* between Scripture and Church, a separation which inevitably leads to the subordination of a purely human Church to a tradition regarded as divine, external and superior to this Church.

However, there have been some excellent studies in this field from the Catholic side which have helped to clear the ground of certain false problems and inadequate notions. Professor J. R. Geiselman and E. Ortigues have put us all in their debt by their efforts to lay bare the precise meaning of the Tridentine decrees.¹ The *Acta* of the Council of Trent remain indeed a useful and fascinating quarry for the theologian of today. It is, for example, of the greatest importance for the advance both of Catholic theology itself and of the ecumenical dialogue to learn that the Fathers of the Council deliberately omitted a proposed text according to which Revelation was to be found *partly* in Scripture and *partly* in unwritten apostolic traditions. As Newman² had already noted, it remains permissible for a post-Tridentine Catholic to hold that all the truths of the Faith are to be found, if not formally expressed, then at least implied, in Scripture, and to that extent contained in it. Better still, the Council made Scripture and Tradition not two principles or sources, but rather two forms, functions and means of the transmission of a single

¹ E. Ortigues: 'Ecritures et Traditions apostoliques au Concile de Trente', in *Recherches de Science religieuse*, 36 (1949), pp. 271-99; J. R. Geiselman: 'Das Konzil von Trient über das Verhältnis der Heiligen Schrift und der nicht geschriebenen Traditionen', in *Die mündliche Ueberlieferung . . .*, hrsg. v.M. Schmaus. Munich, 1957, pp. 123-206.

² *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*. 1878 edition, ch. 4, n. 4.

legacy from the Apostles who themselves received it from Christ, namely in the Gospel, the source of all saving truth and Christian life.³

Father G. H. Tavard devotes a chapter of his recently published book⁴ to establishing the true sense of this text of Trent in the light of the discussions and memoranda which preceded it. This chapter is important and illuminating but says nothing which was not previously known.⁵ On the other hand the book provides new material towards an understanding of the history of that separation and opposition of Scripture and Church which is at the heart of the drama of the Reformation. The plan which Father Tavard follows is not something new.⁶ What is new is the extremely rich documentation with which he provides it as well as the clarity and delicacy of judgment which makes this such an attractive book to read.⁷ I propose now to give a brief outline of this historical *schema* interspersed with some comments of my own.

For the Fathers, Church and Scripture formed an organic unity. It was impossible to think of the one without bringing in the other. Scripture provided for the Church its objective and interior rule and its foundation; but at the same time Scripture if not interpreted by the Church (and this interpretation forms the kernel of the *doctrinal* aspect of the Church's tradition) is not really Scripture. For one thing, without the Church, considered here as depositary and guardian of the apostolic Tradition and

³ Denziger, 783. A most important text to be read very closely, pen in hand.

⁴ G. H. Tavard, A.A.: *Holy Writ or Holy Church. The Crisis of the Protestant Reformation* (Burns and Oates, 30s.).

⁵ I am not entirely happy with the explanation which Father Tavard gives of the phrase '*pari pietatis affectu*' as it appears in the *Acta* of the Council of Trent. According to him it signifies there *pietas fidei*, *fides* (p. 207). But *pietas*, even in the expression *pietas fidei*, is a very broad and polyvalent term. The expression found its way here from a text of St Basil which had been appealed to several times in the course of the Council, *De Spiritu Sancto*, xxvii, 66, where the meaning is that Tradition and Scripture have the same force *for salvation*.

⁶ It is one I myself had already set out in *Vraie et fausse réforme dans l'Eglise*, Paris, 1950, p. 483.

⁷ The exposition, in good scholarly fashion, keeps close to the available texts. It would, however, have been an advantage to have the original given in footnotes, at least whenever the actual words used were of particular interest. It seems a pity, too, that Father Tavard, with one or two exceptions, never refers to studies and monographs: an adequate bibliography of the subject-matter is lacking.

Two slight imprecisions might also be noted here: p. 17, n. 4—the *Enarr. in Cant.* of P.L., 162, is not by Anselm of Laon, but by an anonymous author of the beginning of the thirteenth century; p. 117—Jacques Almain was not a Dominican.

not as deciding the matter by an act of its own authority,⁸ canonical writings cannot be discerned from non-canonical. And for another, it is only in the Church that we can find Scripture together with its real meaning. Heretics may indeed read the same text as Catholics, but they pervert its meaning simply because they do not read the text within the Tradition of the Church. Basic to the Catholic position, which holds as equally necessary the duality and unity of Scripture and Tradition (of the Church), is the duality and unity of the *text* and its meaning. We hold that this duality and unity are themselves related to the duality of the Word Incarnate and his Holy Spirit, and to the unity of the work which they have been sent by the Father to accomplish. A patristic and Catholic ecclesiology actually gives full weight to the revealed truth that the Church is the Body of Christ and the Temple of the Holy Spirit—to the Church conceived herself as mystery, as we shall see later.

This teaching of the Fathers was maintained in the medieval period until towards the end of the thirteenth century. That healthy part of the Middle Ages, however, lacked a clear distinction between inspired Scripture in the strict sense and the writings of the Fathers and conciliar and papal decrees. It used indiscriminately for all of these such terms as *inspirare, revelare, inspiratio, revelatio*, or equivalents such as *dictante (suggerente, inspirante) Spiritu Sancto*. There was, of course, a distinction made between canonical and non-canonical writings, but, as Father Tavard says, the Canon seemed to them to be still open, and certainly the expressions *Scriptura Sacra, Divine Pagina* were often used to cover both canonical writings and texts from Fathers or Councils.⁹

What Father Tavard has to say here is indeed correct, and it

- Father Tavard's résumé of the Fathers' position on this point does not seem to me entirely satisfactory, especially as regards the earliest among them. He appears to attribute to them a position approximating to that of certain Catholic apologists of the sixteenth century, according to whom it is the Church which discerns which books are inspired. But the ancient Fathers held the Canon to be an *apostolic* tradition which the Church had only to guard and transmit. This discernment by the Church is conceived as taking place through her allowing certain books to be read in the liturgy; and Father Tavard tends to identify here public reading in the assembly with liturgical reading. But it should be noted: (1) Those books were read in the liturgy which were held to be canonical (in accordance with an apostolic tradition), and not *vice versa*; (2) One must distinguish between liturgical reading and simple public reading: cf. J. Ruwet, 'Lecture liturgique et Livres saints du N.T.', in *Biblica*, 21 (1940), pp. 378-405.
- For the second expression, see J. de Ghellinck, '“Pagina” et “Sacra Pagina”'. Histoire d'un mot et transformation de l'objet primitivement désigné', in *Mélanges A. Pelzer*. Louvain, 1947, pp. 23-59.

could be supported with many other references than those he gives. It seems, however, that two highly relevant remarks should be made here.

(1) The words *revelare, inspirare (revelatio, inspiratio)* did not then have the precise sense which we give them today. Every action of the Holy Spirit, even every intellectual 'illumination', was called by the medievals *inspiratio, revelatio*. They were interested after all not in the historical created causes which are at play on the phenomenal level, but in the causality which is transcendent, immediate and, so to say, vertical. What was important to them was to know, not *how* a thing had come to be, but *from whom*, that is from what superior source, it proceeded, *who* was responsible for it and what in consequence was its value (all this lies behind the medieval notion of *auctoritas*). This, it is important to note, will still be, broadly speaking, the point of view of the Catholic theologians and apologists of the sixteenth century, not only in their writings—of these Father Tavad gives many examples—but also in their activity at the Council of Trent. What will appear to them decisive and will motivate their *pari pietatis affectu* will be the fact that it is the *Holy Spirit* who is really the author of and responsible for such-and-such a development, doctrinal decision, conciliar decree or liturgical or ecclesiastical institution. The Reformers for their part will think in a much more *historical* way, being for the most part men of the New Learning and no longer medievals. This important difference of approach deserves closer study than it has so far received.

(2) There was, however, one man who had denounced the imprecision of the term *revelare-revelatio*, namely St Thomas Aquinas. He had done so, however, in his usual quiet and unruffled way, and unfortunately on this point his thought was hardly followed up, except for the fact that the Thomists seem in this matter rather closer than others to the sane patristic conception of the relations between Scripture and the Church or papal authority. Father Tavad, who quotes St Thomas more than once, has not unfortunately referred to the quite remarkable examination of this point which the Common Doctor made, despite the fact that several recent studies have drawn attention to it.¹⁰ St Thomas generally applies the words *revelare, revelatio, Scriptura sacra* only to *biblical* revelation and is remarkable in

¹⁰ See J. de Guibert, 'Pour une étude méthodique des "loca parallela" de S. Thomas', in *Bull. de Littér. ecclés.*, 1914, pp. 472 s. (reprinted in *Les doublets de S. Thomas*. Paris, 1926, pp. 55 s.); and cf. J. de Ghellinck, 'Pour l'histoire du mot *revelare*', in *Rech. de Sc. relig.*, 6 (1916), pp. 149-57. Cf. St Thomas, *Summa Theol.*, I, 1, 8, ad 2.

giving the Doctors and Fathers the status of commentators on Scripture and guardians of its true sense.¹¹ What a pity it is that his thought here was not followed up better.

Let us return to Father Tavard's account which becomes from this point more richly documented. The fourteenth and fifteenth centuries stand for an epoch of criticism and dissection. That the men of the time felt the need of a more precise knowledge of the part played by human, relative and historical causes was a good thing and could have proved the beginning of a real progress in theology. But they went further and *separated* what had until then been held together organically. Nominalism tended to make of reason and faith two quite separate and even conflicting domains. Similarly there was a tendency to separate spiritual and temporal authority. Opponents of the papal power like Occam and Marsilius of Padua dissolved the certitudes of the Catholic's idea of the Church. The Great Schism, that intolerable situation which gave rise to the conciliar movement as a last desperate remedy, led to the Papacy being set up against the body of the Church, a thing unthinkable in the true Catholic tradition.

Unhappily the theologians who maintained a balance were rare. It is disconcerting to find so great a figure as Henry of Ghent holding as regards the fallibility of the Church positions scarcely less extreme than those of Occam. Moreover, the excrescences of the papal power, especially in the political field, did not lack canonists to aggravate them; some texts of the time (and they are not unpleasurable) are really quite terrifying. According to some the Pope can do what God does; he could, if he wanted to, correct the Gospel! In short, in place of an organic unity of Church and Scripture, a unity not to be severed without harm to both, there is a tendency to hold them in separation. Quite often the question is put in these terms: of the two, Scripture and Church, which is superior to the other, which is the foundation for the authority of the other?

This is the very position which, as I have shown in *Vraie et fausse réforme*, should have been ruthlessly cast aside. And in fact the majority of Catholics did bypass it without however rejecting it or always avoiding an equivocal expression of their own position. Some of course did formally denounce and reject it,¹² but others unhappily remained its victims. And the Reformers

¹¹ See my study 'Tradition et Sacra Doctrina chez S. Thomas d'Aquin', in *Festgabe J. R. Geiselmann*.

¹² Cochleus, for example, who emerges from Father Tavard's book as no mean figure, even if he is largely responsible for the transmission to

whose basic intention was to restore to *God's* action its proper primacy and sovereignty—an aim which has our sympathy—were among its victims too. They set out from this false formulation of the question and imputed to all Catholics what was at most the excess or error of only a few, namely the theory of the superiority of the Church.¹³ For their part they went to the other extreme: Scripture is in no respect dependent upon the Church and in no way implies the Church. It carries its own meaning within it and this can be laid bare for every individual believer by the interior witness of the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, Scripture judges the Church from without and in a sovereign manner. The Church only exists where the Word of God—here in practice identified with Scripture—is preached and received in its purity. Truth to tell, concurrently with this warping of the true Catholic tradition another evil process had developed, having to do this time with the idea of the Church. It was again the canonists, at least in part, who were responsible for this. Whilst the Fathers and medieval theologians had considered the Church as a mystery, as the Body of Christ at once visible (*sacramentum*) and invisible (*res interna*), there had now begun to develop an entirely sociological and collectivist notion of the Church as the *collectio fidelium*. In this mental climate it was clear that a part at least of the faithful who composed the Church could be in error as regards the Faith, and therefore that considered as a whole this Church was not infallible, even if, with Occam (and Henry of Ghent before him) it was held that at least one member would always remain faithful, that simple 'old woman', perhaps, for whom all the medieval theologians had such a touching respect.¹⁴ When the Fathers or the great Scholastics spoke of the Church as being assisted by the Holy Spirit and, on this account, interpreting Revelation or even developing it in her Tradition, her dogmas and decrees, they were thinking of her as a mystery and as an organic whole which is summed up, 'represented' and personified in her leaders, these being considered not simply as functionaries on the juridical level but as priests who celebrated the sacraments, not excluding the sacrament of the Word. This

subsequent times of an entirely polemical impression of Luther (cf. A' Herte's study). Or again the Colloquium of Ratisbon, 1541, despite the determined opposition of J. Eck.

¹³ According to Calvin, Catholics say 'que l'Eglise ait la puissance de juger tellement de l'Escriture qu'elle lui octroie selon son bon plaisir toute la certitude qu'elle peut avoir' (*Inst. chrét.*, edition of 1541: Budé, t.I, p. 66); this amounts, Calvin thinks, to 'vouloir marcher sans la Parole'.

¹⁴ See my article 'Incidence ecclésiologique d'un thème de dévotion mariale', in *Mél. de Science relig.*, 1950, pp. 277-92.

sacramental and mystical sense of the Church almost disappeared. J. Lortz has remarked that many good Catholics of the Reformation period, especially those among them who were nominalists and humanists, no longer retained it.¹⁶ The continental Reformers had a fundamentally collectivist notion of the Church, be this due to their having inherited it or to the fact that it suited their position as critics. Only a Church which is a sacramental mystery, the Body of Christ, Spouse and Temple of the Holy Spirit, can be held to form one living organism with Scripture; if the Church is nothing more than the *collectio fidelium*, it is an easy step to go on and say that it is a completely human and fallible thing, and can only be the Church of God to the extent that it is submissive to the action of the Word. Father Tavard does not develop these ecclesiological aspects but does sufficiently point them out. His account, if carefully read, is in this matter most suggestive.

It is however just on this point, to my mind, that we ought to meditate longer and more deeply. For when we speak of Holy Scripture and Holy Church, the first expression is clear, or at least appears to be so. The second, however, which appears of equal clarity, is in fact not really so at all. What is meant here by 'Church'? In what sense and in what way is the Church something else and something more than the simple *collectio fidelium*? If it is that and nothing more, it is only a result of faith in the Word, and thus, in the final analysis, there is but *one* gift of God, namely his Word, this to be conceived, as with the Reformers, as an active and almost sacramental reality. As is well known, Brunner has recently set the debate in motion once again by maintaining that according to New Testament revelation *ekklesia* never means anything more than the assembly of the faithful (*Das Missverständnis der Kirche*, Zurich, 1951). When the Fathers spoke of a mutual inclusion of Church and Scripture, 'Church' for them meant the *unity* of the Church. To what extent, and in what way, is this unity something other than the sum of the faithful? To what extent is it a mystery, an '*Ursakrament*'? There is the question that calls out for elucidation by exegete, historian and theologian.

There has been an epilogue to this story, and Father Tavard traces at least its beginnings. In reply to the Protestant negations,

¹⁶ This remark (perhaps it is a little too severe) was made in connection with Erasmus. cf. J. Lortz: *Die Reformation als religiöses Anliegen heute*. Trèves, 1948, p. 80 (cf. also pp. 38 s., 51). On the other hand the full sacramental notion of the Church is to be found in the catechisms published by C. Mofang: *Katholische Katechismus—en des 16. Jahrhunderts*, Mayence, 1881.

several sought a new synthesis by maintaining that Catholic doctrines were to be found partly in Scripture and partly in unwritten apostolic traditions or in decisions of the Church equivalent in authority to revelation. This was not the position of Trent, but was already more or less that of Thomas More, Driedo and Albert Pighi, and would be that of Martin Perez de Ayala, Canisius and Bellarmine.

That position too is one that calls out to be criticized and superseded. What we must do is rediscover the traditional position of the Fathers, and the classical Middle Ages which saw Scripture and Church as one living whole and as mutually including each other, and also assume into that position all the legitimate acquisitions of modern times. By this last we mean:

(1) A more accurate assessment of historical causes and the throwing into greater relief of the primacy of the initial historical *data* of the deposit made to the Apostles, and of the 'once-for-all' nature of the Incarnation and of the apostolic function. In certain ways of speaking of the Holy Spirit still in force in the Church today there is far too great a tendency to put on the same level the actual time when Revelation was in the making and the time for the faithful preservation and explicitation of what was revealed. We can see this at work, for example, in John Eck and John Mensing, two direct opponents of Luther. We have seen how the Middle Ages lacked to some extent this sense of history, preoccupied as it was with transcendental causes and the present activity of the Holy Spirit. Oddly enough the Middle Ages had a theology of 'event' all of its own, but instead of conceiving it in a wholly personal and even individual manner, as modern Protestantism has tended to do under the influence of Barth, it gave it a place within the Church, without sacrifice of liberty.

(2) A sound theory of development. This was something lacking in the Middle Ages and the sixteenth century, although there were notable first sketches here and there.¹⁶ As a result the men of these periods, when faced with the fact that the actual teaching and life of the Church presented 'more' than the letter of Scripture said, were forced to ascribe this either to 'unwritten apostolic traditions' or to 'revelations' of the Holy Spirit. In both cases there was a misunderstanding of the real nature of development.

A great deal more could be said by way of comment on the rich and suggestive book which Father Tavard has given us. We have,

¹⁶ For example, by Driedo (Tavard, p. 139), Alphonsus de Castro (p. 144), Albert Pighi (pp. 148-9), and the Recusants Thomas Harding and Cole (p. 234).

for example, said nothing of the last two chapters which are entitled 'The Anglican Search' and 'The Elizabethan Way'. Anglicanism, as is well known, has followed a *via media* and sought to harmonize the principle of the sufficiency of Scripture as an objective norm with some notion of tradition. This tradition, however, is conceived in an historical and humanist way as the aggregate of the positions, as these are to be found in documents of an epoch held to have been fully faithful to Scripture, namely the first six Christian centuries, the age of the first five or six Councils, in short the age of the Fathers. In this way Anglicanism is a sort of mixed species which in its representatives on either extreme joins up with one or other of the two pure but opposite attitudes which we have been considering above.