

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](https://paypal.me/robbradshaw)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Theological Students Fellowship (TSF) Bulletin (US)* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_tsfbulletin-us.php



BULLETIN

THEOLOGICAL STUDENTS FELLOWSHIP

JANUARY-FEBRUARY 1983

Vol. 6, No. 3

\$2.00

EDITOR

Mark Lau Branson TSF General Secretary

ADVISORY EDITORS

Clark H. Pinnock, *Systematic Theology*
McMaster Divinity College

Paul A. Mickey, *Practical Theology*
Duke Divinity School

ASSOCIATE EDITORS

Stephen T. Davis, *Philosophy*
Claremont McKenna College

Donald Dayton, *News Analysis*
Northern Baptist Theological Seminary

Robert L. Hubbard, *Old Testament*
Denver Seminary

Stephen C. Mott, *Ethics*
Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary

Grant R. Osborne, *New Testament*
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

Donald Tinder, *Church History*
New College, Berkeley

David Lowes Watson, *Evangelism*
Perkins School of Theology

PERSPECTIVES EDITORS

Elward D. Ellis Madison, WI

Luis Cortes Philadelphia, PA

Nancy A. Hardesty Atlanta, GA

Thomas F. Stransky Oak Ridge, NJ

FACULTY CONTRIBUTORS

Bernard Adeney Pacific School of Religion

Donald Bloesch University of Dubuque
Theological Seminary

Geoffrey W. Bromiley Fuller Theological
Seminary

Harvie M. Conn Westminster Theological
Seminary

Charles Ellenbaum College of DuPage

Vernard Eller University of LaVerne

David Gill New College, Berkeley

Larry Hurtado University of Manitoba

Susanne Johnson Perkins School
of Theology

Richard Mouw Calvin College

Thomas Oden Drew University
Theological School

PHEME PERKINS Boston College

Bernard Ramm American Baptist
Seminary of the West

Gerald Sheppard Union Theological
Seminary

Charles R. Taber Emmanuel School
of Religion

Keith Yandell University of Wisconsin

Gregory A. Youngchild New Haven, CT

FOUNDATIONS

**Evangelicals and the Enlightenment:
Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism**

Bernard Ramm 2

**Tradition and Theology: A Roman Catholic
Response to Clark Pinnock**

Avery Dulles, S.J. 6

MINISTRY

Toward a Social Evangelism (Part I)

David Lowes Watson 8

INQUIRY

Beyond the Nation-State:

Defining a Transnational Vision for the Contemporary Church

Dean C. Curry 11

SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Mentoring

Spiritual Formation in the Seminary Community

Dick Daniels 13

Meditations for Couples

Applying the Teachings of Christ to Build Stronger Marriages

Edward "Chip" Anderson 15

ACADEME

Student Initiative: Models for Action

Mark Lau Branson 17

INTERSECTION

Meetings, Meetings, Meetings

19

REVIEWS

Book Reviews (Itemized on back cover)

21

Tradition and Theology

A Roman Catholic Response to Clark Pinnock

by Avery Dulles, S.J.

In his article, "How I Use Tradition in Doing Theology" (*TSF Bulletin*, Sept.–Oct. 1982), Clark Pinnock has given a frank and challenging discussion of the role of tradition in three types of Christianity: conservative evangelical, Roman Catholic, and liberal. His description of each type seems to me to be about as accurate as such a concise presentation would allow. I was particularly interested in his observations regarding the way in which partisans of each type of theology tend to form alliances with one of the other two, so that there are hybrid types such as evangelical–catholic, liberal–evangelical, and catholic–liberal. In terms of this schematization, Pinnock might be described as an evangelical who leans toward the catholic rather than the liberal alternative. I might describe myself as a catholic who leans more to the evangelical than to the liberal stance.

If this characterization is correct, it should not be surprising that I found Pinnock speaking about liberalism in much the same terms as I myself would. While neither of us wishes to overlook the real merits of liberalism, we can agree that liberals have neglected the positive values of tradition and that liberalism continues to be as vigorous today as it ever was. Conservative Protestants and conservative Catholics, not to mention groups such as the Orthodox, will be hard put to avoid being swept away by the liberal tide. My own feeling is that liberal Christianity, unless checked by evangelical or catholic concerns, can all too easily become a mere stage on the road to dechristianization. Having appealed from tradition to Scripture, the liberals appeal from the Christ of faith to the Jesus of history, and eventually from the Jesus of history to whatever their tastes find most congenial. But there is no need to develop this point further, since I am quite content to let the case rest where Professor Pinnock leaves it.

Against liberalism, conservative evangelicals and the majority of Catholics are agreed that God has performed certain specific saving acts in history, and that the word of God authoritatively teaches certain truths that command the assent of faithful Christians. The two groups agree in finding the word of God in the canonical Scriptures. They also look to the creeds and to the ancient dogmas of the Church as a reliable interpretation of the central biblical message.

The revelatory meaning of Scripture cannot be found without tradition.

Pinnock's own version of evangelicalism comes close to Catholicism insofar as he is aware of the difficulties in appealing to "the Bible alone" as the norm of Christian belief. He prefers, as many Catholics do, to speak of the Bible as "never alone," since it is always read with the help of tradition. He agrees with Catholic theologians that tradition is important for the protection of the Church against "a flood of novel and private interpretation."

I would have been helped if Pinnock in his article had given a fuller discussion of what he means by tradition. At one point he describes it

as "the process of interpreting and transmitting the Word." Elsewhere he characterizes it as "the distillation of the church's reflections" upon Scripture. He repeatedly designates tradition, in contrast to the Bible, as "human." Although Jesus and Paul sometimes speak of "human traditions" in a pejorative sense, there is New Testament warrant for regarding tradition as divinely authoritative (2 Thes. 2:15; 3:6; 1 Cor. 11:2, 23; 1 Cor. 15:3). The New Testament, of course, does not speak directly of the authority of post-biblical tradition.

The contemporary Roman Catholic theology of tradition has been heavily influenced by Maurice Blondel, who, at the beginning of the twentieth century, rejected the prevailing view of tradition as the transmission, principally by word of mouth, of information and doctrines that happen not to have been written down. If this were the correct view, Blondel protested, tradition would gradually become superfluous as more and more recollections were consigned to writing. Furthermore, tradition would progressively lose credibility with the increasing time-gap between the revelation given in the biblical period and the present. Blondel rightly questioned the presupposition of this unacceptable theory of tradition, namely, that it "only reports things explicitly said," prescribed, or done, and that "it furnishes nothing which cannot or could not be translated into written language."¹

As a preferable alternative, Blondel proposed a dynamic notion of tradition, in which believers are drawn into the tradition through prayer, worship, and Christian conduct. Tradition, he said, "is the guardian of the initial gift in so far as this has not been entirely formulated nor even expressly understood, although it is always fully possessed and employed."² More recently Michael Polanyi has emphasized the necessity of tradition as a means of handing on tacit or unspecifiable knowledge. "A society which wants to preserve a fund of personal knowledge," he writes, "must submit to tradition."³

According to a rather common Catholic view, which is by no means restricted to Roman Catholics, the Christian faith is never fully specifiable. The divine mystery manifested in Jesus Christ can never be exhaustively formulated in propositional statements. The Christian symbols point beyond themselves to an encompassing reality that is

known in a way that defies full articulation. Tradition is the ongoing corporate life of the Christian community insofar as this life serves to transmit aspects of the gospel known in a tacit or unexplicit way.

Tradition is not known by looking at it as an object but rather, as Polanyi insists, by dwelling in and relying on it. In this respect it is more like a bodily skill—such as the ability to swim or type—than it is like factual information. Those who, through adherence to tradition, worship and behave as Christians do, within the context of the Christian community, gain an instinctive sense of the faith, thanks to which they can recognize certain attitudes and statements as either consonant with, or repugnant to, the authentic heritage.

The concept of tradition I have here outlined seems to me to have

Avery Dulles is Professor of Theology at the Catholic University of America.

been in substance endorsed by Vatican Council II (1962–65). In the second chapter of its Constitution on Divine Revelation, the council spoke of apostolic tradition as the manner in which the apostles, by their preaching, example, and precepts, “handed down what they had received from the lips of Christ, from living with him, and from what he did, or what they had learned through the prompting of the Holy Spirit.”⁴ In the following section the Constitution goes on to speak of the task of the Church to perpetuate this apostolic heritage. Tradition is here described as “everything which contributes to the holiness of life, and the increase of faith, of the People of God,” and as the process whereby the Church “in her teaching, life, and worship, perpetuates and hands down to all generations all that she herself is and all that she believes.” This is a wider concept of tradition than Pinnock’s “distillation of the church’s reflections” on Scripture. The transmission of the Scripture is itself a matter of tradition.

Pinnock raises very acutely for Catholics the question of the relationship between Scripture and tradition. Do we Catholics understand the two as parallel sources? Are they equal or unequal in authority? Are there any revealed truths not attested by the Scriptures? As Pinnock is no doubt aware, there is no agreed Catholic position on these points.

To preserve its authenticity, tradition must continually align itself with Scripture.

Prior to Vatican Council II, the majority of Catholics looked on tradition as a “second source,” having an authority independent of and equal to that of the Bible. Yves Congar regards Scripture and tradition as a single composite source, in which the two elements are inseparable. Karl Rahner, while holding that all revelation is contained in the Bible, considers that tradition is necessary for the correct interpretation of the biblical texts. Hans Kung gives preeminent authority to the Scripture, and looks on tradition as derivative and subordinate.

Of these positions, that of Congar seems most in accord with Vatican II, perhaps because he was a major influence in the composition of the chapter on tradition in the council’s Constitution on Revelation. Tradition and Scripture are here described as inseparably connected, so that together they constitute a single divine wellspring.⁵ The word of God, consigned to writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is authoritatively handed on, with the help of the Spirit of Truth, by tradition. “Therefore both sacred tradition and sacred Scripture are to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of devotion and reverence.”⁶

Much as I respect Rahner and the other Catholic theologians who say that the whole of divine revelation is contained in the Bible alone, I do not personally find this expression helpful. I have some difficulty in perceiving what it means for revelation to be fully contained in a book. A book by itself consists of ink marks on paper and, strictly speaking, contains no ideas at all. Revelation is contained in the Scriptures only in the sense that there are living minds capable of finding it there; and they have this capacity only because they are enlightened by the grace of God and directed by the tradition of the Church. The meaning of the book is relational; it exists only in human minds that make proper use of the book. The proper use of Scripture, as a source of faith for the Church, is its use within the Spirit-governed Church. The revelatory meaning of Scripture, therefore, cannot be found without tradition; but, in the light of tradition, the whole content of revelation can, I suspect, be found in the Bible.

Unlike Kung and the majority of Protestants, therefore, I would not speak of tradition as *norma normata* (the rule that is ruled). Since Scripture, apart from tradition, would lack divine authority, I cannot see how it can be the judge of tradition. On the other hand, Scripture cannot be unilaterally subordinated to tradition, as though the latter were *norma normans* (the rule that rules). Tradition itself lives off Scripture, and constantly returns to it for revitalization and direction. The Scriptures, as privileged sedimentations of the faith—traditions of ancient Israel and of the apostolic Church, are a divinely given touchstone of sound tradition. To preserve its authenticity, tradition must continually align itself with Scripture.

It would be misleading, in my opinion, to depict the Bible as being, in the first instance, propositional teaching. The Bible undoubtedly contains propositions, but God’s word in the Bible is far richer and

more comprehensive than what the biblical propositions signify to the exegete in quest of the “literal meaning.” In revelation God discloses himself as inexhaustible mystery. This revelation can give rise to a vast multitude of true propositions, but it cannot be reduced to any particular collection of propositions, or to what can be logically deduced from these propositions. The biblical stories, events, and symbols, contemplated in the light of Christian experience, can give rise to unpredictable new insights as they are contemplated in new contexts, yielding hitherto unrecognized aspects of God’s word.

With this statement I have raised the question of the development of doctrine. Catholics are often asked how they can find any biblical or apostolic foundation for a doctrine such as the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin, defined by Pope Pius XII in 1950. According to Pinnock, this doctrine is not required by Scripture and thus cannot be binding upon Christians. This particular dogma, it must be admitted, is problematic for some Catholics, not because they deny it but rather because they are not quite sure what the definition requires them to believe. If it means that the Mother of Jesus was at her death taken up into the fullness of heavenly glory, which is what I understand to be the heart of the doctrine, Catholics would say that it follows from a right

understanding of the efficacious love of Jesus for his mother, which is implied in a number of biblical passages which speak of Mary as singularly blessed (e.g., Lk. 1:28, 42, 45). The doctrine is not directly deduced from any one biblical passage, but it fits into the total fabric of Christian belief once one sees that Mary’s special gifts and graces were the results of God’s redemptive love toward her in Christ. The Catholic Church, as a community that lets its beliefs be shaped, in part, by its worship and prayer—that is to say, by the *lex orandi*—has come to look upon Mary as the prototype of redeemed humanity. In Mary the Church finds its own destiny prefigured in an eminent way.

As Pinnock acknowledges, certain beliefs of Baptists cannot easily be defended on the basis of the Bible alone. In order to have the Bible teach the “right things,” he notes, Baptists have with great regularity drawn up confessional statements and furnished their Bibles with footnotes (as do Catholics). As an outsider to the Baptist tradition, I would have questions about how Baptists find compelling biblical evidence for many of their cherished beliefs, such as the sufficiency of Scripture, the separation of Church and State, and the autonomy of the local church. Even a doctrine such as the limitation of baptism to those who are already believers is not unequivocally taught by the New Testament. In fact, a number of distinguished exegetes, such as Joachim Jeremias and Oscar Cullmann, have claimed that the New Testament favors the practice of infant baptism.

The existence of conflicting doctrines in different Christian communions, based on their traditional reading of the Bible, makes it clear that, as Pinnock states, tradition can be a distorting factor. On the grounds that Jesus rejected certain “traditions of the elders” (cf. Mt. 15:

With so many common concerns, evangelicals and Roman Catholics cannot afford to ignore each other.

2, etc.) and that Paul warned against “human traditions” (Col. 2:8), many have urged, as does Pinnock, that the churches today should be alert to detect deviations in their respective traditions. The Faith and Order Conference at Montreal in 1963 made a celebrated distinction between Tradition (with a capital T) and traditions. In like manner, Catholics have commonly distinguished between divine or apostolic tradition, as fully authoritative, and merely human traditions, which are not. The second chapter of Vatican II’s Constitution on Revelation deals with tradition in the singular, and frequently qualifies this as “sacred.”

To distinguish this divinely authoritative tradition from nonauthoritative human traditions is sometimes very difficult. One must often

make use of multiple criteria, including the witness of Scripture, the teaching of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, the judgment of theologians, the common preaching and teaching of the pastors of the Church (notably popes and bishops), the official teaching of creeds and magisterial documents, the general sense of the faithful, the arguments offered, and the anticipated practical effects of embracing or rejecting the doctrine in question. Only rarely will any one of these criteria be so clear and decisive that consultation of the others becomes superfluous. Normally truth is reached through a kind of logic of convergence.

As compared with Protestants, Roman Catholics, as Pinnock notes, tend to place greater weight on the teaching office of the Church. In his presentation of the Catholic position Pinnock can perhaps be criticized for identifying tradition too closely with the magisterium, though some Catholics, it must be admitted, have done likewise, especially in the early part of the twentieth century. Vatican II, like other councils, clearly distinguished the two. It taught that "the teaching office is not above the word of God, but serves it, teaching only what has been handed on."⁷ The magisterium, therefore, is subordinate to both Scripture and tradition. Although it can interpret the word of God with authority, it is not free to depart from the word of God.

Pinnock notes with apparent approval that some evangelicals are "urging us to grasp the threefold cord of Scripture, rule of faith, and church authority." Catholic readers will applaud this suggestion and will be pleased by Pinnock's emphasis on "the usefulness of a teaching

office." He clearly recognizes the value of the magisterium for clarifying the meaning of the Bible and for preserving the Church from strange teachings. He even notes the desirability of a universal magisterium. In his own words, "What is needed is a voice which can gather together the insights of the fully ecumenical experience of the people of God and exercise an office clearly subservient to the Scriptures, relying upon a teaching charism in the churches which listens to the text in a responsible way." This sentence comes close to describing what Lutherans and Catholics, in their American dialogue, agreed upon as the desiderata for the "Petrine office."

In bringing this brief response to a conclusion, I am gratified by the extent to which I find myself in agreement. Professor Pinnock's article encourages me to believe that conservative evangelicals and Roman Catholics are at length becoming engaged in a fruitful dialogue. With so many common concerns, the two groups cannot afford to ignore each other.

FOOTNOTES

1. M. Blondel, *History and Dogma* (Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1964), p. 266.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 268.
3. M. Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge* (Harper Torchbooks, 1964), p. 53.
4. Vatican II, *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (Dei Verbum)*, no. 8.
5. *Ibid.*, no. 9.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*, no. 10.

MINISTRY

(The application of theology, ethics, and prayer to the life of the church)

Toward a Social Evangelism

Part I

by David Lowes Watson

The Christian faith is first and foremost a message for the world, and evangelism as the communication of that message is rightly perceived by the church as a priority. This does not, however, make evangelism a singular activity. The ministry of the church has many forms of outreach, and the focus of evangelism on the essentials of the gospel renders it no less accountable to other disciplines of the church than it in turn is the measure of their accountability to the Christian witness. Mutual accountability, of course, is much more than the exchange of inter-disciplinary formalities. It is nothing less than genuine dialogue, undertaken openly and at risk. What follows in this paper, therefore, is an attempt to expose evangelism not only to the relevance, but to the impact of social ethics.

Defining Evangelism

It is important at the outset to establish a working definition of evangelism, and to attempt this in the North American context is at once to be aware of the need for a clear phenomenology. This is the premise of the forceful and well-documented monograph by Mortimer Arias, "In Search of a New Evangelism," in which some prevailing stereotypes are exposed and rightly censured; that of psychological salvation, for example, as little more than an inner transaction to achieve peace of mind; that of the "churchification" of

the world as "at least disputable from a biblical point of view"; or that of radical social change as the mere baptism of revolution with the Christian cause. These and other alternatives, suggests Arias, pose a false dilemma between the "saving of souls" and the "Christianizing of the social order," whereas true evangelism must address people in the totality of their being: individual and social, physical and spiritual, historical and eternal.¹

A helpful contribution has been made recently by David Bosch in discussing the relationship between evangelism and mission.² He takes issue with John R. W. Stott, who has argued that mission is the comprehensive work of the church, including evangelism and social responsibility.³ As part of the church's mission, according to Stott, evangelism is the announcement of the gospel, regardless of the results, and Bosch agrees to the extent that evangelism must be defined in terms of its content rather than its objects. He disagrees, however, in that he regards the church's credibility as also of the utmost importance.⁴ Verbal proclamation cannot be all there is to evangelism, and to distinguish it from social action is potentially restrictive, since evangelism and mission are the frontier of the church's presence in the world. Mission is "the task of the Church in movement, the Church that lives for others," and evangelism is its fundamental dimension.⁵

Phenomenologically, however, this is less than clear for the purposes of evangelism in the North American context. To regard it as a dimension, albeit the fundamental dimension, of the frontier of the church's presence in the world is to imply that there are other dimensions of ministry which are in some way the hinterland, and this is not consistent with the corporal nature of the church. Proclamation (*kerygma*) and witness (*marturia*) are neither more nor less significant

David Lowes Watson is Assistant Professor of Evangelism at Perkins School of Theology. This article was originally presented as a paper at the Conference on Evangelism and Social Ethics held at Perkins in April, 1981. It is reprinted from the Perkins Journal by permission.