
**THE THREE REFORMATION "ONLY"S AND CATHOLICISM: THE RESULT**

For a Catholic understanding of the faith there is no reason why the basic concern of Evangelical Christianity as it comes to expression in the three "only"s should have no place in the Catholic church. Accepted as basic and ultimate formulas of Christianity, they do not have to lead a person out of the Catholic church. Where of course other and more fundamental dogmas of the Catholic church are denied, a consensus could no longer be arrived at. But these theologies, for example, the theology of demythologizing, or a theology which denies the divinity of Jesus Christ or the Trinity, are not formative of church from an Evangelical point of view. For the reformers of the sixteenth century did not deny the traditional doctrines of God, of
Christ, of the one divine person in Christ, and of the two natures. Rather they presupposed them as something to be taken for granted, although here and there in Luther and in Calvin, because of their basic and ultimate theological stance, dogmas coming from the whole Christian tradition were modified somewhat in their interpretation as far as emphases and perspectives go.

THE POSITIVE SIGNIFICANCE OF EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY FOR THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

If a Catholic understanding of the church cannot simply recognize in non-Roman churches the same salvific and theological quality with regard to the question about the church of Jesus Christ, this in no way denies a positive significance in Evangelical Christianity for Evangelical Christians and also for the Catholic church. According to the Catholic conviction too, scripture exists as an authority within Evangelical Christianity. There is valid baptism, and there is a great deal else even in the social and ecclesial dimension which is a historical concreteness of Christianity which is willed positively by God. The Catholic understanding of faith and of the church in no way denies that within Evangelical Christianity there is grace and justification and the Holy Spirit, and hence there exists that reality as the event and the power of God's grace for which everything institutional, all words and sacraments, everything juridical and organizational, and all the techniques of administration are only the preparation and the historical manifestation, and except for this they are nothing. Consequently, there is a unity in very many elements which are formative and constitutive of church in the tangible and categorical dimension of salvation history, and beyond this and all the more so there is a unity in the pneumatic dimension. And with respect to both dimensions, of course, Evangelical Christianity as it touches individual Evangelical Christians has a positive and spiritual function.

In spite of all the questions and in spite of the guilt which is to be presumed on both sides, Evangelical Christianity also has a positive function for the Catholic church. Let us say that by the will of Christ the Catholic church is the church which professes in principle to preserve everything Christian, professes to know Christianity not only in an ultimate reduction to the basic and ultimate knowledge, and professes to live not only in the basic and ultimate event of justifying grace. Rather it wants to be the church which develops these ultimate and most fundamental things abundantly throughout the whole length and breadth of the historical and social dimension and on the level of reflection, and does so without fearing that this development by means of the ultimate power of its origins has to be a defection from these origins. Then in relation to this Catholic church Evangelical theology, Evangelical Christianity and also the Evangelical churches can have a positive function for the Catholic church in their reduction to the ultimate, to what is most specific, to the animating power, and to that which gives Christianity its ultimate meaning. They can call the attention of the Catholic church again and again to the fact that grace alone and faith alone really are what saves, and that with all of our maneuvering through the history of dogma and the teaching office; we Catholic Christians must find our way back to the sources again and again, back to the primary origins of Holy Scripture and all the more so of the Holy Spirit. By God's grace he forms the innermost center of our existence and is at work there.

In his understanding of the church the Catholic will say in the abstract, of course, that this would have to be possible for the Catholic church as founded by Christ even if there were no Evangelical Christianity. But a Catholic Christian can readily acknowledge that the concrete activity of God and of his Christ on his Catholic church is to a large extent mediated and carried out in the concrete by what in fact and in its historical concreteness comes as the goal of the Reformation, as a corrective influence, and as a warning from Evangelical Christianity to Catholic Christianity. In the Catholic understanding of the church it has to be readily admitted that the Catholic church in modern times owes a great deal to the existence of Evangelical Christianity. From a historical point of view the concrete reality of Catholic Christianity cannot even be imagined outside an historical situation to whose powerful historical moments Evangelical Christianity did not also belong.

THE FUNDAMENTAL UNITY OF CHRISTIANITY AND THE QUESTION ABOUT THE "MEANING" OF THE DIVISION

It is taken for granted in Catholic dogmatic theology that there is a "hierarchy of truths." It is therefore also taken for granted that beyond the divisions in Christianity not only is there a unity among Christians and among the Christian churches insofar as they have a great deal in common even in the social and ecclesial dimension, but that there is also a unity even beyond this. In and through our profession of faith in the God of Jesus Christ the redeemer, in his grace, in his word, and in the eschatological salvation which is given through Christ, we are united in the hierarchy of
truths in a unity which is deeper than the unity which is hindered by the controversial theological questions which divide the churches. If we make distinctions within this hierarchy of truths and within their religious and existential importance, then from this perspective, too, it is to be taken for granted that Christians are united in a more radical sense than they are divided, although they are divided in a true and important sense. We cannot dismiss in a so-called fundamentalism all of the controversial points which divide Christianity as mere theological squabbles. But as Christians we can and must say that what unites us in our profession of faith is more fundamental, more decisive and more significant for salvation than what divides us.

From this perspective we can presumably reach some insight into the question why then God in his salvific providence allows this division in Christianity. This question is more difficult to answer today than it was at the time of the Reformation. At that time it was presupposed by both sides in practice and in the concrete, although perhaps not in their sublimest theories, that this division implied guilt, and indeed each side presumed that the guilt was on the other side. Today we admit that the historically identifiable reasons and guilt for the division of the church lie on both sides. Beyond saying this it is impossible for Christians and even for historians to measure more exactly the guilt which is to be apportioned to the two sides. A judgment in this sense is forbidden to Christians because this judgment is left only to the judgment of God. Both sides, then, mutually have to presume the good faith of the other side. In a human judgment and also in an optimism about salvation which is completely justified, and which indeed is required of Christians as the virtue of hope, we can even say that on all sides in Christianity at least the majority of Christians really exist in an interior, positive and guiltless relationship to their church and to the other churches.

But if we presuppose this, then in a theologically radical way the question about the division is a question of theodicy, a question which has to be placed to God. The moment a definite historical fact stems immediately from man's guilt, there is indeed still the question how God could permit this guilt, how the holy and just and infinitely loving God could permit and create a world in which such guilt exists. But where we cannot assume such guilt, or at least do not have to assume it, the theodicy problem becomes more acute. For historical facts which do not stem from guilt are to be placed "on God's account" in a much more immediate and intensive sense than those facts which stem from a real, subjective and serious guilt on man's part. And to this extent, at least presupposing that people today are by and large innocent with respect to the divisions in Christianity, we have to ask and demand much more intensively that these facts have and must have a positive meaning in God's salvific providence than we would if these facts were just the objectification of an abysmal guilt on man's part.

If, then, we pose the question about the salvific and providential meaning of the division differently, then presumably we can say that Christians perceive and experience the really radical and fundamental truths and realities of Christian faith and of Christian existence more clearly than perhaps would be the case if everyone were in the same social and ecclesial situation, and if they all naturally and obviously belonged to one and the same church. The radical question about what Christianity really is, and the constantly critical attitude towards the Christianity which they themselves embody remain present in this division. We cannot say, of course, that this process of salvation may dispense Christians from devoting all of their powers towards striving for the unity of the church, nor from feeling responsible for this unity. But as long as we are separated, as long as in God's dispensation people's consciences are convinced that their churches have to be separated, we can certainly ask about a positive salvific meaning in this situation and say that we have to make the best of it.

This means that we have to force each other mutually to be and to become as Christian as possible, and to understand what is really radical about the Christian message a little better. Even in its divisions Christianity exists today in a historical, social, cultural and spiritual situation which obliges all of these separated Christians to ask themselves how they can do justice to the future which is pressing upon us. And where the theologies of the different churches are making an effort really to answer the questions which a non-Christian age is posing to Christianity, there will there be the best chance that this new theology being done by people who belong to different churches will slowly develop a theological unity from out of the questions which are being proposed to all of them in common. This unity will then move beyond many of the controversial theological problems which at the moment are insoluble, and will render them to a certain extent otiose.

6. Scripture as the Church's Book

This is perhaps the appropriate place in our reflections, or at least it is a possible and legitimate place, to discuss at least the fundamentals about Holy Scripture, both in the Old and the New Testaments. For if we regard
scripture as the church's book to begin with, this gives us perhaps the best access to an understanding of what the official doctrine of the church itself says about its holy book. This will avoid the danger of "mythologizing" the nature and the task of scripture.

SOME REFERENCES TO EARLIER DISCUSSIONS

We have already discussed scripture under different headings quite frequently elsewhere either implicitly or in passing. For the basic and ultimate theological problem with regard to the essential nature of scripture is a question whose content runs through all of our reflections: the problem of the unity between transcendental and historical revelation. The history through which grace is mediated to man, and hence the history through which God's turning to man in revelation is mediated to him, is not indeed always and in the first instance a word, and consequently it is not a scriptural word. It is rather salvation history as a whole, and, as we have already said, this does not have to be made thematic always and everywhere in an explicitly religious way. However, it is when this history is made thematic in an explicitly religious way that it reaches its real goal and its climax, and hence becomes the history of salvation and revelation in the usual sense.

If, then, scripture is understood as one of the ways, although a preeminent way, in which God's revelatory self-communication to man becomes explicit and thematic in history, then it is clear that everything which we said especially in the fifth and sixth chapters about the relationship between transcendental revelation and history already pertains to the real and basic problem about scripture. It really is also clear immediately that scripture can be understood as the word of God as distinguished from a word about God only if it is understood in connection with what is called grace, God's self-communication, the Spirit, gratuitous transcendental revelation and faith. We are not, of course, going to go into this problem all over again at this point. It should just be mentioned that we have already said some very essential things about scripture earlier without mentioning it by name.

Moreover, we have already discussed the prophets and their function, for example, a function by which, under the dynamism of grace and God's special providence, universal revelation and the universal history of revelation becomes concrete in an authentic and pure way in the special history of the Old and New Testaments. We spoke further about the relationship of the Old and New Testaments to each other, and in doing so we took the history of the old covenant and its holy book together. Finally, in the sixth chapter we evaluated the New Testament from the viewpoint of

fundamental theology to the extent that this was possible within the scope of these lectures. We did this in answering the question who Jesus of Nazareth is, and what he means to us. Also, we have already discussed Evangelical Christianity's axiom "scripture alone." Hence we have already discussed scripture in these and similar contexts.

THE CHURCH'S BOOK

Nevertheless, we are going to say something about scripture in a more explicit way at least briefly. We regard it as the church's book, the book in which the church of the beginning always remains tangible and visible as a norm for us in the concrete. Indeed it is norm which is already distinguished from those things which are found in the original church but which cannot have a normative character for our faith and for the life of the later church. If the church in every age remains bound to its origins in its faith and in its life, if the church as the community of faith in the crucified and risen Jesus is itself to be in its faith and in its life the eschatological and irreversible sign of God's definitive turning to the world in Jesus Christ, a sign without which Jesus Christ himself would not signify God's irreversible coming into the world and would not be the absolute saviour, and if this church of the beginning objectifies itself in scriptural documents at least in fact, and also does so necessarily given the historical and cultural presuppositions in which the church came to be, then in all of this together we have a point of departure for understanding the essence of scripture.

It is also a point of departure from whose perspective we can arrive at an adequate and at the same time a critical understanding of what is really meant by the inspiration of scripture and by a binding canon of scripture. Since scripture is something derivative, it must be understood from the essential nature of the church, which is the eschatological and irreversible permanence of Jesus Christ in history. It is to be understood from this perspective as something normative in the church. (We have already mentioned in the fifth chapter the most important points about how from this perspective the Old Testament can be understood not merely as a collection of documents about the history of Israel which are of interest for the history of religion, but rather can be understood as a part of what is normative for Christian faith.)

THE APOSTOLIC AGE

Scripture, we are saying, is the objectification of the church of the apostolic age which is normative for us. We have already said in another context that
for a variety of reasons we may not understand the duration of this apostolic age in too limited a way. Hence we may not consider it in too primitive a fashion as ending with the death of the "twelve" as the "apostles" and with the death of Paul without getting into superfluous theological difficulties. We cannot of course simply deduce the exact temporal duration of the apostolic age from theological principles. But there are no special objective difficulties in saying that, according to the self-understanding of the ancient church, the age ended with the writing of the final books of the New Testament, and hence around the first decades of the second century. This obviously involves a bit of a circle: the apostolic church is supposed to be normative, and hence the apostolic age is the criterion for what can be valid as scripture. And, conversely, we are defining what can be valid as the apostolic age from the duration of the history of the canon. But by the very nature of the case this circle belongs to the essence of a historical reality which itself determines the scope of its "beginning" to some extent. Consequently, from the mass of things which are found in this initial period it knows essentially what should have a normative character for it in the future, but it does not know this with a clarity which can any longer be made completely rational.

Given these presuppositions which we have done no more than indicate, we can say then: the church of the apostolic age objectifies itself in scripture. Therefore this scripture has the character and the characteristics which belong to this church in its relationship to future ages of the church. What this means more precisely will follow as we now try in the coming sections to say something about the canon and the formation of the canon, and about the inspiration and the inerrancy of scripture. We shall do this more from the perspective of the traditional data of the church's official doctrine and the theology of the schools.

The formation of the canon

It is not possible here to trace the history of our knowledge of the scope of the canon. That is a task for the introductory course in the biblical sciences which we cannot assume here. The difficulty in this undertaking for the dogmatic and systematic theologian was just indicated: the canonicity and the inspiration of the individual parts of what is in fact the New and the Old Testament should not be constituted by being recognized by the church, a notion which the First Vatican Council rejected (cf. D.S. 3006); but the scope of the canon and hence the inspired character of the individual books in the strict and theological sense is only known to us in fact through the teaching of the church. But as we can see from the history of the canon, this teaching of the church cannot be grounded by saying that by means of an oral tradition which goes back to the explicit testimony of the first recipients of revelation (that is, the apostles until the death of the last apostle) the church has acquired through explicit testimony a knowledge of what is inspired and what is not inspired in the scriptural deposit of the apostolic age, and consequently has acquired a knowledge of what belongs in the canon of Holy Scripture. We shall indeed have to agree with the First Vatican Council that inspiration and canonicity cannot be constituted by means of a recognition of definite books on the part of the later church, by means of a recognition which comes to these books from outside as it were, and which dictates to them from outside a higher value than they have by themselves.

But if we understand the origin of these writings themselves as a moment within the formation of the original church as something which is normative for future ages, as a moment in the process in which the essence of the church in the theological sense comes to be, as a moment in the constitution of this essence which can certainly have a temporal duration, and in that to derive the essence of scripture from the essence of the church does not fall under the censure of the First Vatican Council. During the apostolic age the real theological essence of the church is constituted in a historical process in which the church comes to the fullness of this essence and to the possession of this essence in faith. This self-constitution of the essence of the church until it reaches its full historical existence (and it is not until then that it can fully be the norm for the future church) implies written objectifications. Therefore this process is also, but not exclusively, the process of the formation of the canon: the church objectifies its faith and its life in written documents, and it recognizes these objectifications as so pure and so successful that they are able to hand on the apostolic church as a norm for future ages. From this perspective there is no insuperable difficulty with the fact that the formation of these writings and the knowledge that they are representative as objectifications of the apostolic church do not simply coincide in time, and that the formation of the canon was not finished until the post-apostolic age. In this understanding the canonicity of scripture is established by God insofar as he constitutes the church through the cross and the resurrection as an irreversible event of salvation, and the pure objectifications of its beginning are constitutive for this church.
The Inspiration of Scripture

From this perspective, or so it seems to us, we can also clarify what is called “inspiration” in the church’s doctrine on scripture. In the documents of the church it is said again and again that God is the  author (author) of the Old and New Testaments as scripture. The school theology, which is at work in the encyclicals of Leo XIII and up to those of Pius XII, tried time and time again to clarify by means of psychological theories how God himself is the literary author or the writer of Holy Scripture. And it tried to formulate and to clarify the doctrine of inspiration in such a way that it becomes clear that God is the literary author of scripture. This, however, did not deny (and the Second Vatican Council affirmed it explicitly) that this understanding of God’s authorship and of inspiration may not reduce the human authors of these writings merely to God’s secretaries, but rather it grants them the character of a genuine literary authorship of their own.

This interpretation of the inspired nature of scripture which we have done no more than sketch can of course be understood in such a way that even today one does not necessarily have to accuse it of being mythological. We would have to recall in this connection what we said in the fifth chapter about the unity between transcendental revelation and its historical objectification in word and in writing, and about the knowledge of the success of these objectifications. In any case it cannot be denied in the Catholic church that God is the author of the Old and New Testaments. But he does not therefore have to be understood as the literary author of these writings. He can be understood in a variety of other ways as the author of scripture, and indeed in such a way that in union with grace and the light of faith scripture can truly be called the word of God. This is true especially because, as we said elsewhere, even if a word about God is caused by God, it would not by this very fact be a word of God in which God offers himself. It would not be a word of God if this word did not take place as an objectification of God’s self-expression which is effected by God and is borne by grace, and which comes to us without being reduced to our level because the process of hearing it is borne by God’s Spirit.

If the church was founded by God himself through his Spirit and in Jesus Christ, if the original church as the norm for the future church is the object of God’s activity in a qualitatively unique way which is different from his preservation of the church in the course of history, and if scripture is a constitutive element of this original church as the norm for future ages, then this already means quite adequately and in both a positive and an exclusive sense that God is the author of scripture and that he inspired it.

Nor at this point can some special psychological theory of inspiration be appealed to for help. Rather we can simply take cognizance of the actual origins of scriptural which follow for the impartial observer from the very different characteristics of the individual books of scripture. The human authors of Holy Scripture work exactly like every human author, nor do they have to know anything about their being inspired in reflexive knowledge. If God wills the original church as an indefectible sign of salvation for all ages, and wills it with an absolute, formally pre-defining and eschatological will within salvation history, and hence if he wills with this quite definite will everything which is constitutive for this church, then he is the inspirer and the author of scripture, although the inspiration of scripture is “only” a moment within God’s primordial authorship of the church.

The Inerrancy of Scripture

From the doctrine that Holy Scripture is inspired theology and the official doctrine of the church derive the thesis that scripture is inerrant. We can certainly say with the Second Vatican Council (Dei Verbum, art. 11): “Therefore, since everything asserted by the inspired authors or sacred writers must be considered as to be asserted by the Holy Spirit, we must profess the books of scripture that they teach with certainty, with fidelity and without error the truth which God wanted recorded in the sacred writings for the sake of our salvation.” But if because of the very nature of scripture as the message of salvation we acknowledge the inerrancy of scripture first of all in this global sense, we are still far from having solved all of the problems and settled all of the difficulties about the meaning and the limits of this statement which can be raised because of the actual state of the scriptural texts. The inerrancy of scripture was certainly understood earlier in too narrow a sense, especially when inspiration was interpreted in the sense of verbal inspiration, and the sacred writers were only regarded as God’s secretaries and not as independent and also historically conditioned literary authors. That difficulties still exist here in the understanding and in the exact interpretation of the church’s doctrine on the inerrancy of scripture is shown even by the history of the conciliar text just cited. It follows from this history that the Council evidently wanted to leave open the question whether the phrase about the truth which God wanted to have recorded for the sake of our salvation is supposed to restrict or to explicate the meaning of the sentence.

We cannot of course treat and answer all of these questions and difficul-
ties in detail here, especially since we cannot go into individual scriptural texts which raise special difficulties with regard to their "truth." We shall have to leave them to the introductory disciplines and to exegesis. Nor can we go into the question here whether in the papal encyclicals of the last century and up to Pius XII the doctrine on the inerrancy of scripture was not understood here and there in a too narrow and materialistic sense. It is also obvious that much of what was said elsewhere in this book, for example, about the inerrancy of Christ and the inerrancy of real dogmas in the teaching of the church, can have its corresponding validity in this question too.

We only want to say here very briefly: scripture in its unity and totality is the objectification of God's irreversible and victorious offer of salvation to the world in Jesus Christ, and therefore in its unity and totality it cannot lead one away from God's truth in some binding way. We must read every individual text within the context of this single whole in order to understand its true meaning correctly. Only then can it be understood in its real meaning, and only then can it really be grasped as "true." The very different literary genre of the individual books must be seen more clearly than before and be evaluated in establishing the real meaning of individual statements. (For example, in the New Testament stories it is not impossible in certain circumstances that we find forms of midrash and that they were originally intended to be such, so that according to scripture's own meaning the "historical" truth of a story can be relativized without any qualms.) Scriptural statements were expressed within historically and culturally conditioned conceptual horizons, and this must be taken into account if the question of what is "really" being said in a particular text is to be answered correctly. In certain circumstances it can be completely legitimate to distinguish between the "correctness" and the "truth" of a statement. Nor may we overlook the question whether the really binding meaning of a scriptural statement does not change if a particular book has its origins outside the canon as the work of some individual, and then is taken into the totality of the canonical scriptures.

Just as by the very nature of the case there is an analogy of faith which is a hermeneutical principle for the correct interpretation of individual statements in the official teaching of the church, so that the individual statement can only be understood correctly within the unity of the church's total consciousness of the faith, so too and in an analogous sense, or as a particular instance of this principle, there is also an *analogia scripturae* or an analogy of scripture which is a hermeneutical principle for interpreting individual texts of scripture. If there is a "hierarchy of truths," that is, if a particular statement does not always have the same objective and existentiell weight which another statement has, then this has to be taken into account in interpreting individual scriptural statements. This does not mean that the statement which is "less important" in relation to another statement has to be qualified as incorrect or as false.

If we grant the validity of and apply these and similar principles, which follow from the very nature of the case and from the nature of human speech and are not the principles of a cheap "arrangement" or a cowardly attempt to cover up difficulties, then we certainly do not inevitably have to get into the difficulty of having to hold that particular statements of scripture are "true" in the meaning which is really intended and is intended in a binding way, although a sober and honest exegesis might declare that they are incorrect and erroneous in the sense of a negation of the "truth."

**SCRIPTURE AND TEACHING OFFICE**

With regard to the relationship between scripture and the church's teaching office, the most important points will be covered in the next section which treats the church's teaching office. Insofar as the church's teaching office in later ages continues to be bound permanently to the original church's consciousness of the faith which is the constitutive beginning of the church as a whole, and insofar as this consciousness has been objectified in an authentic and pure way in Holy Scripture, the teaching office does not stand above scripture. Rather it only has the task of giving witness to the truth of scripture, of maintaining this truth in a vital way, and of always interpreting it anew in historically changing horizons of understanding as the one truth which always remains the same.

**SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION**

If everything which has been said so far is understood correctly (and would be developed more clearly), then there also follows the correct understanding of the relationship between scripture and tradition. Scripture itself is the concrete process and the objectification of the original church's consciousness of the faith, and by means of it this consciousness of the faith is "transmitted" to later ages of the church. The formation of the canon is a process whose legitimacy cannot be established by scripture alone, but rather it is itself a fundamental moment in the tradition. Conversely, the Second Vatican Council refused to make tradition a second source for us today which exists by itself alongside scripture, a source which testifies to
individually, material contents of faith which have no foundation at all in

scripture. However, much the more precise relationship between scripture

and tradition still needs a great deal of further theological clarification, it

is perhaps obvious from what has already been said earlier that the

"scripture alone" of the Reformation is no longer a doctrine which distinguishes

and separates the churches. For Evangelical theology too recognizes that

scripture is the objectification of the original church's living consciousness

of the faith, and is so in the midst of a very clear pluralism in the original

curch's preaching and in the theologies which are found there. This

pluralism can ultimately be held together in unity only by the church's

single and living consciousness of the faith.

With regard to Holy Scripture in the life of the church and in the life

of the individual Christian, we may refer to the sixth chapter of the Second

Vatican Council's Constitution on Revelation, Dei Verbum, and recommend

this chapter for serious spiritual reading.