A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE PROTESTANT PRINCIPLE OF *SOLA SCRIPTURA* IN LIGHT OF THE CATHOLIC ARGUMENTS ON THE TEMPORAL PRECEDENCE OF TRADITION AND THE FORMAL INSUFFICIENCY OF SCRIPTURE

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Introduction

This paper offers a critique of the Protestant doctrine of *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone) from a Catholic perspective, highlighting the temporal precedence of Tradition over Scripture and the material sufficiency, *but* formal insufficiency, of Scripture. In the end, I will delve deeper into the Catholic position by examining what the great French Dominican theologian, Yves Congar, calls "the whole genius of tradition" in light of the Church's effort to unite Scripture, Tradition, and Magisterium in Vatican II's *Dei Verbum* and recognize their inherent and interdependent relationship as being "so closely linked that one cannot be conceived divorced entirely from the two others."[1]

Congar, in his book *The Meaning of Tradition*, asserts that on the question of what constitutes the *norm* for the Church, the disagreement between Protestantism and Catholicism is arguably very deep.[2] On the one side of the abyss is the Protestant

1 Yves Congar, *The Meaning of Tradition* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 101.

2 Ibid., 162.

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claim that concerning the true nature and authentic foundation of human beings' relationship with God, "no authority would intervene other than that of *God* in person, expressing himself by his Word, that is, concretely, in the Scriptures."[3] This position, incontestably framed in the classical formulation of *Sola Scriptura*—one of the five *solas* of the Reformation—has been the Reformers' ecclesial battle cry since the 16th century. Briefly, the Protestant theory of *Sola Scriptura*, as described by Congar, asserts that

> Scripture possesses by itself and in itself, that is, without needing the addition of any other principle, the qualities of a real sacrament of salvation, or rather, of saving faith... [I]t possesses efficacy, being the principal—and for some the sole—means of grace; it contains all that is necessary for the Christian; it is clear, explaining itself without help and needing nothing besides itself to make known God's thoughts.[4]

This doctrine "affirms that Scripture is to be understood as the sole source of divine revelation, the only inspired, infallible, final and authoritative norm of faith and practice."[5] For the Protestants, the twofold mode of transmitting the Gospel, the Word of God, or Revelation (which is the Catholic position) has been invalidated by the existence of the Sacred Scripture, insisting that "in laying down a scriptural canon, the Church has forfeited the use of unwritten tradition as a standard reference, with a value comparable to that of Scripture."[6]

On the other side of the doctrinal divide is the Catholic assertion that, aside from the Scripture, the living Tradition and the Church as instituted by God in Christ—with its hierarchical

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid., 92.

5 https://www.reformationbiblecollege.org/blog/the-five-solas

6 Congar, *The Meaning of Tradition,* 19.

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structure of Magisterium—also enter into the very definition of what constitutes an essential element of human relationship with God.[7] Hence, for the Catholics, "[t]o deny [the validity of traditions] would be to disregard and neglect one of the two great ways in which the Church of today and of all times is linked to the apostles" and that "[t]o keep the writings alone would mean keeping only part of this heritage, for the apostles have left us more than this."[8]

Critique of the Protestant Position of *Sola Scriptura*

Temporal Precedence of Tradition Over Scripture

Rene Latourelle, commenting on *Dei Verbum* 7 in his book, *Theology of Revelation*, observes that "Vatican II speaks first of all of Tradition, and then of Scripture (contrary to the order adopted by the Council of Trent)," which for him "follows the actual order of events," since "as a matter of fact, Tradition did precede Scripture."[9] Congar provides a compelling analysis of the temporal precedence of Tradition over Scripture in his work, *Tradition and Traditions*. In the book, he argues that if we confine ourselves to the proclamation and transmission of the Gospel message, we would see that the initial transmission of the divine, salvific truth was primarily oral. "Jesus wrote nothing down: it is worth pausing to reflect on this fact and its meaning.... Jesus gave everything to the apostles, but not in writing."[10] For Congar, "[t]he apostles themselves at first built up the Church by the completest possible communication of

7 Ibid., 162.

8 Ibid., 43-44 and 83-84.

9 Rene Latourelle, *Theology of Revelation* (New York: Alba House, 1987), 474.

10 Yves Congar, *Tradition and Traditions: An Historical and Theological Essay* (London: Burns & Oates, 1966), 283-284. Henceforth referred to as *Tradition and Traditions.*

the Gospel, by words and actions, preaching and example, by the exercise of authority and organization; not by writing."[11] He asserts that the Gospel in its fullness, which was deemed sufficient for the constitution of the Church, was already in existence before the composition of the canonical Gospels and Epistles. In fact, "the Church was never more itself than when it had the Christian mystery itself alone imprinted in its heart, without any Scripture apart from the prophetic writings."[12]

Congar anticipates this point in his earlier work, *The Meaning of Tradition*. In the book, he points out that during the earliest period of the Church, "there was neither letters by the apostles nor written accounts of what Christ had said and done," for "[t]he Gospel was preached, and the Christian faith was handed on simply by 'tradition.'"[13] Given that Tradition encompasses the totality of the Christian faith, it must be differentiated from Scripture in terms of both its mode of transmission and its content. As John Fisher argues in his 1526 *Confutatio* of Luther (found in Jared Wicks' article), "the apostolic writings, e.g., 2 Thes 2:15; Jn 20:30; 21:25, point to an oral communication of doctrine and rules beyond what is set down in the writings collected in the Bible, and some practices of the universal church derive from this nonwritten source."[14] Thus, when the Catholic Church found itself doctrinally challenged by the *Sola Scriptura* argument of the Reformers, "it trembled at the prospect of losing any part of that which had been handed down by the apostles, not just quantitatively speaking, but from the

11 Ibid., 284.

12 Ibid., 285.

13 Congar, *The Meaning of Tradition*, 15-16.

14 Jared Wicks, "Council of Trent," in R. Latourelle and R. Fisichella (eds.), *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1990), 1126.

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point of view of the manner in which the inheritance had come down to it through the ages."[15]

In *The Meaning of Tradition*, Congar delineates the distinction between Tradition and Scripture. For him, if an essential aspect of tradition is transmitting an object from one to another, that which exists in writing is not included in the handing on, since what exists in writing does not need to be passed from one to another to be possessed. Hence, "[i]n this stricter sense tradition signifies transmission by some other means other than writing."[16] In trying to understand this non-written mode of transmission, Congar explains that for the first thirty years after Pentecost, the Christians gathered together and celebrated, for instance, the breaking of the bread, even if there was no written text yet on this "sacrament." It sufficed that the apostles witnessed Jesus celebrating it, breaking bread with them, and that from its actual celebration of the apostles and their disciples, the Church gradually understood the meaning of the Eucharist. For Congar, the Gospel and Christianity were propagated by means of this—by means other than writing, by means of Tradition.[17] However, "when we speak of communication by some means other than writing, we think less of an oral transmission of an unwritten teaching than of transmission of the very substance of the Christian faith, which surpasses any written statement."[18] If such a transmission of the Gospel in its entirety was already going on long before the Scripture was written, then Tradition indeed preceded Scripture, and for Congar, it was so because

15 Congar, *Tradition and Traditions*, 291.

16 Congar, *The Meaning of Tradition*, 14.

17 Ibid., 17-18.

18 Ibid., 20.

> [t]he Church could not wait until the critics were agreed among themselves: she had to live. She lived her own life, which had been handed down to her as such, before the texts and together with them, in the texts and yet not limited to them, independently of them. She did not receive her life from them. She *was* the Church from the time of the apostles and not the product of their writings; she used these writings, not following them word for word... but treating them as a mirror and yardstick to recognize and restore her image, in each new generation.[19]

Indeed, if I may offer an insight that essentially belongs to Part III, *initially*, as pointed out by *Dei Verbum*, the apostles handed on the Gospel "by the spoken word of their preaching, by the example they gave, by the institutions they established, what they themselves had received—whether from the lips of Christ, from his way of life and his works, or whether they had learned it at the prompting of the Holy Spirit" (DV 7). *Then*, the apostles and other men associated with them, under the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, "committed the message of salvation to writing" (DV 7).

Sacred Scripture: Materially Sufficient *But* Formally Insufficient

George Lindbeck, a Lutheran theologian, describes the Bible as "self-interpreting and the *norma normans non normata* ("normative norm not normed")... [whose]... authority is that of God himself, and this cannot be increased by any amount of human reasoning."[20] In this realm of the fundamental insignificance of reason on the whole, Lindbeck includes "all the other supports that could be proposed for the authority of Scripture: tradition, church, theories of inspiration or revelation, or faith

19 Ibid., 22.

20 George Lindbeck, "Lutheranism," in R. Latourelle and R. Fisichella [eds.], *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1990), 609.

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itself."[21] Indeed, for the Reformers, Scripture is "the supreme and sole norm of doctrine and life and... that Scripture has in itself a self-interpreting capacity (*sacra Scriptura sui ipsius interpres*, according to Luther)."[22]

For Congar, in his *Tradition and Traditions*, the Catholic Church regards the Sacred Scripture as consisting of "inspired" books written under the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, as the authentic written expression of divine Revelation, and because it is the normative crystallization of the transmission of the Gospel in writing, it must therefore be the constant normative reference point of all handing on of Revelation from the time of its writing. However, Sacred Scripture cannot be an autonomous entity, which means that it cannot be divorced from the living Tradition of the community—the Church—that brought it into being. The best evidence of Scripture's dependence on Tradition and the Church, according to Congar, is the formation of the Scripture canon. While Scripture does not take its authority from the Church, it was nevertheless the Church that exercised the authority to recognize the canonical status of biblical books. In the same way that the Church was necessary for the early Christians to learn which books were of apostolic origin, the Church's Tradition and Magisterium are also necessary to determine which scriptural interpretations are consistent with the apostolic deposit.[23] Hence, for Joseph Ratzinger, "[t]o contrast Scripture strictly with the Church... is not only impossible from the start... because the writings gathered together in the Bible are, and can be, a 'Bible,' 'Scripture,'

21 Ibid., 610.

22 Wicks, "Council of Trent," 1126.

23 Cf. Congar, *Tradition and Traditions*, 417.

only within the Church."[24] Johann Eck and Johann Cochlaeus, therefore, conclude: "[T]he Protestant use of the Bible as a critical norm against the church was destructive of the Bible itself, since it is the church that, by fixing the biblical canon, identifies and authenticates the books that are normative."[25]

Thus, with the Reformers, "we can admit *Scriptura sola* in the sense of a *material* sufficiency of canonical Scripture... [which means that]... Scripture contains, in one way or another, all truths necessary for salvation."[26] In fact, for Congar, "[a] number of good Catholic authors ... are of the opinion that it is still possible... to hold that all the truths necessary for salvation are contained, in one way or another, in the canonical Scriptures."[27] Nevertheless, for the Catholic Church—and contrary to the Protestant argument of Lindbeck and other Reformers—Sacred Scripture is "formally insufficient" in that it is incapable of being its own herald and interpreter; contrary to the Reformers' position, Catholic theology insists that the Bible cannot interpret itself, for it contains no self-interpreting power or capacity. Thus, after affirming that "much in the Bible is in fact hard to understand, as 2 Pt 3:16 indicates," John Fisher, re-echoed by Wicks, concludes: "The Bible alone, instead of resolving controversies, actually leads to divisions and errors, as the history of heresy confirms."[28] Indeed, determining Christian doctrine and practice demands consulting other theological loci within the Church's Tradition, as "an appeal to the Bible does not suffice by itself," since the meaning of the

24 Joseph Ratzinger, "The Transmission of Divine Revelation," in H. Vorgrimler (ed.), *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 193.

25 Wicks, "Council of Trent," 1126.

26 Congar, *Tradition and Traditions,* 410.

27 Congar, *The Meaning of Tradition,* 106.

28 Wicks, "Council of Trent," 1126.

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Sacred Scripture is interpreted, understood, and expressed through the Church's life and worship.[29] According to Congar:

> The Scriptures do not surrender their meaning by the bare text; they surrender it to a mind that is living, and living in the conditions of the Covenant. This mind, or living subject... is the Church, God's People, the Body of Christ and Temple of the Holy Spirit. Thus, in a certain way, Scripture possesses its meaning outside itself.... The place where this is found is precisely tradition as it is understood by the early Fathers; it is there, in this setting and in these conditions, that the holy Scriptures reveal their meaning.[30]

The *Catechism for Filipino Catholics*, in Chapter 2, Section III, Subsection A on *Scripture and Tradition*, affirms this when it says:

> The Scriptures, then, are never to be separated from the people of God, whose life and history (Tradition) formed the context of their writing and development... As Sacred Scripture grew *from* Tradition, so it is interpreted *by* Tradition—the life, worship, and teaching of the Church. Tradition depends on Scripture as its normative record of Christian origins and identity, while Scripture requires the living Tradition of the Church to bring its Scriptural message to the fresh challenges and changing contexts confronting Christians in every age.[31]

Indeed, the Church, in her Tradition and Magisterium, must interpret the Sacred Scripture, spelling it out in Christian life, teaching, and worship. "That is why [even though] the Church verifies and proves her teaching by Scripture... she [nevertheless] interprets Scripture in her tradition and decides controversies by means of her Magisterium, with

29 Ibid., 1127.

30 Congar, *The Meaning of Tradition,* 91.

31 Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, *Catechism for Filipino Catholics* (Manila: Word and Life Publications, 1997), nos. 82, 84.

reference to Scripture and Tradition."[32] Hence, if by Scripture we understand "not the materiality of the printed text but the reading and understanding of the sacred Text," then it does not possess a total autonomy with respect to Tradition, as "[t]he unanimous verdict of Christian history is that Scripture must be read within the Church, that is to say, within Tradition."[33] While affirming this, we must also assert that Tradition must listen and be subject always to Scripture, the critical norm for discerning the divine from the human, as "Tradition or the Church has no complete autonomy regarding Scripture."[34] Thus, for Ratzinger, "tradition must not be considered only affirmatively, but also critically; we have Scripture as a criterion for this indispensable criticism of tradition, and tradition must always be related back to it and measured by it."[35] Indeed,

> [t]he truth is that there is no doctrine of the Church based *solely* on Scripture independently of tradition, and none that she holds solely by oral tradition independently of Scripture: because, on the one hand, Scripture has no implications for faith independently of its meaning, given to us in the Church's delivery of it, animated by God's Spirit and, because, on the other hand, tradition possesses many links with Scripture.[36]

"The Whole Genius of Tradition:" The Unity of Scripture, Tradition, and Magisterium in *Dei Verbum*

I will now examine the intrinsic relationship between Scripture, Tradition, and Magisterium by drawing on the fundamental insights of *Dei Verbum*, nos. 7-10, which deal with

32 Congar, *The Meaning of Tradition,* 101.

33 Congar, *Tradition and Traditions,* 414.

34 Ibid.

35 Ratzinger, "The Transmission of Divine Revelation," 185.

36 Congar, *The Meaning of Tradition,* 106.

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the twofold transmission of divine revelation and its relation to the Church's Magisterium, and enriching the discussion with pertinent insights from Yves Congar, René Latourelle, and Karl Rahner on this subject.

René Latourelle notes that *Dei Verbum* 7-10, which comprises Chapter II of the Constitution, tackles the very important topic of "[the] transmission of divine revelation" (the chapter's title) "under the form of Tradition and Scripture, their mutual relationship, and their common relationship to the Church and to the Magisterium."[37]

Dei Verbum 7 commences with the idea that "God graciously arranged that the things he had once revealed for the salvation of all people should remain in their entirety, throughout the ages, and be transmitted to all generations." For Latourelle, the opening sentence of DV 7 communicates the object of the entire chapter: "[I]t is God's will that His revelation *abide* in its full integrity over the course of the centuries and be *handed on* to all generations."[38] Christ's explicit command to his apostles to preach the gospel, the source of all salvific truth and moral life, to all the people was spoken of and promised by the prophets of old and ultimately fulfilled and promulgated by Christ himself. The Risen Lord's great commission to his apostles to proclaim the gospel to all the nations

> was carried out first of all by the preaching and testimony of the apostles themselves. It was understood in a *concrete* manner, including not only words but also examples and ways of acting, usages, institutions, and rites. In a word, it included everything the apostles had *received from Christ through* his conversation and his activity, as well as everything they had *learned from the Holy* Spirit by his promptings concerning the words and works of Christ.

37 Latourelle, *Theology of Revelation,* 473.

38 Ibid.

> The testimony of the apostles thus goes far beyond oral preaching. It also includes the whole domain of cult and sacrament (especially Baptism and Eucharist) and the whole domain of moral conduct and the moral direction of Christian communities.[39]

Tradition and Scripture, two complementary modes through which God has chosen to reveal Himself to humanity, are indeed considered in this paragraph "like a mirror, in which the Church, during its pilgrim journey here on earth, contemplates God, from whom she receives everything, until she is brought to see him face to face as he really is." (DV 7)

On *Dei Verbum* 8, Latourelle offers the following observation: "This is the first time that any document of the extraordinary Magisterium has proposed such an elaborate text on the nature, object, and importance of Tradition."[40] The opening passage of this paragraph not only underscores the necessity of preserving the apostolic preaching, as enshrined in Scripture, in an unbroken line of succession until the end-time, but also urges the faithful to uphold the traditions handed on to them by the apostles. What has been transmitted by the apostles "comprises everything that serves to make the People of God live their lives in holiness and increase their faith," through which the Church "in her doctrine, life and worship, perpetuates and transmits to every generation all that she herself is, and all that she believes." (DV 8) This handing down not merely of the Church's faith but her very life as well is beautifully expressed by Rahner in his article, "Scripture and Tradition:"

> The Church—we may say quite correctly—in so far as it has Jesus Christ in her midst, i.e., the Church of the apostles, is what is handed on. She is handed on, of course, not only in

39 Ibid., 474.

40 Latourelle, *Theology of Revelation,* 476.

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> her teaching, but in what the Church is herself, what she believes and celebrates, the Church in her sacraments, in her concrete life, her experience, her Lord's Supper and of course also in the reflex expression of what she has heard and what she lives herself, in the word of the apostles.[41]

An important assertion in this paragraph of *Dei Verbum* is the idea that in the handing down of Tradition, "[t]here is a growth in insight into the realities and words that are being passed on" (DV 8). We can, therefore, say that "Tradition is continually developing in her under the action and assistance of the Holy Spirit... [though]... it is not the apostolic Tradition itself, but rather our penetration of these inherited words and realities which develops and grows."[42] For Congar, "[t]radition is not the simple permanence of a structure, but a continual renewal and fertility *within* this given structure, which is guaranteed by a living and unchanging principle of identity."[43] *Dei Verbum* affirms the reality of "growth in insight" as the whole process of transmission is described as one by which "the Church is always advancing towards the plenitude of divine truth, until eventually the words of God are fulfilled in her" (DV 8). What brings about this growth, according to this paragraph, are contemplation and study by the faithful, the intimate experience of spiritual realities, and the preaching of bishops who possess the sure charism of truth. "It follows that a truth handed down by Tradition could never be known

41 Rahner, "Scripture and Tradition," in *Theological Investigations* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd., 1969), Volume VI, 102.

42 Latourelle, *Theology of Revelation,* 477. Towards the end of his commentary on Chapter II, Latourelle touches again on this very significant aspect of Tradition: "What is perfected in the course of the centuries is not revelation itself, but the *understanding* we have of it. It is the successive series of *explanations* which we make in our efforts to discover its inexhaustible riches and in so doing to enlighten future generations" (Ibid., 483).

43 Congar, *Tradition and Traditions,* 264-265.

or understood in its full richness through a single Church document or testimony, but only by the sum total of all the testimony and forms of expression in which it lives: the writings of the Fathers, the liturgy, the practice of the Church, and theological speculation."[44] The last sentence reveals the importance of Tradition in relation to Scripture. According to Latourelle,

> [t]his importance stems from the following facts: a) it is through Tradition that the canon of inspired books is known to us in its *fullness*. On this point, the Council recognizes that the objective content of Tradition surpasses that of Scripture; b) it is also through Tradition that Scripture is more profoundly understood; c) finally, it is through Tradition that Scripture is constantly actual and actualized.[45]

In *Dei Verbum* 9, which explores the mutual relationship between Tradition and Scripture, the paragraph opens with the insight that the two are "bound closely together, and communicate one with the other." (DV 9) It is, thus, an error, according to Latourelle, to regard them as two parallel and independent forms of revelation, to recognize the existence of one and deny the existence of the other, or to disregard their mutual relationship. Brian Johnstone, likewise, has a similar observation: "In the post-Tridentine era, Scripture and Tradition were considered as two separate fonts, and thus the argument from Tradition was considered distinct from the argument from Scripture. After the correction of this position in *Dei Verbum*,

44 Latourelle, *Theology of Revelation,* 477.

45 Ibid., 478.

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such a distinction would seem to be no longer valid."[46] Scripture and Tradition are indissolubly bound because they emanate from the same divine wellspring of revelation, coalesce into a unified expression of divine mystery, and converge upon the ultimate goal of human salvation. The third sentence offers the final reason for the mutual relationship between Tradition and Scripture: "[E]ach of them is equally the *word of God*."[47] Scripture is the Word of God, which was committed to writing under the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Similarly, Tradition is the Word of God, entrusted by Christ and the Holy Spirit to the apostles and faithfully transmitted to their successors who, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, preserve, expound, and disseminate the gospel of salvation (DV 9). Re-echoing the second-to-last sentence of the paragraph, which asserts that "the Church does not draw her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone," Latourelle writes:

> It follows from this that the certainty which the Church has concerning everything God has revealed... does not derive from *Sacred Scripture alone*, since the Church never ceases to possess in its entirety... the living word which she received in the beginning. Furthermore, when the Church hesitates to

46 B. V. Johnstone, "The Argument from Tradition in Catholic (Moral) Theology," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 69 (2004): 152. Rahner describes the post-Tridentine relationship between Tradition and Scripture in this way: "[I]t undoubtedly looks as if scripture and tradition were two tributaries flowing in a somewhat parallel manner and bringing us materially different contents of faith, so that one can perhaps, to begin with, find and determine certain truths only in scripture and then other truths—and this is the real crux of the problem—only in oral tradition" (Rahner, "Scripture and Tradition," 103). Rahner, however, observes that in post-Tridentine theology, the principal tendency was to maintain, based on the anti-Protestant front, that "there is not only the truth of the inspiration and of the canon of scripture but that there are also other truths of faith which are not to be found in the scripture, so that for them oral tradition is a materially distinct source of faith" (Rahner, "Scripture and Tradition," 107).

47 Latourelle, *Theology of Revelation,* 479.

> pronounce herself on a particular point because Scripture does not seem sufficiently clear and explicit, she can find in the Tradition of which she is the guardian a source of enlightenment and assurance.[48]

Latourelle concludes his commentary on this paragraph by affirming the complementary nature of Tradition and Scripture and positing that they complete and illuminate one another, not so much quantitatively but qualitatively, as both transmit and preserve the same divine revelation and are oriented toward the ultimate goal of human salvation.[49] Consequently, they must be received and venerated "with equal feelings of devotion and reverence" (DV 9).

Dei Verbum 10, the last paragraph of Chapter II, deals with the common relationship of Tradition and Scripture to the Church and Magisterium. The paragraph consists of two parts. The first part, which deals with the relationship of Tradition and Scripture to the whole Church, asserts that "[s]acred Tradition and sacred Scripture make up a single deposit of the Word of God, which is entrusted to the Church" (DV 10). It asserts that the entire people of God, united with their shepherds, preserve and transmit this deposit of revelation through the apostolic teaching, the common life, the breaking of the bread, and prayer, in such a way that a remarkable harmony is maintained between the bishops and the faithful in the practice and profession of the faith. Rahner stresses this dimension of the Church in the transmission of Tradition:

> This tradition, heard, accepted, and believed in his own day... means the community of believers who have directly experienced Jesus Christ at least in their own contemporaries, and who have received this word and testimony of Jesus Christ directly through the living word

48 Ibid., 480.

49 Ibid.

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> of the very witnesses who saw and heard him; in short, it signifies the Church... What was heard, celebrated, received, and believed there, is and remains the standard which must be handed on, since it is the eschatological saving event of Jesus Christ himself and since we are speaking here in the true sense of the primitive Church.[50]

Congar, similarly, links the concept of Tradition to the Church as communion. After examining the concept of Tradition as a process of transmission, essentially involving two parties—a transmitter and a receiver—he proceeds to state that "[t]he relations of giving and receiving, dependence and exchange, do not exist merely between isolated individuals, but involve communities too, and essentially... because what is transmitted brings about an incorporation into a communion."[51]

The second part, which delves into the relationship of Tradition and Scripture to the Church's Magisterium, affirms that "the task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition, has been entrusted to the living teaching office of the Church alone" (DV 10). Latourelle, commenting on this part, insists that "[i]t is most important to establish the correct relationship of Tradition and Scripture to the Magisterium, for Protestants frequently have the impression that we subordinate Scripture to Magisterium and that we confuse the Magisterium with Tradition."[52] DV 10 unequivocally affirms that the interpretation of the Word of God, whether in Sacred Scripture or in Tradition, is the purview of "the living teaching office of the Church alone," whose "authority in this matter is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ" (DV 10). In relation to Scripture, DV 12 adds that the manner of scriptural interpretation

50 Rahner, "Scripture and Tradition," 102.

51 Congar, *Tradition and Traditions,* 240, 241.

52 Ibid., 481.

"is ultimately subject to the judgment of the Church which exercises the divinely conferred commission and ministry of watching over and interpreting the Word of God" (DV 12). Congar expounds on this idea as follows:

> The magisterium is a power of making distinctions, since it has received an authentic teaching mission from Christ. It is not, itself, a source of revelation and enjoys no autonomy in respect of the deposit, of which it is only an agent. The positive theology of the magisterium cannot be separated from the positive theology of the sources of revelation.[53]

Likewise, Johnstone argues that "[p]articular *interpretations* of the Tradition... as distinct from the Tradition itself, are declared to be authentic or not authentic, by the authority of the Magisterium."[54] Nevertheless, "this Magisterium is not superior to the Word of God, but is its servant," whose three-fold sacred duty is to devotedly listen to, diligently guard, and faithfully expound the Word (DV 10). It is, in Latourelle's words:

> the servant of God's word, teaching nothing more than what has been handed down to her... The Magisterium, by reason of the express mandate it has received from Christ, and with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, hears with filial devotion, guards as sacred, faithfully explains, and draws from the one and only deposit of faith everything that it proposes for belief as divinely revealed.[55]

The last sentence concludes the paragraph by stating that "in the supremely wise arrangement of God, Sacred Tradition, sacred Scripture and the Magisterium of the Church are so connected and associated that one of them cannot stand without the others," as "they all contribute effectively to the salvation of souls" (DV 10). Insofar as Tradition and Scripture

53 Congar, *Tradition and Traditions,* 269-270.

54 Johnstone, "The Argument from Tradition in Catholic (Moral) Theology," 140.

55 Latourelle, *Theology of Revelation,* 482-483.

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are inseparable from one another, so the two of them are inseparable from the Church's Magisterium.

Conclusion

In light of the arguments presented in this paper about Tradition, Scripture, and Magisterium, and their relationship with each other, with Congar, we must, however, say that "[e]xactly, the same value... should not be attributed to *tradition* and to the holy Scripture,"[56] even if Vatican II argues that "both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal feelings of devotion and reverence" (DV 9). The reason is that "[t]he holy Scriptures have an absolute value that tradition has not, which is why, *without being the absolute rule of every norm*, like the Protestant scriptural principle, *they are the supreme guide to which any others there may be are subjected*."[57] That is why, for Congar, if the Church, in her Tradition and Magisterium, claimed to teach a doctrine that contradicted Scripture, it would surely be false. However, while always being the supreme rule, which is subject to no other objective rule, Scripture is nonetheless "not the *sole* principle regulating the belief and life of the Church,"[58] as God has also established two other principles—Tradition and the Church's Magisterium. This is where we find the reason for the great "doctrinal divide" between Protestantism and Catholicism:

> [Whereas the] Protestant Reformation has unhappily put these three realities in opposition, subjecting one to the other and setting one against the other... the whole genius of tradition consisted in uniting them and recognizing their mutual relations, so closely linked that one cannot be conceived divorced entirely from the two others.[59]

56 Congar, *The Meaning of Tradition,* 100.

57 Ibid. [emphasis mine]

58 Ibid.

59 Ibid., 100-101.

Hence, against the Protestant claim that Sacred Scripture can and does interpret itself, possesses a "self-interpreting capacity," is the sole judge, rule, and guide of faith, and that there is thus no need for Tradition and the Church's Magisterium, the Catholic Church staunchly defends the indispensable role of Tradition in the appropriation of Scripture and the exclusive authority of the Magisterium in its interpretation.

> It follows from this that the certainty which the Church has concerning everything God has revealed... does not derive from *Sacred Scripture alone*, since the Church never ceases to possess in its entirety... the living word which she received in the beginning. Furthermore, when the Church hesitates to pronounce herself on a particular point because Scripture does not seem sufficiently clear and explicit, she can find in the Tradition of which she is the guardian a source of enlightenment and assurance.[60]

60 Latourelle, *Theology of Revelation,* 480.

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