

## AN ANGLICAN RESPONSE TO GOWING'S "SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION"

H. Ellsworth Chandlee

IT is a most difficult task to attempt a critique of so excellent a paper as that which Dr. Gowing has presented. He has said so much of what this writer is convinced is right and necessary to be said that there is scant room for disagreement with the contents of the paper. Dr. Gowing writes so like a good Episcopalian that one in that tradition hesitates to criticise what has been said in the paper lest he find himself at variance with his own tradition! I would therefore wish to underscore most of what Dr. Gowing has said, and to confine myself to the expansion and elucidation of some of the points which he has made.

When those in the Protestant tradition enter into dialogue with those in the Catholic tradition of Christianity in regard to Scripture and Tradition and the relative authority of the two, it has doubtless often seemed to Protestants that Catholics in their appeal to the authority of the Holy Tradition of the Church and in their insistence upon its authority have been guilty of placing the Scriptures in a vastly inferior position; of dethroning, as it were, the supreme Word of God—indeed, of attempting to substitute the traditions and teachings of men for the commandments of God. But Catholics, on the other hand, have been quite equally suspicious of Protestants in an appeal to *sola scriptura* as the rule of faith and order. Catholics have thought that Protestants intend to insist that nothing at all is valid and of authority in the life of the Church which is not explicitly stated in the Scriptures. We have felt that Protestantism is seeking the rejection of the historic Church of the Apostles and Fathers, and in its place setting up a man-made organization—in effect taking the position that the true Church had been unknown or at best so immersed in sin as to be unrecognisable from the time of the writing of the last New Testament document until the 16th Century, when the Protestant Reformation got everything all straightened out and restored the pure Bible religion. Happily, as

Dr. Gowing pointed out, we are coming to understand each other more and more, and as we do so we are coming more and more deeply to realise that the Church is a continuity, and that we cannot escape Tradition even if we would when we consider the Church as an historic institution. By means of our continuing dialogue along the lines pointed up in Dr. Gowing's paper we shall, please God, grow in deeper understanding and shall perhaps find we are not so far apart as we had supposed.

While most of us are agreed upon what we mean by the term *Scripture*,<sup>1</sup> it has been the experience of the writer that we have by no means the same amount of agreement about what is meant by the term *Tradition*. It may therefore serve our discussion to expand somewhat Dr. Gowing's definition of tradition, and the understanding of the place and authority of tradition in the life of the Church generally held by those who are in what I would call the classical Catholic tradition. If a personal reference may be made, I rather feel that in some of the ecumenical dialogues we have been at times talking at cross purposes because we do not always mean the same thing by the same word. When an Anglican—and here I think we may say generally when a Catholic—speaks of the Tradition of the Church, he means the continuous transmission of the Faith in all its varied forms and lines and the content of what is transmitted.<sup>2</sup> The Church by her very nature as the Body of Christ is continuous. Being one organic entity, she does not change and assume new forms and teaching from age to age and place to place.<sup>3</sup> There are certain marks by which the Church is known and recognized everywhere and at all times.<sup>4</sup> The Holy Tradition shows clearly these marks, and it is the adherence to the Holy Tradition which guarantees the continuity of the Church, bears witness to the fact that the Church today is the Church which Jesus Christ founded; it is adherence to the Tradition which enables the Church to be the same and teach

1. The Anglican definition of Scripture will be found in *Article VI of the Thirty Nine Articles*. These are printed in the *American Book of Common Prayer* beginning on page 603. Cf. F.J. Hall, *Authority, Ecclesiastical and Biblical*, New York, 1918, page 194ff.
2. J. A. Pike and W.N. Pittenger, *The Faith of the Church*, New York, 1951, page 19. See also Pittenger, *His Body the Church*, New York, 1945, Chapter VII.
3. *Ibid.* Cf. Hall, *op cit.*, especially Chapter 9.
4. These are the four points of the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral. An excellent discussion is to be found in Hebert, *The Form of the Church*, London, 1944, under the Credal Notes of the Church.

the same truth to all peoples and in all ages. Thus classical Anglicanism has never appealed to the Scriptures alone as the rule of faith and order.<sup>5</sup> As it has been put, Anglicanism appeals to the Faith once delivered to the Saints, contained in Holy Scripture, summed up and stated in the Creeds, affirmed and defined by the great Ecumenical Councils, taught by the Fathers of the Church—in other words, the Faith as it has been transmitted to us through the Holy Tradition.<sup>6</sup> Another way of stating this, and at the same time of guaranteeing against unwarranted additions to or subtractions from the wholeness of the Faith as transmitted by the Tradition, and of testing the integrity of the tradition which we have received, is the canon of Catholic Consent: what has been believed by all, everywhere, always.<sup>7</sup> Faithfulness to the Tradition—to what is indeed the apostolic *paradosis* transmitted and preserved in the ongoing and continuing life of the Church is the continuing in the Apostles' teaching and the guarantee that what we meet in the Church today, or at any time, here, or at any place, is the true Catholic Faith and Order, the Church in its fullness and wholeness, and not a man-made organization nor a creation of someone's personal convictions, valuable as these may be. One of the hymns in the Hymnal of the Episcopal Church puts all this in a remarkably concise manner:

"Let what apostles learned of the thee  
Be ours from age to age:  
Their steadfast faith our unity,  
Their peace our heritage."<sup>8</sup>

Perhaps this will serve to explain the Anglican and Catholic view of Tradition and show why we consider it so vital and indeed so fundamental in a truly Catholic Church.

Another point in the paper may well be expanded. Dr. Gowing has most aptly pointed out that there is a growing recognition that the writers of Scripture wrote from an ecclesiastical point of view. What had been received from the Lord has been embodied in these writings. But it was the Church which took *these* writings from

5. Cf. *Doctrine in the Church of England*, New York, 1938, page 32. Note also the extracts in More and Cross, *Anglicanism*, London, 1935, IV and V.

6. This summary was in a Syllabus for a course in Dogmatic Theology given by the late Marshall Bowyer Stewart.

7. Hall, *op. cit.*, page 258. This is the so-called "Vincentian Canon."

8. Hymnal 1940, No. 380. The words are by Howard Chandler Robbins.

among others and made of them the Sacred Canon.<sup>9</sup> Historically, the fact that this was done was the result of the need to define just what was the true and authoritative Tradition in the face of Gnostic distortions of it. *These* writings contained the true and authoritative Tradition; therefore, they are the Scriptures. It is the Church which both preserves and transmits the Canon, for therein she finds the true authoritative Tradition, the true *paradosis*. Thus it is to the Scriptures the Church looks and must ever look for the normative deposit of the faith; it is by the Scriptures the Church constantly judges her life, teaching, and doctrines, so that there may always be brought before men and mediated to them the basic and fundamental experience of the mighty acts of God for us men and for our salvation—those mighty acts upon which the whole life of the Church rests. It is by means of Scripture that the Church tests the purity of her Holy Tradition.<sup>10</sup> But a word of caution here: Catholic consent has not accorded this testing and judging, what we may call the interpretation of the Scriptures as they pertain to faith and order, to private judgment. The Council in Trullo in 690 A.D. stated the classical Catholic position:

And if any controversy in regard to Scripture shall have been raised, let them not interpret it otherwise than as the lights and doctors of the Church in their writings have expounded it.<sup>11</sup>

Thus even for interpretation of Scripture, the Church appeals to Tradition. Those of the Catholic persuasion have suspected that Protestants deny this appeal, and that they subscribe to the untrammelled right of private judgment to decide what the Scriptures say in matters of faith and order. Catholics accordingly fear that Protestants in so doing are leading inevitably to the admission of strange and erroneous teachings and indeed contributing to the fragmentation of the Church into sects based upon some particular interpretation. This, one feels, needs to be faced quite frankly; needs to be fully discussed and clarified.

Anglican, and for that matter classical Catholic thought if we except post-Tridentine Roman thought for the most part, refuses to maintain that there is any real antithesis whatever between Scrip-

9. Hall, *op. cit.*, page 191ff.

10. Moss, *The Christian Faith*, London, 1954, pages 216ff.

11. Quoted in Hall, *op. cit.*, page 120.

ture and Tradition, or to set them up as a double source of authority. This Dr. Gowing has pointed out, and I would underscore it. The two are complementary each to the other and are not to be considered as in opposition to each other. They are parts of the same thing, as it were.<sup>12</sup> The result of failing to see this is the separation of biblical from ecclesiastical authority, to the detriment of both and at the expense of one or the other, and to the weakening of the necessary hold upon both. Anglicanism, then, and Catholic consent generally looks upon the Scriptures as the *fundamental part* of the Holy Tradition, as normative to it, as of supreme authority in it. But the Scriptures are by no means the whole of the *paradosis*. Dr. Gowing's point in this respect deserves further discussion. Space does not permit us to here detail the many facets of the Tradition which are not Scriptural, except perhaps seminally. There is the great dogmatic tradition. We would not seek to deny the supremely important place of the Creeds and the great affirmations of Christian Dogma. Yet these are of the Tradition and are transmitted through it. They may indeed be proven by Scripture, but they are not explicit in their details in Scripture. And so it is with the Liturgical Tradition—there is a tradition and a Catholic consent in this as well. There is a tradition of Church Order, and of many other aspects of the life of the Church. These are not an inchoate body of ideas and opinions, but they bear a recognisable and definable form and content, and they are the property of no one part of the Church nor did they take their authority from any one part of it—they derive from the Tradition, and claim the authority of Tradition. One would wish further to illustrate all this, and perhaps future discussion of it will prove very fruitful.

There is one other point which Dr. Gowing made, the discussion of which will be most productive and may make for future clarification. At one place in his paper, Dr. Gowing gave us a brief discussion and a quotation from the results of the Consultation on Church Union held this past March in Oberlin, Ohio. The consultants pointed out that the Church today confronts not only Scripture and Tradition, but also traditions: individual expressions of the Tradition. The writer believes that the study and clarification of these traditions and the ascertaining of their relation to the Tradition itself,

<sup>12</sup> Pike and Pittenger, page 19.

and indeed the submission of them to the judgment of the Tradition, will be a great advance in our ecumenical understanding. In closing, the writer would state one or two points not mentioned in the paper, but points which need frank investigation and discussion: (1) the role of the historic Episcopate as witness to the integrity of the Tradition and as living guarantee of the continuity of the *paradosis*; (2) the economy of the Holy Spirit in his continuous guidance of the Church into all truth, ever bringing into fuller realization the Word of God, and the Tradition as the voice of the Spirit in the Church. The writer is most grateful to Dr. Gowing for a very illuminating paper, and particularly for the full bibliography which he has indicated in his footnotes.