

## SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION: TRENDS IN PROTESTANT THEOLOGY TODAY

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### *Introduction*

**T**HIS paper is concerned with pointing out the trends apparent in contemporary Protestant theology with respect to the important matter of the relation of Scripture and tradition, and their respective authority in the Church. There is general awareness that Catholics affirm that divine truth comes through both Scripture and tradition while Protestants tend to insist that Scripture has a primacy over any and all other channels of revelation.

A full discussion of the subject of this paper would prove very helpful in the Philippine Protestant community for at least two reasons:

First, Protestant denominations in the Philippines are sometimes under the illusion that the faith they confess is based solely on Scripture—that unlike their Roman Catholic brothers, they are comparatively and happily free from traditions. Deeper reflection on the meaning of tradition and on the historical background and development of their confessional life would reveal that this is simply not so. Protestants in the Philippines need to become more aware of how very much tradition, both that imported from the Occident and that which has grown from Philippine soil, has influenced the faith they confess, the interpretations of Scripture they prize and, indeed, the divisions which keep them separate from their Christian brothers in other denominations. A realistic appraisal of this fact might help the various denominations in the Philippines to become more ecumenical in character if it leads them to study not only the traditions which have contributed to their particular witness but also those major traditions which lie in back of and beyond the history of the separated Christian bodies.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Tetsutaro Ariga's discussion of this with respect to the Japanese scene in his "Christian Tradition in a Non-Christian Land," *Ecumenical Review*, XII, No. 2 (January, 1960), 199-205.

And second, Evangelical Protestant theology in the Philippines, especially, needs to be rescued from the tendency to Biblicism—the compulsion to tie whatever one says or believes as a Christian to some literally interpreted text of Scripture. It has not yet come to fully appreciate the implications of the truth that the New Testament is the product of the Christian community (which also claimed the Old Testament as its inheritance) and derives its authority from its acceptance in that community. Philippine Evangelical theology needs to recognize that the New Testament is the record of only a part of the experience of the Christian community and the whole Bible must be read in the context of the *total* experience of the community, which includes to day as well as yesterday.<sup>2</sup>

Before we proceed, let us be clear as to what we mean when we use the terms “Scripture” and “tradition.” Though the Church has never known agreement as to the exact number of books included in the canon of Scripture (thus we have a “Catholic Bible” and a “Protestant Bible”), still, all Christians affirm that the Word of God has a written form recognized as Sacred Scripture and regarded as canonical, that is, as authoritative in the life of the Church. All agree that Scripture is divided into the canons of the Old and New Testaments—the former representing the documents inherited from the Jewish Church and the latter being the primary and classical documents of the Apostolic Church. It is to the Word of God in its written form, and as such recognized as canonical, that we refer in using the term “Scripture”, no matter how many books are regarded as belonging to it by this or that body of Christians.

The Second World Conference on Faith and Order at Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1937, defined tradition broadly as “the living stream of the Church’s life”.<sup>3</sup> We shall make our definition only a little more precise by saying that tradition is the Word of God revealed in the whole life of the whole Church. Three conclusions may be drawn immediately from this definition. First, it is quite correct to say, as most Christians nowadays readily admit, that the written form of the Word of God—the Sacred Scripture—is the product of tradition. The Word of God was before as well as after the formation of Scripture. Scripture and the Word of God are not co-extensive. Second,

<sup>2</sup> See my “Unwholesome Tendencies In Philippine Evangelical Theology,” *Silliman Christian Leader*, V, No. 1 (September, 1962), 14-17.

<sup>3</sup> Hugh Martin, *Edinburgh 1937*, (London: SCM Press, 1938), p. 43.

every expression of the Church's spiritual activity forms a part of tradition in which the Word of God is revealed—which is not to say, however, that everything the Church does reveals the Word of God, for we are aware that the Church (defined as the organized body of believers) has in its history done some manifestly evil things. Still, in the Church's confessions of faith, services of worship, prayers, ethics, and so forth, the Word of God has continued to be made plain for all who have had eyes to see and ears to hear. And third, tradition is like history in that it is even now being made. The revelation of the Word of God is an on-going process, though, of course, in the past the Church has paused to actually define, for purposes of clarity, this or that as belonging to tradition.

### *Historical Background*

Professor John S. Whale has pointed out that tradition was regarded in the Apostolic Age and in the ancient undivided Catholic Church as a living link with the teachings of Christ and the testimony of the Apostles.<sup>4</sup> It was regarded as the unfolding of the gospel in the life of the Church, an unfolding that was partly continuous from, interpretive of, and consistent with the gospel as recorded in Scripture. This is still the way tradition is viewed in the Catholic churches, though, as we shall see, the Roman Catholic Church has deviated somewhat from the classical view. Writing in Richardson and Schweitzer's *Biblical Authority for Today*, Professor Panagiotis I. Bratsiotis affirmed:

For the Bible is, so to speak, the Lydian stone for the accurate ascertainment of the truth of tradition. . . Moreover, according to the Orthodox conception, the sacred tradition contains nothing contrary to the Bible, with the content of which the content of the tradition essentially coincides. . . because. . . both are the product of the same Divine Spirit, who dwells in the Church.<sup>5</sup>

The Roman Catholic Church has introduced a radical element in

<sup>4</sup>J. S. Whale, *The Protestant Tradition*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1955), p. 255.

<sup>5</sup>Alan Richardson and Wolfgang Schweitzer (eds.), *Biblical Authority for Today*, (London: SCM Press, 1951), p. 21. For an excellent discussion of what tradition meant to the Fathers of the Ancient Church, see the first chapter in G. L. Prestige, *Fathers and Heretics*, (London: S.P.C.K., 1958).

its conception of tradition. Professor Whale outlines four main stages in the development of the Roman Catholic conception.

First, from the emergence of the papacy proper in the sixth century till the middle of the twelfth century, Roman canon law was largely theological in emphasis and was based mostly on Scripture and on interpretations of Scripture by the Fathers of the Church and the great Ecumenical Councils.

The second stage began towards the close of the twelfth century when there came about a change from a theological to a juristic emphasis in Roman canon law. The Roman Church began thinking of itself as a State (or Superstate) with the Pontiff as its lawgiver. The idea emerged that Christ ruled his earthly kingdom through the Church, and canon law started to take on the characteristics of civil law. Much was added to the body of canon law which had no essential relation to Scripture.

The third stage began with the Council of Trent and the Counter-Reformation. Trent formalized a tendency which had been growing in the Church to put non-Scriptural tradition on the same level as Scripture itself and to affirm that the context, text and meaning of Scripture were subject to the interpretive authority of the Church in the name of tradition. The Protestant Reformers attacked this notion with zeal.

The fourth and latest stage opened with the decree of the Vatican Council of 1870 on Papal Infallibility, reaching its climax in 1918 with the publication of the new edition of *Corpus juris canonici*. The whole body of Roman Catholic dogma was declared subject to the papal jurisdictional power and the Pope was declared able to create new dogmas 'of himself' without reference to General Council, Cardinalate or Episcopate.

Professor Whale summarizes his analysis of the concept of tradition in the Roman Catholic Church by saying:

In short, tradition no longer means what it meant for St. Irenaeus or St. Augustine; namely, an unbroken chain of testimony linking each age of the Church to the controlling 'givenness' of apostolic experience and teaching. It has come to mean an absolute monarchy legislating *de jure*.<sup>6</sup>

It was this emerging tendency on the part of the Roman Catholic Church to establish tradition as a parallel source of divine truth,

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<sup>6</sup> Whale, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

separate and independent from Scripture, which aroused the ire of the sixteenth century Reformers. Luther and Calvin looked about them and saw all manner of institutions, doctrines, canon laws, customs and practices having no basis at all in Scripture and, indeed, often contrary to Scripture. The Roman Catholic Church defended them on the ground of tradition; the Reformers condemned them on the ground of Scripture. At the Council of Trent, the Roman Catholic Church defined its position:

. . . following the example of the orthodox Fathers, this Synod receives and venerates, with equal pious affection and reverence, all the books of the New and Old Testaments, since one God is the author of both, together with the said Traditions, as well those pertaining to faith as those pertaining to morals, as having been given either from the lips of Christ or by the dictation of the Holy Spirit and preserved by unbroken succession in the Catholic Church. . . .<sup>7</sup>

Against this, the Reformation churches affirmed their doctrine and attitude of *sola scriptura*—all things necessary for salvation were to be found in Scripture alone. Article VI of the Anglican *Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion* expressed it:

Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation.

The sixteenth century Reformation never went so far as to assert that tradition was valueless. Martin Luther held Ecumenical Councils in high respect, particularly the early ones, for their defense of Biblical doctrine;<sup>8</sup> and Article XV of the Augsburg Confession explained that minor traditional usages are permissible if they "promote peace and good order in the Church". Again, Article XXXIV of the Anglican *Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion* declared:

. . . . Whosoever, through his private judgment, willingly and purposely, doth openly break the Traditions and Ceremonies of the Church, which be not repugnant to the Word of God, and be ordained and approved by common

<sup>7</sup> Henry Bettenson (ed), *Documents of the Christian Church*, (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1948), p. 367.

<sup>8</sup> See Jaroslav Pelikan's "Luther's Attitude Towards Councils," in *The Papal Council and the Gospel*, edited by K. E. Skydsgaard, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), pp. 37-60.

authority, ought to be rebuked openly, (that others may fear to do the like), as he that offendeth against the common order of the Church. . . .

The chief quarrel of the Reformation with the Roman Catholic Church on this subject was over the Roman Catholic belief that teachings based on tradition alone (without reference to Scripture) could be elevated to the status of dogmas, acceptance of which was necessary to salvation.

Later Protestantism was willing to throw out the baby with the bath: it attacked the whole principle of tradition, and fancied that in so doing it was being fiercely loyal to Scripture as the fountainhead of divine truth. As Protestants and Roman Catholics moved further apart, the word "tradition" brought to Protestant minds the Roman Catholic concept of it—an evil thing that would distort and undermine the authority of Scripture, therefore a thing to be despised.

#### *Protestant Re-discovery of the Importance of Tradition*

In recent years there has come about a marked change in the Protestant attitude towards the principle of tradition. There is now a new appreciation of the meaning and importance of tradition as a medium for the transmission of the Word of God, supplementary to Scripture. We can, perhaps, point to three or four factors which have contributed to this change in attitude.<sup>9</sup>

First, the Ecumenical Movement has brought Protestants into rather close contact with non-Roman Catholics who hold the classical view of tradition in contrast to the deviant Roman Catholic view. Protestants find the interpretations of tradition offered by Eastern Orthodox Christians, Old Catholics and Anglo-Catholics at least discussable and not entirely incompatible with their historical convictions about the primacy of Scripture. Indeed, the main issue which remains between Protestants and non-Roman Catholics on this subject is the question of the relative authority of tradition in deciding questions of faith.

Second, a reappraisal (prompted by contacts with Catholics in the Ecumenical Movement) of the Catholic doctrine of the Church as the mystical body of Christ has helped Protestants to appreciate

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Daniel Jenkins' treatment in his *Tradition and the Spirit*, (London: Faber and Faber; ca 1951), pp. 15-19.

anew the truth that the on-going life of the Church is closely linked with its living Lord. The life and experience of the Church today and yesterday has afforded a field for God's revelational activity as surely as the life and experience of the Church in New Testament times. The living Lord is still, and always has been, with His church (thought of as His body) and has spoken in it and through it.

Third, Biblical criticism has helped Protestants to see that Sacred Scripture is less a theological text and more an expression of the "living stream of the Church's life". Form criticism, for example, has called attention to the earliest apostolic period when the gospel, was transmitted by oral tradition alone. Today no serious student of the New Testament fails to recognize the important role which the notion of tradition played in the letters of St. Paul. Biblical criticism, accompanied by a renewed interest in patristic studies, has greatly helped Protestants to see that the Bible is part of an on-going tradition.

And fourth, Protestants, again prompted by the Ecumenical Movement to examine their separate confessional histories, have become increasingly aware of the peculiar traditions—springing not only from the sixteenth century Reformation, but from other and later developments as well—to which they have given their allegiance. They have been surprised to discover the extent to which traditions four hundreds years old, or less, have influenced their denominational characteristics. Some have been honest enough to inquire whether loyalty to traditions four hundred years old are any more or less justified than loyalty to traditions a thousand years old, or nineteen hundred years old!

#### *Some Representative Contemporary Protestant Views on Scripture and Tradition*

It might be instructive for us to examine briefly the ideas of certain contemporary Protestant thinkers on the subject of Scripture and tradition. In general, there is now a consensus among Protestants that tradition has an important and positive part to play in Christian teaching.

C. H. Dodd, the distinguished English Congregationalist and Biblical scholar, has pointed out that in fact all religious readers go to the Bible with pre-suppositions—prior beliefs (part of the tradition of their denomination, perhaps) which pre-determine their in-

interpretation of the Bible. Dodd affirms that tradition is necessary to preserve the Church from an irresponsible individualism which is not Christian. But he warns that we must guard against tradition which is a static finality in religion. He pleads for a tradition of life and experience rather than dogma, of religion rather than theology. Tradition, he says, is progressive. Dodd directs us to John 16:13 wherein our Lord says: "I have much still to say to you, but at present you cannot bear the weight of it. When however *He* comes, who is the Breath of the Truth, He will lead you into the whole Truth." That leading, Dodd asserts, was not confined to the New Testament period, for the "faith once delivered" has actually grown and developed as it has encountered life and experience in a changing world.<sup>10</sup>

Another English Congregationalist, Hubert Cunliffe-Jones, has emphasized that tradition is important not as an additional source to determine what the gospel is, but as the fruit of the working of the gospel in the life of the Church. He also points out that the Bible must be understood in the context of the Church and is judged and renewed by that revelation to which the Bible testifies. There is a difference, says Cunliffe-Jones, between the authority of the Bible and the authority of tradition. The Bible gives us the content of revelation; tradition shows us how the gospel was applied under specific conditions. Cunliffe-Jones waxes mystical at this point and affirms that the Holy Spirit helps us to know whether or not, under specific conditions, tradition is the guidance of God.<sup>11</sup>

An American Congregationalist, Dr. James Muilenburg, the noted Old Testament scholar and professor at Union Seminary in New York, once defined tradition as "the teaching of the fathers of the Christian community", and went on to affirm that the Church has always regarded tradition as one of the most important, if not the most important, bridge between the past and the present. While Protestants and Catholics differ sharply over the relative authority which tradition has in deciding questions of faith, both have nevertheless made great use of it in determining the meaning of Scripture

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<sup>10</sup> C. H. Dodd, *The Authority of the Bible*, (New York: Harper & Bros., 1962), pp. 21, 273.

<sup>11</sup> Cunliffe-Jones, "A Congregationalist Contribution," in Richardson and Schweitzer, p. 55.



for the contemporary Church.<sup>12</sup>

Bishop Gustaf Aulén, the well-known Swedish Lutheran theologian and ecumenist, has stated that systematic theology must be positively, but not legalistically, dependent upon the continuous testimony of faith given through the ages—that is, on tradition. But he also affirms that within this tradition the writings of the New Testament occupy a special place because, though they were originally part of the primitive tradition of the Church, they are “the first and decisive testimony to that deed of the Christ which is the fundamental fact of Christianity”. Aulén feels that the fundamental testimony of the New Testament must act as a regulative principle; that is, what appears within Christianity in the later development (tradition) must be in inner harmony with that conception of God and relationship to God which is revealed in the work of Christ and proclaimed in the New Testament.<sup>13</sup>

Edmund Schlink, a German Lutheran and professor of systematic theology at the University of Heidelberg, has flatly pointed out that whether one accepts the principle of tradition or not, the fact remains that every Christian inherits a definite historical tradition, and that, indeed, the New Testament itself reflects a variety of traditions. “Our main concern,” he writes, “must be to discover the spiritual wealth conceded in the different traditions, and to seek the unity of the Church not in uniformity but in a fellowship of different traditions.”<sup>14</sup>

The late Dr. James Moffatt, the renowned Scottish Biblical scholar, and a Presbyterian, urged an understanding of tradition in what he felt was its original and broader sense: a witness to the living Lord. He wrote: “We cannot disinherit ourselves by declining to take account of its function during the long interval between ourselves and its first phases within the Church of our fathers.” But Moffatt would have us test the tradition by Scripture and the present leading of the Holy Spirit, and challenge false claimants.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Mulenburgh, “The Interpretation of the Bible,” in Richardson and Schweitzer, p. 221.

<sup>13</sup> Aulén, *The Faith of the Christian Church*, (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1948), pp. 90-91. The distinguished English Congregationalist and scholar, Daniel Jenkins, adopts precisely the same point of view. Cf. Jenkins, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

<sup>14</sup> Schlink, “The Significance of the Eastern and Western Traditions for the Christian Church,” *Ecumenical Review*, XII, No. 2 (January, 1960), 133, 142.

<sup>15</sup> Moffatt, *The Thrill of Tradition*, (New York: Macmillan Co., 1944), p. 56.

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<sup>15</sup> Moffatt, *The Thrill of Tradition*, (New York: Macmillan Co., 1944), p. 56.

Clarence Tucker Craig, before his death in 1953 a leading American Methodist New Testament scholar, theologian and ecumenist, affirmed his belief that God speaks his will in at least three other channels besides Scripture: natural law, tradition and the internal witness of the Holy Spirit. With respect to tradition, Craig reminded Protestants of the obvious fact that it was not the New Testament which authorized the Church, but the Church which authorized the New Testament as containing a sufficient guide to faith and action. He made clear his conviction that the later teaching of the Church should be as binding upon members as the letter of Scripture. Professor Craig was fond of pointing out that even those Christians who claim to be guided only by Scripture are nevertheless fond of quoting authorities (Luther or Calvin, for instance) to support their interpretations. In his essay for Richardson and Schweitzer's symposium on *Biblical Authority for Today*, Craig concluded:

The Church of every age stands under the judgment of the written Word which comes to us from the past. But in the interpretation of valid standards, the Church never can and never should disregard the accumulated experiences of the continuous fellowship of believers. . . . Church history will not afford "solutions" any more than the Bible will directly, but it will offer "guidance" for all who retain the inquiring spirit.<sup>16</sup>

Professor Tetsutaro Ariga, a member of the *Kyodan*, the United Church of Japan, has introduced a new note in the discussion by speaking of Christian tradition as a paradox. He points out that we are tradition-bound, like it or not. But Christian tradition is not simply something handed down from the past; it brings us to Christ who liberates man from the bondage of the past. It is in this paradox that any church tradition finds its *dynamis*. As for Scripture, Professor Ariga affirms that in reading the Bible we come to know Christ, the eternal Word of God. "Traditions are valuable," he writes, "and worthy of respect in so far as they help us to understand and interpret the meaning of the Gospel better."<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Craig, "A Methodist Contribution," in Richardson and Schweitzer, pp. 35-40. For a brief discussion of the problem of tradition vs. traditionalism among American Methodists, see Gerald H. Anderson "The Challenge of the Ecumenical Movement to Methodism," *The Asbury Seminarian*, XIV, No. 2 (Spring-Summer, 1960), pp. 25-28.

<sup>17</sup> Ariga, *op. cit.*, p. 205.

Anglicans have had a great deal to say in recent years on the subject of Scripture and tradition and have sought to discuss and interpret the matter to both their Protestant and Catholic brothers in the Ecumenical Movement. Ecclesiologically they are in an especially strategic position to do this, as we all know. Let us ponder briefly the ideas of two prominent English Anglicans on this subject.

R. R. Williams has a rather mystical turn of mind and much of what he has to say about Scripture and tradition corresponds with the views of Cunliffe-Jones.<sup>18</sup> In his *Authority in the Apostolic Age*, Williams writes:

It is the Holy Spirit who brings home to Church and Christian the authority of God in Christ. The Lord is the Spirit. His voice does not come to us always in unmistakable tones. We walk by faith and not by sight. If in doubt, the individual will pay great attention to the voice of the Church. The Church will always try to move in loyalty to the Scriptures. And both the Church and the individual will be ready to leave room for the contemporary living voice of God the Holy Spirit. . . . Scripture, antiquity and reason will all have their message if we have ears to hear and eyes to see. . . . by loyalty to the historic Church, by loyalty to the Word of God in the Bible, and by the honest following of whatever light God vouchsafes to our minds and hearts, we may at least be in the way of hearing God's authoritative Word for ourselves, the Church and the world.<sup>19</sup>

Alan Richardson, in an essay for the symposium he helped to edit, summarizes what might be regarded not only as the predominant position held by Anglicans but also as the growing consensus of Protestant thought generally on the subject of Scripture and tradition. He affirms that tradition represents the mind of the Universal Church and is the best guide for interpreting the sense of Scripture, especially where Scripture is ambiguous. But tradition is not a separate authority to be set alongside the Bible. Rather, tradition supplements the Bible and Biblical teaching is to be interpreted by both reason and tradition.<sup>20</sup>

#### *Important Recent Ecumenical Pronouncements on Scripture and Tradition*

As has already been suggested, the problem of the relation of

<sup>18</sup> See text and note 11 above.

<sup>19</sup> (London: SCM Press, 1950), pp. 141-142.

<sup>20</sup> "An Anglican Contribution," in Richardson and Schweitzer, p. 118.

Scripture and tradition and their respective authority in the Church has been a matter of considerable discussion in the Ecumenical Movement, particularly in Faith and Order deliberations. The Second World Conference of Faith and Order at Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1937, was very clear in recognizing that the living Word precedes and creates the Church, and the Church's life and tradition precedes and creates the written Word:

A testimony by *words* is by divine ordering provided for the revelation uttered by the *Word*. This testimony is given in Holy Scripture, which thus affords the primary norm for the Church's teaching, worship and life. . . . We are at one in recognizing that the Church, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, has been instrumental in the formation of the Bible.<sup>21</sup>

Edinburgh did not reconcile all the differences the delegates represented on the subject, of course. Protestants could not subscribe to much of the *content* of tradition as interpreted by Eastern Orthodox Christians and others who valued certain beliefs which did not rest on Scripture. Nor could most of the Protestants go along with the Eastern Orthodox and others who regarded Scripture and tradition as equally authoritative. The majority of the Protestant delegates at Edinburgh felt that the Church

. . . is bound exclusively by the Bible as the only rule of faith and practice and, while accepting the relative authority of tradition, would consider it authoritative only in so far as it is founded on the Bible itself.<sup>22</sup>

The Third World Conference on Faith and Order held at Lund, Sweden, in 1952, revealed that the sharp contrast present at Edinburgh had not much changed. The Catholic and Protestant delegates at Lund reported from one of the sections:

All accepted the Holy Scriptures as either the sole authority for doctrine or the primary and decisive part of those authorities to which they would appeal. . . All Churches represented among us recognize the traditions of their Christian past with gratitude and pride. . . There are, however, among us two distinct emphases upon the relation between Scripture and Tradition. Some would regard Tradition as a living process, whether embodied in written documents or not, continuous with, though not necessarily additional to, the biblical revelation, while others would restrict its character to a clarification

<sup>21</sup> Quoted from Martin, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

and exposition of the biblical Gospel.<sup>23</sup>

The "Consultation on Church Union" which met at Oberlin College in Ohio on March 19-21, 1963, to continue deliberations on the proposed union of six Protestant denominations in the United States (Protestant Episcopal, United Presbyterian, Methodist, United Church of Christ, Evangelical United Brethren and Disciples of Christ) produced a remarkable statement on the subject of Scripture and tradition which was quoted in the *Christian Century*. The members of the Consultation defined tradition as "the whole life of the Church, ever guided and nourished by the Holy Spirit, and expressed in its worship, witness, way of life, and its order." Tradition thus defined is regarded as both the act of delivery by which the gospel is made known and transmitted as well as the teaching and practice handed on from one generation to another. The Consultation then went on to say that the Church confronts not only Scripture and *Tradition* but *traditions* as well. *Traditions* are individual expressions of the *Tradition* which more or less characterize particular churches at various times and places. These *traditions* must ever be brought under the judgment of Scripture, for Scripture is the norm of the Church's total life. "To bring its traditions under the judgment of the Scriptures is an inescapable obligation of the church."<sup>24</sup>

Only time will tell how helpful the distinction between *Tradition* and *traditions* will be—but it is certainly pregnant with possibilities. The distinction was, of course, not original with the Consultation. The Commission on Faith and Order, on the recommendation of the Lund Conference, established a Theological Commission on Tradition and Traditions to "explore more deeply the resources for further ecumenical discussion to be found in that common history we have as Christians and which we have discovered to be longer, larger and richer than any our separate histories in our divided churches."<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> *The Third World Conference on Faith and Order: Lund, 1952*, edited by Oliver S. Tomkins, (London: SCM Press, 1953), pp. 251-252.

<sup>24</sup> Kyle Haselden, "Fusion at Oberlin," *Christian Century*, LXXX, No. 14 (April 3, 1963), p. 423.

<sup>25</sup> *The Third World Conference on Faith and Order*, p. 27. See Professor Chrysostomos Konstantinides' interesting use of the distinction in his "The Significance of the Eastern and Western Traditions Within Christendom," *Ecumenical Review*, XII, No. 2 (January, 1960), 143-153. See also J. Robert Nelson "Tradition and Traditions as an Ecumenical Problem," *Theology Today*, XIII (July, 1956), 151-165.

The Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order which met at Montreal, Canada, in July of 1963, contributed to the discussion by maintaining that the Christian Tradition (capital T) is the gospel itself, transmitted from generation to generation in and by the Church. It is Christ himself present in the life of the Church. This Tradition is the work of the Holy Spirit and is embodied in the *traditions* which are "the expressions and manifestations in diverse historical forms of the one truth and reality which is Christ."<sup>26</sup>

The Montreal deliberations on Scripture, Tradition and Traditions (Section II) helped to bring ecumenical conversation to the point of beginning to appreciate the determinative place of Tradition in the life of the Church—as something upon which all our traditions are dependent and as something which has operated from the very beginning of the Church's history even before the New Testament was written. An important paragraph of the Report of Section II reads:

Our starting point is that we are all living in a tradition which goes back to our Lord and has its roots in the Old Testament, and are all indebted to that tradition inasmuch as we have received the revealed truth, the Gospel, through its being transmitted from one generation to another. Thus we can say that we exist as Christians by the Tradition of the Gospel (the *paradosis* of the *keryma*) testified in Scripture, transmitted in and by the Church through the power of the Holy Spirit. Tradition taken in this sense is actualized in the preaching of the Word, in the administration of the Sacraments and worship, in Christian teaching and theology, in mission and witness to Christ in the lives of the members of the Church.<sup>27</sup>

### *Prospects for Advance*

The question remains as to whether or not there is any prospect for a complete Catholic-Protestant reconciliation with respect to the relation and authority of Scripture and tradition. Eastern Orthodox Christians, Roman Catholics and others regard them as equally authoritative, while Protestants insist on the primacy of Scripture even though they are coming increasingly to appreciate the authoritative character of tradition. The Roman Catholic Church,

<sup>26</sup> World Council of Churches, Division of Studies, Commission on Faith and Order, "Fourth World Conference of Faith and Order, Montreal, July, 1963: Report of Section II" (13 pp. mimeographed), pp. 1, 3.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

as we pointed out earlier, has gone to the extreme of regarding tradition as a separate authority for divine truth, independent of Scripture. Can there ever be a reconciliation of these views?

The Report of Section II at Montreal lifted up certain recommendations which it felt would at least help create a climate of understanding in which progress in discussions on Scripture and tradition might be possible. Specifically, it recommended that the divided churches through their theological representatives do the following:

1. Study the Filioque.
2. Study the Councils of the Early Church and their implications.
3. Study the history of exegesis.
4. Engage in joint study of the various Christian traditions of Spirituality and Prayer, whereby a proper understanding of our common heritage may be reached.
5. Engage in joint study of catechetical documents in the light of ecumenical concern.
6. Study the problem of hermeneutics.
7. Encourage the Churches to train clergy in close acquaintance with the original languages of the Bible, for without this ecumenical dialogue is without a common terminology.<sup>28</sup>

Walter Marshall Horton sees hope in the fact that non-Roman Catholics are now generally agreed that traditions contrary to Scripture cannot be sound traditions, and that even among Roman Catholics one of the two "permitted opinions" is that tradition is not a parallel source of divine truth separate from Scripture but is simply the authorized churchly interpretation of Scripture in its wholeness. Horton asserts that many Catholic thinkers (Roman and otherwise) would agree that the New Testament is "that part of the Christian tradition which gives the norm to all the rest."<sup>29</sup>

Daniel Jenkins has pointed out that one of the interesting and hopeful features of the present situation is that at the same moment Protestantism is realizing how closely Scripture and tradition are intertwined, Roman Catholicism is beginning to realize, partly under the influence of the Biblical revival in Protestantism, the full magnitude of the claim of Scripture to authority. And Father Hans Küng, the rising star in contemporary Roman Catholic theological

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>29</sup> Walter M. Horton, *Christian Theology: An Ecumenical Approach*, (New York: Harper & Bros., 1958), pp. 49-52.



as we pointed out earlier, has gone to the extreme of regarding tradition as a separate authority for divine truth, independent of Scripture. Can there ever be a reconciliation of these views?

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thought, has described with approval the growing regard for Biblical studies in his Church, stimulated in large measure by Pope Pius XII's encyclical of 1943 *Divino afflante Spiritu*.

Perhaps it is too much to hope for a complete Protestant-Catholic reconciliation on the question of the authority of tradition, but surely George Tavard and Hans Küng have marked out the avenue of advance in understanding and accord. Father Tavard, a French Roman Catholic priest and noted irenic scholar, now teaching theology in the United States, would have his fellow Catholics remember that tradition is man's encounter with the Word in the Church and that it cannot be divorced from Scripture, which is the very backbone of tradition. "Tradition," he says, "is not superadded to another 'source'. For it is guided by the inspired expression of the earliest Tradition, which is also the model of all Tradition, Holy Scripture."<sup>30</sup>

And Father Hans Küng, the young professor of theology at the University of Tübingen in Germany, whose recent (1961) book *The Council, Reform and Reunion* has been enthusiastically received by Roman Catholics and Protestants alike, would have the hierarchy of his Church confess its faith in the Word of God, leaving aside all controversies over the relation of Scripture to tradition, and proclaim the pre-eminent significance of the Word of God over every word of man. Father Küng would have the hierarchy of his Church declare unequivocally that the Word of God has power to pardon, to save, to illuminate, to strengthen, to console. The effect, Küng feels, would be extraordinarily beneficial.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> George Tavard, "The Problem of Tradition Today," *The Ecumenist*, I, No. 3 (February-March, 1963), 35-36.

<sup>31</sup> Hans Küng, *The Council, Reform and Reunion*, (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1961), pp. 181-182.