

## IS ALL REVELATION IN SCRIPTURE?

The question to which we are seeking an answer to-day is posed with the utmost simplicity: Is all revelation in Sacred Scripture? But, as is often the case, apparent simplicity conceals a great deal of complexity. One might wonder, for example, which of the current meanings of the word "revelation" is intended in the question. Is revelation understood as a divine encounter with men, or as the history of the divine encounters with men? Or is it to be taken as signifying a divine message to men, a series of objective propositions through which God reveals truths to men? Does Sacred Scripture mean all the sacred books which the Catholic Church accepts as divinely inspired, or only those books accepted as such by the Protestant Churches? Lastly, as to the manner of the containment of revelation in Scripture, does the question mean contained explicitly or implicitly or both? Also, is it "all" absolutely or all "essentials"?

In our present case the perplexity of these questions need not delay us, for I take it that the question is posed in the light of current views on the relationship between revelation, Scripture and Tradition. Since the Council of Trent the prevalent view among theologians has been that revelation, in the sense of the truths revealed to us by God, is contained partly in Scripture and partly in Tradition. That this has been the case is attested to by Geiselmann, who himself holds a contrary view.<sup>1</sup> But, in contemporary theological literature, we find a small, but increasing, number of authors who hold that all the *essential* revealed truths are to be found in Scripture, not in Scripture as isolated from Tradition, but in Scripture as interpreted by Tradition.<sup>2</sup>

The problem which we face to-day, then, as I take it is to determine, if possible, which of these two conflicting views has

<sup>1</sup> J. R. Geiselmann, "Scripture and tradition in Catholic theology," *Theology Digest*, VI, 2, spring 1958, p. 74.

<sup>2</sup> Geiselmann, *op. cit.* p. 78; C. Journet, "Scripture and the Immaculate Conception," in *The Dogma of the Immaculate Conception*, ed. by E. D. O'Connor, Notre Dame, Indiana, 1958, p. 10ss.

established its case, or whether one view seems stronger than the other.

In order that my own position may not be misunderstood, it is necessary to make a few preliminary remarks both about my own conclusions on this matter and about some truths which are presupposed anterior to the discussion itself.

In the first place let me say that I feel a strong sympathy with the position that all revelation can be found in Sacred Scripture as interpreted by Tradition. Its attractiveness seems to me obvious. Some of the Fathers of the Church held it.<sup>3</sup> Some of the Fathers at Trent held it (or at least held it in the sense that all revealed truth necessary for salvation can be found in Scripture).<sup>4</sup> The exact bearing of the Tridentine decree of the 8th of April, 1546, on this matter is not clear. Several modern theologians find it acceptable. In addition such a view might bring about a more harmonious relationship between Catholics and Protestants and so help toward reunion of the Churches.

Secondly, however, I feel at the moment that the view is not sufficiently established, that its proofs are not definitively conclusive, that it does not answer adequately some of the questions to which it gives rise. My conclusion, therefore, will be, not a flat assertion that Scripture does not contain all of revelation, but the qualified statement that the contrary view is not definitely proven.

Thirdly, I presuppose that the Tridentine decree of April 8, 1546, whether or not it affirmed anything about the relationship between Scripture and Tradition, did state that Tradition is a source of revelation for us and that the Tradition of which it speaks is divine-apostolic Tradition, coming either from the mouth of Jesus himself or from the preaching of the Apostles under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

First of all, let us examine the reasons offered for the view that all of revelation is in Scripture. Since the contrary view bases its position partly at least on the Tridentine decree that we can dis-

<sup>3</sup> St. Athanasius, *e.g.*, said, "The holy and inspired Scriptures suffice for the definition of the truth." (*Oratio contra gent.* 1, P.G. XXV, col. 4A.)

<sup>4</sup> Bonnucci, General of the Servites, "Iudico omnem veritatem evangelicam scriptam esse . . .", in *Concilium Tridentinum*, V, 40.

cover revelation in Scripture and unwritten traditions, those who oppose this position contend that this is a falsification of the meaning of Trent. Trent declared that revelation is contained "in libris scriptis et sine scripto traditionibus." Does this mean that Scripture and Tradition are two separate sources of revelation and that revelation is to be found partly in Scripture and partly in Tradition? Vacant holds this position.<sup>5</sup> Deneffe denies this and is followed by Geiselmann.<sup>6</sup> Burghardt confesses he is tempted to adopt the position of Deneffe.<sup>7</sup>

The chief reason for holding that the Council did not intend to define that revelation is partly in Scripture and partly in Tradition is the fact that, while the draft of the decree proposed on March 22, 1546 contained precisely the "partly . . . partly" formula, the final decree of April 8 omitted this formula and used instead the present phrase, "in libris scriptis et sine scripto traditionibus."<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately the reason for the change is not clear in the historical records. At the general session of the Council held on April 1, the General of the Servites, Bonnucci declared, "Non placere veritatem evangelii partim in scriptis partim in traditionibus contineri."<sup>9</sup> In the records of the session he seems to have been the only one to vote against the "partly . . . partly" formula. We know that Nacchianti, the Bishop of Chioggia, held that all the revealed truths necessary for salvation were to be found in Scripture.<sup>10</sup> But he does not seem to have objected publicly to the "partly . . . partly" formula at the session of April 1. Yet, in the final decree passed on April 8 the formula was omitted and the present one substituted. Why was the change made? Because the Fathers of the Council were swayed by the view of Bonnucci and perhaps a few others?

<sup>5</sup> J. Vacant, *Etudes theologiques sur les constitutions du Concile du Vatican d'après les actes du concile*, Paris and Lyons, 1895, I, p. 375.

<sup>6</sup> Geiselmann, *op. cit.*, p. 78; A. Deneffe, *Der Traditions-begriff: Studie zur Theologie*, Munster, 1931, p. 73.

<sup>7</sup> W. Burghardt, S.J., "The Catholic Concept of Tradition," in *The Catholic Theological Society of America, Proceedings of the Sixth Annual Convention*, 1951, p. 48, n.16.

<sup>8</sup> For the preliminary draft cf. *Conc. Trid.* V, 31.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 33.

This is not impossible, although the prevalent view among the Fathers of the Council seems to have been in favor of the "partly . . . partly" doctrine.<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately we do not seem to have sufficient evidence to determine precisely why the formula was changed.

This seems to reduce us to the extremity of appealing to the weight of private authority. On the one hand we have the prevailing view (prevailing since Trent) that Trent canonized the "partly . . . partly" formula. This view is somewhat weakened by the fact that the documents of the Council were only made readily available in our own time by the *Societas Goerresiana*. On the other hand we have the view of Deneffe, Geiselmann *et al.* Like Burghardt I am tempted to believe that Trent did not adopt the "partly . . . partly" formula and that its decision leaves the way open for the position that all revelation is in Scripture. But I also would wish for a satisfactory explanation of the change on the part of the Council.

The second argument offered in favor of the view that all revelation is in Scripture is the statement that this view has in its favor a long line of theologians from Irenaeus through the middle ages, whereas the contrary view has only a weak appeal to tradition in this restricted sense<sup>12</sup> It should be remarked first of all that both views are to be found in the Fathers. But, is it possible to weigh the testimony of one group against another and by that simple means determine which one represents the authentic stream of Christian teaching? While those favoring the "partly . . . partly" formula are, perhaps, fewer in number, they are not, by reason of their eminence, without weight. St. Epiphanius tells us that we must not seek all truth in Scripture: "The Apostles have left us some truths in writing and some in traditions."<sup>13</sup> St. John Chrysostom tells us that the Apostles "did not hand everything on to us by letters, but they handed on many things without writing

<sup>11</sup> Cf. the discussion in the general session of April 1, 1546 in *Conc. Trid.* V, 42-47.

<sup>12</sup> Geiselmann, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

<sup>13</sup> St. Epiphanius, *Haereses*, LXI, n.6, P.G. XLI, col. 1048 B.

and these truths are also worthy of faith."<sup>14</sup> St. John Damascene states, "The Apostles handed on to us many things which were not written."<sup>15</sup> Perhaps too, we should not forget that St. Irenaeus, who is cited for the other view, also held that the true Gospels could be recognized only by tradition.<sup>16</sup>

Lastly, I should like to propose some questions which the view of Geiselman *et al.* seem to raise. There are two questions which the theory raises which do not seem to have been answered satisfactorily. The first is concerned with the apparent difficulty of finding some revealed truths in Sacred Scripture. Among those frequently mentioned at the present time are the Immaculate Conception, the Assumption and the Canon of Scripture itself. Obviously, it will not be possible to find all the truths which the Church presently teaches explicitly in Scripture. Hence, to maintain that all revelation is in Scripture means also to hold that some truths are in Scripture only in germ, implicitly, and that the Church's present knowledge of them and understanding of them is to be explained by the development of Christian doctrine. Now we cannot deny that doctrine develops, certainly in the sense that the Church's understanding of the deposit of faith develops and thus new formulations of doctrine are always possible. But, at the moment, there is no generally accepted theory of the way in which doctrine develops and of the way or ways in which later formulations are to be considered as contained in earlier explicit formulations. In the absence of such a generally accepted theory, is it wise to adopt a position which depends, at least for its acceptance by non-Catholics, on such a theory?

But, apart from this question of theory, it seems to me that the question of the Canon of Scripture is a particularly acute case for the theory that all revelation is in Scripture. It is a revealed truth, defined at Florence and Trent, that all the books of Scripture now found in the Catholic Bible are divinely inspired. Is this truth to be found in Scripture? Certainly it is not there explicitly.

<sup>14</sup> St. John Chrys. *In epist II ad Thess*, hom IV, n.2, P.G. LXII, col. 488.

<sup>15</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *De fide orthodoxa*, 1 IV, c. XII, P.G. XCIV, col. 1136 B.

<sup>16</sup> Irenaeus, *Fragm. Ammen.*, VI, P.G. XII p. 737.

Journet tells us that it is there implicitly. According to Scripture, he tells us, the Church is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets" (Eph. 2,20). This is the revealed principle in virtue of which the Church knows "that every doctrinal book written or guaranteed by an apostle was normative."<sup>17</sup> Now, if an adequate theory of doctrinal development is available, this may well be true. But does this solve all questions? Suppose that the Church allowed us to hold that the Epistle to the Hebrews was not written by an Apostle, but only guaranteed by him? How does the Church know of the existence of this guarantee, except through some oral tradition?

Lastly, it seems to me that the question of the precise relation between Scripture and Tradition involves revealed truth itself. Hence a definitive answer is possible only from the magisterium, whether universal ordinary or extraordinary. Only the Church herself can tell us definitively whether or not all revelation is in Scripture. When we consider the composition of the whole Bible it is apparent that many of the sacred writings are occasional in character. This does not prove that, in the providence of God, all revelation could not be found in Scripture. But it makes it necessary for God himself to tell us so, which means, practically that the Church must tell us so. In the absence of such a definitive teaching, we cannot be sure that all revelation is in sacred Scripture.

I do not mean to imply that no one can investigate the question or propose arguments in either direction. I mean to say only this: at the moment the contrary opinion prevails and the arguments against the prevailing opinion are not absolutely conclusive.

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<sup>17</sup> Journet, *op. cit.*, p. 12-13, n.22.