

THE CATHOLIC CONCEPT OF TRADITION IN THE LIGHT OF MODERN THEOLOGICAL THOUGHT

THE theological turmoil of the last decade is eloquent evidence that a neuralgic problem of our time is the theme of tradition. It is not simply that the *role* of tradition with respect to revealed truth is a sign of Christian contradiction: that much we have recognized since the Reformation.¹ Today it is the very *concept* of tradition that divides us. The reactions evoked by *Humani generis* and *Munificentissimus Deus* have laid the axe to the root of the problem. Thus, Georges Barrois, who like Demas "has deserted [us]" (2 Tim. iv. 9), wrote in the *Christian Century* with reference to *Humani generis*:

There is no doubt that the "new theologians" were about to rediscover a most neglected and misunderstood factor in the Christian heritage, that of tradition. Instead of the Council of Trent's unworkable definition of tradition, they came out with a fresh and at the same time critical appreciation of the common expressions of Christian thought throughout history. . . .

It looks as if Rome had given up the definition of Trent for all practical purposes. *Humani generis* discreetly casts a mantle of Noah on the ill-fated concept of unwritten tradition. Instead, it lays the major emphasis upon what it calls "the living teaching authority of the Church," vested in the hierarchy. . . .²

In the *Ecumenical Review*, H. Alivisatos discussed the dogma of the Assumption from an Eastern Orthodox standpoint and remarked:

Simple ecclesiastical traditions, of quite chance origin, cannot be made into dogmas. In this, as is well known, we differ seriously from the Roman Catholic Church, because we remain

¹ Cf. Joaquín Salaverri, "La tradición valorada como fuente de la revelación en el Concilio de Trento," *Estudios eclesiásticos*, XX (1946), 39: the denial of tradition was "the point of departure of Lutheran theology."

² Georges A. Barrois, "An Overlooked Encyclical," *Christian Century*, LXVIII (Jan. 17, 1951), 79. For a synthesis of the reactions to *Humani generis*, mostly from the Catholic side, cf. Gustave Weigel, "Gleanings from the Commentaries on *Humani generis*," *Theological Studies*, XII (1951), 520-49.

faithful to the basis of faith as this is contained in Holy Scripture and in the Sacred Tradition. . . . But the Roman Catholic Church professes belief in the power of the Church (with the Pope as its sole representative) to create the Sacred Tradition, and on his own authority to pronounce new dogmas, even where there is no evidence for them in Holy Scripture or the Sacred Tradition. . . .³

And from the Catholic side the patrologist Berthold Altaner ruffled theological tempers no end when he concluded (before *Munificentissimus Deus*) that "the definability of the Assumption cannot be maintained from the standpoint of scientific theology," because "there is no proof from Scripture" and "a proof from tradition, which would establish a tradition going back in some form or other to the apostolic age, cannot be adduced. The declarations and texts usually cited . . . do not rest on any historico-theological tradition. . . ." Consequently a denouement achieved by definition would be a triumph of ecclesiastical positivism, a return to late-medieval Nominalism with its radical divorce between faith and knowledge.⁴

From out the welter of Protestant, Orthodox, and Catholic confusion has come an awareness: a contemporary exigence of Catholic theology is a precise understanding of the very concept of tradition.⁵ It is to this problem that the present paper addresses itself. The complexity of this single issue makes imperative a conscious disregard of several closely allied questions, and demands that we restrict our research to the fundamental problem: What *is* tradition?

I should like to approach the problem in three stages. The first stage is an *historical* survey, on broad lines, to indicate landmarks

³ H. Alivisatos, "The New Dogma from an Eastern Orthodox Standpoint," *Ecumenical Review*, III (1950-51), 154-55. For a number of Protestant and Orthodox reactions to the proclamation of the dogma, cf. Luigi Giussani, "Atteggiamenti protestanti ed ortodossi davanti al dogma dell'Assunta," *Scuola cattolica*, LXXIX (1951), 106-13; D. P. D., "Le dogme de l'Assomption et l'Orthodoxie grecque," *Irénikon*, XXIV (1951), 86-90.

⁴ Berthold Altaner, "Zur Frage der Definibilität der Assumptio B. M. V.," *Theologische Revue*, XLVI (1950), 19-20.

⁵ This contemporary necessity has been emphasized, with reference to the Assumption, by Otto Semmelroth, "Überlieferung als Lebensfunktion der Kirche," *Stimmen der Zeit*, CXLVIII (April, 1951), 1.

and emphases in the movement of Catholic thought on tradition from Trent to our own day. The second stage is an effort at *synthesis*, an attempt to fuse the best insights of Catholic theology into an acceptable conceptual scheme. The third and final stage will endeavor to relate the Catholic concept of tradition with what is sometimes called "purely historical tradition," by clarifying the difference between historical and theological method. The results thus achieved will be concretized by an application to Our Lady's Assumption.

I

First, then, the historical survey (1546-1951). I am acutely conscious that, in the development of ideas, sharply defined temporal divisions can be seductively deceptive; and I am well aware that the progression in the Catholic concept of tradition is rather a question of emphasis and explicitation than of radical dissonance. That much confessed, let me submit that the theology of tradition since Trent falls broadly into three periods.⁶

(1) From Trent to the end of the seventeenth century we find (a) the emphasis on tradition as a source; (b) a parallel stress on the objective aspect of tradition, i.e., on the doctrine contained therein; and consequently (c) a distinction, implicit at least, between tradition and magisterium.

(2) In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there are no remarkable insights in regard of the fundamental concept, but there is (a) increasing insistence on a tradition that includes a living rule of faith; there is (b) a striking emphasis on tradition as itself a living, dynamic thing; and (c) the total Catholic theology of tradition, as it existed at the time of the Vatican Council, is summed up in Cardinal Franzelin.

(3) The contemporary, twentieth-century theology of tradition (a) regards tradition not so much as a source, as rather the rule of faith; (b) it stresses the active aspect, the preaching of the Church, as the formal aspect; consequently (c) it insists upon identifying tradition properly so called and magisterium.

⁶ For the development of the concept of tradition since Trent I am greatly indebted to A. Michel, "Tradition," *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, XV, 1 (Paris, 1946), 1320-46.

This progression of thought has been limned by Michel with a single bold stroke: the point of departure is the concept of tradition as *doctrine* received from the apostles; the end result is the concept of tradition as the Church's *magisterium*; neither concept, however, is exclusive of the other.⁷

1. TRENT TO END OF SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

In point of time, and by reason of their consistent influence, the Council of Trent and Melchior Cano will serve as springboards for the study of modern thought on tradition.⁸ The Tridentine decree on Scripture and tradition (April 8, 1546) is inspired by a polemic.⁹ It is directed against the Protestant position that Scripture is the unique source of our knowledge of Christian revelation. Not only is tradition incapable (so said the Reformers) of witnessing to truths not contained in the sacred books; even where tradition testifies to

⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, col. 1320-21.

⁸ To fathom Trent's terminology on tradition, an intimate study of the early sixteenth century theologians would be quite useful; among others, John Driedo, apparently the first theologian to treat ex professo of tradition, in the fourth book of his *De ecclesiasticis scripturis et dogmatibus* (Louvain, 1533). For Driedo, *traditiones* are truths and customs which (1) are extra-scriptural, (2) cannot be substantiated explicitly by Scripture, (3) ought nevertheless to be received, and (4) originate either with Christ or with the apostles. *Traditio* is the movement of this extra-scriptural teaching across history. It is a *professio*, continuous from the Church's cradling to our own day; its object is the whole content of revelation, whether explicitly in Scripture or not; its agent is the Catholic Church universal in time and space. The closest we come to a definition of *traditio* is "ipsa professio concors omnium sanctorum patrum secundum suorum temporum successiones concorditer reddentium testimonium scripturis sacris, sententiis Christi, et consuetudini primitivae ecclesiae" (*op. cit.* [folio ed. 1550], IV, 5, fol. 227^vC). A competent summary of Driedo's thought on tradition has been presented by Joseph Lodrioor, "La notion de tradition dans la théologie de Jean Driedo de Louvain," *Ephemerides theologicae Lovanienses*, XXVI (1950), 37-53. In the above definition Lodrioor, unlike De-neffe, sees as the agent of tradition not merely the hierarchy but the Catholic Church whole and entire.

⁹ Cf. sess. IV, decr. 1: "Recipiuntur libri sacri et traditiones apostolorum"; *Concilium Tridentinum: Diariorum, actorum, epistularum, tractatum nova collectio*, ed. Societas Goerresiana (Freiburg, 1901 ff.), V, 91.

truths scripturally verifiable, tradition is not a *distinct* source of revelation. Its validity is based utterly on the presence of those same truths in Scripture. In a word, tradition has no value as an independent source.¹⁰ What was Trent's answer? (1) There are in the Church apostolic traditions. (2) These traditions are a source of divine revelation. (3) As a source of divine revelation, these traditions have in the Church an authority equal to that of Scripture, precisely because of their divine origin. From this definitive decree and from the preliminary discussions salient facts emerge with respect to the Tridentine concept of tradition.¹¹

(1) Trent neither envisaged nor attempted a systematic treatment of tradition or even a scientific definition of the concept. From the very exigencies of her polemic Trent was interested in one aspect of tradition: tradition was introduced into the deliberations as a source, and tradition emerged from the definitive decree as a source—a source on which the Church can draw, no less than on Scripture,

¹⁰ The Reformation thesis was not a crude, out-and-out rejection of Christian tradition. The Reformers were quite ready to admit that the primitive Christian communities received their faith by oral preaching, that the generations following hard upon the apostolic age held oral tradition in high regard, that not every deed and doctrine of Christ has been recorded in Scripture. But they insisted that, once Scripture was complete, everything necessary for salvation is contained therein. The knowledge of other, non-scriptural revealed truths is of interest for history rather than religion. Time has so blurred their features, often so erased them, that it has become impossible to recognize and recapture their apostolic origin. In point of fact, therefore, the genuine tradition of the apostles is identified with Scripture; soon after the apostolic age Scripture became, and has remained, the one source of our knowledge of Christian revelation. Cf. A. Michel, *art. cit.*, col. 1315; G. Van Noort, *Tractatus de fontibus revelationis nec non de fide divina* (3rd ed. rev.; Bussum, 1920), pp. 92-93.

¹¹ Cf. R. Hull, "The Council of Trent and Tradition," *Ecclesiastical Review*, LXXXI (1929), 469-82, 602-15; *Idem*, "The Tridentine Decree on Tradition," *Month*, CLIV (1929), 10-16; J. Salaverri, *art. cit.*, pp. 33-61; Edmond Ortigues, "Ecritures et traditions apostoliques au Concile de Trente," *Recherches de science religieuse*, XXXVI (1949), 271-99; A. Michel, *art. cit.*, cols. 1311-17; August Deneffe, *Der Traditionsbegriff: Studie zur Theologie* (Münster, 1931), pp. 62-73; Jean Vacant, *Etudes théologiques sur les constitutions du Concile du Vatican d'après les actes du concile* (2 vols.; Paris and Lyons, 1895), I, 367-79.

for the intelligence and communication of revealed truth.¹² It would be quite unwise, therefore, to regard the Tridentine decree as the ultimate expression of Catholic thought on tradition.¹³

(2) Trent speaks of "traditions" in the plural, i.e., what theologians of a later day will call objective tradition: the aggregate of truths pertaining to faith and morals which the apostles heard from the lips of Christ or from the dictation of the Spirit, and which have been passed on as if by hand from age to age.¹⁴

(3) These traditions are "apostolic" in the sense that the apostles were the original recipients of the truths in question, and were the channel through which these truths have been communicated to the Church.¹⁵

(4) These traditions are "unwritten" (*sine scripto*), not in the sense that they have never been consigned to writing—such an understanding of the phrase *sine scripto* does little credit to the intelligence

¹² Cf. J. Salaverri, *art. cit.*, p. 38. Her purpose in fashioning the decree on Scripture and tradition Trent expressly formulated: "Omnes itaque intelligent, quo ordine et via ipsa synodus post iactum fidei confessionis fundamentum sit progressura, et quibus potissimum testimoniis ac praesidiis in confirmandis dogmatibus et instaurandis in ecclesia moribus sit usura" (*Conc. Trid.*, ed. Soc. Goerr., V, 91). The two chief *testimonia ac praesidia* are Scripture and tradition; it is on these foundations that the Council will especially rely when she proceeds to define her dogmas.

¹³ Cf. R. Hull, *Eccl. Rev.*, LXXXI (1929), 607.

¹⁴ True, the Council does use the singular in the course of her pronouncements; cf. sess. XIV, cap. 1: ". . . ut ex apostolica traditione per manus accepta ecclesia didicit . . ." (J. D. Mansi, *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio* [Florence, Paris, and Leipzig, 1759 ff.], XXXIII, 98). Here, and in other instances where the singular is employed, the accent is apparently on the method of transmission. In the decree on tradition, however, the emphasis is on the truths transmitted; that conclusion imposes itself from the preliminary discussions as well (cf., e. g., the general congregation of Feb. 26; *Conc. Trid.*, ed. Soc. Goerr., V, 18). It is worth remarking, too, that *morum disciplinae* in the decree does not refer to disciplinary questions, but "the moral aspect of revelation. It is always a question of revealed truths" (E. Ortigues, *art. cit.*, p. 287, note 1).

¹⁵ Cf. R. Hull, *Eccl. Rev.*, LXXXI (1929), 607. The decree is not concerned with purely ecclesiastical traditions, as is evident not merely from the definitive text but also from the preliminary acts (cf. *Conc. Trid.*, ed. Soc. Goerr., V, 18; V, 41; I, 490; X, 394, 474).

of the Fathers of Trent—but in the sense that the Church has received them from the apostles in a way other than through the medium of inspired writings (*sine scripto inspirato*).¹⁶

(5) The channel by which these traditions have reached us and will reach men till the end of time is the Catholic Church: her infallible teaching is the guarantee of their authenticity and purity. Here the decree touches—but does no more than touch—the formal

¹⁶ Such is the minimal exegesis. Vacant, however, while conceding that this interpretation would merit no censure, insists that “this is not the meaning which emerges from the text of the decree, nor that which was in the thought of the Fathers of Trent.” For Trent and Vatican, “tradition is composed of doctrines which are not recorded at all in the inspired Scriptures, even though they are or could be written in other books” (*op. cit.*, I, 376, 375). True, in the thought of many of the Fathers of Trent tradition had this exclusive meaning; the Bishop of Fano, for example, thought that the objections to the preliminary draft of March 22 would vanish if the ultimate decree were to add: “quoniam sancta haec synodus scit, quam plura alia esse in ecclesia a Spiritu Sancto dictata, quae in sanctis litteris non sunt prodita, propterea illa quoque suscipit et veneratur” (*Conc. Trid.*, V, 40). However, from a comparison of the draft and the decree one is tempted to deny that Trent intended a distinction between Scripture and tradition on the basis of the truths contained in each source. The draft of March 22 was quite clear: “. . . hanc veritatem partim contineri in libris scriptis, partim sine scripto traditionibus” (*ibid.*, V, 31). But the General of the Servites, Bonnucci, declared in the general congregation of April 1: “Non placere veritatem evangelii partim in scriptis partim in traditionibus contineri” (*ibid.*, V, 47). Deneffe has pointed out (*op. cit.*, p. 73) that the reason for Bonnucci’s displeasure is not subjoined. Quite true; but Bonnucci had already clarified that point on March 23, as we know from the diary of Massarelli: “Iudico omnem veritatem evangelicam scriptam esse, non ergo *partim*” (*Conc. Trid.*, I, 525). At any rate the *partim partim* does not appear in the final decree of April 8; there we read simply: “. . . hanc veritatem et disciplinam contineri in libris scriptis et sine scripto traditionibus” (*ibid.*, V, 91). That is why Deneffe concludes: “This belongs to the essence of the traditions treated here by the Council: they are doctrines which were preached orally by the apostles. But this is to be understood in the positive, not the exclusive, sense. The oral preaching took place as such *sine scripto*, but the same doctrine that was preached orally could also stand in Holy Scripture or be subsequently recorded therein” (*op. cit.*, p. 73). The latest comments I have seen on the suppression of *partim partim* are to be found in the article of Ortigues (*supra*, note 11; cf. pp. 286-87); I must confess, however, that he fails to clarify the reasons the Council itself had for the suppression.

aspect of tradition, which only post-Vatican theology will set in full relief.¹⁷

(6) Finally, in her understanding and employment of tradition Trent distinguishes between tradition and magisterium: tradition is a source on which the magisterium may draw.¹⁸

What does Melchior Cano understand by tradition?¹⁹ We look

¹⁷ As Deneffe has noted, it is of the essence of these traditions that, just as they proceeded originally from Christ or the Holy Spirit, and were entrusted to the apostles, so they have been preserved through the Church's magisterium: Trent's *continua successione* shows us where to find the *manus* through which the traditions have passed (*op. cit.*, pp. 72-73). Cf. Michel: "There is here only an indication, but an indication pregnant with consequences, and whose total richness the theologians will succeed in placing in relief" (*art. cit.*, col. 1316-17).

¹⁸ Cf. J. Salaverri, *art. cit.*, p. 52. The essential Tridentine ideas on tradition are discoverable in a theologian of the Council, Martin Pérez de Ayala, in his *De divinis apostolicis atque ecclesiasticis traditionibus* (Cologne, 1549); note his definition of theological tradition: "arcana doctrina consuetudine fidelium roborata, ex animo in animum a majoribus in posteris medio incurrente verbo transfusa" (quoted by Michel, *art. cit.*, col. 1321).

¹⁹ Cf. Albert Lang, *Die Loci Theologici des Melchior Cano und die Methode des dogmatischen Beweises: Ein Beitrag zur theologischen Methodologie und ihrer Geschichte* (Munich, 1925); A Gardeil, "Lieux théologiques," *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, IX, 1 (Paris, 1926), 712-47; P. Mandonnet, "Melchior Cano," *ibid.*, II (1905), 1537-40. Cano's treatise appeared posthumously (Salamanca, 1563); the edition used here is that of Titus M. Cucchi, *Melchioris Cani episcopi Canariensium ex Ordine Praedicatorum opera* (3 vols.; Rome, 1890), which is itself nothing more than the well-known edition of Hyacinthus Serry (Bassano, 1746). For Cano, theology's supreme sources of knowledge are authority and reason (the latter, of course, in a secondary and subordinate role). Under these broad heads fall Cano's ten theological loci. Of the ten, seven are properly theological, because they rest on revelation, on authority; the other three appeal to reason. Of the seven properly theological loci, two are fundamental, five secondary. The two fundamental loci are Scripture and apostolic traditions—fundamental because they *found* the credal character of a truth, they contain all of revelation, the very datum of theology. But Scripture and tradition are not the only loci from which the credal character of a truth can be *known*. The deposit of faith consigned to Scripture and tradition has been entrusted by God to a living authority for its certain conservation, authentic interpretation, and binding transmission to succeeding generations. Hence three further loci, inasmuch as the infallibility of the Church's doctrine can be guaranteed by the belief of

in vain for a definition.²⁰ There are, however, four conclusions I shall simply assert from a study of *De locis theologicis*, III.²¹ (1) Cano is influenced by the concept of tradition as doctrine: tradition as a locus is primarily a question of "veritates traditae."²² And the truths are apparently those not recorded in Scripture at all, or only darkly recorded.²³ (2) Cano's loci "are theology's sources of knowledge; they serve to provide the theologian with his principles; from the elaboration of these principles result the conclusions of theology."²⁴ (3) Tradition is something distinct from the authoritative preaching of the Church. This is evident from Cano's own division and juxtaposition of the loci. In fact, the five secondary loci—Church, councils, Popes, Fathers, theologians—have for their object "to orientate the seeker toward the primary locus of apostolic tradition."²⁵ (4) Apostolic tradition, at least as a distinct source, is restricted to apostolic times:

the collective Church, by the doctrinal activity of the councils, and by the infallible decisions of the Popes. Besides the official magisterium, however, two other loci have a role to play in the transmission of the deposit of faith: the Fathers, and the Scholastic theologians and canonists. Finally, for the defense, guarantee, and better understanding of the truths of faith the theologian needs natural knowledge too; and so we have the three appended, subsidiary loci: natural reason, philosophy, and history.

²⁰ The second of the loci is simply described as "auctoritas traditionum Christi et apostolorum, quas, quoniam scriptae non sunt, sed de aure in aurem ad nos pervenerunt, vivae vocis oracula rectissime dixeris" (*De locis theologicis*, I, 3 [ed. Cucchi, I, 5]).

²¹ The whole of Book III deals with the locus "apostolic traditions" (ed. Cucchi, I, 151-87).

²² Cf. A. Michel, *art. cit.*, col. 1322; A. Lang, *op. cit.*, p. 112. At times, however, Cano seems to be referring primarily to an activity, a method of communication; thus, in III, 4: "Si quidquam est nunc in ecclesia communi fidelium consensione probatum, quod tamen humana potestas efficere non potuit, id ex apostolorum traditione necessario derivatum est" (ed. Cucchi, I, 170).

²³ Cf. A. Deneffe, *op. cit.*, p. 86; also *De locis theologicis*, III, 3: "Apostolos maximis de causis alia quidem litteris, alia autem viva voce prodidisse" (ed. Cucchi, I, 161). These traditions are, for Cano, either truths to be believed or customs to be observed.

²⁴ A. Lang, *op. cit.*, pp. 72-73.

²⁵ A. Michel, *art. cit.*, col. 1322.

As far as I can see, Cano takes tradition (where he distinguishes it from the Church and her doctrinal preaching) in the following sense. Taken actively, tradition is the personal doctrinal activity of Christ and the apostles. This personal activity ceased with the death of the apostles; from that point on there is no longer any tradition in this sense. The corresponding tradition taken passively is the doctrine, insofar as it is heard immediately from the mouth of Christ and the apostles. Such a tradition could be enjoyed only by the immediate hearers of Christ and the apostles; it too comes to an end with the death of the apostles.²⁶

However, Cano does not cling slavishly to this restricted idea of tradition. He hints here and there that the activity of tradition is not limited to the apostles; it is to be ascribed to the permanent living magisterium.²⁷

Briefly, in Trent's thought and in Cano's all the elements are present for a definition of tradition: revealed truth, non-scriptural transmission, authoritative communication. But the synthesis is lacking. And the later sixteenth-century theologians—Toletus, Stapleton, Bañez, Vasquez, Suarez—will simply take up, with insignificant variants, the theme so vigorously proposed by Cano. Tradition is doctrine, tradition is source. The magisterium enters in, yes—otherwise traditions have no infallible guarantee—but the magisterium is not the direct, immediate object of attention.²⁸

The same concentration on the objective aspect of tradition

²⁶ A. Deneffe, *op. cit.*, pp. 125-26.

²⁷ Thus, *De locis theologicis*, III, 2: “. . . plura adhuc . . . disserentur . . . quo videant catholici, cum omnes locos ratione animoque lustraverint, nullum esse certiozem, nullum stabiliorem, nullum denique sacris literis exponendis magis necessarium quam is est, quo ecclesiae traditio continetur” (ed. Cucchi, I, 158-59).

²⁸ A convenient summary of the doctrine of the later sixteenth-century theologians may be found in Michel, *art. cit.*, col. 1322-23, and in Deneffe, *op. cit.*, pp. 87-88. Note Toletus' definition of tradition: “doctrina a Christo apostolis, vel a Spiritu sancto ecclesiae data, nulla scriptura contenta”; and that of Bañez: “doctrina ad fidem et religionem spectans, quae sacris scripturis nunquam fuit commendata, sed a maioribus ad minores, a patribus ad filios derivata.” Michel finds in Stapleton “a sort of first draft of a doctrine on tradition no longer merely source of faith but rule of faith” (col. 1323).

continues into the seventeenth century. For Cardinal Bellarmine the time-honored theological notion of tradition is "tantum doctrina non scripta," i.e., not written by its first author. Thus divine traditions are doctrines taught by Christ to the apostles and nowhere found in the Sacred Books; apostolic traditions originate with the apostles aided by the Spirit, yet are not recorded in their epistles.²⁹ The same definition is taken up by Adrian and Peter Wallenburg; they insist that the theologians, after the example of the Fathers, use the word "traditio" rather of the "res tradita" than of the "actio tradentis."³⁰ The same emphasis is discoverable in Bossuet. Perhaps the most striking illustration of his preoccupation occurs in the *Catéchisme de Meaux*. In the Second Catechism (for those being prepared for Communion) we read:

²⁹ Cf. Robertus Bellarminus, *De controversiis christianae fidei adversus huius temporis haereticos*, I, 4: "De verbo Dei non scripto" (*Opera omnia* [Naples, 1856 ff.], I, 115-41). The definition and divisions of tradition are given in Chapter II (pp. 115-16). His reason for attributing the same force to divine and apostolic traditions as to Scripture is splendidly put: "for the word of God is not God's word, nor has it any authority, because it is written on parchment, but because it has come forth from God, either immediately . . . or by means of the apostles" (p. 116). Bellarmine's significance for us lies in the useful precisions he has brought to the division of tradition, in his demonstration of the necessity of traditions, and in his five rules for the recognition of true apostolic and divine traditions. In these rules it is not precisely the infallible magisterium that comes into play as the central factor, but rather the infallibility of the universal Church. Deneffe suggests that the reason for this may be found in Bellarmine's polemical position: "it seems that he wants to work with a principle which even the adversaries had to concede, i.e., that the universal Church of Christ cannot fall into error" (*op. cit.*, p. 91).

³⁰ Cf. Adrianus et Petrus à Walenburch, *De controversiis tractatus generales*, VI (ed. J. P. Migne, *Theologiae cursus completus*, I [Paris, 1860], 911-24). Their definition of unwritten tradition is this: "quae a primo auctore in litteras non est relata, quamvis eadem doctrina ab aliis sit scripta" (col. 911). Their divisions are the same as Bellarmine's. If you regard the *actio tradentis*, you have divine, apostolic, and ecclesiastical traditions; if you consider the *res tradita*, you have traditions of faith or of morals, perpetual or temporary, universal or particular, obligatory or free (*ibid.*). The merit of their work, Michel observes, consists in "having adapted to the controversies of the time the argument from prescription which Tertullian had used of old with so much success" (*art. cit.*, col. 1325).

Do you believe only that which is written? I believe also that which the apostles have taught orally, and which has always been believed in the Catholic Church.—What do you call this doctrine? I call it God's unwritten word ("parole de Dieu, non écrite"), or tradition.—What does this word "tradition" mean? Doctrine passed from hand to hand, and always received in the Church.³¹

2. EIGHTEENTH AND NINETEENTH CENTURIES

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, I said, there is (a) increasing insistence on a tradition that includes a living rule of faith; there is (b) a striking emphasis on tradition as itself a living, dynamic thing; and (c) the total Catholic theology of tradition, as it existed at the time of the Vatican Council, is summed up in Franzelin.

³¹ For the complete works of Bossuet, cf. the edition of M. l'abbé Guillaume, *Oeuvres complètes de Bossuet* (10 vols.; Paris, 1879). The passage quoted is taken from his *Catéchisme de Meaux*, II, 2, 12, 5 (Guillaume, VIII, 516). Actually, Bossuet's concept of tradition is not easy to categorize. It is true, he does look upon *la parole non écrite* as a locus whence theology draws its arguments to establish or clarify the dogmas of the faith (cf. *Défense de la tradition*, II, 1 [Guillaume, II, 536]). But in the course of his works the thing becomes quite complex. "Oral tradition," he says, "is one of the means chosen by the apostles to make the Christian truths pass to succeeding ages" (*Fragments sur diverses matières de controverse*, V: "De la tradition ou de la parole non écrite" [Guillaume, III, 151]). It is the oral preaching of Christ and the apostles; to this activity correspond the doctrines themselves, first preached orally, and passed on from hand to hand to subsequent ages (cf. *ibid.*, pp. 152, 155). In another place tradition seems to be the teaching of the Church (cf. *Défense de la tradition*, II, 1 [Guillaume, II, 538]). He insists that "tradition is nothing else than the perpetual recognition of the infallible authority of the Church" (*ibid.*, II, 18 [Guillaume, II, 544]). Elsewhere he defines tradition as "the ever evident progression of the teaching left and continued in the Church, the principle of truth and the source which flows always in the succession" (*Instruction pastorale sur les promesses de l'église*, XXVII [Guillaume, IV, 100]). In fact he once describes this unwritten tradition as "the fulness of Christian knowledge, which comprises in its extent, together with Scripture itself and the correct interpretation of Scripture, all the dogmas written and unwritten. It is this tradition, ever living in the Church, which forms its unalterable rule" (*Tradition des nouveaux mystiques*, 16, 8 [Guillaume, V, 209]). In some of his statements, therefore, Bossuet rivals the modern emphasis on the active element in tradition.

The insistence on a living rule of faith emerges, with relative degrees of clarity, from the works of Mayr, Gotti, Billuart, and Kilber.³² For each of them the strict theological notion of tradition is quite the same thing: a truth of faith or morals, received originally by the apostles from the lips of Christ or from the suggestion of the Spirit, not consigned (at least expressly) to Scripture, but communicated to the Church and transmitted to succeeding ages in a vital way.³³ But Mayr insists that tradition, like Scripture, is not of itself a rule of faith. To distinguish apostolic from ecclesiastical traditions, and even from illegitimate traditions, the definitive

³² Cf. Antonius Mayr, *Tractatus theologicus de virtutibus theologicis* (Theologia scholastica, VII; Ingolstadt, 1732); Vincentius Ludovicus Gotti, *Theologia scholastico-dogmatica iuxta mentem divi Thomae Aquinatis* (3 vols.; Venice, 1750); Carolus Renatus Billuart, *Tractatus de fide et regulis fidei* (Cursus theologiae, VII; Würzburg, 1758); Henricus Kilber, *De principiis theologicis* (Theologia Wirceburgensis, I; 3rd ed.; Paris, 1880).

³³ Cf. Mayr: "Per traditiones in restricta et theologica significatione acceptas intelliguntur certa catholicae fidei dogmata aut etiam morum instituta, quae apostoli vel a Christo Domino oretenus vel ex suggestione Spiritus Sancti acceperunt et postea viva voce ecclesiae tradiderunt, quin ea libris canonicis insererent. Itaque traditiones debent quidem non esse in sacra scriptura expressae. . ." (*op. cit.*, disp. 3, q. 1, a. 1, n. 193; p. 208). Sacred tradition is for Gotti "fidei aut morum doctrina, non scripta sed viva voce quasi de aure in aurem successive usque ad nos perveniens" (*op. cit.*, I, tract. 1, q. 3, dub. 3, n. 1; pp. 42-43). It is unwritten, not in the sense that it is nowhere found written, but "quia viva voce, non scripto, a suo primo auctore tradita, nulloque in libro canonico scripta (saltem expresse) mandata, quamvis deinde a successoribus de illa testificantibus fuerit litteris consignata" (*ibid.*, p. 43). Tradition is defined by Billuart as "doctrina ad fidem et mores christianos pertinens, viva voce a suo auctore communicata" (*op. cit.*, tract. de reg. fid., diss. 2, a. 1; p. 187). He explicitly says that tradition is defined as "doctrine, because tradition is taken here not for the act of transmission but for the thing transmitted" (*ibid.*, p. 186). Kilber defines tradition in its strict and theological meaning as "notitia sacra, h.e. ad religionem pertinens, oretenus primum aliis communicata, h.e. non contenta saltem expressis verbis in sacra scriptura, sed viva voce primitus ab auctore suo proposita, ac deinceps quasi de aure in aurem ad posteros successive perducta, sive post modum aut in conciliorum actis, aut in patrum scriptis, aut in historicorum libris fuerit authentice consignata, sive non" (*op. cit.*, disp. 1, c. 2, a. 1, dico 1; p. 66).

decision of the Church must intervene.³⁴ The same idea is fundamentally in Cardinal Gotti: "as doctrine, tradition is a source; as doctrine transmitted by the authority of the Church, tradition is a rule."³⁵ For Billuart there are five rules of faith: two are lifeless, scil., Scripture and tradition; three are living, scil., Church, Pope, and general council.³⁶ By itself tradition is not a sufficient rule: to know what tradition is imposed upon the faithful, the judgment of the infallible Church is indispensable.³⁷ In Kilber's view, to treat of Scripture and tradition is to treat of the object of faith.³⁸ But the decisive question is: how determine genuine tradition? The answer: in general, by the judgment of the Church. *There* is the rule of faith.³⁹

The contribution of the nineteenth century to the concept of tradition may be summarized in three names: Möhler, Newman, and Franzelin. Möhler personifies the Catholic School of Tübingen, whose role in the story of tradition is deathless because of its insistence that tradition is not an aggregate of lifeless propositions but a living, throbbing, dynamic thing.⁴⁰ For Möhler worked within

³⁴ Cf. A. Mayr, *op. cit.*, disp. 3, q. 1, a. 3, n. 197 (pp. 214-15); disp. 3, q. 3, a. 3, nn. 306-7 (pp. 355-57).

³⁵ A. Michel, *art. cit.*, col. 1328.

³⁶ Cf. C. Billuart, *op. cit.*, tract. de reg. fid., p. 143.

³⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, diss. 2, a. 1; pp. 188-89.

³⁸ Cf. H. Kilber, *op. cit.*, praef.; p. 6.

³⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, disp. 1, c. 2, a. 3, dico 1; pp. 81-82.

⁴⁰ Cf. Johann Adam Möhler, *Die Einheit in der Kirche oder das Prinzip des Katholizismus dargestellt im Geiste der Kirchenväter der drei ersten Jahrhunderte* (Tübingen, 1825; cf. edition of Emil Joseph Vierneisel: Mainz, 1925); *Symbolik oder Darstellung der dogmatischen Gegensätze der Katholiken und Protestanten nach ihren öffentlichen Bekenntnisschriften* (Mainz, 1832; cf. 9th ed., 1884); Pierre Chaillot, "La tradition vivante," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques*, XXVII (1938), 161-83; M.-J. Congar, "Sur l'évolution et l'interprétation de la pensée de Moehler," *ibid.*, pp. 205-12; A. Fonck, "Jean-Adam Moehler," *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, X, 2 (Paris, 1929), 2048-63; Edgar Hocedez, *Histoire de la théologie au XIX^e siècle*, I (Brussels and Paris, 1948), 231-51; Joseph Ranft, "La tradition vivante: Unité et développement," in *L'Eglise est une: Hommage à Moehler*, ed. Pierre Chaillot (Paris, 1939), pp. 102-26; Edmond Vermeil, *Jean-Adam Möhler et l'école catholique de Tubingue (1815-1840)* (Paris, 1913); Gustav Voss, "Johann Adam Möhler and the Development of Dogma," *Theological Studies*, IV (1943), 420-44.

the framework of the Romantic Revival, with its "consciousness of historical continuity, of organic growth, and of life as something dynamic and ever active."⁴¹ Into his conception of living tradition Möhler fused three essential elements: the mystical, the organic, and the active. The mystical element he affirmed against the pressure of individualism and rationalism, for the mystical element of tradition is the permanent action of Christ and His Spirit in the collective life of the Church: tradition is a collective life of Unity in Love. The organic element he asserted against the sterility of a theological method frozen in abstraction, for the organic element is the continuity and progress of this collective life and faith, together with the identity of the Church's consciousness through every moment of its development. The active element he opposed to a nascent historicism and to the Protestant return to the pure Gospel by a seductive, impossible recovery of primitive Christianity; for the active element of tradition is the commitment of the whole Church and especially the indispensable role of the magisterium as the authorized, permanent representative of Christ.⁴²

In his *Symbolik* Möhler distinguishes two aspects of tradition, objective and subjective. "Tradition in the objective sense is the universal faith of the Church throughout all centuries, embodied in outward historical testimonies. In this sense tradition is usually termed . . . the rule of faith."⁴³ This deposit of faith admits no change, "for one doctrine of faith has subsisted and must subsist through the whole history of the Church."⁴⁴ Tradition in the subjective sense is the Church's consciousness of this faith. It is

. . . the peculiar Christian sense existing in the Church and transmitted by the pedagogy of the Church. Yet this sense is

⁴¹ G. Voss, *art. cit.*, p. 424.

⁴² Cf. P. Chaillet, *art. cit.*, pp. 162, 164-65; the three elements are taken from the manuscript of a course given by Möhler on Church history in 1825-26. A partially different treatment of the same three properties of tradition is given by J. Ranft, *art. cit.*, pp. 110-15.

⁴³ *Symbolik*, n. 38 (9th ed., pp. 357-58).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, n. 42 (9th ed., p. 383). If this were not so, the Holy Spirit would cease to activate the body or would even contradict Himself (cf. *Einheit*, n. 10 [ed. Vierneisel, p. 24]).

not to be conceived in isolation from its content; rather has it been molded in and by this content, so that it may be termed an enriched sense. Tradition is the word of God living perpetually in the hearts of the faithful.⁴⁵

This is the tradition that is subject to development, precisely because it is not simply the word of God, but the word of God "living in the hearts of the faithful."⁴⁶ The principle of essential identity does not demand a static state. The vital interior oneness must be safeguarded, but the consciousness of the Church can grow, its life develop and flower by becoming more and more clearly present to itself. It is thus that the Church reaches manhood, becomes the full-grown Christ.⁴⁷

But the very history of development shows the need of a visible, living authority, to protect progress against deviation or alteration. It is precisely because the Catholic acknowledges an active role exercised in tradition by the authoritative Church, that development represents a meaningful evolution, an intelligible history, not merely a corruption of primitive Christianity.⁴⁸

In brief: without employing traditional terminology, Möhler has

⁴⁵ *Symbolik*, n. 38 (9th ed., pp. 356-57).

⁴⁶ Some insight into the richness of Möhler's intuition may be gathered from his own summary of his thought on tradition in *Einheit*, nn. 12-13 (ed. Vierneisel, pp. 28-34); cf. also A. Michel, *art. cit.*, col. 1332-35; E. Vermeil, *op. cit.*, pp. 137-46; A. Fonck, *art. cit.*, col. 2058-60.

⁴⁷ Cf. *Einheit*, n. 13 (ed. Vierneisel, pp. 33-34).

⁴⁸ Cf. *Symbolik*, n. 37 (9th ed., p. 342); P. Chaillet, *art. cit.*, p. 180. It is well for us to realize that in the *Symbolik*, as contrasted with *Die Einheit*, "the visible institution, the body of the Church, are no longer merely a means of expressing the inner spirit; they are a means of procuring it. The Church as a visible society is no longer merely a product of an interior and mystical Christianity; it is the divinely instituted means of transmitting, realizing, and developing the internal and mystical" (M.-J. Congar, *art. cit.*, p. 211). Ranft insists that this transformation of Möhler's conception of the Church had repercussions on his doctrine of tradition: "tradition is no longer the exclusive domain of the action of the Spirit, but it has a solid foundation in the divine institution, in the episcopacy and in the consummation of the episcopacy, the papacy" (*art. cit.*, p. 121). On the criticism that Möhler underrated and understated the prominence we must concede to the magisterium and overemphasized the *Gemeingeist*, cf. G. Voss, *art. cit.*, pp. 438-43.

preserved for the concept of tradition the positive elements of classical theology. But his merit lies in having advanced the traditional positions. He has set in relief the correspondence that exists between the teaching Church and the Church taught; he has shown in tradition the real element of Catholic life and movement; "better than anyone before him, he has searched out the psychological and historical bases of the principle of tradition, and . . . he has tried to demonstrate that this principle, far from being a cause of intellectual impoverishment, is the very condition of progress in the Church."⁴⁹

There is little to indicate that Newman was consciously influenced by Möhler.⁵⁰ Like Möhler, however, Newman accented the element of life and growth in Christian doctrine. As Father Benard put it:

His analogy between the development of doctrine and the progress of the vital idea in the human mind opened up a new and provocative aspect of the matter. His comparison of doctrinal development with the growth of a living organism was delineated with such a penetrating delicacy of nuance that there has been nothing to add to it since.⁵¹

And that is the core of his contribution to the concept of tradition: accent on the dynamic. There is, moreover, a striking resemblance between Möhler's subjective and objective tradition and the distinction which the Newman of the *Via media* introduced between episcopal and prophetic tradition.⁵² This prophetic tradition is

⁴⁹ A. Michel, *art. cit.*, col. 1335; cf. col. 1334. Fonck believes that Möhler should be ranked among the mystical theologians rather than among the speculative: his theology is "intuitive, synthetic, constructive, creative"; his thought is not "discursive, analytical, critical." But "it would not be impossible for certain views of Möhler, more or less retouched, to be incorporated in Catholic theology, e.g., his idea of tradition. . ." (*art. cit.*, col. 2062).

⁵⁰ Cf. Henry Tristram, "J. A. Moehler et J. H. Newman: La pensée allemande et la renaissance catholique en Angleterre," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques*, XXVII (1938), 184-204.

⁵¹ Edmond Darvil Benard, *A Preface to Newman's Theology* (St. Louis, 1945), p. 85.

⁵² Cf. J. H. Newman, *The Via Media of the Anglican Church*, I, Lecture 9: "On the Essentials of the Gospel," nn. 10-11 (London and New York, 1891), pp. 249-51.

St. Paul's "mind of the Spirit," the thought and principle which breathes in the Church, "her accustomed and unconscious mode of viewing things," rather than any systematic collection of dogmas elaborated by the intellect.⁵³ This prophetic tradition, it has been observed, is too subtle a thing to be transmitted sheerly by word or writing: assimilation is possible only in an atmosphere permeated with it. It is a genius, a spirit, a life, elusive yet real, difficult to define yet readily recognizable, in consequence of which the members of a social group conform their ways of thinking and acting to a single model.⁵⁴

Cardinal Franzelin's treatise on tradition and Scripture marks an end and a beginning.⁵⁵ Franzelin summed up the Catholic theology of tradition as it existed at the time of the Vatican Council, and his work was the framework in which that theology would evolve in the decades to come. For our purpose Franzelin's merit is two-fold: he distinguished, more clearly than had the past, the active and objective aspects of tradition, and he set in strong relief the role of the living magisterium.⁵⁶

Objective tradition is, for Franzelin, the doctrine transmitted; active tradition is the ensemble of acts and means whereby the doctrine is transmitted. The two aspects should be distinguished; they cannot be separated. The full concept of tradition embraces both elements, matter and form. Franzelin concedes that the Fathers sometimes used "tradition" of doctrines transmitted scripturally; he insists, however, that the more restricted notion of tradition, which implies a mode of transmission and conservation that is different

⁵³ *Ibid.*, n. 12 (p. 251). It is interesting to note that, when Newman quotes the passage on prophetic tradition in his *Essay on Development* (2, 2, 2), he concludes from the existence of such a tradition, even a priori, to the necessity of an infallible authority in the Church to authenticate these various expressions of Christian doctrine (7th ed.; London and New York, 1890, p. 77).

⁵⁴ Cf. H. Tristram and F. Bacchus, "John Henry Newman," *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, XI, 1 (Paris, 1931), 361-62. On Newman and tradition cf. Jean Guittou, *La philosophie de Newman: Essai sur l'idée de développement* (Paris, 1933), ch. 2: "Religion et tradition," pp. 23-63.

⁵⁵ Cf. Ioannes Bapt. Franzelin, *Tractatus de divina traditione et scriptura* (Rome, 1870); I shall use the 3rd ed., 1882.

⁵⁶ Cf. A. Michel, *art. cit.*, col. 1336-39; A. Deneffe, *op. cit.*, pp. 97-99.

from Scripture, is the common concept. The matter may be in Scripture or not; at least the manner of conservation and propagation is different. Thus arises, and thus is resolved, the problem of methodology. In treating of tradition and its authority we should deal less with truths transmitted than with the mode and organ of transmission. The primary question is not: have revealed truths come down to us that are either totally absent from Scripture or at least not totally intelligible from Scripture? The palmary problem is: did Christ institute another instrument besides Scripture to preserve and propagate revealed doctrine with at least equal assurance? The latter question is logically prior, the more significant of the two; it contains in germ the answer to the former; it is polemically the more fundamental in the Catholic-Protestant conflict. That is why Franzelin concentrates his treatise on the discovery of an authentic, living, perpetual, divinely-guided magisterium, in whose hands even the Scriptures are but an instrument.⁵⁷

3. CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGY OF TRADITION

A glance at the post-Franzelin textbooks on tradition leads to three broad conclusions.⁵⁸ (1) Active tradition is identified with

⁵⁷ For the concept of tradition cf. especially Section I of Franzelin's treatise; the first two theses deal directly with the concept (pp. 11-20). Thesis 11 is important because it presents the proper concept of tradition by way of synthesis from what has gone before: "Doctrina fidei universa, quatenus sub assistentia Spiritus Sancti in consensu custodum depositi et doctorum divinitus institutorum continua successione conservatur, atque in professione et vita totius ecclesiae sese exserit, sensu maxime proprio divina est traditio" (p. 96). Essentially the same definition occurs a little later: "doctrina et disciplina divina inde ab apostolis conservata et propagata, si consideretur una cum modo et organo propagationis, quod ab instrumentis scripturae distinctum ac diversum a Christo ipso est institutum, *divina traditio* est ac dici debet sensu maxime proprio" (p. 98). Another synthetic way of presenting the concept is given in thesis 21: "custodia illa depositi et perpetua ecclesiastica praedicatio sub directione Spiritus Sancti sensu theologico maxime proprio est *traditio*" (p. 260). The word of God in Scripture or in the monuments of tradition Franzelin calls a remote rule of faith (*verbum Dei explicandum*); the Church's living magisterium and her preaching is the proximate rule of faith (*verbum Dei explicatum*) (cf. thesis 13, pp. 167-68).

⁵⁸ A brief glimpse into a number of textbooks is offered by Michel, *art. cit.*, col. 1339-40.

the preaching of the magisterium from apostolic times to our own day. (2) Passive or objective tradition is the doctrine thus transmitted; frequently this doctrine is restricted to truths not contained in Scripture. (3) Active tradition is a rule of faith. However, it is not difficult to find in theologians at the turn of the century the following formula: tradition, like Scripture, is a remote rule of faith, the magisterium is the proximate rule. A work of correction and precision was in order,

. for to assert purely and simply that tradition is only a remote rule of faith and that the magisterium or the teaching of the Church is the proximate rule is to weaken many, many affirmations of the Fathers which imply the identity of the magisterium and active tradition.⁵⁹

The necessary nuances were achieved almost simultaneously by Père Bainvel (1905) and, in a more penetrating fashion, by Cardinal Billot on the occasion of the Modernist crisis (1904).⁶⁰

For Billot, tradition in the true, formal, Catholic sense is "nothing else than the continued preaching from age to age, by the successors of the apostles with the charism of indefectibility, of that revelation which was originally received from the mouth of Christ or from the lips of the apostles at the dictation of the Holy Spirit."⁶¹ However, this *praedicatio ecclesiastica* can be looked at in two ways. (1) It can be envisioned *in its past*, as the transmission through the centuries of the doctrine received from Christ and the apostles. Tradition thus envisioned is constituted concretely by ecclesiastical documents, by the monuments of the ages that have fled. Here we are confronted by a rule of faith, because we are face to face with the teaching of the Church. But here the rule is sheerly remote, because it involves a scientific study of the past with the resources of history and theology. (2) The preaching of

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, col. 1341.

⁶⁰ Cf. J. V. Bainvel, *De magisterio vivo et traditione* (Paris, 1905); Ludovicus Billot, *De immutabilitate traditionis contra modernam haeresim evolutionismi* (4th ed.; Rome, 1929). For our purposes the essential section of Billot's work is the first chapter: "De catholico conceptu sacrae traditionis" (pp. 11-45).

⁶¹ L. Billot, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

the Church can be envisaged as it exists *here and now*, under the precise formality of the authoritative magisterium clearly proposing and explaining what must be believed in accord with the revelation it has inherited. Under this formality tradition (*a*) is the proximate rule of faith, and (*b*) is adequately and completely identified with the ever-living magisterium, considered formally as magisterium.⁶²

The truths preached by tradition can, if you will, be designated "tradition in the objective sense." But this objective tradition Billot refuses to consider a rule of faith, however remote; it is simply the object of faith. "Si enim de regula agitur, formaliter qua regula est, non oportet considerare id quod est credendum, sed id quod dirigit in credendo per credendi obiecti propositionem."⁶³

⁶² Cf. *ibid.*, p. 33. The passage in question is perhaps the most illuminating single paragraph I have encountered on tradition, and deserves to be reproduced in full. "Et sane, indesinens illa, et per saeculorum decursum perseverans usque ad nos Ecclesiae praedicatio, duobus modis accipitur. Primo quidem, in interpositis antecedentium aetatum annulis a quibus pendet, et quibus mediantibus semper continuatur cum praedicatione eorum qui primi et immediati fuerunt verbi revelati promulgatores. Deinde vero, secundum se absolute, in qualibet seorsum designata temporis differentia. Primo igitur modo, praedicatio ecclesiastica est traditio sub praecisa ratione *transmissionis doctrinae revelatae quasi de manu in manum inde ab apostolis*, seu traditio re-duplicative ut per indisruptum canalem e fonte a saeculis decurrens, et sub hac consideratione non est plus quam *remota* fidei catholicae regula. Sic enim in-notescit tantummodo per investigationem monumentorum praeteritae aetatis, id est per studium operum quae ex antiquitate relicta, in cognitionem ducunt sententiae, professionis, ac fidei quae olim erat circa doctrinam christianam, vel ex integro, vel in singulis capitibus spectatam. Et si nonnisi mediante investigatione et processu scientiae theologicae proprio cognoscitur quoad ea quae continet dogmata, ergo regulae proximae rationem nec habet nec habere potest. Quare veniendum est ad praedicationem ecclesiasticam, non amplius consideratam in cohaerentia continuaee successionis a prima revelationis origine, sed absolute in sui exercitio pro hoc signato nunc temporis. Quo sub respectu, semper quidem traditio est, quatenus semper tradit id quod explicite vel implicite accepit a maioribus, sed iam est traditio sub praecisa formalitate *auctoritativi magisterii diserte proponentis et explicantis id quod credere necesse est secundum decurrentem inde ab apostolis revelationem*. Et sic etiam, regula est fidei *proxima* atque immediata, quae cum infallibili ac semper vivente Ecclesiae catholicae magisterio, formaliter ut magisterium est, adaequate convertitur."

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 23, note 1; cf. pp. 22-24.

August Deneffe's exposé of the concept of tradition was born of controversy.⁶⁴ Dieckmann had claimed that tradition and magisterium are identical concepts; Deneffe insisted that tradition is something anterior to the Church's preaching. A more profound study of the problem converted Deneffe to the Dieckmann position, though he salvaged something of his earlier thesis by adding a secondary idea.⁶⁵ Here, in short, are Deneffe's conclusions:

(1) In its primary meaning, dogmatic tradition is the infallible preaching of the faith, exercised by the living magisterium. This is the proximate rule of faith. Deneffe distinguishes therein the very act of preaching (tradition in the active sense) and the truth or sum of truths as proposed by the magisterium and received by the faithful from the magisterium (tradition in the objective and passive sense).⁶⁶ By analogy tradition is sometimes applied to the magisterium itself or the persons holding the magisterium.⁶⁷

(2) In a derived and secondary sense, tradition is used of the documents of tradition properly so called, e.g., the writings of the

⁶⁴ Cf. August Deneffe, *Der Traditionsbegriff: Studie zur Theologie* (Münster, 1931). The work is divided into two parts: an historical section and a systematic. The historical section is a survey of *traditio* in ecclesiastical and extra-ecclesiastical usage from earliest times. The investigation is relatively brief (pp. 3-105) for the centuries that must be covered, and Michel asserts that there are serious lacunae with respect to the Fathers and theologians (*art. cit.*, col. 1346).

⁶⁵ Cf. A. Deneffe, *op. cit.*, p. iii.

⁶⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 160. The tradition-activity of the apostles and that of their successors, he adds, are distinguished one from the other by the proximate source of the doctrines to be preached. The apostles received them by immediate revelation from Christ or the Holy Spirit; their successors receive them by succession from predecessors. But in its object, authority, and intimate essence the preaching of the apostles coincides with that of their successors. The former may be called *traditio constitutiva*, the latter *continuativa* (cf. *ibid.*, pp. 160-61, 163).

⁶⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 161, 163. Deneffe notes that the name "tradition" is given now and again to the internal knowledge that lies at the root of the external preaching, i.e., to the *conscientia catholica*, the *intellectus catholicus*, of the magisterium. If the transmission of the doctrine by the collective Church, even the laity, is designated "tradition," still the real pith of tradition lies in the authoritative, infallible transmission exercised by the magisterium (cf. *loc. cit.*).

Fathers and theologians, inscriptions, the belief of the faithful, etc. Tradition in this sense can be called a remote rule of faith. In these documents lies in whole or in part the preaching of the magisterium of the past.

But if the magisterium of a later date draws from these documents the doctrine of the magisterium of an earlier period . . . nevertheless it draws that doctrine ultimately from its very self. For the later magisterium is numerically identical with the earlier, just as the Church and the spouse of Christ is numerically one today, yesterday, and tomorrow, though the physical persons be different.⁶⁸

(3) Deneffe does not believe it expedient to restrict tradition to truths not contained in Scripture. His palmary argument is that such an understanding obscures the primary concept of tradition, i. e., the preaching of any truth of faith and of the whole deposit entrusted to the magisterium. Where tradition is distinguished from Scripture, the basis for the distinction is not a difference of objects, a division of truths, but a difference in the way in which a truth of faith is transmitted and proposed.⁶⁹

Deneffe has added nothing significantly new to the insights of Billot. In fact, as Michel has pointed out, he "seems to have been inspired by Billot, whom he barely mentions, though he has doubtless drawn from him the best of his didactic exposition."⁷⁰

Essentially the same ideas are discoverable in other theologians of tradition: e. g., in Ranft,⁷¹ in Michel,⁷² in Filograssi.⁷³ But enough

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 163-64.

⁶⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 164.

⁷⁰ *Art. cit.*, col. 1346.

⁷¹ Cf. J. Ranft, "Tradition," *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, X (Freiburg, 1938), 243-48; also his more complete work, *Der Ursprung des katholischen Traditionsprinzips* (Würzburg, 1931), the contents of which I know only from Michel's summary (*art. cit.*, col. 1346).

⁷² Cf. A. Michel, *art. cit.*, col. 1347-49.

⁷³ Cf. J. Filograssi, "Traditio divino-apostolica et Assumptio B.V.M.," *Gregorianum*, XXX (1949), 443-89; note especially pp. 443-53. From Trent and Vatican, Filograssi derives a definition of divine-apostolic tradition which, he notes, corresponds to Franzelin's description (cf. note 57, *supra*, "Doctrina fidei universa, etc."): "fidei doctrina, quatenus ex ore Christi aut Spiritu Sancto

has been said, I believe, to illustrate our fundamental contention, that the contemporary theology of tradition (*a*) regards tradition not so much as a source, as rather the rule of faith; (*b*) stresses the active aspect, the preaching of the Church, as the formal aspect; and (*c*) insists upon identifying tradition properly so called and the magisterium.

II

So much for the historical survey. It is high time that, as an outgrowth of this progression of thought, we ventured some sort of synthesis. Tradition, in the sense in which the theologian uses it—divine tradition as opposed to the traditions of men, theological or dogmatic as contrasted with the purely historical, apostolic in view of the first recipients—this tradition is in essence the preaching of the Church, *praedicatio ecclesiastica*. In this general concept there are three elements to be distinguished: (1) the doctrine preached, (2) the preacher, and (3) the act of preaching.

(1) The doctrine preached is always the same: a truth, or the totality of truth, originally communicated to the apostles by Christ our Lord or by the Holy Spirit. Some of these truths are propositions to be believed, some are rules of conduct, some are institutions and practices. But all are contained in the deposit of Christian revelation.

(2) The preacher is primarily, directly, and officially the teaching Church, the magisterium regarded as a body of men, the apostles and their successors down the ages. Those who comprise the teaching Church in any given age will not be the same individuals who form the magisterium in another age. But that is quite incidental. As Deneffe insisted, "the later magisterium is numerically identical with the former, just as the Church and the spouse of Christ is numerically one today, yesterday, and tomorrow, though the physical persons be different."⁷⁴ Indirectly the teaching of the official Church can be conserved and manifested in various ways: in the writings of the Fathers and theologians, in the consciousness and

manifestante ab Apostolis primitus accepta ab iisque viva voce praedicata, ac dein de aevo in aevum continua successione usque ad nos Spiritus Sancti assistentia incorrupta conservata atque transmissa" (p. 448).

⁷⁴ *Op. cit.*, pp. 163-64.

consent of the faithful, in the liturgy—all those ways and means which manifest the mind of the official representatives of Christ. But in genuine apostolic tradition the ultimate teacher is the one authorized teacher, the *ecclesia docens*.

(3) The act of preaching is the actual exercise of the teaching function of the Church, the magisterium *qua* magisterium, the actual communication by the apostles or their successors of what is to be believed or done according to the revelation of Christ or His Spirit. The precise method of communication will differ with time and circumstance. The one method of communication that matters is this: according to the common theological understanding of the term, "tradition" implies a method of transmission and communication different from that of the inspired writings; in tradition the doctrine is transmitted and communicated in a way other than Scripture. The precise method, as I said, will vary. The apostles transmitted Christ's doctrine orally, Clement of Rome by a letter to a single Christian community, Leo XIII by encyclicals, Pius XII by radio; and television is on the threshold. But all this is incidental; the essential is the activity of the teaching Church.

Tradition, then, is the communication by the teaching Church of the revelation made by Christ and His Spirit to the apostles. But from the very nature of the Church's commission, and by reason of her continued existence in time, tradition is not exhausted by a single act. Tradition involves continuity: continuous preservation and continuous presentation. Consequently, as Billot saw so well, we can eye the preaching of the Church in two ways. (1) We can see it *in its past*, as the very transmission through the ages of the Christian revelation. Or (2) we can envisage it *here and now*, as the actual presentation by the magisterium of the revelation committed to her and preserved by her along the corridor of the centuries. To see the preaching of the Church in its uninterrupted transmission involves a scientific study of the past; tradition thus envisaged can therefore be at best a remote rule of faith. It is the communication here and now of the inherited revelation that constitutes for the Christian his one and only proximate and immediate rule of faith.

Here perhaps is the desideratum in the popular intelligence of

tradition: the recognition that tradition is not confined to the past. To recognize this is to recognize the uniqueness of tradition, its function, its dynamism. For if tradition were imprisoned in the past—say in the early councils, or concretely in Mansi, Denzinger, Cavallera, de Journel—tradition would become ultimately as lifeless a thing as Scripture, more lifeless perhaps because uninspired. In tradition there is life, because in tradition there is growth and progress: growth in the Church's consciousness of her possession, progress in the presentation of that possession to men. What makes the act of communication a living thing is not simply that the communication is (or may be) vocal: it is that the communication is vital, that the preaching of Pius is not sheer verbal repetition of the preaching of Peter, not a mere echo of Scripture. The *ecclesia docens*, as such, does not look to the past; the *ecclesia docens* looks within, to her own living consciousness of the doctrine confided to her and nourished within her by the Spirit of Truth.

Let me indicate briefly several consequences that follow hard upon this Catholic notion of tradition:

(1) *Tradition and revelation.* Properly speaking, as Michel has pointed out, there is only one source of faith, and that is revelation. But revelation has been transmitted to men in two ways: by inspired writings and by the living preaching of the Church, i. e., by Scripture and tradition. Under this aspect of the mode of transmission, we may speak less properly of two sources of faith.⁷⁵

(2) *Tradition and magisterium.* Tradition, in its primary meaning, is not something that exists prior to the preaching of the Church. Tradition is the preaching of the Church; active tradition and the living magisterium, active tradition and the magisterium in action, active tradition and the magisterium regarded formally as magisterium, are one and the same thing: the actual communication of the Christian revelation. (In fact, Filograssi has tried to show recently that the magisterium in its totality is identical with tradition in its totality.⁷⁶)

⁷⁵ Cf. Vatican Council, sess. III, c. 3 (*DB*, 792); A. Michel, *art. cit.*, col. 1347.

⁷⁶ "Si [magisterium] complete sumatur, quatenus comprehendit collective ipsos magistros authenticos quibus constituitur, simulque in iis consideratur

(3) *Tradition and Scripture.* From one aspect, the method of communication, tradition and Scripture are adequately distinct: they are two different ways in which the Christian revelation is transmitted, i. e., by inspired writings and by the non-inspired but divinely-directed pronouncements of the teaching Church. Such a distinction is quite justified. However, there is a sense in which tradition and Scripture are not adequately distinct, a sense in which tradition may well be said to include Scripture. The viewpoint here is the matter involved, the revelation itself. For the Church teaches Scripture too. Scripture is not something that hangs in the air, to be grasped by all and sundry. It is the Church's book. She received it and she owns it; in fact, she wrote it. Only she can tell us what is Scripture and what is not; only she can tell us authoritatively what it means; only she has the divine right to quote Scripture and to say: "This you must believe." That is why Tertullian insisted that the heretics had no right to quote Scripture: it was not their book. It is the Church's book.⁷⁷

Cardinal Billot did well to remind us that it is not in Scripture but in tradition alone that revelation has been integrally deposited. To this primitive and primary instrument of preaching set up by Christ Scripture has been entrusted, not only to let us know what is inspired but to explain its meaning. In the deposit of tradition, therefore, even written revelation is contained in some way; and if *even* written revelation, then the whole of revelation.⁷⁸ So, then, to limit the content of tradition to truths *not* contained in Scripture is a sheer polemical expedient. It will find its justification in a set

habitualis notitia veritatis ut acceptae et traditae: tali ratione sumptum magisterium idem est ac traditio divino-apostolica. Traditio enim est *praedicatio ecclesiastica*, in qua distinguitur praedicans, i.e., Ecclesia; doctrina praedicata, seu notitia veritatis; actus praedicandi, seu exercitium magisterii Ecclesiae" (*art. cit.*, pp. 450-51). A more general treatment of the magisterium and tradition, after the fashion of Franzelin, may be found in H. Pérennès, "Tradition et magistère," *Dictionnaire apologétique de la foi catholique*, IV (Paris, 1928), 1783-93. This follows immediately upon a competent article by Adhémar d'Alès, "Tradition chrétienne dans l'histoire," *ibid.*, col. 1740-83.

⁷⁷ Cf. Tertullian, *De praescriptione haereticorum*, XIX and XXXVII (*CSEL*, LXX, 22-23, 47-48).

⁷⁸ Cf. L. Billot, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

of historical circumstances, in a contingent exigency of the practical order; it need not and cannot invalidate the richer fundamental concept of tradition; and it carries with it the danger of misconstruing, of depreciating, the all-embracing role assigned to the magisterium in relation to revelation.⁷⁹ The refusal to harbor a total and therefore unreal dichotomy between Scripture and tradition is not new; it goes back to St. Paul: ". . . hold fast to the *paradoseis* that you have learned, whether by word or by letter of ours" (2 Thess. ii. 15).

(4) A final conclusion is significant for theological method. Partially at least for polemical purposes we have divided our theological "proofs" into categories: magisterium, Scripture, Fathers, theologians. The relevant remark here is that these are not adequately distinguished categories. Actually, the sole legitimate theological method is the argument from tradition, from the preaching of the Church. The argument from the magisterium is an argument directly from the Church's preaching, directly therefore from tradition. The argument from the Fathers and theologians is the same argument, but indirectly, virtually. The Church does not derive her doctrine from the Fathers and theologians; the Fathers and theologians derive their doctrine from the preaching of the Church, from tradition. With respect to Scripture: when we play the theologian and not the polemist, we do not argue from Scripture on the plane of pure philology. On that level a Protestant *nego* is frequently as cogent as a Catholic *affirmo*; sometimes more cogent. Scripture is the Church's book; it is the Church's task to tell us what, e. g., Mt. xvi. 16 means. And her interpretation is not merely as good as her reasons. Her interpretation is her intelligence of the revelation of Christ; and that intelligence is always within her. An argument from Scripture is theologically an argument from the Church's understanding of her own book; and that is an argument from tradition.

⁷⁹ Cf. A. Deneffe, *op. cit.*, pp. 135, 161-62, 164; also J. Filograssi, *art. cit.*, pp. 449-50. Worth mentioning in this connection is the recent article by Johannes Beumer, "Heilige Schrift und kirchliche Lehrautorität," *Scholastik*, XXV (1950), 40-72.

III

In the third and final stage of this paper I should like to relate the Catholic concept of tradition (dogmatic or theological tradition) with what is sometimes called "purely historical tradition," by indicating the difference between historical and theological method.⁸⁰ The problem at issue is this: how do we go about discovering the *praedicatio* of the past, what has been taught and believed by the Church in the course of her history? Take a concrete question: how are we to discover what the Church has taught and believed through the ages on the final lot of the Mother of God?

For that discovery theology and history have, in general, the same evidence at their disposal: the monuments in which the living preaching and the living faith of the Church have been concretized—acts of councils, writings of Fathers, liturgy, epitaphs, etc. The methods of approach, however, are poles apart. The historian deals with the evidence in the light of sheer historical principles, sheer human reason. He works on two principles: coherence and economy. Coherence: put the data together into a rational unity by some logical construction. Economy: make your synthesis as simple as possible. No extraneous influences are allowed to enter into that synthesis, into the interpretation of the data.⁸¹ To admit such outside influence would be to prostitute the science of history. Historical method, as such, investigates and explains the documents in the light of facts and the principles of historical criticism.

Theological method, on the other hand, investigates the same documents, the same monuments, in the light of faith and of the Church's doctrine—especially the doctrine of the Church here and now. I do not mean that the theologian falsifies the evidence; that

⁸⁰ A number of fine ideas in this matter are suggested by J. Filograssi, *art. cit.*, p. 473 ff. Twelve pointed observations on theological tradition and its relation to historical scholarship may be found in the first few pages of the article by Joseph Ternus, "Zur historisch-theologischen Tradition der Himmelfahrt Mariens," *Scholastik*, XXV (1950), 321-60. On the other aspects of the problem of tradition, one might profitably consult Ternus' *Beiträge zum Problem der Tradition*, *Divus Thomas* (Freiburg), XVI (1938), 33-56, 197-229.

⁸¹ No extraneous influences, that is, beyond perhaps the recognition of the Church as a negative norm for the Catholic historian.

he puts into a document what was never there; that, if something has been demonstrated with certainty according to the legitimate criteria of history, the same can be shown false according to the higher principles of faith and the criteria proper to theology. I mean simply that the theologian has another and more powerful instrument with which to read and understand the evidence, with which to supply for the uncertainty and even the absence of evidence. I mean specifically that the teaching and belief of the Church today relative to the final lot of Mary is an indispensable guide to the teaching and belief of the Church of yesterday; that the tradition which is *Munificentissimus Deus* may well throw light on the relatively few monuments, the rather obscure documents, that remain from patristic times. It is not impertinent to point out that historical criticism, when dealing with the monuments of early Christian tradition, results, more often than not, in conclusions that are no more than probable. The evidence is usually imperfect, so imperfect as to render apodictic conclusions quite hazardous. The sorry truth of this observation is at hand for all to read in the histories of dogma.

These principles have significant consequences for the interpretation of both the inspired and the non-inspired documents of the Church. Take Scripture. The theological method, while respecting legitimate historico-grammatical rules of interpretation, complements that interpretation, adds to it norms that derive from the dogma of inspiration, from the teaching of the Church, from the consent of the Fathers, etc. We all know the frustration of the exegete when confronted with James v. 14-15. Trent steps in and adds: the Church has learned from apostolic tradition that we have here the matter, form, proper minister, and effect of extreme unction.⁸²

So, too, with extra-canonical documents. The historian, employing the critical method alone, does not always have at his disposal the means of excluding substantial change in the meaning and understanding of a dogma through the centuries; he does not always see how later tenets of the Fathers agree with earlier opinions; he does not always perceive how the current consent of the Church

⁸² Cf. J. D. Mansi, *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, XXXIII, 98.

coincides with the consent of the past. By invoking a dogmatic criterion, a superhuman element, the theologian recognizes the expression of faith where the historian could not possibly do so, for the theologian legitimately explains the past in the light of the Church's infallibility and in the light of the homogeneous growth of dogma.

Historical method, dealing with the past, begins and ends with the documents of the *past*. Theological method, seeking to determine the tradition of the early Church, may legitimately begin with the *present*. For the ancient doctrine of the Church lives on in the living magisterium of today. To discover whether the early Church taught the Immaculate Conception, the historian will have recourse to the monuments of Christian antiquity and perhaps conclude that the primitive Church did not possess that truth, did not preach it. The conclusion would be wrong. The conclusion should be: there is inadequate historical evidence to show that the primitive Church preached the Immaculate Conception. The theologian is not so limited. The theologian may licitly begin with the Bull *Ineffabilis Deus* of 1854; as a result of that pronouncement, he knows for certain that the Immaculate Conception was preached by the Church through the ages. Not explicitly; certainly there was evolution; he may not be able to put his finger on that preaching. But he knows infallibly that it was there, that it was always there, that consequently there is an unbroken dogmatic tradition on the Immaculate Conception.⁸³

Briefly, in the study of theological tradition the primary and indispensable method is the theological method, i. e., the investigation and interpretation of the evidence in the light of faith and the Church's own teaching. Human reason, historical criticism, is a means toward the same end, but a purely subsidiary means and not always to be trusted. Cardinal Newman's observations on this point are remarkably keen:

⁸³ Cf. J. Filograssi, *art. cit.*, p. 475 ff. As Bernard Leeming has remarked, "this method of theologizing, that is, of looking to see what is the present Christian belief and accepting that as normative . . . is a method, as the lawyers would say, for which there are unimpeachable precedents" ("The Assumption and the Christian Pattern," *Month*, n.s. V [March, 1951], 145). Father Leeming goes on to give several examples from Cyril of Alexandria and Augustine.

For myself, I would simply confess that no doctrine of the Church can be rigorously proved by historical evidence: but at the same time that no doctrine can be simply disproved by it. Historical evidence reaches a certain way, more or less, toward a proof of the Catholic doctrines; often nearly the whole way; sometimes it goes only as far as to point in their direction; sometimes there is only an absence of evidence for a conclusion contrary to them; nay, sometimes there is an apparent leaning of the evidence to a contrary conclusion, which has to be explained—in all cases there is a margin left for the exercise of faith in the word of the Church. He who believes the dogmas of the Church only because he has reasoned them out of History, is scarcely a Catholic. It is the Church's dogmatic use of History in which the Catholic believes; and she uses other informants also, Scripture, tradition, the ecclesiastical sense or φρόνημα, and a subtle ratiocinative power, which in its origin is a divine gift. There is nothing of bondage or "renunciation of mental freedom" in this view, any more than in the converts of the Apostles believing what the Apostles might preach to them or teach them out of Scripture.⁸⁴

The Assumption is a case in point. Professor Altaner has done a masterful work on the Assumption monuments of the patristic era.⁸⁵ It would be difficult for an historian of Christian antiquity to have handled the evidence with a finer critical sense. From the viewpoint of the historian, Altaner has merited well of Assumption scholarship.

Where is the chink in Altaner's armor? In this: Altaner has tried to discover the teaching of the Church, dogmatic tradition, by a sheerly historical method. He has examined the evidence for a belief in the Assumption in the patristic era. His conclusion: in the first eight centuries no trustworthy historical tradition is extant. Had he stopped there, few theological nerves would have

⁸⁴ J. H. Newman, *Certain Difficulties Felt by Anglicans in Catholic Teaching* (London, 1888), pp. 312-13. Cf. L. Billot, *op. cit.*, c. 3: "De vitio methodi historicae in crisi monumentorum traditionis," pp. 79-97.

⁸⁵ Cf. Berthold Altaner, "Zur Frage der Definibilität der Assumptio B. M. V.," *Theologische Revue*, XLIV (1948), 129-40; XLV (1949), 129-42; XLVI (1950), 5-20.

been touched.⁸⁶ But he added: therefore no proof from tradition can be adduced. More than that: since there is no tradition in the first eight centuries, there can be none in the next twelve. Since no tradition is demonstrable, the definability of the Assumption cannot be maintained from the standpoint of scientific theology.

But that is not the theological method. A valid argument for a dogmatic tradition, for the Church's teaching in the past, can be constructed from her teaching in the present. And that is actually the approach theology took to the definability of the Assumption before November 1, 1950. It began with a fact: the current consensus, in the Church teaching and in the Church taught, that the corporeal Assumption was revealed by God. If that is true, if that is the teaching of the magisterium of the moment, if that *is* the Church's tradition, then it was *always* part and parcel of the Church's teaching, part and parcel of tradition. And that, understandably enough, is what the Bull of definition actually asserted: we know that the Assumption is revealed truth, because the whole Church believes it.⁸⁷

Given the fact of the present-day unanimity, then the theologian goes back to the past. Not only does he discover explicitly-taught dogmas that contain the Assumption implicitly.⁸⁸ More than that: the consensus of the Church today throws light on the rare remains of patristic times, illumines the relatively few references to the Assumption in antiquity. It assures us, e. g., that the Christian sense, the Christian consciousness, as reflected in the apocryphal *Transitus*

⁸⁶ With respect to the historical evidence, however, note the quite benign attitude of Otho Faller, *De priorum saeculorum silentio circa Assumptionem B. Mariae Virginis* (Rome, 1946), and the (generally) middle-of-the-road position of Martin Jugie, *La mort et l'Assomption de la sainte vierge: Etude historico-doctrinale* (Vatican City, 1944). Of value, too, is the treatment of G. Jouassard, "L'Assomption corporelle de la sainte vierge et la patristique," in *Assomption de Marie: Bulletin de la Société Française d'Etudes Mariales*, 1948 (Paris, 1949), pp. 99-117.

⁸⁷ Cf. Pope Pius XII, *Munificentissimus Deus* (English translation: *Thomist*, XIV [Jan., 1951], 6-7).

⁸⁸ Filograssi, e.g., finds the Assumption connected with the divine maternity, Mary's virginity, her holiness and Immaculate Conception, her intimate association with Christ (cf. *art. cit.*, p. 484).

accounts, was fundamentally sound. Of course these apocrypha are valueless as history, as historical reports of the corporeal Assumption. After all, the Bull itself reminds us that the essential element of the Assumption, the heavenly glorification of Mary's virginal body, is not an object of purely human investigation, is not therefore an "historical fact" in the usual sense of the phrase.⁸⁹ The historian dismisses the apocrypha with a critical distaste; and, as an historian, he is quite justified. They are not trustworthy witnesses to the fact of the Assumption. But for the theologian, in the light of the current consent of the Church, in the light of the definition, the apocryphal accounts of the Assumption are priceless witnesses to the fundamentally sound Christian feeling of the faithful for Mary, and, indirectly, priceless witnesses to the preaching of the Church, to tradition.⁹⁰

One last remark. It is only in the light of this conception of theological tradition that anyone, Catholic or otherwise, can grasp the significance of the apparently arrogant remark attributed (how authentically, I do not know) to one of the modern Popes: "Tradition? I am tradition!"⁹¹

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⁸⁹ "Thus, from the universal agreement of the Church's ordinary teaching authority we have a certain and firm proof, demonstrating that the Blessed Virgin Mary's bodily Assumption into heaven—*which surely no faculty of the human mind could know by its own natural powers, as far as the heavenly glorification of the virginal body of the revered Mother of God is concerned*—is a truth that has been revealed by God. . ." (Engl. tr.: *Thomist*, XIV [1951], 7; italics mine).

⁹⁰ Cf. Alfred C. Rush, "Assumption Theology in the *Transitus Mariae*," *Ecclesiastical Review*, CXXIII (1950), 97, 110.

⁹¹ The relevance of an inadequate concept of tradition for practical living has been poignantly underscored in recent days. Victor Bennett, who collaborated with Raymond Winch in writing *The Assumption of Our Lady and Catholic Theology* (London: S. P. C. K., 1950), the purpose of which was to argue the inadvisability of a dogmatic definition "from a Roman Catholic point of view," has just presented "The Assumption: A Postscript," in the monthly review *Theology*, LIV (Nov., 1951), 406-11. "The present anxiety," he says, "to overrule all historical evidence in a dogmatic question shows that a displacement has taken place in the Roman Catholic system. Tradition,

Digest of Discussion

Father John Sweeney, S.J., of Woodstock, Md., proposed the following questions: Is the modern concept of tradition the traditional one? Are there ecclesiastical traditions distinguished from apostolic? What of Trent's definition in the light of Barrois' comment? On the first point, Father Burghardt referred his interrogator to Michel, in *DTC*, on tradition; he voiced a *transeat* to the second point; on the third, he commented that Trent did not give a scientific definition, but rather indicated elements of such a definition.

Father William O'Connor of Dunwoodie, N. Y., posed the following inquiries: Can we distinguish between an historical fact and a dogmatic fact? To drive a wedge between history and dogma seems to echo *Pascendi* and *Lamentabili*, with the Christ of faith opposed to the Christ of history. Cannot the resurrection—a dogma—be proved historically? Can a dogma be dubious historically? To which Father Burghardt replied: There is no wedge; some truths are both historical and dogmatic—e.g., the Ascension. The historical *evidence* for a dogma may be lacking, or weak, but the truth of the dogma is not thereby infringed, for the magisterium has the right to pronounce on it.

Father Bernard Lonergan, S.J., of Toronto, observed that to distinguish between the historical approach and method, and the theological approach and method, as Father Burghardt had done, is in accord with *Humani generis* and is far from the aberrations of modernism, according to which the two approaches are contradictory.

as enunciated at Trent and emphasized at the Vatican, is no longer a factor of paramount importance. Instead the hinge of all doctrine is found in the papal office with its attendant prerogative in matters of faith. This office has been accorded power to override *tradition, which is but another name for the historical evidence of what the Church taught and believed in other ages*" (p. 410; italics mine). The poignancy stems from the very first paragraph of the article: "If this memorandum contains a personal note that is because . . . the present writer is one of a very few who, by the dogma, has been divided from his former spiritual allegiance" (pp. 406-7).

Father Francis Connell, C.S.S.R., of Washington, D. C., inquired: Must the Pope have evidence before he defines? how much? and from whom? Father Burghardt's response: No evidence is necessary; the Church's own consciousness is sufficient "evidence." Ordinarily, however, she consults, and seeks evidence—inquiring into the teaching of the Fathers, theologians, and the faith of the faithful.

Father John J. Galvin, S.S., of Roland Park, Baltimore, asked whether the doctrines which the Church defines in the course of history must be known to be implicit in other explicit doctrines. Father Burghardt replied that the Church need not be conscious of *how* one doctrine is implicit in another explicit doctrine and that she can define without such investigation.

Father Rudolph Bierberg, C.P.P.S., of Fond du Lac, Wis.: What did the Holy Father mean when he said it is the duty of theologians to trace doctrines to their sources? Father Burghardt: Theologians act as ordinary historians and seek evidence for the doctrines which the Church proposes for belief. This has not merely a polemic value (to meet the objections, etc., of those who fail to accept the magisterium), but has an enriching value for Catholic knowledge.

Father Joseph Fenton of Washington, D. C., inquired: What does it mean, to say that the Church "looks into herself" to find dogmas to be proposed? Father Burghardt replied that the answer to this question will depend on one's theory as to the progress of doctrine. At any time in history the Church possesses the whole of revelation; she will never lack that possession, even if all the monuments of antiquity are lost; she need not reach backward into the past. In the present and for the future, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, she has all that she must teach.

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