

CHAPTER X THE SUFFICIENCY OF TRADITION AND SCRIPTURE

The Catholic theology of tradition cannot be understood without reference to the Protestant principle of *Scriptura sola*. Indeed, it can be said that the theology of tradition emerged as a distinct treatise within Catholic dogmatics because of the Reformers' challenge. Catholic theologians had to respond to the charge that the teaching of the Church represents a fundamental corruption of the original revelation of Christianity. They had to consider how Church practices, foreign to the first century, are compatible with the spirit of apostolic teaching. And they had to explain how doctrines which only reached their full maturity long after the time of Christ are implicit in the New Testament. To be sure, the Counter Reformation thinkers were not the first to grapple with the problem of the development of practice and doctrine. But the challenge of the Reformers provided a formidable impetus to further thought.

What is the principle of *Scriptura sola*? According to what can be considered Luther's theoretical exposition of the principle, written in 1520 as a response to the Bull Exsurge Domine of Leo X, Christians should be guided foremost by the Scriptures as the word of God.¹ Merely human words can follow from God's word, but they must lead back to it and be proven by it. The traditions of the Catholic Church are precisely such human words, according to the Reformers.² Traditions therefore do not merit the reverence due to Scripture as the word of God. Catholic theologians involved in the immediate response to Luther, notably Johannes Eck and Johann Cochläus, employed a double argument against the principle of *Scriptura sola*. They affirmed that, first, all heresies stem from the misinterpretations of Scripture, and second, that Scripture is to be understood only within the Church, as guided by the Holy Spirit.³ An authentic tradition

¹ "Sint ergo Christianorum prima principia non nisi verba divina, omnium autem hominum verba conclusiones hinc eductae et rursus illuc reducendae et probandae." Martin Luther, "Assertio omnium articolorum M. Lutheri per Bullam Leonis X. novissimam damnatorum" (December, 1520), in D. Martin Luthers Werke, kritische Gesamtausgabe: sec. 1, vols. 1-57; 58 (Index); 60 (History of the Critical Edition); sec. 2 (Tischreden): 6 vols.; sec. 3 (Deutsche Bibel): 12 vols.; sec. 4 (Briefwechsel): 16 vols.; 93 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883-); vol. 7, p. 98. Gerhard Ebeling notes that Luther's exposition of the Scripture principle is not a clear antithesis to the Catholic understanding, and was prefigured by the Biblicism of medieval heretics. Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart, 3rd (1959) ed., s.v. "Hermeneutik," by Gerhard Ebeling, 111.251.

² Congar points out that, although Luther rarely used the word "traditio," it was always linked to the adjective "human" as a term of derogation ("Ad dialogum Silvestri Prieriatis. . ." (1518) in Luthers Werke, 1. 659, and "Operationes in Psalmos" (1519) in Luthers Werke, V.32). See Congar, I.185, translation, p. 141.

³ George Tavard cites and comments upon Eck's 1521 De primatu Petri adversus Lutherum, among other works by Eck, and upon Cochläus' 1524 De auctoritate Ecclesiae

authorizes the interpretation of Scripture. Luther replied that Scripture is *sui ipsius interpres*: “it wants to be interpreted by a comparison of passages from everywhere, and understood under its own direction.”⁴ This does not mean, of course, that Scripture is granted an absolute independence. It is, on the contrary, the spirit and body of Christ, and the principle of *sola Scriptura* needs to be supplemented by the principles of *sola gratia* and *sola fidei*.⁵ But within this threefold of exclusive principles, there is little room for the interpretive authority of the Church and its traditions. And it is to tradition – not as an antithesis to Scripture, but (in the view of most Counter-Reformation theologians) as its complement – that Catholics turned in their polemic against the Reformers.⁶

et *Scripturae adversus Lutherum* and (in relation to the Holy Spirit) his 1538 *Aequitatis discussio super Consilio delectorum Cardinalium*. See George H. Tavard, *Holy Writ or Holy Church: The Crisis of the Protestant Reformation* (London: Burns and Oates, 1959), pp. 118-129. Tavard also treats Cochläus in a later publication, “Tradition in Early Post-Tridentine Theology,” *Theological Studies* 23 (1962): 377-405, esp. pp. 399-400.

⁴ “Sic habet universa scriptura, ut collatis undique locis velit seipsam interpretari et se sola magistra intelligi.” Martin Luther, “Deuteronomium Mosi cum annotationibus” (1525), in *Luthers Werke*, 14.556. Translation: “Lectures on Deuteronomy,” trans. Richard R. Craemmerer, in *Luther’s Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan et al., 54 vols. (St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), 9.21.

⁵ *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 3rd (1959) ed., s. v. “Schriftprinzip,” by G. Gloege, vol. 5, cols. 1540-43, col. 1541 cited here.

⁶ Thus it is no surprise that the first treatise formally devoted to tradition appeared in 1549, only 32 years after the posting of the 95 theses in 1517: Martin Pérez de Ayala’s *De divinis, apostolicis atque ecclesiasticis traditionibus* (Coloniae: excudebat Iaspar Gennepaeus, 1549). This work stood in the line begun by the pre-Tridentine publication of Albert Pigge’s 1538 *Apologia indicti a Paolo III R. Pontif. concilii adversus Lutheranae confederationis. . .* (Coloniae: M. Nouesianus, 1538) and John Driedo’s 1533 *De Ecclesiasticis Scripturis et Dogmatibus* (vol. 1 of the *Opera Omnia*, ed. Ruard Tapper, 3 vols. (Louvain: Bartholomeus Gravius, 1556)). The most influential treatment of the concept of tradition in the period immediately after Trent is Melchior Cano’s *De locis theologicis*, published posthumously in 1563 (see vol. I of the *Opera Omnia*, 3 vols. (Rome: Libreria edit rice della Vera Romana de E. Filiziani, 1900), esp. Book I, chap. iii). Of later controversialists, the best known is Robert Bellarmine, whose 1599 *De controversiis christianae fidei* in four volumes (Venize: apud Societatem Minimam, 1603) was widely read in the theological world.

On Pérez de Ayala, see George H. Tavard, “Tradition in Early, Post-Tridentine Theology,” *Theological Studies* 23 (1962), esp. pp. 391-399. Albert Pigge is treated by Johannes Beumer in *Die mündliche Überlieferung*, volume I, part iv of the *Handbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, series edited by Michael Schmaus and Alois Grillmeier (Freiburg-Basel/Wien: Herder, 1962), p. 95; and in Tavard, *Holy Writ or Holy Church*, pp. 144-150. An extensive discussion of Bellarmine can be found in Josef Rupert Geiselman, *Die Heilige Schrift und die Tradition*, vol. 18 of *Quaestiones Disputatae*, ed. Karl Rahner and

The power of the Lutheran critique lay in the denial of the complementarity of Scripture and tradition. Instead of complementing one another, the two are antithetical, the Reformers charged: first, because Scripture contains all Christian truth, and requires no supplement from tradition; and second, because Scripture excludes certain doctrines and practices which the Church upholds. The Protestants insisted that, where Scripture and tradition clash, tradition must give way. This argument was a persuasive one, especially in the light of patristic teaching on the unique and primary dignity of Scripture. For the ante-Nicene Fathers, especially for Irenaeus and Tertullian, Scripture is the source of all truth and the court of appeal in doctrinal disputes.⁷ The Fathers of the fourth and fifth centuries were of the same opinion.⁸ One can also cite medieval theologians to the effect that everything necessary for salvation is contained in Scripture.⁹ In the light of

Heinrich Schlier (Freiburg-Basel-Wien: Herder, 1962), pp. 184-221. John L. Murphy's The Notion of Tradition in John Driedo (Milwaukee, Wis.: Seraphic Press, 1959) provides a widely-praised analysis of that Counter-Reformation theologian. Melchior Cano's thought is sketched by Tavad, "Tradition," pp. 378-390.

⁷ Irenaeus of Lyons (fl. 178-200) describes the Scriptures as perfect, because they were spoken by the Word of God and his Spirit (Adversus haereses, chap. 28, in Migne, Patrologia Graeca, vol. 7, col. 805), and Tertullian (fl. 195-220) adds that if something is not written in Scripture, then his opponent, Hermogenes, must fear that which follows upon those who add to or detract from Scripture (Adversus Hermogenem, chap. 22, in Migne, ed., Patrologia Latina, vol. 2, col. 218). For other references, see van den Eynde, pp. 120-121, 274-275; and Congar, I.139-140 (translation, pp. 107-108).

⁸ John Chrysostom (fl. ca. 386) states that everything in Scripture is clear and straightforward (σαφή και ευθέα), and that all necessary things are plain within it (In Epistolam secundam ad Thessalonicenses, chap. III, homily 4, in Migne, ed., Patrologia Graeca, vol. 62, col. 485), and Athanasius of Alexandria (fl. 328-337) writes that the Scriptures suffice (αυτάρκεις) for the exposition of the truth (Oratio contra gentes, sec. i, in Migne, ed., Patrologia Graeca, vol. 25, col. 4). Gerhard Kittel situates the term within its classical and New Testament context in the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, 1964 ed., s. v. "αυτάρκεια, αυτάρκεις" 1. 466-467. Vincent of Lerins affirms that, although Scripture requires the authority of ecclesiastical interpretation, it is complete and more than sufficient ("sibique ad omnia satis superque sufficiat") in itself (Commonitorium primum, chap. 2, in Migne, ed., Patrologia Latina, vol. 50, col. 640). Of all the references cited by Congar as to the sufficiency of Scripture according to the Fathers (I.139-143; translation, pp. 107-111), only Athanasius and Vincent actually use cognates of the adjective "sufficient."

⁹ Thomas Aquinas, for example, makes precisely this point: "sacra Scriptura ad hoc divinitus est ordinata ut per eam nobis veritas manifestetur necessaria ad salutem" (Quaestiones duodecim quodlibetales, ed. Petri Marietti, in Quaestiones disputatae, 5 vols. in 3, 2nd ed. Taurinensis (Augustae Taurinorum: Ex typographia Pontificia et S. RR. Congregationis, 1914), vol. 5, Quodlibetum VII, q. vi, a. 14). For further references see Congar, I.143-148 (translation, pp. 111-116).

this strong testimony from the Catholic Church's own sources, one can understand how Protestants could press Catholics to choose between alternatives which seemed mutually exclusive: either the primacy of Scripture is to be granted, and the Protestant reforms must follow; or human traditions are to be admitted, which would give the lie to Catholic affirmations of the primacy of Scripture. A dilemma faced the Catholic Church: how could it assert the unique and primary dignity of Scripture, on the one hand, and on the other, assert the validity of doctrines and practices whose justification does not lie primarily in Scripture?

Many theologians of the modern period treated this problem by distinguishing between the formal and material sufficiency of Scripture. The sufficiency of tradition was self-evident to them. Scripture, however, was another matter, and required a distinction. The material sufficiency of Scripture refers to that property by which the sacred books are said to contain all the truths necessary for salvation.¹⁰ But the Scriptures are formally insufficient in that they do not suffice for their own interpretation. Heretics, for example, have always appealed to the Bible to support their contentions. As a consequence, the Scriptures need to be authoritatively interpreted. This was recognized in the patristic age,¹¹ and became a point of strife during the Reformation and Counter-Reformation. In Roman Catholic teaching, the ecclesiastical magisterium alone interprets the Scriptures with binding authority. One cannot speak of the sufficiency of the Scriptures in the fullest sense without reference to that body whose exposition of them has the assistance (if not the inspiration) of the Holy Spirit.¹² Yet many theologians, especially those at the end of the modern period, argued that the Scriptures do have a material – and, in that sense, limited – sufficiency. The distinction between formal and material sufficiency has the merit, they said, of being in accord with the teachings of the Council of Trent.

X.1. The Tridentine Decree

The Council of Trent offered the classical solution, if that is the proper term, to the problem of Scripture and tradition. The solution can be found in the decree De canonicis Scripturis, promulgated on April 8, 1546, at the close of the council's fourth

¹⁰ Congar notes that, while the Fathers acknowledged the material sufficiency of Scripture, the link between that phrase and the “truths necessary for salvation” was not forged until the late middle ages (Congar, II.255-261; translation, pp. 508-519).

¹¹ Irenaeus, for example, attests that the fullness of truth was deposited in the Church, apart from which are only “thieves and robbers” (Adversus haereses, Bk. III, chap. iv, 1, in Migne, ed., Patrologia Graeca, vol. 7, col. 855); and Origen states that, while truth rests in the word of the Lord, one need not believe anything which has not been transmitted by the Church of God (Commentaria in Evangelium secundum Matthaem: commentariorum series, in Migne, ed., Patrologia Graeca, vol. 13, col. 1667). Other texts in Congar, I.47-50; translation, pp. 30-35.

¹² See Congar, II.70; translation, p. 302.

session. The council fathers insisted that Scripture and traditions are not antithetical, but form a unity. In the first of the session's three decrees, they answered the questions of where the traditions originated, the manner of their transmission, and the kind of veneration in which the Christian is to hold Scripture and traditions. The first half of the decree, which was followed by a list of the canonical books of Scripture, is quoted here in full:

The sacred and holy ecumenical and general Synod of Trent, lawfully assembled in the Holy Spirit, with the same three Legates of the Apostolic See presiding over it, keeping this constantly in view, that with the abolishing of errors, the purity itself of the Gospel is preserved in the Church, which promised before through the Prophets in the Holy Scriptures our Lord Jesus Christ the Son of God first promulgated with His own mouth, and then commanded "to be preached" by His apostles "to every creature" as the source of every saving truth and of instruction in morals [Matt. 28:19 ff., Mark 16:15], and [the Synod] clearly perceiving that this truth and instruction are contained in the written books and in the unwritten traditions, which have been received by the apostles from the mouth of Christ Himself, or from the apostles themselves, at the dictation of the Holy Spirit, have come down even to us, transmitted as it were from hand to hand, [the Synod] following the examples of the orthodox Fathers, receives and holds in veneration with an equal affection of piety and reverence all the books both of the Old and of the New Testament, since one God is the author of both, and also the traditions themselves, those that appertain both to faith and to morals, as having been dictated either by Christ's own word of mouth, or by the Holy Spirit, and preserved in the Catholic Church by a continuous succession. And so that no doubt may arise in anyone's mind as to which are the books that are accepted by this Synod, it has decreed that a list of the Sacred books be added to this decree.¹³

¹³ "Sacrosancta oecumenica et generalis Tridentina synodus, in Spiritu Sancto legitime congregata, praesidentibus in ea eisdem tribus Apostolicae Sedis legatis, hoc sibi perpetuo ante oculos proponens, ut sublatis erroribus puritas ipsa evangelii in ecclesia conservetur, quod promissum ante per prophetas in scripturis sanctis Dominus noster Iesus Christus Dei Filius proprio ore primum promulgavit, deinde per suos apostolos tanquam fontem omnis et salutaris veritatis et morum disciplinae *omni creaturae praedicari* iussit [Mt. 28,19 sq; Mc. 16,15]: perspiciensque, hanc veritatem et disciplinam contineri in libris scriptis et sine scripta traditionibus, quae ab ipsius Christi ore ab apostolis acceptae, aut ab ipsis apostolis Spiritu Sancto dictante quasi per manus traditae ad nos usque pervenerunt, orthodoxorum patrum exempla secuta, omnes libros tam veteris quam novi testamenti, cum utriusque unus Deus sit auctor, nec non traditiones ipsas, turn ad fidem, turn ad mores pertinentes, tanquam vel oretenus a Christo, vel a Spiritu Sancto dictatas et continua successione in ecclesia catholica conservatas, pari pietatis affectu ac reverentia suscipit et veneratur. Sacrorum vero librorum indicem huic decreto adscribendum censuit, ne cui dubitatio suboriri possit, quinam sint, qui ab ipsa synodo suscipiuntur." Denzinger, no. 783; translation, p. 244. A critical text of the decree (with which I have brought the Denzinger text into accord, mainly by reducing the initial letter of certain proper nouns from the upper to the lower case) can be found in

This passage focuses upon the purity of the Gospel, meaning the entirety of the good news of salvation. The Gospel, as the decree states, is the source of every saving truth and of instruction in morals. This truth and instruction are contained “in the written books and in the unwritten traditions,” *in libris scriptis et sine scripto traditionibus*. To the question of the origin of the unwritten traditions, the Tridentine fathers trace them back to Christ or to the apostles, who received them at the dictation of the Holy Spirit. To the question of the mode of transmitting the traditions, the decree suggests a personal communication (“transmitted as it were from hand to hand,” *quasi per manus traditae*) which has been preserved by a continuous succession in the Catholic Church. To the question of the kind of veneration in which Scripture and traditions are to be held, Trent insisted upon equality: it venerates them both “with an equal affection of piety and reverence,” *pari pietatis affectu ac reverentia*. In short, the council fathers refused to choose, as it were, between Scripture and traditions. The truth and moral instruction of the Gospel is contained in both, and both are to be regarded as making an equal demand upon piety and reverence.

It is clear, even from this preliminary analysis, how issue with the Protestant principle of *Scriptura sola* was to be joined. The Protestants had insisted that, first, primacy of authority belongs to Scripture, and second, that when Scripture and tradition clash, Scripture is to prevail. The fathers of the Council of Trent responded in the following way. On the one hand, they avoided the issue of Scriptural primacy. How the Gospel is contained in Scripture and traditions, and to what extent it is contained in the one or the other, are matters about which the fathers are silent. To be sure, the phrase “*pari pietatis affectu ac reverentia*” suggests that Scripture no longer has primacy, but shares equal authority with unwritten traditions. But saying that the two are to be received and equal affection of piety and reverence is not the same the two are of equal value, for example, in deciding a held with an as saying that doctrinal dispute.¹⁴

On the other hand, the council fathers implicitly denied the premise of the second Protestant critique, namely, that Scripture and traditions can clash. Within the decree, this possibility never arises. The council fathers state that both Scripture and traditions have their origin in God, either from the mouth of Jesus or at the dictation of the Holy Spirit. The fathers present no criterion for deciding between the two media of revelation. The Protestant anti thesis – Scripture or tradition, words of God or words of men, divine or human authority – is never once explored. The Council of Trent made it a dictum that, for Roman Catholics, Scripture and traditions form a unity. The council decree laid the groundwork upon which subsequent theologians would build. But two questions which it

Concilium Tridentinum: diariorum, actorum, epistularum, tractatum, edited by the Societas Goerresiana, 7 vols. in 13 (Freiburg in Breisgau: B. Herder, 1901-), V.91.

¹⁴ It has been noted that the expression “*pari pietatis affectu*” does not set tradition on the same level as God’s unchanging word, but rather puts traditions and Scripture on the same level in order to prevent the degradation of traditions. Joseph Ranft, *Der Ursprung des katholischen Traditionprinzips* (Würzburg: Konrad Triltsch, 1931), 12, 15.

left unanswered became particularly acute for theologians of the modern period, especially in the decade immediately preceding the Second Vatican Council. First, how is the truth of the Gospel contained in both Scripture and tradition? Second, how is the assertion that the two are to be held “*pari pietatis affectu ac reverentia*” to be reconciled with the patristic and medieval testimony to the unique and primary dignity of Scripture? The force with which these questions were raised was due in large part to the research of the Tübingen dogmatic theologian, Josef Rupert Geiselman (b. 1890).

X.1.A. Geiselman’s Interpretation

Geiselman called attention to a change in wording between the draft of the Tridentine decree and the decree itself.¹⁵ In the draft of the decree, dated March 22, 1546, the truth of the Gospel is declared to be “contained partly in the Sacred Scriptures, and partly in the unwritten traditions” (*partim contineri in libris scriptis, partim sine scripto traditionibus*).¹⁶ The actual decree of April 8 deletes the adverbs “partly” and states only that the Gospel is contained in Scripture “and” in tradition (*in libris scriptis et sine scripto traditionibus*). This change is significant, because the draft suggests the complementarity of Scripture and tradition. Part of the truth of the Gospel is contained in one, and part is contained in the other. The final decree, however, permits an interpretation in which Scripture and traditions are media of the same truth, expressing the same thing in different ways. The meaning of the change, from the “partim-partim” formula to the simple conjunction “et,” became Geiselman’s theme.

To ascertain the meaning of the change, he examined, first of all, the origin of the “partim-partim” formula. This, he discovered, originated in the translation into Latin of

¹⁵ Geiselman presented his thesis in a compressed form in the article, “Das Konzil von Trient über das Verhältnis der Heiligen Schrift und der nicht geschriebenen Traditionen,” in Michael Schmaus, ed., Die mündliche Überlieferung. Beiträge zum Begriff der Tradition (Munich: Hax Hueber Verlag, 1957), pp. 123-206. It was presented in a more extended form in Die Heilige Schrift und die Tradition (1962). The thesis appeared first in a preliminary way in Geiselman’s three volume work, Die Überlieferung in der neueren Theologie which, after these three volumes, became a series, and was continued by other authors. Geiselman’s first two volumes, published in 1942 but virtually destroyed during the war, were republished in 1966 as Lebendiger Glaube aus geheiligter Überlieferung. Der Grundgedanke der Theologie Johann Adam Möhlers und der katholischen Tübinger Schule (Freiburg-Basel-Wien: Herder, 1966). The third volume was published in 1959 as Die lebendige Überlieferung als Norm des christlichen Glaubens. Die apostolische Tradition in der Form der kirchlichen Verkündigung – das Formalprinzip des Katholizismus dargestellt im Geiste der Traditionslehre von Joh. Ev. Kuhn (Freiburg: Herder, 1959). In this volume Geiselman first explored the Tridentine decree, pp. 155-160. In “Das Konzil von Trient,” Geiselman (p. 133) credits Edm. Ortigues (“Écritures et Traditions apostoliques au Concile de Trente,” Recherches de Science Religieuse 36 (1949): 271-299) as the first to call attention to the nominalism implicit in the “partim-partim” formula.

¹⁶ Concilium Tridentinum, 5.31.

the Greek Ecclesiastica hierarchia of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, a translation made about 1400 by Ambrosius Traversari, also known as Camaldulensis. Pseudo-Dionysius wrote that what God had revealed to human beings was made known not just in the written word, but also in what is not written. Traversari translated this incorrectly, according to Geiselman, as “partim scriptis, partim non scriptus.”¹⁷ The Latin wrongly suggested that neither Scripture nor that which is unwritten is sufficient in itself. Furthermore, it implies that the relationship between Scripture and tradition is complementary, rather than parallel, and to this degree departs from the Greek text. But the Traversari version, however incorrect, was influential. It was cited by John Fisher in his 1524 Assertionis lutheranae confutatio, and by Johannes Eck in his 1526 De sacrificio missae, both combating the principle of *Scriptura sola*.¹⁸ Fisher and Eck were cited by the council fathers, and through them, according to Geiselman, the “partim-partim” expression became an independent formula.¹⁹

After establishing the origin of the formula contained in the draft, Geiselman asked why this formula was not adopted in the final decree. The answer involves one of the dramas of the council. Most of the fathers, writes the modern historian, Hubert Jedin, took for granted that the truth of the Gospel is contained partly in Scripture, partly in tradition.²⁰ But Giacomo Nacchianti, the Bishop of Chioggia, and Augustine Bonuccio, General of the Servite Order, disagreed. Nacchianti questioned the very principle of tradition on February 23, 1546, suggesting that all doctrines necessary for salvation are to be found in Scripture.²¹ Bonuccio argued, on March 23, that Scripture is complete and

¹⁷ The text in Pseudo-Dionysius is τοις εγγράφοις τε αυτων και αγράφοις μνήσεσιν (Ecclesiastica hierarchia, chap. I, sec. 5, in Migne, ed., Patrologia Graeca, vol. 3, col. 376. Migne’s text, in contrast to that used by Geiselman, spells the first word ταις, and the last μνήσεσι). Traversari’s text was published in 1498 (Strassburg) and 1546 (Cologne). See Geiselman, “Das Konzil von Trient,” pp. 141-145.

¹⁸ Geiselman, “Das Konzil von Trient,” pp. 140-143.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

²⁰ Hubert Jedin, Geschichte des Konzils von Trient; vol. I: Der Kampf um das Konzil, 2nd ed. (Freiburg: Herder Verlag, 1951), and vol. II: Die erste Trienter Tagungsperiode 1545/47 (Freiburg: Herder, 1957); II.60-61. Translation: A History of the Council of Trent, trans. Ernest Graf, 2 vols. (London, Edinburgh, Paris, Melbourne, Toronto, and New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1957), 11.74-75.

²¹ *Ibid.*, II.51-52 (translation, II.64-65). See Concilium Tridentinum, V.18, lines 25-29. Later, in the meeting of April 5, Nacchianti stated that it would be impious to put Scripture and tradition on the same level (Jedin, II.71-72; translation, II.86-87; see Concilium Tridentinum, V.71, line 16), a statement which resulted in “magnus tumultus” (Concilium Tridentinum, II.433, line 5).

that tradition is not the complement of Scripture but its authoritative interpretation.²² The arguments of Nacchianti and Bonuccio did not win general approval. Nacchianti was later obliged to leave the council,²³ and Bonuccio fell into an argument with another of the fathers which had to be silenced by Cardinal Cervini, the future Pope Marcellus II and one of the council presidents.²⁴ Nonetheless, the objections of this minority were apparently met. The formula of the draft of the decree, in which the Gospel was described as being contained “partly” in Scripture and “partly” in traditions, was replaced by one in which the Gospel is said to be contained in the one “and” in the other. The council fathers had settled on an ambiguous formula which seemed to allow the interpretation of both majority and minority.

Geiselmann, however, argues that the conjunction “et” cannot be interpreted in the sense of the formula “partim-partim.” He reasons in the following way: if the text of the final decree can be interpreted in the sense of the draft version, then the replacement of the “partim-partim” formula by the conjunction “et” is superfluous. Such a replacement would simply make the text more ambiguous and less clear. But if the replacement is to be regarded as an improvement in the text, the question arises as to how the text is thereby improved. Geiselmann answers the question by postulating a kind of negative clarification. The change from the “partim-partim” formula to the “et” signifies only what the council fathers did not intend. That is, it affirms that the relation of Scripture and tradition is not a complementary one, and that the Gospel is not contained partly in the one and partly in the other. As to the positive significance of the “et,” Geiselmann argues that there is none. In the eyes of the council fathers, he states, the relation of Scripture to tradition remained an open question, one on which a consensus had not yet been reached.²⁵

Geiselmann’s view on the negative clarification embodied in the “et” is somewhat controversial. First of all, there is no record of the council fathers having discussed the reasons for the change in the draft. We have only the speech of Nacchianti and the objection of Bonuccio, both denying the parity of Scripture and tradition.²⁶ The absence

²² Jedin, II.59-61 (translation, II.74-75). See Concilium Tridentinum, V.47, lines 1-2; I.525, lines 16-18.

²³ Jedin, II.458, fn. 21 (translation, II.64-65, fn. 2).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, II.61; translation, II.75.

²⁵ Geiselmann, “Das Konzil von Trient,” pp. 162-163; *Die heilige Schrift und die Tradition*, pp. 97-98.

²⁶ Jedin emphasizes that this was the minority view and unacceptable: “Es kann nicht zweifelhaft sein, dass die Mehrzahl der in Trient anwesenden Theologen wenn nicht den Ausdruck partim-partim, so doch die Sache billigten, nämlich dass die dogmatische Tradition einen die Schrift ergänzenden Offenbarungsstrom beinhalte.” Jedin, II.61; translation, II.75.

of recorded discussion might suggest, one could argue, that the change in the draft was regarded by the fathers as insignificant.²⁷ Another objection made against Geiselmann's view is that it forces a revision of post-Tridentine theology. Geiselmann characterizes the persistence of the view that the Gospel is partly written, partly unwritten, as a misunderstanding.²⁸ This misunderstanding was perpetuated by Peter Canisius, the first great controversial theologian of the post-Tridentine period, in his work of 1555, the Summa doctrinae christianae.²⁹ It was canonized, so to speak, in the Catechismus Romanus of 1566.³⁰ Robert Bellarmine gave the doctrine of God's word being contained partly in Scripture, partly in tradition, a persuasive exposition in his De verbo Dei, the first controversy treated in his De controversiis fidei, published between 1586 and 1593.³¹ That these representatives of post-Tridentine theology misunderstood the council decree is a contention hard to prove. Even the supporters of Geiselmann are reluctant to accept the thesis that the change in the final decree from "partim-partim" to "et" was meant to

²⁷ This is the point of Heinrich Lennerz ("Scriptura sola?" written in German, Gregorianum 40 (1959): 38-53), who states: "Die Lehre des Konzils ist die gleiche, die wir bei den vortridentinischen Theologen gefunden haben" (p. 45; see also p. 50). Lennerz treats the same themes in "Sine scripto traditiones," written in Latin, Gregorianum 40 (1959): 624-635.

²⁸ The second part of Geiselmann's 1957 article is entitled "Das Missverständnis in der Bestimmung des Verhältnisses von Schrift und nicht geschriebenen Überlieferung in der nachtridentischen Theologie." "See Geiselmann, "Das Konzil von Trient," pp. 168-177.

²⁹ Petrus Canisius, Summa doctrinae christianae, secundum editionem Coloniae, apud Geruvinum Calenum et haeredes Joannis Quentel, anno 1569, 4 vols. (Augustae Vindelicorum, apud Carolum Kollmann, Bibliopolam, 1833), vol. I, in the section "De praeceptis Ecclesiae," sec. ii, p. 389. See Geiselmann, "Das Konzil von Trient," pp. 170-73.

³⁰ Catechismus ex decreto Concilii Tridentini, ad parochos Pii V. et Clementis XIII. Pont. Max., jussu editus ad editionem Romae A.D. 1845, publici iuris factam accuratissime expressus (Ratisbonae: Instit. Librar. pridem G. J. Manz, 1905), Prooemium, XII, p. 11. See Gerhard Bellinger, Der Catechismus Romanus und die Reformation. Die katechetische Antwort des Trienter Konzils auf die Hauptkatechismen der Reformatoren, vol. 27 of Konfessionskundliche und kontroverstheologische Studien (Paderborn: Bonifacius Druckerei, 1970).

³¹ Roberti Bellarmini, Opera Omnia, ex editione veneta, pluribus tum additis tum correctis, ed. Justinus Fèvre, 12 vols. (Paris: apud Ludovicum Vivès, editorem, 1870-1876). Vol. I contains the first three controversies, including De verbo Dei scripta et non scripta. A summary of the fourth book of De verbo Dei, devoted to "De verbo non scripta," is provided by E. A. Ryan, The Historical Scholarship of Saint Bellarmine (New York: Fordham University Press, 1936), pp. 147-148. Bellarmine is also treated in Johannes Beumer, "Die Frage nach Schrift und Tradition bei Robert Bellarmin," Scholastik 34 (1959): 1-22.

exclude the doctrine that the Gospel is contained partially in Scripture, partially in tradition.³²

But perhaps the most controversial aspect of Geiselman's thesis, and the aspect central to the characterization of the modern theology of tradition, is his advocacy of the material sufficiency of Scripture. He states this in an indirect way in "Das Konzil von Trient,"³³ and makes it explicit in Die Heilige Schrift und Tradition. His argument is an historical one. First, he sketches the doctrine of the Church Fathers, according to which divine revelation is identical with the Scriptures.³⁴ This doctrine was taught consistently, he asserts, up until the later middle ages. Then, under the influence of the Decretum of Gratian (a twelfth-century collection of canon law which rapidly achieved universal recognition), theologians began to acknowledge that the Scriptures do not contain everything necessary for the life of the Church.³⁵ The insufficiency of Scripture was emphasized during the Reformation and Counter-Reformation period to such a degree that Scripture and tradition came to be seen as two distinct and very often opposed sources of the Gospel.³⁶ This teaching obscured the venerable doctrine of the material

³² Congar, for example, suggests that while this exclusion was not the conscious intention of the council fathers, it may have had a "prophetic" meaning (I. 217-218; translation, p. 168). Johannes Beumer points out that the council fathers were not concerned about the modern question of whether the Gospel is divided into Scripture and tradition, but simply wished to counter the Protestant critique of the Church's "merely human" traditions ("Katholisches und protestantisches Schriftprinzip im Urteil des Trienter Konzils," Scholastik 34 (1959): 249-58).

³³ In this article, Geiselman affirms the material sufficiency of Scripture by applauding the nineteenth-century Tübingen theologian, J. E. Kuhn, in whose thought he finds the controversial theology of the period after Trent raised to a higher plateau. Kuhn granted to Scripture a "relative Vollständigkeit," which is "inhaltlich [materially] relativ zureichend." Geiselman sums up Kuhn's view (and his own) in the following words: "Die Heilige Schrift vermittelt uns das Evangelium als Offenbarungswahrheit, die schriftgewordene Tradition aber vermittelt die Offenbarungswahrheit des Evangeliums in der Form ihrer Auslegung und ihres auktoritativen Verständnisses." Geiselman, "Das Konzil von Trient," pp. 205-206.

³⁴ See Geiselman, Die Heilige Schrift und die Tradition, sec. 8, "Die Tradition über die materiale Suffizienz der Heiligen Schrift mit Bezug auf den Glauben," esp. p. 228.

³⁵ Gratian's Decretum, which attempted to reconcile various traditions from Christian antiquity – and so was called the Concordia discordantium canonum – acknowledged that, in addition to the "auctoritas scripturarum," there are also the "traditio universalis" and the particular bases for Church practice known as "propria et particularis instructio." See *ibid.*, section nine, "Die Übergang von der inhaltlichen Suffizienz zur Insuffizienz der Schrift," and section ten, "Die Tradition über die inhaltliche Insuffizienz der Heiligen Schrift mit Bezug auf die Mores und Consuetudines der Kirche," esp. pp. 264-265.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 270.

sufficiency of Scripture, according to Geiselman, whose recovery is due to the efforts of nineteenth-century theologians. Men such as Johann Adam Möhler (1796-1838) and Johannes Ev. von Kuhn (1806-1887) figure prominently in Geiselman's analysis of the Catholic Tübingen school, of whose thought he is the principal modern exponent.³⁷

These theologians were so successful, according to Geiselman, that today the material sufficiency of Scripture is widely acknowledged.³⁸ To be sure, it was not one of the doctrines of the Council of Trent. But the decree of the council, especially the change from the "partim partim" formula to the simple "et," permits the doctrine of material sufficiency. This sufficiency extends only to matters of faith, according to Geiselman. As to the Church's moral teaching and customs, he says, their origin lies partly in Scripture, partly in tradition.³⁹ This is the only proper application of the "partim-partim" formula. He adds that failure to distinguish between matters of faith, on the one hand, and matters of moral teaching, on the other, has contributed to the obscurity of the question of sufficiency. With this distinction Geiselman claims to have illuminated the matter. Scripture, insofar as it concerns the question of faith, is the source and norm of the Church's teaching.⁴⁰ Tradition thus becomes the living interpretation of the Scriptures, explicating only what is already implicit in the principles and teaching of Scripture.⁴¹

X.1.B. Opposition to the Material Sufficiency of Scripture

Geiselman's research provides compelling answers to the two questions raised by the decree De canonicis Scripturis of the Council of Trent. He answers the question of

³⁷ Josef Rupert Geiselman, Die katholische Tübinger Schule. Ihre theologische Eigenart (Freiburg: Herder, 1964).

³⁸ Geiselman offers an impressive number of references in his article "Schrift-Tradition-Kirche. Ein ökumenisches Problem," in Maximilian Roesle and Oscar Cullmann, eds., Begegnung der Christen. Studien evangelischer und katholischer Theologie (Stuttgart: Evangelisches Verlagswerk, and Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Josef Knecht-Carolusdruckerei, 1959), 131-159. But at least one of those whom he cites – Joseph Ratzinger – accepts the material sufficiency of Scripture with serious reservations, as we shall find. See the section below entitled "The Question of Authority."

³⁹ Geiselman, Die Heilige Schrift und Tradition, p. 282.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 272.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 282. This is stated more fully in Geiselman, "Das Konzil von Trient," p. 204. It must be noted, however, that this interpretation of or commentary on Scripture by the Church's magisterium is usually distinguished from exegesis, that is, from documentary analysis. The former is authentic because it is an understanding of that oral deposit from the apostles which finds expression in both Scripture and tradition; the latter stands apart from the mind or understanding of the apostles (Mackey, p. 157).

how the truth of the Gospel is contained in both Scripture and traditions by stating that the entire truth is contained in the one and in the other. And he answers the question of how, in the light of the ancient teaching about the primary dignity of Scripture, the two can be held “*pari pietatis affectu ac reverentia*,” with the doctrine of the material sufficiency of Scripture. This doctrine, however, is not without opponents. Bellarmine did not accept it,⁴² and Franzelin gave it a qualified rejection.⁴³ In the modern period, following Geiselmann’s exposition of his thesis, Heinrich Lennerz and Johannes Beumer have taken issue with the doctrine of material sufficiency. Beumer argues primarily on historical grounds. After an analysis of Bellarmine’s treatment of the question, Beumer will not allow material sufficiency, but only the complete harmony of Scripture and tradition. Nothing in Scripture will contradict the truths of faith, he writes, although not all of them will find in Scripture their conclusive proof.⁴⁴ Following a minute analysis of the documents of the Council of Trent, Beumer opposes Geiselmann’s interpretation of the change from the “*partim-partim*” formula in the draft to the “*et*” of the decree. The change does not exclude the view that the truth of the Gospel is contained partly in Scripture, partly in tradition, he claims. Rather, it can be classified as one of many stylistic changes made in the draft which were not intended to alter its content.⁴⁵ Beumer’s writings are valuable in that they suggest the extent to which Geiselmann’s thesis rests upon what is latent, rather than manifest, in the Tridentine documents.

Lennerz’s critique is of more systematic than historical interest. He draws certain conclusions from his rejection of Geiselmann’s interpretation of the change from the Tridentine draft to the final decree. The first is that there are indeed unwritten apostolic traditions. These include the canonicity and inspiration of the Scriptures, the institution of the sacraments by Christ, the worth of infant baptism, the validity of baptism by a heretic, and the perpetual virginity of Mary. Lennerz states further that there are, by consequence, many revealed truths which cannot be proven from Scripture. Lastly, he concludes that this is no cause for lament, but should be acknowledged as a self-evident principle which follows from the conviction of many theologians that not everything is contained in Scripture.⁴⁶ Lennerz’s theses have not been generally well received.⁴⁷ But

⁴² Bellarmine, *De verbo Dei scripto et non scripto*, in the *Opera Omnia*, vol. I, book iv, esp. chap. 11.

⁴³ To be sure, Franzelin granted a “hypothetical” sufficiency to Scripture, and called this material sufficiency. But he emphasized that there is no sense in which Scripture suffices apart from its infallible and apostolic custodians. See the section of his work entitled “*De divina traditione*,” thesis xix.

⁴⁴ Beumer, “Die Frage nach Schrift und Tradition bei Robert Bellarmin,” p. 16.

⁴⁵ Beumer, “Katholisches und protestantisches Schriftprinzip,” p. 258.

⁴⁶ Lennerz, “*Scriptura sola?*” pp. 52-53.

⁴⁷ Mackey (p. 153) criticizes Lennerz’s view that the question of the material sufficiency of Scripture has been decided by Trent, and Congar regrets that Lennerz confines his

he makes it abundantly clear that the doctrine of the material Sufficiency of Scripture is still a matter of dispute.⁴⁸ Furthermore, his juxtaposition of the efforts of Geiselman and his school with the Protestant reformers arouses more than historical interest. The question of the material sufficiency of Scripture, he suggests, is similar to the question of *Scriptura sola*. While conceding that the advocates of material sufficiency distinguish themselves from Protestants by insisting on only a material (as distinct from formal) sufficiency, Lennerz nevertheless taxes them with a position which bears more of a relation to Protestantism than it does to Tridentine Catholicism.

Without a doubt, the context of anti-Protestant polemic within which Lennerz poses the question of *Scriptura sola* is overly controversial. Published in 1959, almost on the eve of the Second Vatican Council, his article displays neither the conciliatory demeanor of the council nor its acknowledgment of Scripture as the very soul of theology. But it does raise, however indirectly, important questions about the relation of the doctrine of material sufficiency to the principle of Protestantism. Can the doctrine be interpreted, for example, simply as a restoration of the Scriptures to their rightful place as defined in Patristic teaching? Or did Geiselman advocate such restoration as an irenic gesture to a Protestant world suspicious of Catholic claims to venerate Scripture? Is the doctrine of material sufficiency purely an affirmation of the unique dignity and unalterable character of Scripture? Or does it implicitly weaken, by linking the Gospel of Jesus Christ to a documentary idea of revelation, the spiritual bond which is at the basis of Christian unity? Lennerz does not raise these questions in an explicit way. He limits his attention to Tridentine theology and its emphasis upon those traditions which deserve veneration equal to that merited by Scripture. But the questions assert themselves, and suggest the vitality – and controversial status – of this aspect of the modern theology of tradition.

X.2. Sufficiency and Authority

The doctrine of the material sufficiency of Scripture can be regarded as an attempt by Catholic theologians to synthesize two ideas which, in Protestant writings, often appear mutually exclusive. The first is the affirmation, whose origins go back to the patristic age, of the unique and primary dignity of Scripture. The second is the equally ancient affirmation that the correct interpretation of Scripture occurs only within the Church. The doctrine of material sufficiency responds to these affirmations by judging first that Scripture is sufficient, in that it contains, at least implicitly, all the truths necessary for salvation. Second, it judges that, while the matter of Scripture is sufficient, that matter requires a correct interpretation. The matter of Scripture only attains a proper form, in the view of theologians of the modern period, when it is rightly appropriated, that is, when the believer comes to share in the mind of the Church.⁴⁹ The Church,

treatment to the content of dogma, rather than acknowledging the formal aspect or authority by which a statement becomes a dogma (I.216-217; translation, pp. 167-16

⁴⁸ Mackey (p. 164) also draws this conclusion.

⁴⁹ This is what Eusebius, citing an anonymous treatise which he calls ancient and orthodox, described as the φρόνημα εκκλησιαστικόν, which in Latin is the “sensus

particularly its official teachers, the magisterium, is the locus of correct understanding of the Gospel, according to the modern theology of tradition. Only in the Church does Scripture enjoy a full, unqualified sufficiency. Only there is it rightly understood. The distinction between the material and formal sufficiency of Scripture, then, raises two questions. The first has to do with the term sufficiency: what does it mean to say that Scripture suffices, containing within it all truth? The second question has to do with authority: why is the Church the authoritative locus for Scriptural interpretation?

X.2.A. The Etymology of Sufficiency

Congar has shown that, for the ante-Nicene Fathers, for the Fathers of the fourth and fifth centuries, and for the medieval theologians, Scripture was deemed sufficient.⁵⁰ For this reason, Congar is prepared to grant, with Geiselman, the sufficiency of Scripture, adding the qualifier “material” sufficiency.⁵¹ The French theologian cites an impressive number of patristic sources testifying to Scripture as the source of all truth. He includes Athanasius of Alexandria and Vincent of Lerins, who uses cognates of the adjective sufficient.⁵² Sufficient comes from the Latin *-ficere* (an unstressed form of *facere*, to make do) and the prefix sub-. It means literally “to make under.” The prefix lends the word a certain ambiguity, because it can be interpreted as signifying either place or relation. In the first and more common interpretation, sufficient is linked to the idea of place. What suffices is that which underlies or enables one to undertake something. This is apparent in the transitive meaning of the verb *sufficio*, to supply or provide. As the battle began to turn against the Trojans, for example, Aeneas’ mother told him that Jupiter himself supplies (“sufficit”) the Greeks with courage and attendant strength.⁵³ What suffices for the Greeks is the divine power which underlies their might. Nothing else is needed. Here, to suffice means to supply something basic and essential.

ecclesiasticus” (Eusebius Pamphili, The Ecclesiastical History, with an English translation by Kirsopp Lake, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, and London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1975), V.28.6; also in Migne, ed., Patrologia Graeca, 20.513). The author of the Letter to the Hebrews referred to the same thing when, quoting Jeremiah, he spoke of the law which the Lord will write on the believer’s mind or *διάνοια* (Heb. 8.10, 10.16). The text is virtually identical with that of the Septuagint version (Jer. 38.33). In Hebrew, the phrase is “I will put my law in their inner part,” *נתתי את־תורתִי בקרבם* (Jer. 31.33).

⁵⁰ Congar, I.139-148; translation, pp. 107-116. This material has been sketched in the section above entitled “The Sufficiency of Tradition and Scripture,” esp. footnotes 8-10.

⁵¹ Ibid., II.166-176; translation, pp. 410-421.

⁵² See footnote 162, above.

⁵³ “Ipse pater Danais animos virisque secundas sufficit.” Vergil, Aeneid, 11.618; in Virgil: Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid, with an English translation by H. Rushton Fairclough, The Loeb Classical Library, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; and London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1960).

Thus when Vincent of Lerins states that the canon of Scripture is itself more than sufficient to enable one to remain firm in the integrity of faith, he means that it undergirds his faith. The Scriptures suffice for faith because they rest at, and indeed supply, its very foundation.⁵⁴

Yet the prefix *sub-* which underlies the word sufficient conveys relation as well as place. It can suggest that the very thing which suffices has something inferior about it. It substitutes for some thing preferable, for what really belongs in the sufficient thing's stead. *Sufficio* can imply this when it means "to have sufficient wealth or resources."⁵⁵ Cicero, for example, notes that the Sicilian people had sufficient wealth for those criminals in league with the greedy Verres, whom he was prosecuting. The Sicilians, he writes, "were not able to resist the cupidity of the few, but in one way or another were able to satisfy [*sufficere*] it."⁵⁶ What Cicero does not say, but certainly implies, is that the Sicilian wealth did not really satisfy Verres' henchmen. They would have preferred even more, because nothing can really suffice the greedy. Yet the Sicilian wealth was sufficient insofar as the criminals took all they could. Here we glimpse the limitations (and, one could say, the inferiority) implicit in the verb *sufficio*. What suffices may not, in an absolute sense, truly satisfy.

Other examples suggesting the inferior status of the sufficient can be drawn from the letters of Pliny. In one of them he relates an incident to Tacitus, desiring that it be included in the historian's annals, and knowing that such inclusion would increase the fame and importance of the incident. Although Pliny knows that Tacitus can enhance the incident's merit, and believes that it deserves treatment by the historian, he nevertheless adds this qualification: "History need never exceed the truth, because the truth suffices for honest deeds."⁵⁷ This truism, were it taken at face value by Tacitus, might seem impertinent. What Pliny insinuates, however, is flattery: the bald truth suffices, but the brilliant Tacitus can do with the incident so much more. Without distorting the facts, he can give the incident meaning. An unadorned narration suffices, but would be inferior to

⁵⁴ Vincent of Lerins, *Commonitorium primum* (chap. II), in Migne, ed., *Patrologia Latina*, 50.640.

⁵⁵ *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, ed. P. G. W. Glare, 8 fascicles (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1968-1982), s.v. "sufficio."

⁵⁶ "[P]aucorum cupiditati tum, cum obsistere non poterant, tamen sufficere aliquo modo poterant." Cicero, *In Verrem*, II.5.48, (par. 127); in Cicero, *The Verrine Orations*, with an English translation by L.H.G. Greenwood, 2 vols., The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press; and London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1953).

⁵⁷ "Nam nec historia debet egredi veritatem, et honeste factis veritas sufficit." Pliny, *Epistulae*, VI.33.10, in Plinius Caecilius Secundus, C., *Letters and Panegyrics*, with an English translation by Betty Radice, The Loeb Classical Library, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press; and London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1969).

a re-telling which portrays the incident in all its importance. The sufficient thing is thus inferior to what Tacitus can accomplish.

A last example comes from a letter of Pliny to his friend, Sabianus. The author pleads with his friend to forgive the wrong-doing of Sabianus' young freedman. "You loved the man, and I hope you will again love him," writes Pliny, "but it suffices in the interim if you allow yourself to be appeased."⁵⁸ While present mollification will suffice, Pliny hopes for a restoration of love in the future. The sufficient appeasement is only partially satisfying, and inferior to a full reconciliation.

Having considered the implications of the word sufficient, we are better able to consider the dilemma of Vincent of Lerins, who says that the canon of Scripture is itself more than sufficient to enable one to remain firm in the integrity of faith. He means, on the one hand, that Scripture is an authority because it is God's own law. It is sufficient, then, in our first sense: God underlies it, and is its foundation. On the other hand, however, Scripture is not universally accepted in one and the same sense. "The same text is interpreted differently by different people," writes Vincent, "so that one may almost gain the impression that it can yield as many different meanings as there are men."⁵⁹ The problem of distinguishing a right from a wrong meaning Vincent solves by an appeal to the traditions of the Catholic Church. Doubtless, Scripture is for him sufficient. But it is sufficient in our second as well as first sense. It suffices, but its very sufficiency suggests that it stands in the place of something preferable: the fullness of divine truth. It is enough only in the context of that truth which is both the source of Scripture and its goal. The dilemma of Vincent, who acknowledges the truth in Scripture but needs to supplement it, finds apt expression in the ambiguities of *sufficio*.

When we turn to the Latin word's Greek roots, we find a related ambiguity. The Greek word for sufficient is *αυτάρκεις* or *αυτάρκης*. The prefix of this word means "of or by oneself," and the body of it stems from the verb *αρκέω*, "to be enough or sufficient."⁶⁰ Thus when Athanasius of Alexandria says that the holy and divinely-inspired Scriptures are sufficient for the proclamation of the truth, he means that they

⁵⁸ Ibid., IX.21.2.

⁵⁹ "Scripturam sacram pro ipsa sua altitudine non unum eodemque sensu universi accipiunt, sed ejusdem eloquia aliter atque aliter alius atque alius interpretatur; ut pene quot homines sunt, tot illinc sententiae erui posse videantur." Vincent of Lerins, *Commonitorium primum* (chap. II), in Migne, ed., *Patrologia latina*, 50.640. Translation: Vincent of Lerins, *The Commonitories*, trans. Rudolph E. Morris, in *The Fathers of the Church*, editorial director Roy Joseph Deferrari, 61 vols. (New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1947-), 7.269.

⁶⁰ *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, I.466-467 (see footnote 162, above).

contain, in themselves, the fullness of it.⁶¹ His use of the word *αυτάρκεις* follows a solid tradition, extending back at least to Aristotle, in which to be self-sufficient is akin to what the Greeks called *σωφροσύνη*, good sense or sound judgment. “Everybody would command that [land] which is most self-sufficing,” writes Aristotle; “and such must be that which is all-producing, for self-sufficiency means having all things and lacking nothing.”⁶² Common sense suggests that self-sufficiency is desirable. Only when land is self-sufficient can the citizens of Aristotle’s ideal state lead a life of tempered leisure, untroubled by the necessity of seeking a livelihood outside of that which belongs to them. Something of this same idea can be transferred to Athanasius. When he writes that the Scriptures suffice for declaring what is true, he means that the Christian, like Aristotle’s citizen, has at hand all that is needed. For Athanasius, the truth is present in Scripture. One need look no further.

But there is another traditional sense of the word *αυτάρκεις* which puts into question the idea that anything apart from God could suffice for truth or salvation. One glimpses this second sense, for example, in the writings of Paul. Writing to the Philippians, he expresses joy in their concern for him, but takes pains to show that he has no undue reliance on them, even in his tribulation. “I have learned,” he writes, “in whatever state I am, to be content.”⁶³ By contentment or self-sufficiency he does not mean independence from Christ. Christ is rather the source of his self-sufficiency, in whom he gains strength (Phil. 4.13). Though the apostle is self-sufficient, that self which suffices is not an autonomous self. This becomes even clearer in Paul’s Second Letter to the Corinthians. There he assures his readers with the following words: “God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that you may always have enough of everything.”⁶⁴ One can certainly have enough and, in that sense, be self-sufficient. But God provides the context in which self-sufficiency occurs. The self which suffices is not one’s own self, but God’s.

The theological resonance of the word *αυτάρκεις* becomes more distinct as one delves into its cognates in the Hebrew Scriptures. There one finds the same ambivalence toward self-sufficiency as was found in the Greek. There is a false self-sufficiency apart

⁶¹ *Αυτάρκεις μεν γαρ εισιν αι αγιαι και Θεόπνευστοι Γραφαι προς την της αληθείας απαγγελίαν.* Athanasius of Alexandria, *Oratio contra gentes*, in Migne, ed., *Patrologia graeca*, 25.4.

⁶² [Π]ερι μεν γαρ του ποίαν τινά, δηλον οτι την αυταρκεστάτην πας τις αν επαινέσειεν (τοιούτην δ’ αναγκαιον ειναι την παντοφόρον, το γαρ πάντα υπάρχειν και δεισθαι μηθενος αυταρκης. Aristotle, *Politics*, VII.5 (1326b 27-29). Translated by H. Rackham, The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press; and London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1910).

⁶³ [Ο]υχ οτι καθ’ υστέρησιν λέγω, εγω γαρ εμαθον εν οις ειμι αυταρκης ειναι. Phil. 4.11.

⁶⁴ [Δ]υναται δε ο Θεος πασαν χάριν περισσευσαι εις υμας, ινα εν παντι πάντοτι πασαν αυτάρκειαν. 2 Cor. 9.8.

from God, and a true self-sufficiency which has its source in God. In the deuterocanonical book of Sirach, for example, one reads in Greek the injunction, “Do not hold fast to your property, and do not say ‘This is sufficient for me.’”⁶⁵ Here the notion of self-sufficiency apart from God is rejected. The Hebrew version underlying the Greek renders the second phrase, “Do not say, ‘It is in the power of my hands.’”⁶⁶ The “power of my hand” is exactly that which is not acknowledged as God’s, but should be. Sirach implies that God alone is the one who, in any absolute sense, possesses sufficiency. Indeed, the divine name El Shaddai includes the idea of sufficiency. The last syllable of the name, יד, can be translated as sufficiency, as the Hebrew commentaries suggest. God’s self-revelation as El Shaddai to Abraham (Gen. 17.1) is described in the Midrash Bereshit Rabba as a statement to the patriarch that the sufficiency of the world is due to God alone: only when El Shaddai (אל שדי) said “enough!” (יד) to the world did creation come to an end.⁶⁷ But sufficiency is not only God’s decision. It is also the divine nature. Thus the midrash further explains the name El Shaddai by quoting Aquila, the second century Jewish proselyte who translated the Old Testament into Greek. For Aquila, says the midrash, the divine name means worthy and sufficient.⁶⁸ The unity of God and the philosophic notion of sufficiency, according to the midrash, is implicit in the divine name itself.

This etymological sketch enables a proper understanding of Athanasius’ statement that the Scriptures suffice for announcing the truth. They are, says Athanasius, holy and divinely-inspired. God has blessed and informed them. Such a statement seems to put Athanasius squarely within the Old Testament tradition. His words suggest that the self-sufficiency of the Scriptures is a gift from God, to be interpreted within a context which belongs to God alone, and ultimately to be identified with God. But then Athanasius

⁶⁵ Μη επι τοις χρήμασίν σου και μη ειπης Αυτάρακη μοί εστιν. Sir. 5.1. Text taken from Ecclesiastico: testo ebraico con apparato criticoe versioni greca, latinae siriaca, a cura di Francesco Vattioni; pubblicazioni del Seminario di Semitistica, a cura di Giovanni Garbini, testi I (Napoli: Istituto Orientale di Napoli, 1968).

⁶⁶ אל תשען על חילך ואל תאמר יש לאל ידי.

⁶⁷ Midrash Bereshit Rabba: Critical Edition with Notes and Commentary, by J. Theodor and Ch. Albeck; introduction and register by Ch. Albeck; second printing with additional corrections by Ch. Albeck; 3 vols. (Jerusalem: Wahrman Books, 1965), I.460-461 (parasha 46.3). Translation: Midrash Rabba, translated into English with notes, glossary, and indices under the editorship of Rabbi Dr. H. Freedman and Maurice Simon, with a Foreward by Rabbi Dr. I. Epstein, complete in ten volumes; vols. I-II: Genesis, trans. H. Freedman (London: Soncino Press, 1939), 1.390-391.

⁶⁸ [ικανός] ואיקנוס [αξιός] תרגם אקילס אקסיוס. Ibid. Although Aquila does not use here the word αυτάρακεις, the concept of self sufficiency is clear in the Greek words transliterated into Hebrew. Ικανός (worthy, fit, sufficient) may be related to the word κανών (canon or limit) as its opposite. Αξιός (honorable) is the root of our word axiom, a maxim accepted on its intrinsic merit.

introduces a characteristic Christian note. The Scriptures are not self explanatory, but must be read within the context of faith in Christ. The Christian exposition of the Scriptures has elicited the best efforts of Athanasius' own teachers, he writes, and of himself. These efforts are aimed at knowledge of that faith which alone enables correct interpretation of the Scriptures. Athanasius forges here a link between hermeneutics and gnosis. He suggests that true gnosis is the result of correct hermeneutics. The hermeneutical key lies in the works of his blessed teachers, in whose absence he himself is writing. From their teachings, he states, "a man will gain some knowledge of the interpretation of the Scriptures, and be able to learn what he wishes to know."⁶⁹ Through the teachers one is led to a proper Scriptural hermeneutic. This enables true knowledge. Such gnosis is the product of those Scriptures, and for it they suffice. But their sufficiency is limited in two ways. First, because they are not themselves the goal, which is truth, but the means to it. Second, their sufficiency depends on the insights of blessed teachers, whose doctrine unlocks the meaning of the Scriptures. In sum, Athanasius' application of the term sufficiency to the Scriptures must be distinguished from the term autonomy. The Scriptures are inspired by God, and are enough to reveal the divine truth, but they are not a law unto themselves. Rather, they require the interpretive tools of Christian tradition.

This glimpse at *sufficio* in Vincent of Lerins and *αυτάρκεις* in Athanasius of Alexandria plunges us into a maze of difficulties. While both writers affirm the sufficiency of Scripture, they also assert that Scripture needs to be authoritatively interpreted. Scripture contains all things necessary for faith, and enough to enable one to proclaim the truth, but it does not explain itself. It is thus sufficient and, in the varied senses which have been brought out, insufficient. The modern theologians of tradition arguing for the material sufficiency of Scripture were advocates, we can now say, of a difficult and elusive concept. The sufficiency of Scripture consists in the fact that it has God for its author. Its insufficiency is due to the fact that it is not God. God is the ultimate authority, and the divine Scriptures have a secondary relation to God. Hence the question of sufficiency leads to the question of authority.

X.2.B. The Question of Authority

The criticism of the sufficiency of Scripture, namely, that it is sufficient only within a context belonging to God, can be leveled against the sufficiency of tradition. It too suffices in the varied senses described above. The sufficiency of the traditions of the Church, in which the truth of the faith is conserved, appears only when one regards the Church in a genuinely theological light, as the privileged creation of God and the body of Christ. This limits its sufficiency in the following way: like Scripture, it must be properly

⁶⁹ [Ο]ις εάν τις εντύχοι, εισεται μὲν πως την των Γραφων ερμενειαν, ης δε ορέγεται γνώσεως τυχειν δυνήσεται. Athanasius of Alexandria, *Oratio contra gentes* (1.4), in Migne, ed., *Patrologia graeca*, 25.4. Translation: Athanasius, *Against the Heathen* (par. 1), in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, translated under the editorial supervision of Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, 14 vols. (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1890-1900); vol. IV: *St. Athanasius: Select Works and Letters*, edited, with prolegomena, indices, and tables, by Archibald Robertson.

understood. Thus it can be said that, apart from a proper theological perspective, arguments for sufficiency, whether of Scripture or of tradition, seem empty and inappropriate. Advocates of Scriptural sufficiency criticize the traditions of the Church as merely human, and the defenders of tradition decry that Scriptural interpretation which, they say, ignores the Church. Both camps tend to overlook the underlying problem of revelation, the problem of God's self communication, which is logically prior to both Scripture and tradition.

This is the point made by the theologian and cardinal, Joseph Ratzinger (b. 1927) who, writing while the Second Vatican Council was underway, belongs to a period subsequent to the modern theology of tradition. His remarks give us a critical view of the sufficiency debate. He argues that "we must go behind the positive sources, scripture and tradition, to their inner source, revelation, the living word of God from which scripture and tradition spring and without which their significance for faith cannot be understood."⁷⁰ Ratzinger's argument is directed at both Protestants and Catholics. Against Protestants, he insists that an exclusive emphasis on Scripture as the word of God tends to surrender the Bible to the caprices of exegetes and historians. Against Catholics – and he mentions Geiselman by name – Ratzinger states that the concession of material sufficiency to Scripture (by which he means that Scripture contains, at least implicitly, all revealed truth) raises insoluble problems. In particular, the problem of the manner in which the Scriptures contain the revealed truth of Mary's Assumption leads to a notion of sufficiency which loses all serious meaning.⁷¹ Geiselman, as we have seen, counted Ratzinger among those theologians who, with him, accept the material sufficiency of Scripture.⁷² Ratzinger, however, seems to disqualify himself as Geiselman's wholehearted ally. At any rate, Ratzinger points to what he considers a serious flaw in the arguments for Scripture's material sufficiency. And he raises questions about the anti-Protestant polemic of those who urge the primacy of tradition over Scripture. Both tend to neglect the underlying issue of revelation.

⁷⁰ "Dann zeigt sich, dass hinter die positiven Quellen Schrift und Überlieferung zurückgegriffen werden muss auf deren inneren Quell: die Offenbarung, das lebendige Wort Gottes, aus dem Schrift und Überlieferung hervorkommen und ohne das beide nicht zu verstehen sind in der Bedeutung, die sie für den Glauben haben." Joseph Ratzinger, "Ein Versuch zur Frage des Traditionsbegriffs," in Karl Rahner and Joseph Ratzinger, Offenbarung und Überlieferung, vol. 25 of Quaestiones disputatae, ed. Karl Rahner and Heinrich Schlier (Freiburg-Basel-Vienna: Herder, 1965), p. 33. Translation: "Revelation and Tradition," in Karl Rahner and Joseph Ratzinger, Revelation and Tradition, tr. W. J. O'Hara, vol. 17 of Quaestiones disputatae (New York: Herder, 1966), p. 34.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 32; trans., p. 34.

⁷² See footnote 38, above.

Ratzinger's thesis subordinates to revelation the positive sources, Scripture and tradition. Revelation, he argues, is more than Scripture.⁷³ It is more in the sense hinted by the prophet Jeremiah, who said that the law written on the heart will supercede that written on tablets of stone (Jer. 31.31-33). And it Paul's sense, that the γράμμα kills while the πνεῦμα gives life (2 Cor. 3.6). One can go even further. Although Ratzinger does not make this point, revelation is more than the teachings of the Church's tradition. Franzelin, as we have seen, acknowledges the presence of doctrines in revelation which have not always and everywhere been sufficiently taught.⁷⁴ In other words, both Scripture and tradition express a revelation which outstrips them. The value of Ratzinger's critique of sufficiency lies in his subordination of the positive sources to their inner source. The positive or phenomenal, one might say, can only be properly considered in the context of the theoretical, speculative, and noumenal. Ratzinger puts the arguments for sufficiency within a wider theological vista. The revealed source of Scripture and tradition, in his view, enjoys a higher authority than they do.

The concept of authority has recently been posed as a philosophic problem within hermeneutics. Although the dimensions of the hermeneutical discussion are too broad to be fully explored at this point, a couple of observations may suggest their pertinence to the topic of sufficiency, and reveal the importance of the discussion of that topic by the modern theologians of tradition. The first observation has to do with the source of authority. Authority is not bestowed by the one who acknowledges it. Rather, it exists as such because one recognizes its superiority.⁷⁵ And that superiority does not consist merely in the fact that it has been delegated to the authority by a yet-higher authority. If that were the case, the more immediate authority would be viewed as a puppet, manipulated by another, enjoying a borrowed status. To describe it as an authority would be less than true. No, a genuine authority is more than a delegate. Its authoritative stature must truly belong to itself.

This insight provides a counter-critique to the view of Ratzinger, who subordinates Scripture and tradition to revelation. In so doing, he tends to diminish the authority of the positive sources. He makes their authority dependent upon that of the inner source, of their divine author, and thus risks the suggestion that the debate on sufficiency is trivial or at least misleading. To be sure, Ratzinger is correct in putting the positive sources in their proper theological context. They are the media of revelation, and the recognition of their common source in God provides an irenic counterpoint to Catholic Protestant debate. But the authority of God only becomes visible in the positive

⁷³ Ratzinger, in Rahner and Ratzinger, *Offenbarung und Überlieferung*, p. 44; translation, p. 45.

⁷⁴ See Chapter Eight, footnote 33, above.

⁷⁵ Gadamer makes the point that, when one acknowledges authority, one concedes that the authority has superior insight, "dass der andere einem an Urteil und Einsicht überlegen ist und dass daher sein Urteil vorgeht." *Wahrheit und Methode*, p. 263; translation, p. 248.

sources of the divine self-revelation. They are themselves authoritative. This fact alone makes the debate over sufficiency comprehensible. It then appears not simply as a question of which positive source should be accorded primacy. In addition, the debate reveals the passion with which Catholics and Protestants have insisted upon the reality of the divine which has been delivered into human hands. The Protestant emphasis on the full sufficiency of Scripture must be regarded as an affirmation of the divine generosity which has expressed itself in language. The Catholic emphasis on tradition must be seen as reverence for the communication of God which has taken up residence, so to speak, in the Church, the body of Christ. True, Scripture and tradition are only the media of revelation. But they possess more than merely a secondary authority. Hermeneutical philosophy suggests that an authority which is only secondary is no real authority at all. Centuries of religious conflict cannot be due to a trivial dispute. The authority of the revelatory media is pivotal.

Hermeneutics offers yet another insight into the nature of authority. It suggests that authority has a dual aspect. Authority has a presence, a solidity, due to the fact that it has already been acquired; and yet authority, one can also see, must always be newly acquired.⁷⁶ When an authority is acknowledged, it exists as such because the one for whom it is authoritative accepts its superiority. It stands as something with an established status. This view of authority is implicit in the theological argument that the authority of the Church enables one to know the truth apart from those insights which belong to oneself.⁷⁷ One acknowledges such authority, because to judge it would be presumptuous. This is the first of the two aspects of authority. Something is authoritative because it exceeds our grasp.

A second aspect complements the first. The second aspect shows that authority must be acquired. It must prove itself. This suggests that the one for whom something is authoritative can judge the authority. He or she may lack the depth of insight possessed by the authority, but can tell whether the authority is legitimate. Such discernment in acknowledging authority distinguishes that acknowledgment from blind obedience.

This insight of hermeneutical philosophy has never been, to my knowledge, systematically applied to the theology of tradition in general, nor to the question of sufficiency in particular. But it suggests a fruitful line of thought. First, it provokes a question about the authority of the positive media of revelation and that of their inner source. This is Ratzinger's question. For our purposes, it is the question of the relation between a mediate but genuine authority, Scripture or tradition, and the immediate authority of God, which is not known until expressed in positive sources. Second, the hermeneutical insight poses the question of how the positive sources must prove themselves as authoritative. This is a real question, because when one subjects them to a

⁷⁶ Gadamer writes that authority is not bestowed, "sondern erworben wird und erworben sein muss." *Ibid.*, p. 264; translation, p. 248. The verb "erwerben" suggests inheritance, acquisition, winnings. Authority has thus been obtained and must be obtained.

⁷⁷ See Chapter Nine, footnote 9, above.

proof, one may be tempted to assume a position of superiority. This would objectivize the positive sources, and thus deprive them of their authority altogether.

The task for theological thought is to define the degree to which a judgment on the authority of the positive sources is necessary and valid, and the degree to which the acknowledgment of such authority is itself an act of knowledge, a recognition of the limits of the human intellect. This task is entangled with the hermeneutical question in general: what is the interpretive stance toward authority which best enables an approach to the truth? The pertinence of the hermeneutical question to the concept of theological authority and sufficiency was not raised explicitly, in its contemporary form, by the modern theologians of tradition. But their meditation on sufficiency set the stage for an appreciation of that pertinence. Hermeneutics is not a question until one glimpses the authority of that which is interpreted, until it is a matter of debate whether the focus of interpretation can suffice for faith and for truth. The modern theologians of tradition, following Trent, affirmed that the traditions of the Church and Scripture contain the truth of the Gospel. The Catholic consensus seems to be that Scripture and traditions suffice in a qualified way for this truth. To affirm their sufficiency is to acknowledge their authority. What that authority is, and how it continues to be acquired, are two questions, two avenues of inquiry, opened up by philosophical hermeneutics.

The Church, in the modern theology of tradition, is the authoritative locus of Scriptural interpretation because the Father has delivered the Son over to the Church, which is the Son's mystical body. This is not the place for an examination of the theology of the Church. But a comment is needed on the authority which the Church claims as the sacrament of Jesus Christ. The divine self-revelation is the source of the truth of the Church's tradition, and is that truth. This might suggest that the authority of the Church is only a derivative or secondary authority. Doubtless this is true, because creation exists for the sake of the creator. And it is the Church's vocation to call itself back to its creator in a ceaseless self examination. But the Church's authority would be wrongly characterized as derivative if this means that its authority is bestowed by its members. Even more misleading would be that view of the Church as the epiphany of an idea, as an approximation of something which exists perfectly in God alone. That draws too bold a line between humanity and divinity. The authority of the Church's traditions, and of Scripture as well, suffices in all senses of the word. To be sure, the traditions are not God. Yet they are the gift of God's own self. To say more would draw us from the theology of tradition to that of the incarnation.