

COLUMNISTS

Scripture, tradition as sources of revelation

One issue that continues to draw a clear line between pre- and post-Vatican II Catholic theology concerns the relationship between Scripture and tradition.

Before the council, many Catholic theologians defended certain teachings of the church that are not found in the Bible, such as purgatory or the Assumption of Mary into heaven, on the ground that there are two sources of revelation, Scripture and tradition. These theologians assumed that the two-source theory had been taught by the Council of Trent in the 16th century.

Many Protestants, on the other hand, argued that there is only one source of revelation, the Bible, and that only those teachings that are explicitly rooted in sacred Scripture can be regarded as belonging to the deposit of faith. *Sola Scriptura* ("Scripture alone") was one of the battle cries of the Reformation, alongside *sola fides* ("faith alone") and *sola gratia* ("grace alone").

It was against this Protestant view that the Council of Trent formulated its teaching on Scripture and tradition. Trent, however, did not teach, as some later thought, that revelation is contained partly in Scripture and partly in tradition. That position, in fact, was explicitly rejected by the council.

Trent simply wanted to renounce the biblical absolutism of the Protestant Re-



essays in theology

By FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

formers who assigned no value at all to tradition.

It should also be pointed out that Trent did not understand tradition in the modern theological sense of the word, that is, as a continuing process, that encompasses the whole life of the church, including its worship and other ministerial activities.

Nor did Trent make a distinction, so crucial today, between tradition and traditions, that is, between what pertains to the essence of the faith and those elements that may come and go in the history of the church without any essential effect on the faith.

For example, belief in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist is part of the essential content of faith, rooted explicitly in sacred Scripture. The devotion known as Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, on the other hand,

developed in the early 14th century and received strong impetus after the Council of Trent as a way of affirming Catholic belief in the Real Presence.

Belief in the Real Presence will always be part of the deposit of faith (tradition). Benediction (a tradition) can disappear as easily as it first appeared in the Middle Ages. Indeed, the practice of Benediction has generally declined since Vatican II.

The issue of the relationship between Scripture and tradition was dramatically joined during the first session of the Second Vatican Council (fall 1962) in the initial debates over the "Constitution on Divine Revelation."

The conservative minority defended the post-Reformation view that teachings not found explicitly in the Bible, such as purgatory and the Assumption, can be regarded nonetheless as part of the deposit of faith. The conciliar majority argued that Scripture and tradition form one sacred deposit of revelation.

When it became clear that the debate was getting bogged down, it was decided that a two-thirds affirmative vote would be required to continue the discussion. Less than two-thirds vote would have scuttled the document and left the more conservative, post-Reformation view in place.

Although a majority of the bishops

voted in favor of continuing the discussion, the necessary two-thirds margin was not attained. But the very next day (Nov. 21, 1962), Pope John XXIII himself intervened and ordered the discussion to continue via a new commission which he established.

After a tedious three-year process, the "Constitution on Divine Revelation" was approved on Nov. 18, 1965. The document taught that Scripture and tradition form one sacred deposit of revelation (n. 10), and that tradition encompasses the whole life, witness, teaching, and worship of the church (n. 8). As such, tradition is a living, dynamic reality which "develops in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit."

Reflection on the meaning of tradition and on its relationship with Scripture has continued since the council. Catholic theologians today insist that tradition is never independent of Scripture as a source of revelation. If something is not in Scripture, neither is it in tradition — even if it happens to be a legitimate "tradition" of the church.

Tradition, in other words, is not a fact-factory. It cannot create biblical "evidence" out of whole cloth. If something is not in Scripture, it is not in Scripture. And if it is not in Scripture, it is not part of the deposit of faith.

An appeal to tradition cannot make it so.

If you're between the ages 18-35, our Young Adult page might be for you.

Catholic Courier

FEBRUARY BINGO CALENDAR

SPECIAL PAID ADVERTISEMENT ■ CALL FOR HOLIDAY CANCELLATIONS

BINGO

SUNDAY

2:00 p.m. ... St. Margaret Mary Church 400 Rogers Parkway, Rochester 716-342-2100

6:15 p.m. ... St. Stanislaus Church 1150 Hudson Ave., Rochester 716-544-9951

7:30 p.m. ... Holy Family Church 899 Jay St., Rochester 716-328-3110

7:30 p.m. ... St. Boniface Church 15 Whalin St., Rochester 716-271-1468

7:30 p.m. ... St. Rita School 1008 Maple Dr., Webster 716-671-1100

7:30 p.m. ... St. Charles Borromeo Church Bingo World, 4419 Dewey Ave., Roch. 716-621-9550

MONDAY

7:00 p.m. ... St. Mary Lyceum Hall 15 Clark St., Auburn 315-252-9545

7:30 p.m. ... St. Charles Borromeo Church Bingo World, 4419 Dewey Ave., Roch. 716-621-9550

TUESDAY

7:30 p.m. ... St. Stanislaus Church 1150 Hudson Ave., Rochester 716-544-9951

7:30 p.m. ... St. Helens Church Gates Center Bingo, Westmar Plaza 716-235-1210

WEDNESDAY

7:30 p.m. ... Guardian Angels Church 2081 E. Henrietta Rd., Rochester 716-334-1412

7:30 p.m. ... Holy Family Home School Assoc. 899 Jay St., Rochester 716-328-4800

7:30 p.m. ... Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church/St. Andrew School, 923 Portland, Rochester 716-226-6458

THURSDAY

7:30 p.m. ... St. Anne Church 1600 Mt. Hope Ave., Rochester 716-271-3260

7:30 p.m. ... St. Stanislaus Church 1150 Hudson Ave., Rochester 716-544-9951

8:00 p.m. ... Holy Cross Church 4488 Lake St., Rochester 716-225-5363

FRIDAY

8:00 p.m. ... St. Mark Church 54 Kuhn Rd., Rochester 716-225-3710

SATURDAY

7:30 p.m. ... Good Shepherd Church 3288 E. Henrietta Rd., Rochester 716-334-3518

8:00 p.m. ... St. Thomas the Apostle Church 41 Colebrook Dr., Rochester 716-226-2943

✕ CLIP & SAVE ✕

Quality, full service, affordable, dental care.

KODAK RETIREES

Only a \$10 Co-pay for each procedure! This includes:
Dentures, Partials, & Crowns! Participating with
ALL Dental Plans...

SENIORS

Without dental coverage? We offer a 20% DISCOUNT
on all treatment for seniors age 60 & over.

We offer "uniquely" lower co-payments for most plans. (many procedures covered in full)

BC/GM, BC/XEROX* accepted as full!
* Maximum \$50 Co-payment for major procedures only.
*Up to your yearly maximum deductible applies.

Wegman's • U. of R.*
Remember your insurance is covered in full!
*Up to your yearly maximum deductible applies.

Q-Dental Premier Plan
A self initiated benefit plan for those who don't have
coverage through their employers. Call for details.

Q-Dental Group

Greece 865-3776 3800 Dewey Ave.
Gates 426-3020 517 Beahan Rd.
Irondequoit 544-2003 1730 E. Ridge Rd.

PAG
D
Cor
(Bo
is a
may
figu
"1
er t
mor
bibl
wer
H
prof
tion
Sch
ing.
cava
ebb
"Th
B
goo
note
they
cha
But
alle
arch
said.
T
light
away
"I
Lan
L
sors
men
digs.
ciate
lege
Gez
Test
tells
dóm
Jeru
Apd
som
com
sum
walk
riod.
At
ther
at G
atten
tions
grim
Cent
dug
the s
verif
mult
then
clair
mag
CORR
do,"
To
Solo
natio
Bu
ston
Megi
that,
shou
faith.
"S
arch
there
conti
the b
imali
arch
we're
need
Ac
an a
Fishe
contr
what
cal st
Fir
biblic
archa
in or
thing
the l