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SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION AT THE COUNCIL OF TRENT:

MARTIN CHEMNITZ AGAINST THE ROMANISTS

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Systematic Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Sacred Theology

by

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CHEMNITZ--ON SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION; Balzer; S.T.M., 1978

TABLE OF CONTENTS

GENERAL INTRODUCTION	1
PART I. THE TRIDENTINE FORMULATIONS	
Chapter	
I. INTRODUCTION	7
II. SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION	9
III. THE CANON	21
IV. ABUSES IN CONNECTION WITH SCRIPTURE	24
V. CONCLUSION	33
PART II. CHEMNITZ' RESPONSE TO TRENT--THE <u>EXAMEN</u>	
I. A SHORT LIFE OF CHEMNITZ	36
II. INTRODUCTION TO THE <u>EXAMEN</u>	43
III. SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION	45
IV. THE CANON	66
V. THE VULGATE	74
VI. THE INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE	77
VII. CONCLUSION	81
PART III. BELLARMINI'S RESPONSE TO CHEMNITZ--THE <u>CONTROVERSIES</u> --AND CHEMNITZ' DEFENSE OF HIMSELF	
I. A SHORT LIFE OF BELLARMINI	84
II. INTRODUCTION TO THE <u>CONTROVERSIES</u>	89
III. SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION	91
IV. THE CANON	107
V. THE VULGATE	109

VI. THE INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE	115
VII. CONCLUSION	123
GENERAL CONCLUSION	125
.	
BIBLIOGRAPHY	126

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Martin Chemnitz, referring to Martin Luther, wrote in his Loci Theologici: "Our Lord, being merciful to His church, sent Dr. Martin Luther, who started to purify the doctrine of the church. He directed her path to the living source of Scripture and to the rule of the prophetic and apostolic faith."¹ The reverence this quotation demonstrates for Luther was carried over in a practical way in all of Chemnitz' theological writings. This is especially true with regard to his role as the defender of Luther's theological teachings in relation to the Council of Trent (1545-63), teachings that Luther himself was unable to defend, due to his death in 1545. The Council of Trent was said by the Roman Church to have been convened in order to correct the widespread abuses of both doctrine and practice in the Church. And, indeed, the first session opened with the Papal decree that the purpose of the Council was to "suppress all errors and to preserve the true purity of the Gospel."² In this there was agreement with the ancient councils, at least on the surface. In truth, however, the Pope ordered Trent convened primarily to provide an answer to the challenge hurled at the Roman Church by Luther at Worms, where he boldly cried out that "his conscience and

¹Herman A. Preus and Edmund Smits, eds. The Doctrine of Man in Classical Lutheran Theology (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1962), p. x.

²Arthur B. Lossner, "Martin Chemnitz and His Locus De Sacra Scriptura, Against Roman Errors" (B.D. thesis, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1947), p. 30.

reason were captive to the Word of God; he could not and would not accept as articles of faith anything which lacked proof and foundation in Holy Writ or which militated against the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins in Christ."³

Thus, what was finally upheld at Trent was, in actuality, what Martin Chemnitz called the "papalist tyranny" by which "the canonical Scripture is thrust from its place, usurping its divine right as sole rule and norm of judgment."⁴ This represented a firm rejection of Luther's principle of sola scriptura as well as a drastic change from the ancient councils, where it had been the custom to place the Sacred Gospel in the midst of the assembly to signify the means whereby errors should be corrected. And in fact, when, for example, Constantine the Great opened the Synod of Nicea, he declared: "The evangelical books are both those of the Apostles and of the ancient Prophets; these clearly instruct us what to do about divine things. Let us, therefore, accept the solutions of the problems on the basis of the divinely-inspired writings."⁵ The Council at Trent had no intention of following the ancient councils in this matter. Their judgments, in Chemnitz' view, were in fact: (1) "By no means . . . shall the Scripture be the sole rule and norm of our judgment; but first of all they decree that the unwritten traditions . . . shall be accepted and venerated with the same pious affection and reverence as the Scripture itself"; (2) "They

³E. F. Klug, From Luther to Chemnitz (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1971), p. 115.

⁴Ibid., p. 150.

⁵Lossner.

destroy, abrogate, and set aside the difference between the canonical books of the Scripture and the Apocrypha"; (3) "They decree that the Vulgate version must be considered authentic" even though "the true sense of the Scripture is often not sufficiently expressed" in it but often "corrupted"; (4) "Their strongest demand" is "that they alone have the right and authority authentically to interpret the Scriptures."⁶

What in essence the Romanists were doing was not only to put Tradition alongside Scripture as a norm for dogma, but to actually put Scripture in an inferior position, as is shown by this remark from Andrada, the chief spokesman of the Roman Church: "Tradition is clearer, more open, and not so flexible, while the Scriptures are frequently very obscure," and "therefore it follows that the inflexible measuring instrument by which the Scripture is measured is the consensus of ecclesiastical tradition."⁷

Albert Pighius, one of the Papacy's staunchest defenders, and one who took part in the Diets of Worms and Regensburg, was the first to argue from Tradition in an effort to refute the objections of the Protestants in advance.⁸ Pighius anticipated Andrada in advising that Traditions should be used in controversial matters rather than the Scriptures, since the former are clear and inflexible, while the Scriptures "are as pliable as a waxen nose or a lead ruler, so it can be twisted and turned to fit any preconceived notion."⁹ And he concluded

⁶Klug, p. 151.

⁷Ibid., p. 152.

⁸Lossner, p. 36.

⁹Ibid.

that had this practice been used against Luther, "this terrible conflagration would never have arisen."¹⁰ Chemnitz points out in the Examen that Pighius realized if he was to argue from Scripture alone, as was done against Luther, it would prove too detrimental to the Papal position; therefore, his methodology was to "orate with every carefully-chosen rhetorical device about the limitations, imperfection, insufficiency, ambiguity, and obscurity of Scriptures and defend the necessity, authority, perfection, certainty, and clarity of unwritten traditions."¹¹

It was Martin Chemnitz' task, in defense of Luther's principle of sola scriptura and in refutation of the decrees of the Council of Trent, to do the opposite, to affirm and prove, using sacred Scripture itself and the testimony of church fathers, that

. . . the sacred Scripture is the canon, norm, rule, foundation, and pillar of our whole faith, so that whatever is to be accepted under this title and name that it is the doctrine of Christ and of the apostles, must be proved and confirmed from the Scripture.¹²

He accomplished this task in his Locus De Sacra Scriptura, and in his Locus De Traditionibus, from his Examen Concilii Tridentini. He accomplished it so well that to this day his argumentation has not been successfully refuted on the basis of either Scripture or the witness of the ancient church fathers. De Sacra Scriptura in particular represents a defense of the great Reformation principle sola scriptura, a principle of faith and life whose importance, then as now cannot be overestimated, as

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 37.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Examen, Locus I, Sec. IV, p. 101.

both Luther and Chemnitz were committed to the truth of the expression: "If sola scriptura falls, then do also sola gratia and sola fide."¹³

The present paper is both an exposition of Chemnitz' teaching concerning Scripture and Tradition and an appreciation of a great man of God, who so loved and served his Lord and Savior by heeding His voice in Scripture. But it is also an exposition of Chemnitz' teaching concerning Scripture and Tradition within a particular historical setting, specifically the occasion of the Council of Trent, against whose canons and decrees Chemnitz sets forth the clear teachings of Scripture. It is within this context especially that this paper deals.

Thus Parts I and II treat respectively the formulation of the Tridentine decrees and the response of Chemnitz in the Examen. In addition, in Part III, the counter-attack of Trent's most formidable polemicist, the Jesuit theologian Robert Bellarmine, is presented in order to provide an evaluation of the Roman response to the Examen. This is done through an examination of the arguments contained within Bellarmine's Disputationes de controversiis christianae fidei, in which he attempts to discredit Chemnitz' (and other Reformers as well) attack on the Tridentine formulations. A final response by Chemnitz is likewise provided, again, based on the Examen. It is also hoped that in setting forth Chemnitz' teachings with regard to Scripture in relation to the decrees of Trent, a greater appreciation for the continuity of our own doctrine, from apostolic times to the present day, may be realized.

¹³Klug, p. 145.

PART I

THE TRIDENTINE FORMULATIONS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"In the sixteenth century it was the concern of Catholics confronted by the Reformation to justify the value of certain practices and assertions which could not be directly supported by explicit texts in the canon of Scripture."¹ This was likewise the preoccupation before the minds of the Catholic fathers at the Council of Trent, who had been presented with the following four doctrinal propositions of the Lutherans, which the Council was asked to anathematize:

- 1) That Holy Scriptures contained all things necessary for salvation, and that it was impious to place apostolic tradition on a level with Scripture
- 2) That certain books accepted as canonical in the Vulgate were apocryphal and not canonical
- 3) That the Scriptures must be studied in the original languages, and that there were errors in the Vulgate
- 4) That the meaning of Scripture is plain, and that it can be understood without commentary with the help of Christ's Spirit.²

At stake were the normative factors in the Catholic Church's life that had generally been divided by the theologians of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries into three basic categories: sacred Scripture (and

¹Yves Congar, Tradition and Traditions (New York: Macmillan Company, 1967), p. 376.

²Carl Otto Beiderweiden, "The Council of Trent as a Landmark in the History of Roman Catholicism" (B.D. thesis, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1943), pp. 53-54.

what could be directly derived from it), apostolic Traditions not written down in Scripture, and ecclesiastical Traditions or Traditions of the Church.³ Many included them in scriptura, although not in scriptura canonica.

The Reformers, of course, subordinated all writings and pronouncements in matters of faith and life to the sole norm of God's Word, thus wounding the Catholic Church's consciousness of the fact that its life and guide were the Holy Spirit. Thus the Catholic fathers at Trent were anxious to define and affirm the principles which they felt had always governed the life of the Church and to eliminate the abuses which they themselves recognized. The decrees representing their efforts in this regard, the Decree Concerning the Canonical Scriptures and the Decree Concerning the Edition and Use of the Sacred Books, were promulgated in the Fourth Session, on 8 April 1546. They are properly divided topically into three parts: (1) Scripture and Tradition; (2) The Canon; (3) Abuses in Connection with Holy Scripture.

³Congar, p. 157.

CHAPTER II

SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION

In February of 1546 the Council met to discuss the relationship between Scripture and Tradition. Debates were carried on principally at the meetings of the three classes, each one presided over by one of the three Cardinal Legates (Giovanni Maria del Monte, Marcello Cervini, and Reginald Pole). In this way the larger meetings of the general congregations could be freed to take care of the most important matters and the taking of votes.

On 11 February the bishops of the various classes were given statements informing them that the decree on the books of Sacred Scripture should also mention the fact that "besides the scriptures of the New Testament, we have the traditions of the apostles" ⁴ The apostolic Traditions were considered to pertain to divine revelation no less than the matters expressly given in Scripture. The purpose of this contention was to stifle the criticisms of those who held that if "such a thing is not found in Scripture, therefore it is not true." ⁵

On the following day, at the general congregation, Cardinal del Monte told the group that divine revelation had been handed down to them

⁴John L. Murphy, "Unwritten Traditions at Trent," American Ecclesiastical Review 146 (April 1962):235.

⁵Ibid., p. 236.

by the Church "partly from the scriptures which are in the Old and the New Testament, partly also from a simple handing-down by hand."⁶ The partim-partim phrase he used eventually found its way into the first version proposed for the decree, which phrase indicated yet again the Council's desire to oppose the Reformer's constant appeal to the principle of sola scriptura.⁷

This same idea was repeated again during the meetings of the classes on 18 February, as is indicated by a statement by Pietro Bertano, Bishop of Fano, who pointed out that the apostolic Traditions "were dictated by the same Holy Spirit as were the Scriptures."⁸ And Cardinal Cervini added that the only difference between these Traditions and Sacred Scripture is that Scripture is written and Traditions are not, but they both come from the same Spirit. In this regard Cervini also singled out the three foundations of the Catholic faith that became the common position of the sixteenth-century Catholic apologetes: (1) The revelation itself (both in the Old and New Testaments), which was perfected by Christ "who planted His gospel not in writing, but orally; not on paper, but in the heart";⁹ (2) The twofold principle of Scripture and Tradition, referring to "the gospel which Christ did not write but which He taught verbally and which He implanted in the hearts (of His followers); later the evangelists committed some of this gospel to writing, but many things

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid., p. 237.

were also left in the hearts of men";¹⁰ (3) Since the Son of God was not to remain with us bodily forever, He sent the Holy Spirit who "would reveal the secrets of God in the hearts of men and daily until the end of the world would teach the Church all truth, and who would clarify matters if something doubtful should occur to the minds of men."¹¹ It was these foundations the Reformers attacked by means of their principle of sola scriptura; it was these foundations the Catholic fathers at Trent had at all costs to maintain and strengthen.

On 23 February the three classes met again under the three Cardinal Legates. A list of testimonies both from Scripture and the early fathers of the Church was read in order to produce evidence that apostolic Traditions should be accepted together with the canonical books of Scripture in the forthcoming decree. Naturally enough the Scriptural texts were carefully selective, indicating either that there were other things the apostles had taught apart from their writings, or that they promised to teach on a later visit, or those that stress that the truth of God is written primarily on the hearts of men rather than on parchment. The emphasis was on the need of something beyond and outside of Scripture in order to know the fullness of God's revelation. In addition to Scriptural testimonies, they added brief quotations from Pseudo-Dionysius, Irenaeus, Serapion of Antioch, Origen, Epiphanius, Tertullian, Cyprian, Basil, Jerome and Augustine, as well as two sections of the Decree of Gratian and the decree, Cum Marthae, of Pope Innocent III.¹² And again

¹⁰Ibid., p. 238.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid., p. 240.

the same theme repeats itself; sola scriptura is not enough. The unwritten element of Christian revelation must also be consulted.

In summing up the conclusions arrived at in his class, which discussed the question of whether or not specific Traditions should be enumerated and classified, Cardinal Cervini, while again stressing the necessity of the Traditions, ruled out any attempt at enumerating them or defining them to any detailed degree, on the grounds that there "are many things both in regard to the essentials of faith and in regard to ceremonial matters, which are not written down but which are only handed down to us, as in the ceremonies of Lent, which can scarcely be proven from Scripture."¹³ This was a problem throughout the Sessions. The word Tradition itself was never carefully defined. In the first reports on Tradition, the phrases "traditions of the Apostles" and "traditions of the Church" were used, but without any precise definitions.¹⁴ And the Jesuit Claude Lejay clarified the discussion by distinguishing between Traditions that pertain to faith and all other Traditions. Yet both disciplinary and liturgical Traditions continued to be mixed into the discussions on dogmatic Traditions.¹⁵

On 26 February the Archbishop of Sassari insisted on ecclesiastical Traditions being reckoned with apostolic ones, lest the impression be given they were being rejected, while the Bishop of Sinigaglia (for the

¹³Ibid., p. 242.

¹⁴Gabriel Moran, Scripture and Tradition (New York: Herder and Herder, 1963), p. 34.

¹⁵Ibid.

second time) demanded a listing of individual Traditions. Neither suggestion was adopted, however.

An interesting sidelight to the discussions of the twenty-sixth was the protestation of G. Nacchianti, Bishop of Chioggia, who objected to the partim-partim formula of the proposed decree, declaring that all truths necessary to salvation are to be found in Scripture. Needless to say, Nacchianti's protestation was rejected.

Despite these various disagreements, by the end of the day agreement had been reached on three points: there are apostolic Traditions which are truly doctrinal; Tradition refers to the oral transmission of the teaching of Christ; and the Council refused to enumerate such Traditions.¹⁶ The drafting of the decree was then begun, and it was completed by 22 March as follows:

The holy, ecumenical and general council of Trent, lawfully assembled in the Holy Ghost, the same three legates of the Apostolic See presiding, keeps this constantly in view, namely, that the purity of the Gospel of God may be preserved after the errors have been removed. This (Gospel) of old proclaimed through the Prophets in the Holy Scriptures, our Lord Jesus Christ, His Son, promulgated first with His own mouth, and then commanded it to be preached by His Apostles to every creature as the rule at once of all saving truth and norms of conduct. It also clearly perceives that this truth is contained partly in the written books and partly in the unwritten traditions, which, received either by the Apostles from the mouth of Christ Himself, or from the Apostles themselves, the Holy Ghost dictating, have come down to us, transmitted as it were from hand to hand. Following, then, the examples of the orthodox fathers, it receives and venerates with the highest reverence as sacred and canonical all the books both of the Old and New Testaments, since one God is the Author of both; also the traditions, to which is due an equal feeling of piety as having been dictated either orally by Christ or by the Holy Ghost and preserved in the Catholic Church in unbroken

¹⁶Ibid., p. 35.

succession; and orders and decrees that these be received by all the faithful of Christ. (The remainder of the decree refers to the canon.)¹⁷

On 23 March the Council proceeded to debate the decree's adequacy. Criticism began with the passages which had already been subjects of controversy in the previous debate. Once again the question arose whether it would be possible to omit all mention of ecclesiastical Traditions in addition to the apostolic ones, without risking the depreciation of the former. To these it was replied that in accepting apostolic Tradition, the Council did not reject other Traditions which might be considered in their proper place.

The Bishop of Sinigaglia thought that the description of "Tradition" was too general, in that it would include Traditions which were no longer in use or which had been rejected, such as the prohibition against strangled meat; but the Bishop of Feltrensis pointed out that the decree limited the Traditions to those which were still present in the Church. The Bishop of Bellicastrensis replied in the same sense, adding that we do not receive even all the Traditions which the Holy Spirit may at one time have given to the Church, but only those which have come down to us, though all come from the Holy Spirit, yet not all have been given to be permanent. When the Bishop of Fano appealed to the changing of Tradition as a reason for not accepting it with "an equal feeling of piety" (pari pietatis affectu) as the sacred books, the Bishop of Bellicastrensis answered by pointing out that the change itself must be ascribed to the Holy Spirit, from whom all Tradition originally came.

¹⁷Richard Baepler, "Scripture and Tradition in the Council of Trent," Concordia Theological Monthly 31 (June 1960):361.

Bonuccio, general of the Servites, objected to the partim-partim formula in much the same way as Nacchianti had on 26 February stating, "It is my judgment that all evangelical truth is written, hence not part of it."¹⁸ In Bonuccio's opinion, the content of New Testament revelation does not divide into Scripture and Tradition, as had been taken for granted by every speaker in the previous debate (with the exception of Nacchianti), but Scripture is complete as to its content and contains all truths necessary for salvation. For him Tradition is essentially an authoritative interpretation of Scripture, not its complement.¹⁹ This position, however, was very much in the minority, and Bonuccio's objection, like Nacchianti's before him, was rejected.

On 27 March another general congregation was held. The anathema on those guilty of transgressing the Traditions was criticized by the Bishop of Senogalliensis, who wished to have it removed altogether, and by the Bishop of Fano, who thought it was too severe. The Bishop of Bituntinus replied that it would be incurred not by mere transgression but only by open contempt of Tradition.

The contents of the decree were also severely criticized, again, as on the twenty-third, by the Bishop of Fano, who maintained that it was monstrous to say that the sacred books and Tradition should be received pari pietatis affectu, in that there were such fundamental differences between them. Scripture is unchangeable, while Tradition is not and, in fact, has been changed by the Church many times. The fact that both

¹⁸Moran, p. 36.

¹⁹Hubert Jedin, A History of the Council of Trent, vol. 2: The First Sessions at Trent (1545-1547), trans. E. Graf (New York: Nelson, 1961), p. 75.

proceeded from the same Holy Spirit was no valid reason for accepting them with the same reverence, since all truth came from the Holy Spirit, and yet not every writing containing truth was to be received as of the same authority. Again, he argued that if Tradition is accepted by the Council in the manner suggested in the decree, the heretics would be able to say that we accept just those that we like, and reject the rest; and he cited examples of Traditions originating with the apostles, which the Church had either rejected or allowed to fall into disuse. He continued by arguing that if it be said that the decree accepts only those Traditions that have come down to us (the reasoning of Cardinal Cervini and the Bishops of Sinigaglia and Bellicastrensis), and not all apostolic Tradition, the heretics would answer that it is through our fault that certain Traditions have disappeared, and therefore it is true to say that we accept only those that we choose to accept.

In defense of the decree, Bituntinus, one of the deputies, supported the phrase pari pietatis affectu on the ground that Scripture and Tradition have similar origins and that even if all truth did come from the same source, it did not come in the same way. As for the fact that certain of the Traditions had been changed, he reasoned that not everything which the apostles had said, and handed down, was so handed down as to be perpetually recognized in the Church--some Traditions were permanent, such as those that pertained to faith, some were only intended to be temporary, others were matters of counsel; it all depended on what kind of Traditions were being talked about; therefore there was no real reason to be surprised if some Traditions had been changed. And as for the posited accusations of the heretics, that we accept Traditions as binding now, which we may later change or even drop altogether, he replied

that all future changes would be in accordance with the will of the Holy Ghost, who did not intend that all the apostles handed down should be permanent in the Church. The arguments of Bituntinus, which reflected the majority sentiments of the Council fathers, made it impossible for the Council to continue to maintain that the decree on Scripture and Tradition dealt only with matters that pertained to faith; its scope had been broadened considerably.²⁰

Due to the late hour, and as no decision had been reached, the congregation was brought to a close by Cardinal Cervini, suggesting that the various points the fathers had touched upon should be noted down, so that they might later have the opportunity to vote on them according to the will of the majority. This proposal was accepted and, accordingly, a list of fourteen questions was placed before the Council on the twenty-ninth. The most important of these are as follows:

Question 6: Should the decree confine itself to acknowledging the existence of Tradition, or should it also impose their acceptance?

Question 7: Should the words "to which is due an equal feeling of piety" (quibus par debetur pietatis affectus) be deleted, and others substituted "which ought both to be held to and expressed with reverence" (quae debitam utrisque reverentiam adhibendam expriment)?

Question 8: Should these words be retained, and others added to explain that pari pietatis affectu is due to those Traditions which pertain to dogma, as to those dogmas which are contained in the Sacred Scripture, and similarly with regard to "morals" (mores)?

Question 9: Is the anathema to be retained in the case of both books and Tradition?²¹

²⁰R. Hull, "The Council of Trent and Tradition," American Ecclesiastical Review 81 (1929):609-10.

²¹Ibid., p. 610.

The vote on the questions was taken at a general congregation held on 1 April. In answer to Question 6, the Council was nearly unanimous in deciding that the decree should not confine itself to the statement that there are Traditions in the Church, but should also explicitly say that they are to be received. With regard to Question 7, the Council voted nearly three to one in favor of retaining the words pari pietatis affectu, thus indicating their desire to maintain the unqualified parity of Scripture and Tradition; those who rejected the words favored in their place the words "similar feeling" (simili affectu); a few wanted to leave the matter even more vague, substituting the above mentioned phrase quae debitam utrisque reverentiam adhibendam exprimant or the equivalent-- words that left untouched the question as to the relative authority and claim to respect of Scripture and Tradition. In addition to retaining the words pari pietatis affectu, it was voted in response to Question 8 to admit the insertion of some words to make clear the sense in which they were to be accepted. And in answer to Question 9, it was voted to retain the anathema in the case of both Scripture and Tradition.

Before the general congregation on 5 April, the decree was remodeled in accordance with the views of the majority expressed in the congregation of 1 April. On 5 April the modified form of the decree was again presented. The main change was the insertion of the phrase "whether they (the Traditions) relate to faith or morals" (tum ad fidem, tum ad mores pertinentes), to exclude ecclesiastical Traditions and to establish an internal criterion for apostolic ones.²² Surprisingly, the question concerning the parity of Scripture, already voted on at the

²²Baepler, pp. 352-53.

1 April general congregation, again became an issue. The Bishops of Castellamare, Fano, Bergamo, and Chioggia advocated once again the substitution of "similar" (simili) for "equal" (pari). Added to this show of obstinance, the Bishop of Chioggia, Nacchianti, said: "To put Scripture and Tradition on the same level is ungodly."²³ In order to put an end to the ensuing uproar, Nacchianti was forced to apologize, which he did, but he also added: "I cannot change my opinion unless convincing arguments to the contrary are brought forward; this is my right as long as the decree has not been published in the Sessions and given force of law. If this is done I shall submit."²⁴ That same afternoon, in order to placate the outspoken and persistent minority opinion in this matter, the committee decided to replace the "equally" of the decree with "similarly," explaining that it was not really an essential change, but they hoped it would be viewed as an effective compromise solution to the dispute. This was done even though they were aware of the fact that the 1 April vote had officially settled the question. On the next day, in the particular classes which were convened, the whole subject was examined once more, with the result that the alteration had to be changed back again. Only in the general congregation of 7 April was the decree finally approved, and then not until et had been mysteriously substituted for the partim-partim formula at the very last moment, to alter that particular section of the decree to: revelation is contained in written books and unwritten Traditions. To this day this last minute change of a much-debated wording remains a mystery. It has been the subject of

²³Jedin, p. 86.

²⁴Ibid., p. 87.

much present day speculation, investigation, and reinterpretation, particularly by such modern Catholic theologians as Geiselman and Tavard. Yet the records of the Council itself give absolutely no indication why the change was made or how it is to be interpreted.²⁵

On 8 April the decree was read. It appears below in its final form. The underlined words in both the first draft, completed on 22 March, and in the final decree, represent alterations that were made in the process of fixing the final decree.

Decree Concerning the Canonical Scriptures (First Part)

The holy, ecumenical and general council of Trent, lawfully assembled in the Holy Ghost, the same three legates of the Apostolic See presiding, keeps this constantly in view, namely, that the purity of the Gospel may be preserved in the Church after the errors have been removed. This (Gospel) of old promised through the Prophets in the Holy Scriptures, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, promulgated first with His own mouth, and then commanded it to be preached by His Apostles to every creature as the source at once of all saving truth and norms of conduct. It also clearly perceives that this truth and rule are contained in the written books and in the unwritten traditions, which, received by the Apostles from the mouth of Christ Himself, or from the Apostles themselves, the Holy Ghost dictating, have come down to us, transmitted as it were from hand to hand. Following, then, the examples of the orthodox Fathers, it receives and venerates with a feeling of equal piety and reverence all the books both of the Old and New Testaments, since one God is the author of both; also the traditions, whether they relate to faith or morals, as having been dictated either orally by Christ or by the Holy Ghost, and preserved in the Catholic Church in unbroken succession.²⁶

²⁵Moran, p. 37.

²⁶Baepler, pp. 361-62.

CHAPTER III

THE CANON

The general congregation of 8 February thought it expedient to establish the principle of the Scriptures of both Testaments as the necessary basis of their dogmatic labors. This basis was found to be necessary in that the canonicity of certain books of the Bible had been called in question.²⁷ In addition, this procedure would also provide an opportunity for building up into a connected whole the Tradition of the Church and the decisions of the General Councils. After a brief debate, the general congregation decided to establish "which Scriptures were part of the canon and which were not."²⁸

Discussion of the canon of Scripture was begun in the general congregations of 12 and 15 February. A unanimous desire was exhibited to take up the canon of Holy Scripture within the limits which the decree of the Council of Florence of 1441 had circumscribed it.

Essentially, there were only two questions in this matter to be debated, namely, should the Florentine conciliar decision simply be taken over, without any prior discussion of the subject, as the jurists Del

²⁷These books were, from the Old Testament, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, Judith, Tobit, Baruch, and 2 Maccabees; and from the New Testament, James, Jude, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, and the Apocalypse of John. This question, which Trent did not debate, will be treated by Chemnitz in his discussion of the canon, Part II, Chapter IV.

²⁸Jedin, p. 53.

Monte and Pacheco asserted, or should the arguments that had recently been advanced against the canonicity of certain books of Sacred Scripture be examined and refuted by the Council, as two other legates, with Madruzzo and the Bishop of Fano, desired? The second question was closely linked with the first, namely, should the Council meet the difficulties raised both in former times and again more recently, by distinguishing different degrees of authority within the canon.

With regard to the first question, the legates themselves were not of one mind. During the general congregation of 12 February, Del Monte, taking the standpoint of formal Canon Law, declared that the Florentine canon, since it was a decision of a General Council, must be accepted without discussion. On the other hand, Cervini and Pole, supported by Madruzzo and a number of prelates familiar with the writings of the Reformers and Humanists, urged the necessity of countering in advance the attacks that were to be expected by the Protestants by consolidating their own position, and of providing their own theologians with weapons for the defense of the decree as well as for the instruction of the faithful. Their efforts, however, were in vain. When the vote was taken, Del monte's side had won, 24-16. The decision to accept the Florentine canon without further discussion, and as an article of faith, already contained the answer to the second question. The approved canon appears as follows:

Decree Concerning the Canonical Scriptures (Second Part)

It has thought it proper, moreover, to insert in this decree a list of the sacred books, lest a doubt might arise in the mind of someone as to which books are received by this council. They are the following: of the Old Testament, the five books of Moses, namely Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy; Joshua, Judges, Ruth, the four books of Kings, two of Paralipomenon, the first and second of Ezra, the latter of which is called Nehemiah, Tobit, Judith, Esther, Job, the Davidic Psalter of 150 Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Canticle of Canticles, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, Isaiah, Jeremiah, with Baruch,

Ezekiel, Daniel, the twelve minor prophets, namely, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi; two books of Maccabees, the first and second. Of the New Testament, the four Gospels, according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John; the Acts of the Apostles written by Luke the Evangelist; fourteen Epistles of Paul the Apostle, to the Romans, two to the Corinthians, to the Galatians, to the Ephesians, to the Philippians, to the Colossians, two to the Thessalonians, two to Timothy, to Titus, to Philemon, to the Hebrews; two of Peter the Apostle, three of John the Apostle, one of James the Apostle, one of Jude the Apostle, and the Apocalypse of John the Apostle. If anyone does not accept as sacred and canonical the aforesaid books in their entirety and with all their parts, as they have been accustomed to be read in the Catholic Church and as they are contained in the old Latin Vulgate Edition, and knowingly and deliberately rejects the aforesaid traditions, let him be anathema. Let all understand, therefore, in what order and manner the council, after having laid the foundation of the confession of faith, will proceed, and who are the chief witnesses and supports to whom it will appeal in confirming dogmas and in restoring morals in the Church.²⁹

²⁹Ibid., pp. 17-18.

CHAPTER IV

ABUSES CONNECTED WITH HOLY SCRIPTURE

The third point of the Council's provisional program concerned itself with Scriptural abuses connected with the Latin Vulgate edition of Jerome and the question of vernacular interpretations of the Bible. The study of the original languages of the Bible had been given an extraordinary impetus by Erasmus' Greek New Testament, by the Complutensian polyglot Bible, as well as by Lefevre, the Humanists and Reformers, and had led to a lively criticism of the Latin translation in use in the Catholic Church, the Vulgate.³⁰ Erasmus had himself set the precedent by adding a Latin translation to his Greek New Testament.³¹ Others, such as Osiander, Petreius, and Pellican, had followed his example. In addition, this work was not being confined only to the Reformers, as, for example, the Dominican Santes Pagninus had translated both Testaments from the original texts into Latin in 1528.³² The librarian of the Vatican Library, Augustinus Steuchus, had corrected the Old Testament in accordance with the Hebrew text in 1529.³³ And the Benedictine Isidorus Clarius

³⁰Ibid., p. 67.

³¹Ibid.

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid.

had published an edition of the Vulgate of both Testaments revised in the light of the original text in 1542.³⁴

Differences of opinion were even more sharply marked with regard to translating the Bible into the vernacular; there was no uniform practice in the Catholic Church in this respect. In England, since the days of Wyclif, such translations were strictly forbidden. In Germany, before Martin Luther's time, there existed no less than eighteen printed translations of the entire Bible into German.³⁵ Luther's translation of the New Testament from the Greek in 1522 saw nearly one hundred editions in ten years, and his complete Bible, finished in 1534, became immensely popular and could not be displaced by the Catholic versions of Emser, Eck, and Dietenberger.³⁶ In fact, the translation of the Bible into the language of the people had actually become the pace-maker of the Lutheran reform.³⁷ It was for this reason that it had been forbidden in France both by the Catholic Church, at the provincial Synod of Sens in 1528 and by the secular authority, the Parliament of Paris in 1543.³⁸ In Spain a prohibition of this kind had existed since the reign of the Catholic kings. And when Antonio Bruccioli published an Italian translation of the Bible at Venice, in 1532, Ambrosius Catharinus expressed his astonishment that such a book,

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Ibid., p. 68.

³⁸Ibid.

which clearly betrayed the influence of Martin Bucer, could be printed and sold in Italy.³⁹

During the Council's 1 March preliminary debates, differences of opinion with regard to both the translation of the Bible into the vernacular and the responses to the various criticisms of the Vulgate, were found to be more divergent than had been anticipated. Thus, in a conference held on 4 March, the Papal legates decided to propose to the general congregation the formation of a deputation which would draw up a catalogue of existing abuses and submit proposals for their suppression. This was done the following day. Chosen as members of the deputation were the Archbishop of Aix, the Bishops of Astorga, Castellamare, Sinigaglia, Cava, Fano, and Bitonto, and the general of the Augustinians, Seripando. In addition, the eight committee members were advised by the theologians Alfonso de Castro, Richard of Le Mans and Ambrosius Catharinus, who spoke to the general congregations held on 8 and 9 March. The members of the committee submitted the results of their meetings, held between 11 and 13 March, to the general congregation of 17 March.

Their report singled out four abuses and proposed four corresponding remedies:

- 1) The first abuse is that lectures, disputations, and sermons are based on different versions of the Scriptures. This abuse will be removed if the Council declares the Vulgate to be an authentic text, though without prejudice to the authority of the Septuagint or a depreciation of other editions in so far as they contribute to a better understanding of the Vulgate.
- 2) But since it is not to be denied that the Vulgate has come down to us in a faulty condition, the Council should request the Pope to see to the production of an emended text of the Vulgate and also, if possible, of the Greek and Hebrew texts of the Bible.

³⁹Ibid.

3) Neither the public nor the private interpretation of Holy Scripture can be left to individual good pleasure; on the contrary, this interpretation must conform to the Church's interpretation and the unanimous consent of the Fathers.

4) The printing and sale of Bibles and Biblical commentaries is subject to a previous examination either by the Pope, or by the metropolitan assisted by two suffragans, or by the ordinary, and in the case of religious, permission of their superiors is also required. Anyone selling or having in their possession unapproved Bibles is liable to the same fines as the printer of such books.⁴⁰

It was all too obvious that the committee report had purposely skirted the burning issue of the translation of the Bible into the vernacular. Pacheco immediately rose to ask what had become of the prohibition of the translation of the Bible into the vernacular. Madruzzo rose after him and earnestly dissuaded the Council from such a prohibition. Debate on the report grew so heated that the legates decided to discontinue debate and, instead, leave it to the particular classes to consider.

It is easy to see why the committee legates wished to delay debate on this issue. They realized that the divergence between the two sides was so sharp that any majority decision would only embitter the minority, and what is worse, such a decision could not be made effective in countries where a contrary practice prevailed.⁴¹ Spain and France would not submit if translation was permitted, while Germany, Italy and Poland were not likely to agree to a prohibition of the vernacular Bible.⁴²

The majority, led by Pacheco, clearly favored the prohibition of the vernacular Bible. They feared a recurrence in other countries of the situation in Germany. Nevertheless, in an attempt to placate the minority,

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 71.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 72.

⁴²Ibid.

Pacheco proposed a compromise that said in countries in which the practice of reading the Bible in the vernacular had come to stay, the translation of certain books, such as the Psalms, Proverbs, the Acts of the Apostles, might be conceded, but not that of the Epistles of St. Paul and the Apocalypse. In any case, Pacheco insisted that the debate could not be limited to a discussion of the committee report; the controversy concerning the vernacular Bible must be dealt with in full. The legates, however, managed to circumvent debate on this issue until yet another day.

The general congregation of 23 March was untroubled by major controversy, chiefly due to the expertise of Cardinal Cervini, who redirected any question that in the least hinted of the troublesome issue of the vernacular Bible. Instead, the Council Fathers kept strictly to the four points of the committee report. Still, even with regard to the discussion of the committee report, there were problems. The Bishop of Motula asked why the editions of the Bible other than the Vulgate were not either accepted or rejected in plain language. The Bishop of Belcastro felt uneasy about the imperfection of the Vulgate being officially acknowledged by the Council, pointing out the advantages this gave the heretics. The Archbishop of Palermo and the Jesuit Lejay urged the Council to take the revision of the Vulgate into its own hands instead of leaving it to the Pope, whom they could not possibly reduce to the rank of a corrector. The Archbishop also described as unseemly the threat of a fine instead of an ecclesiastical censure against transgressors.

In defense of the committee report, the Bishop of Fano responded:

The Vulgate is declared authentic because it has been the Church's Bible for centuries, but this does not mean that all other

translations, even those made by Protestants, are condemned out of hand, for the simple reason that much that is good can be found in them.⁴³

He was also fully convinced of the necessity of a revision of the Vulgate, but was unaware of the difficulty of such a task, thinking its faults were only copyists' and printers' errors which it would be easy to eliminate by means of a comparison of the text with the manuscripts. Thus it would be far easier for the Pope than for the Council--were it only on account of the expense--to procure these manuscripts and to secure trained men to restore the text. If the threat of a fine had been substituted for that of a censure, the reason was that in those days it acted as a stronger deterrent than the threat of a censure, to the already excessive number of which no further addition should be made.

The controversy over the vernacular Bible arose once more during the general congregation of 27 March. The Bishop of Fano, appealing to Christian liberty, boldly demanded toleration of other translations, even those made by Protestants. Pacheco condemned vehemently such a suggestion, while Madruzzo defended it by pointing out that if such translations are forbidden, isn't the Church acting like the Pharisee, who holds the key to sacred knowledge but will not allow anyone else to enter? This would be to take away the Word of God from the people who read it. It is by no means true that the reading of the Bible by the laity is the source of all heresies; in actuality, Luther, Zwingli, Oecolampadius, Melanchthon, and Bucer were exceptionally well acquainted with the original languages of the Bible. If they could not forbid the study of the Bible in the original languages, why should the vernacular Bible be prohibited? None should be

⁴³Ibid., p. 77.

precluded from reading the Bible. That there were risks was not to be denied; but the danger could be countered by adding explanations of difficult passages and forbidding translations that had been tampered with or had not been approved. Obviously, after Madruzzo's impassioned defense of the vernacular Bible, Pacheco rose quickly to refute him. But Cardinal Del Monte forestalled his impending attack with the remark that no one, except the legates, was entitled to bring up for debate matters not included in the day's program. Once again, the issue had been delayed.

Pacheco had his opportunity, however, in the general congregation of 3 April, which was again supposed to be concerned exclusively with the committee report on the four abuses. "All translations other than the Vulgate, even the Septuagint, must be forbidden!" was his outraged cry.⁴⁴ He also stated that all clerics and laymen, with the exception of doctors of theology, should be forbidden to interpret Holy Scripture. Only with regard to the revision of the Vulgate did he agree with Madruzzo's opinion that a start should be made at the Council, and if possible before the declaration of the Vulgate's authenticity. Obviously he, too, like the Bishop of Fano before him, had underestimated the difficulty of such an undertaking.

At the end of the day's debate, a vote was taken in order to clarify some of the differences with regard to the controverted points. Agreement was arrived at on two points, namely, that all anonymously printed books of the Bible should be prohibited and that one single edition of the Bible should be declared authentic; the others, including the Protestant ones,

⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 83-84.

should simply be passed over in silence. Former differences of opinion only reappeared when it came to the voting on the second question, whether one edition of the Bible in the various vernacular languages should be declared authentic. Should not at least one authentic text be produced in each of the three current Biblical languages, Hebrew, Greek and Latin? Madruzzo and nine other bishops answered the first question in the affirmative while Pacheco, with thirteen others, replied in the negative. Twenty-two Council fathers declared themselves in favor of one authentic Latin version, and only a very few favored an authentic edition in all three languages.

On 7 April the decree was presented anew to the Council. It had been altered at various points. The Spaniards had complained from the beginning that in the first section the Vulgate was declared authentic while in the second it was said to need revision. Above all, there was no agreement where, and by whom, this revision was to be carried out, whether at Trent by the Council, or in Rome by the Pope. In order to keep clear of these controverted questions, the whole passage about the revision had been dropped, but on the other hand a section was added against the misuse of God's Word. In this new form the decree was passed without any serious objections and appears in its final form below:

Decree Concerning the Edition and Use of the Sacred Books

Moreover, the same holy council considering that not a little advantage will accrue to the Church of God if it be made known which of all the Latin editions of the sacred books now in circulation is to be regarded as authentic, ordains and declares that the old Latin Vulgate Edition, which, in use for so many hundred years, has been approved by the Church, be in public lectures, disputations, sermons and expositions held as authentic, and that no one dare or presume under any pretext whatsoever to reject it.

Furthermore, to check unbridled spirits, it decrees that no one relying on his own judgment shall, in matters of faith and morals

pertaining to the edification of Christian doctrine, distorting the Holy Scriptures in accordance with his own conceptions, presume to interpret them contrary to that sense which holy mother Church, to whom it belongs to judge of their true sense and interpretation, has held and holds, or even contrary to the unanimous teaching of the Fathers, even though such interpretations should never at any time be published. Those who act contrary to this shall be made known by the ordinaries and punished in accordance with the penalties prescribed by the law.

And wishing, as is proper, to impose a restraint in this matter on printers also, who, now without restraint, thinking what pleases them is permitted them, print without the permission of ecclesiastical superiors the books of the Holy Scriptures and the notes and commentaries thereon of all persons indiscriminately, often with the name of the press omitted, often also under a fictitious press-name, and what is worse, without the name of the author, and also indiscreetly have for sale such books printed elsewhere, (this council) decrees and ordains that in the future the Holy Scriptures, especially the old Vulgate Edition, be printed in the most correct manner possible, and that it shall not be lawful for anyone to print or to have printed any books whatsoever dealing with sacred doctrinal matters without the name of the author, or in the future to sell them, or even to have them in possession, unless they have first been examined and approved by the ordinary, under penalty of anathema and fine prescribed by the last Council of the Lateran. If they be regulars they must in addition to this examination and approval obtain permission also from their own superiors after these have examined the books in accordance with their own statutes. Those who lend or circulate them in manuscript before they have been examined and approved, shall be subject to the same penalties as the printers, and those who have them in their possession or read them, shall, unless they make known the authors, be themselves regarded as the authors. The approbation of such books, however, shall be given in writing and shall appear authentically at the beginning of the book, whether it be written or printed, and all this, that is, both the examination and approbation, shall be done gratuitously, so that what ought to be approved may be approved and what ought to be condemned may be condemned.⁴⁵

⁴⁵Ibid., pp. 18-19.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The Council of Trent's primary concern was to oppose the Reformation principle of sola scriptura. With the Decree Concerning the Canonical Scriptures, the Council fathers countered this principle with the principle of the Traditions on faith and morals, which, they asserted, went back to Christ and came down to us, being passed on "as it were from hand to hand" from the days of the Apostles, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In addition, instead of defining the content of the current of Tradition by listing individual Traditions, the decree connected it with the uninterrupted succession of the officials of the Catholic Church while its authority was given parity with that of Scripture. With regard to the section concerning the canon, the Council fathers, rather than open a theological can of worms, refrained from debate on controverted issues and simply accepted the decree of a previous council.

Trent's second decree, the Decree Concerning the Edition and Use of the Sacred Books, declared the Vulgate edition authentic, that is, reliable and furnishing dogmatic proofs for practical use in "public lectures, disputations, sermons, and expositions," not because of the Vulgate's agreement with the original texts (the Council fathers were well aware of the need for a revision according to the original texts), but because of the long use made of it by the Church. The fact that mention of the need for a revision had been dropped from the final form of the decree points to

the need felt by the majority of the Council fathers to preserve the integrity of the Roman Church's claim to being free from error.⁴⁶ Instead, it was thought that a revision could be carried out in secret, with the necessary changes made by the time the decree had been confirmed by the Pope. In addition, the hotly debated question of the translation of the Bible into the vernacular was left unanswered. The interpretation of the Bible was taken entirely out of the hands of the individual and given over to "holy mother Church," its authentic interpreter, as confirmed by "the unanimous consent of the Fathers." And all books with a theological content were subjected to a preventive censure by the ordinary, "under penalty of anathema and fine prescribed by the last Council of the Lateran." Now on to Chemnitz.

⁴⁶Later on, when the decree had been submitted to the Roman conciliar commission and to the commission of cardinals for their opinion, the Council was much criticized for this omission; yet the Council failed to take up the question of the Vulgate a second time, and the decree was confirmed by Pius IV unchanged.

PART II

CHEMNITZ' RESPONSE TO TRENT--THE EXAMEN

CHAPTER I

A SHORT LIFE OF CHEMNITZ

Martin Chemnitz was born on 9 November 1522 at Treuenbrietzen, a small town near Wittenberg. In his autobiography, written in 1570 and tracing his life up until 1555, he relates that his father's ancestors were at one time the lesser nobility of Brandenburg and of considerable wealth, but his father himself had fallen upon leaner times and supported himself and his family as a woolweaver and shopkeeper of only moderate means. He died when Martin was eleven. Martin's mother was a considerable influence in his early life, especially as she encouraged him in his academic ambitions. He was also encouraged in his early education by Laurentius Barthold, a local schoolmaster, who saw in him superior capabilities and, at his instigation, with the gracious monetary assistance of relatives, Martin was sent by his mother to the Latin school in Wittenberg. Unfortunately, the young Martin failed to learn his Latin grammar as his teacher thought he should, and he was sent back home, where he was apprenticed by his mother to the woolweaver's craft.

Nevertheless, Martin read Latin at home (principally the writings of Laurentius Valla) and even translated the apocryphal book of Jesus Sirach from German into Latin.¹ Because of his continued diligence with

¹Fred Kramer, "Biographical Sketch of Martin Chemnitz," from his translation of Examination of the Council of Trent, Part I. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971), p. 17.

respect to the furtherance of his education, family friends living in Magdeburg convinced his mother he should study there, where, being given a second opportunity, he learned his Latin grammar, became proficient in writing Latin and, in addition, began the study of Greek and astronomy. Chemnitz later wrote of his three years at Magdeburg: "For all this I am, under God, indebted to the school of Magdeburg, for there I laid the foundation."²

After tutoring for a short time in order to save money, Chemnitz entered the University of Frankfurt-an-der-Oder, studying there for one year. Again running out of money, he was forced to resume teaching, this time at Wriezen, near Frankfurt, where he added to his income by collecting the local sales tax on fish. In 1545 he transferred to the University of Wittenberg in order to study under Melanchthon. Here he studied Greek, mathematics, and also astrology, which served him well later on as his expertise in casting horoscopes earned him the friendship and patronage of Duke Albert of Prussia. While a student in Wittenberg, he was also fortunate enough to hear Luther lecturing and preaching, yet, unfortunately, he writes: "I was then intent upon other studies. I did not hear him with due attention then."³

His studies at Wittenberg were temporarily interrupted when the Smalcald War broke out, so Chemnitz, along with his relative, the poet-laureate and historian George Sabinus, went to the newly established University of Konigsberg, earning his master's degree in 1548. When pestilence

²E. F. Klug, From Luther to Chemnitz (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1971), p. 125.

³Ibid., p. 126.

ravaged Konigsberg the same year, he went to Salfeld and studied Peter Lombard and Luther. Already at Konigsberg, Chemnitz had acquired a deep interest in theology together with a growing disenchantment with astrology, so that when the ducal library in Konigsberg was in need of a librarian, he applied and was appointed by Duke Albert, thus giving him both the time and the ample resources to study theology as he wished. "Those were indeed days when I lived in clover," he wrote.⁴ His methodology in studying was first to read all the books of the Bible, including the Apocrypha; secondly, he read all the commentaries in the library, taking copious notes on slips of paper; thirdly, he read through the ancient church fathers; and finally, he read the writings of the more orthodox teachers of his own times. He was able to continue in this way at the library for three years, when an unfortunate incident caused him to resign his position at the end of 1552. The occasion for his resignation was the Osiandristic controversy, in which Chemnitz had severely attacked one of Duke Albert's favorites, Andreas Osiander, who taught that, in regard to the sinner's justification, the sinner was made righteous, by enabling grace of God, rather than that the sinner was accounted righteous, by a forensic act of imputed righteousness, which Luther had asserted was essential to justification by faith.⁵ In addition, one of Chemnitz' friends, Joachim Morlin, had been banished by the Duke, because he, too, had opposed Osiander. Therefore, Chemnitz left Konigsberg in 1553 in order to resume his studies at Wittenberg. Instead, Melanchthon asked him to lecture on his Loci Communes, which Chemnitz began in June. His lectures were popular with students and faculty alike, and it

⁴Klug, p. 127.

⁵Ibid.

seemed a certainty that he would soon be asked to fill a faculty position. Indeed, he was asked, but only after Chemnitz' friend Morlin, who was superintendent of the churches at Braunschweig, invited him to be his assistant. Chemnitz accepted Morlin's offer, despite heavy pressure from the Wittenberg faculty to remain, and he was ordained to the sacred ministry by John Bugenhagen before he left.

In mid-December of 1554 he assumed his new duties at Braunschweig. The following year he married Anna Jager, the daughter of a licensed jurist; she bore him two sons and eight daughters, four of whom died in infancy. Chemnitz was able to continue his lectures on Melancthon's Loci in Braunschweig, which lectures were collected and published posthumously as Chemnitz' Loci Theologici. Such was the Loci Theologici that, although incomplete, it served as model for the great dogmaticians of the seventeenth century.⁶ In 1556 he began the study of Hebrew and progressed rapidly. In 1557 both Chemnitz and Morlin journeyed to Wittenberg in order to help relieve the tensions brought on by the Adiaphoristic and Synergistic controversies; later they traveled to Worms for the famous colloquy between the Roman Catholics and the Lutherans. In 1560 Chemnitz published "The True and Sound Doctrine about the Presence of the Body and Blood of Christ in the Holy Communion," which was immediately popular and which prompted the theological faculty of the University of Rostock to recommend it as the simplest and most accurate exposition of Eucharistic doctrine available.⁷

⁶Ibid., p. 129.

⁷Arthur C. Piepkorn, "Martin Chemnitz' Views on Trent: The Genesis and the Genius of the Examen Concilii Tridentini," Concordia Theological Monthly 37 (January 1966):8.

In 1562 Chemnitz became involved in his long controversy with the Jesuits, publishing his Theologiae Jesuitarum praecipua capita ex quadam ipsorum censura, annotata. This was in answer to an anonymous Jesuit polemic entitled Censura de praecipuis capitibus doctrinae coelestis, published in 1560 and directed against the Calvinist, John Monhemius, who had published his Catechismus in quo christianae religionis elementa . . . explicantur, based on Calvin's Institutes, in 1560.⁸

The Jesuits, or Society of Jesus, had been founded by Ignatius of Loyola in 1534. The organization was confirmed by Pope Paul III in 1540 and in 1554 Ignatius created a master plan for the destruction of the Reformation in Germany. Two years later the Society established itself at the University of Cologne and soon proceeded to dominate the theological faculty. The Censura represents their first theological publication directed against the Protestants.⁹

Meanwhile, another defender of the Jesuits was entering the battle. Jacob Payva de Andrada was a secular priest and a missionary-minded professor of theology at the Portuguese University of Coimbra. He had been sent by King Sebastian I of Portugal to the Council of Trent as a member of a four-man team of theologians. At Trent he came upon Chemnitz' Theologiae Jesuitarum praecipua capita and was strongly urged to refute its assertions against the Jesuits. He did so in a work entitled Orthodoxarum explicationum libri decem.

As Chemnitz soon found out, Andrada was in actuality defending the theology of the Council of Trent. The result on Chemnitz' part was the

⁸Ibid., p. 11.

⁹Klug, p. 130.

Examen Concilii Tridentini. Chemnitz spent eight years on the Examen, the first volume, covering the chief articles of the Christian faith, appearing in 1565, the remaining three volumes, treating the sacraments and the abuses in the Catholic Church that Trent had tried to defend, not appearing in their entirety until 1573. The compilation of the Examen was slow work due not only to its massive size but due also to the frequent interruptions brought about because of his ministerial responsibilities. In 1567 he succeeded Morlin as superintendant at Braunschweig. During that same year he received his doctorate from the University of Rostock. In 1568, at the invitation of Duke Julius, the new Lutheran ruler of the Duchy of Brunswick-Wolfenbuttel, Chemnitz and James Andreae supervised the introduction of the Lutheran Reformation into the previously Roman Catholic territory. In addition, Chemnitz issued his theological opinion in connection with the controversy on good works that centered around George Major and Nicholas von Amsdoff, which presaged a constantly increasing role in the adjudication of the controversies that had been dividing the Lutheran community since Luther's death in 1546. Chemnitz' great work on the person of Christ, De duabus naturis in Christo, was published in 1570. The following year he wrote the Lower Saxon Confession subscribed to at Heinrichstadt by the theologians of Rostock and Lower Saxony, and later by the clergy of Hamburg and Lubeck. In 1574 he reworked Andreae's Swabian Concordia to produce the Swabian-Saxon Concordia. In 1576 he participated in the conference at Torgau which welded into a single document (the "Torgau Book") the Swabian-Saxon Concordia and the Maulbronn Formula of Luke Osiander and Balthasar Bidebach. And in 1577 he played an important role in the conference at Bergen Abbey, where the criticisms of the Torgau book were taken into account and the Formula of Concord was produced. Due to

the Formula's wide acceptance, the Lutheran Church was saved from self-destruction by the internal strife which had been occasioned after Luther's death by doctrinal dissensions concerning original sin, conversion (and therefore justification), the Lord's Supper, and ecclesiastical ceremonies.¹⁰ After the formal publication of the Book of Concord in 1580, Chemnitz was one of the three theologians designated to prepare the Apologia oder Verantwortung des christlichen Concordienbuchs, published in four parts in 1582 and 1583.

In 1576 Chemnitz participated in the formal inauguration of the new imperially chartered University of Helmstedt. That same year he entered into an agreement with the city council of Brunswick not to accept any other vocation. His health failed rapidly after 1582, and on 8 April 1586, he died quietly. His last recorded words, spoken two days before his death, after he had made his confession and had received holy absolution, were: "Lord, do with me according to Your will and command that my spirit may be received in peace, for it is much better for me to die than to live."¹¹

¹⁰Kramer, p. 22.

¹¹Piepkorn, p. 10.

CHAPTER II

INTRODUCTION TO THE EXAMEN

Undoubtedly the best introduction to Chemnitz' Examen is that given by Chemnitz himself in his Preface, where he writes:

I had many weighty reasons why I wanted to answer Andrada since he provoked me to this debate so proudly and insolently. In addition, many things are stated in such a way in those 10 books of Andrada that a discussion of them cannot but be useful and instructive Andrada played a principal role in the deliberations of the Synod of Trent and wrote his books against me while the council was in session, and he did so at the request and urging of those whose advice the fathers of the council accepted as though it came from the oracle of the fabled Pythian Apollo, for these are the very words of Andrada. Moreover, Andrada quite bluntly explains many things which are hard to understand in the decrees of the council, the meaning of which a person could hardly suspect as he reads. This will be shown in the proper places. So, when at the same time I received both the vituperations of Andrada and the decrees of the Council of Trent, I felt certain that the way had been shown to me in which the answer should be undertaken. The decrees of the synod are set forth briefly and simply. But what went on at the deliberations, on what basis the decisions were made, and from what fountains they were drawn, with what trickery the decrees were fabricated, what is their meaning and purpose, these things the explanations of Andrada will to some extent show When I shall have compared Andrada's explanations with the decrees of the council and shall have compared and examined both according to the norm of the Scripture, I shall on that basis draw up and publish an Examination of the Decrees of the Council of Trent, which can, I think, be done with some benefit to the reader. I judge that in this way I can most fitly answer my opponent Andrada and wash and wipe away the stains which, by means of his vituperations, he has cast not only on my garments but on those of our churches.¹²

With the above thoughts in mind, Chemnitz directs his answer to Andrada (and Trent) in an effort to prove the following four points:

¹²Examen, Preface, pp. 29-30.

(1) Sacred Scripture was intended by God and the holy writers to be the only source and norm of faith and life, over and above the Traditions of men; (2) The canonical books of Scripture are truly reliable as retained by the primitive church, while the apocryphal books cannot be admitted as equal; (3) Scripture is truly reliable as found in its original languages and all translations (including the Vulgate) must be corrected and amended by the original; (4) Scripture does not need the interpretation of the hierarchy to make it a reliable source and norm of doctrine; Scripture interprets itself.¹³

The first point is taken up by Chemnitz specifically in Sections I through V in his Locus De Sacra Scriptura and in Sections I through VIII in his Locus De Traditionibus, while Sections VI, VII, and VIII of his Locus De Sacra Scriptura address themselves to points (2), (3) and (4), respectively.

¹³Arthur B. Lossner, "Martin Chemnitz and His Locus De Sacra Scriptura, Against Roman Errors" (B.D. thesis, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1947), p. 32.

CHAPTER III

SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION

Chemnitz begins with the Locus De Sacra Scriptura. Very little needs to be said about Section I, "Concerning Holy Scripture," as it is essentially a statement of the problem and has been said previously.

Section II, "Concerning the Origin, Reason for, and Use of New Testament Scripture," is chiefly concerned with the exposition of four points. In the first place, Chemnitz shows "what was the beginning of the divinely-inspired Scripture, and who is its author."¹⁴ Of this he writes:

It does much to shed light on the dignity and authority of Holy Scripture that God Himself not only instituted and commanded the plan of comprehending the heavenly doctrine in writing but that He also initiated, dedicated, and consecrated it by writing the words of the Decalog with His own fingers.¹⁵

In the second place, Chemnitz shows that Scripture was instituted because "the purity of doctrine was not being preserved by the traditions."¹⁶ In other words, during the 2,454 years from the beginning of the world, the divine Word was propagated and handed down only by the living voice, but that that Tradition "was repeatedly corrupted,

¹⁴Examen, Locus I, Section II, p. 62.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 53.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 62.

adulterated, and perverted by those whose duty it was to preserve, propagate, and deliver to others the traditions received from the fathers."¹⁷ He uses this very same argument in Section III in relating the Romanists' abuse of Traditions to that of the Pharisees and the Talmudists. In both cases, Chemnitz argues that the Traditions by themselves are unreliable because sinful man continually perverts them. Therefore, thirdly, God intended that Scripture alone should be the norm and rule of faith, and of decisions in controversies and disputes concerning religion, because Scripture is God's own holy, infallible Word. As Chemnitz illustrates:

Whenever Christ and the apostles in the New Testament assert that the prophets said something, that God spoke by the mouth of the prophets . . . they are not directing us to silent unwritten traditions; they mean that which is written in the Scripture.¹⁸

Thus it is, fourthly, that God selected the chief points from the teaching of the patriarchs and prophets to be written by divine inspiration, so that posterity would have a sure and certain rule in matters of faith and life. Chemnitz then points out that at this point Andrada would object, remarking that "this discussion does not belong here, that this discussion is not concerning the books of the Old Testament but concerning those of the New Testament."¹⁹ In actuality, Chemnitz was laying the groundwork for his discussion of the New Testament. As Klug reminds us:

Because of Andrada's devaluation of the New Testament Scriptures particularly, it is necessary, in Chemnitz' judgment, to enunciate

¹⁷Ibid., p. 51.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 59.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 62.

plainly the whole position concerning Scripture's divine origin and the divine purpose behind the written Scriptures.²⁰

Section III, "Concerning the Similarity and Affinity of the Traditions of the Papalists with Those of the Pharisees and of the Talmud," asserts that both the Pharisees and the Romanists appeal to unwritten Traditions outside Scripture, and, in the case of the Pharisees, this is precisely what Christ refuted and rejected in such New Testament passages as: Mark 7:2-13, Luke 11:37-52, and Matthew 23. In addition, by other Traditions they twisted the clear words of Scripture around to suit their purposes, as in Matt. 5:27,31,33,38,43; 15:1-9; 23. Thus again, Scripture alone must prevail. In a quotation much like the one concerning Luther at the beginning of this paper, Chemnitz says of Christ that He "restored the pristine and genuine purity of the prophetic doctrine in this way, that He rejected and refuted the traditions and led the church back to the Scripture."²¹

Section IV, "Concerning the New Testament Scripture," examines the New Testament evidence and demonstrates why and for what use the apostles committed their doctrine to writing. Because Chemnitz adduces twenty such reasons, this paper will present only that which will give the reader an adequate idea of: (1) The objections of the Romanists in favor of unwritten Traditions; (2) The methodology and some specifics concerning Chemnitz' defense; and (3) A short list of Chemnitz' major conclusions.

The initial objection of the Romanists to a written New Testament Scripture centered on their misinterpretation of two passages from

²⁰Klug, p. 80.

²¹Ibid., p. 157.

Scripture, the first Jer. 31:33; "I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts," which the Romanists contended meant that the doctrine of Christ and the apostles was to be preserved and handed down orally, not in written form, and the second 2 Cor. 3:3; "You are our letter written by us not with ink but with the Spirit of God; not on tablets of stone but on the fleshy tablets of the human heart," which they contended meant the same. In the first instance, Chemnitz asks: if this is true, then why did Paul quote Jer. 31:33 in the midst of writing the Epistle to the Hebrews? And why did he write anything at all if the 2 Cor. 3:3 passage means what the Romanists say it does? Chemnitz' conclusion is particularly striking, and represents well his method of crushing an opponent through understatement: "We shall be pardoned if we judge that the apostles understood the meaning of Jeremiah and of Paul better than do the papalists."²²

Another of the Romanists' arguments asserted that since the apostles waited almost twenty-three years to begin committing Christ's doctrines to writing, they were not meant to be written, but transmitted orally. Chemnitz' response was to point out the fact that the process of committing the Old Testament to writing was not begun until 2,454 years from the beginning of the oral tradition. Quoting Irenaeus, he adds:

That alone is the true and living faith which the church received from the apostles and communicated to her children. For the Lord of all gave His apostles the power of the Gospel, and through them we also have come to know the truth . . . That, indeed, which they then preached, they afterward delivered to us in the Scriptures by the will of God, that it should be the foundation and pillar of our faith.²³

²²Examen, Locus I, Section IV, p. 73.

²³Ibid., p. 80.

Under Article I, "Concerning the Writings of the Evangelists," Chemnitz seeks to prove "that whatever of the words and deeds of the Lord the apostles judged necessary for the later church to know should come down to posterity in writing."²⁴ He then cites evidence in support of his contention, with respect to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. For example, gathering information from the fathers, he adduces four reasons why Matthew wrote his Gospel: (1) Because of his absence to provide in writing what he could not provide by his presence and his oral teaching; (2) Because memory is fallible, to safe-guard his teachings; (3) Those who could not have the oral teaching might have a summary of the faith in writing; and (4) To combat heresy.²⁵

Under Article II, "Concerning the Writings and Epistles of the Apostles," Chemnitz operates in the same way, citing his proofs from the fathers and from Scripture, this time with respect to the remaining books of the New Testament. At the conclusion of Article II, he lists "the sum of the things we have demonstrated."²⁶ And while some of them are similar to Matthew's reasons for putting his Gospel into written form, Chemnitz adds concerning the epistles and the rest such reasons as these: (1) The churches were being disturbed and the doctrine adulterated under the pretext and title of Traditions supposedly received from the apostles; (2) Other teachers who were not apostles might have the written testimony from which they could prove to the churches that the doctrine which they brought was apostolic; (3) They received the command to write from the Son

²⁴Ibid., p. 87.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid., p. 148.

of God Himself (Chemnitz earlier had written: "Strictly speaking, there is no difference between the doctrine of Christ and that of the apostles,"²⁷ and cited Matt. 28:20: "Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you," and John 14:26: "The Holy Ghost will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.") and (4) The origin, cause, and use of the Scripture in the New Testament is the same as in the Old Testament, so that nothing may be added, nothing taken away, and nothing be departed from either to the right or to the left.²⁸

Section V, "Testimonies of the Ancient Church Concerning the Scriptures," contains Chemnitz' final arguments relating to proving Scripture to be the only source and norm of Christian faith and life. He does this by defending the Scriptures against the charges by Andrada that, on the one hand, the Scriptures are insufficient and, on the other hand, they are obscure, and that, therefore, they need the assistance of the unwritten Traditions.

Where the previous Sections of De Sacra Scriptura dealt specifically with proving the Scriptural norm on the basis of the Scriptural evidence itself, with substantiating testimony from the fathers of the church, this Section concentrates primarily on the fathers. And yet the Scriptures are never far away, as Chemnitz explains his use of the fathers' testimony:

For we give to the writings of the Fathers their proper and honorable place, which is due them, as men who have explained many passages of Scripture very clearly and defended the ancient doctrines of the

²⁷Ibid., p. 100.

²⁸Ibid., p. 149.

Church against the new corruptions of the heretics, and that from Scripture, explaining many doctrinal passages correctly.²⁹

This selection of the fathers is, of course, selective, as Chemnitz again writes:

We diligently inquire into the consensus of scholarly and ancient authorities. We love and exalt that witness of the Fathers which agrees with the Scriptures. Our standpoint is that in religious controversies the judge is God's Word itself, which is later joined by the confession of the true church.³⁰

Chemnitz knew that by quoting the ancient fathers the Romanists could not accuse him of spreading new ideas concerning Scripture. But Chemnitz also let Scripture speak ultimately for itself, as the final authority. He never let the testimony of the fathers supplant the authority of God's Word.

Returning to Andrada's accusations that the Scriptures are both insufficient and obscure, Chemnitz first of all attacks Andrada's charge that Scripture is insufficient and must be supplemented by ecclesiastical Tradition. He does so by arraying against Andrada's charge a long list of testimonies from the fathers, such as the following statement from Augustine:

If anyone preaches either concerning Christ or concerning His church or concerning any other matter which pertains to our faith and life; I will not say, if we, but what Paul adds, if an angel from heaven should preach to you anything besides what you have received in the Scriptures of the Law and of the Gospel, let him be anathema.³¹

²⁹Francis Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, 3 vols. trans. T. Engelder, J. Mueller, W. Albrecht (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1960), 1:204.

³⁰Herman A. Preus and Edmund Smits, eds. The Doctrine of Man in Classical Lutheran Theology (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1962), p. 18.

³¹Examen, Locus I, Section V, p. 152.

Chemnitz then quotes Andrada's sly evasion of the father's testimony that Scripture does, indeed, contain all that is necessary for faith and life:

For although all that is comprehended in the sacred writings is most true, nevertheless, not all the things which the Christian faith believes and which religion venerates have been committed to the memorials of the Holy Scripture.³²

Chemnitz answers: "I could quote more statements from the fathers," but, realizing the futility of so doing, he instead sets down these words from the Council of Basel:

And expressly, that in controversies the divine law, the practice of Christ, of the apostles, and of the primitive church, together with the councils and teachers which genuinely take their stand on these, are to be admitted as the truest judge in this council.³³

Apparently this statement from an earlier Council appeared intolerable to the Tridentine fathers, because Trent deleted Basel's formula and substituted the following:

And expressly, that matters of controversy be dealt with in the Council of Trent according to the Holy Scripture, the traditions of the apostles, the approved councils, the consensus of the Catholic Church, and the authority of the holy fathers.³⁴

With regard to the supposed obscurity of Scripture, Chemnitz quotes Andrada as saying: "These passages are mysterious, they are veiled, they are figurative; we urgently ask for something clear which does not need an interpreter."³⁵ Chemnitz replies:

But when Andrada seems to suggest that certain mysteries of the faith are taken only from obscure passages of Scripture, we simply oppose

³²Ibid., p. 161.

³³Ibid., p. 162.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Ibid., p. 165.

him with the words of Augustine: "Almost nothing is brought out of these obscurities which is not found stated in the plainest manner elsewhere."³⁶

And Pieper adds: "Augustine, Luther, Chemnitz, Gerhard, regard it as a well-established axiom that all Christian doctrines are revealed in passages that need no explanation whatsoever."³⁷ Chemnitz concludes by quoting 2 Cor. 4:3-4, in a judgment against the Council: "If our Gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the Gospel."³⁸

Chemnitz next turns his attention to the subject of the eight kinds of Traditions, as he expounds on them in his Locus De Traditionibus. It is important to remember that throughout this Locus (and Chemnitz' writings in general) Traditions, so long as they are not said to hand down anything outside of or beyond Scripture, are perfectly acceptable and useful in the church. Thus in Sections I through VII Chemnitz relates the seven kinds of acceptable Traditions, which do not make claims to provide anything outside of or beyond Scripture, while in Section VIII he details the kind of Traditions appealed to by the Romanists, which goes both outside of and beyond Scripture, and, in many cases, clearly against Scripture.

The first kind of Traditions Chemnitz describes as "the things Christ and the apostles delivered by word of mouth and which were later committed to writing by the evangelists and apostles."³⁹ An example of

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Pieper, p. 324.

³⁸Examen, p. 166.

³⁹Examen, Locus II, Section I, p. 223.

this kind of Tradition comes from Cyprian, who writes: "In presenting the chalice of the Lord in order that it may be filled with wine, let the tradition of the Lord be observed, and let nothing else be done by us than what the Lord has previously done for us."⁴⁰ This "tradition of the Lord," of course, refers to what Scripture relates as to His instructions for the proper use of the chalice in Holy Communion. As Chemnitz concludes:

Therefore, the first kind of traditions is this, that the apostles delivered the doctrine orally, but this was afterwards set down in writing in the Scripture. Apostolic men also proclaimed many things received from apostles, but all these agreed with the Holy Scriptures.⁴¹

The second kind of Traditions is this, "that the books of Holy Scripture were, as Augustine says, cared for by the church in an unbroken span of time and by a sure unbroken succession and faithfully transmitted to posterity and to us . . . from hand to hand."⁴² Origen, for example, writes that he had learned "through traditions" that four Gospels are accepted without doubt in the whole church.⁴³ And Eusebius often uses the words "tradition" and "reception" in writing about the canonical books.⁴⁴ The manner of this Tradition, that is, the "witness of the church concerning the genuine and canonical books of Scripture," as we have already learned, was a matter of heated controversy between Catholics and Protestants. This matter of the canon will be treated more fully

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 226.

⁴² Examen, Locus II, Section II, p. 227.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

from the Protestant side in the next chapter, as Chemnitz refutes specific points concerning the canon as contained in the Decree Concerning the Canonical Scriptures.

Chemnitz numbers apostolic Tradition as the third kind of Traditions. A good example of an apostolic Tradition is that of the Apostle's Creed, which has been passed down to us by means of the church fathers. Nevertheless, apostolic Traditions in no way circumvent or go outside of the bounds of Holy Scripture, because "these are altogether the same dogmas of faith which are contained in the Scripture and which the primitive church had received from the tradition of the apostles and had preserved pure until those times."⁴⁵ So it is that Tertullian writes: "What we are (namely, by holding the apostolic tradition), that the Scriptures are, and we indeed are from them."⁴⁶ And Irenaeus: "That this Father of our Lord Jesus Christ was proclaimed by the churches from the Scripture itself all who want to can learn and so understand the apostolic tradition of the church."⁴⁷ Chemnitz sums up the matter by saying: "When, therefore, traditions are set forth which do not agree with the Scripture and which cannot be shown and proved from the Scripture, it is quite certain that they are not apostolic."⁴⁸ And he impugns the motives of Trent by reminding the reader:

They are not chiefly contending about the true, certain, and ancient traditions of the apostles and the church but about other things which

⁴⁵ Examen, Locus II, Section III, p. 236.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 239.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 237.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 239.

they thrust on us for the strengthening of the papal rule under the name and pretext of apostolic traditions.⁴⁹

The fourth kind of Traditions concerns "the exposition, the true sense, or natural meaning of the Scripture."⁵⁰ In this regard, Chemnitz includes, from Irenaeus, four rules concerning the interpretation of Scripture from which, Chemnitz observes, "it can be perceived what is the truly apostolic tradition concerning the interpretation of the Scripture."⁵¹

The first principle of Biblical interpretation is that Scripture interprets itself. Irenaeus writes: "All the Scriptures, both the prophetic and the evangelical, can be heard clearly and without ambiguity and in the same way by all."⁵² The second principle is that:

. . . what is stated in the Scriptures ambiguously in parables, not clearly nor expressly nor without controversy, is not to be interpreted contrary to what is stated clearly, nor is anything to be construed from it which cannot be proved from other passages in which clear language is used.⁵³

In other words, the dark passages of Scripture are to be explained by those that are clear, a fact that Chemnitz pointed out earlier by quoting Augustine. The third principle states that "the interpreter ought to set before himself the whole body of doctrine which is transmitted in the

⁴⁹Ibid., pp. 242-43.

⁵⁰Examen, Locus II, Section IV, p. 244.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 245.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Ibid.

Scriptures, in order that the interpretation may not go against it."⁵⁴

The fourth and final principle states that:

. . . if we cannot find solutions of all the things which call for solutions in the Scriptures, let us not for this reason seek another God . . . let us not depart from that meaning which is clearly declared in the Scriptures. In this way let us by the grace of God solve some things in the Scriptures, but other things let us commit to God not only in this world but also in the next.⁵⁵

Applying these rules of interpretation to the decrees of Trent,

Chemnitz concludes:

But we confess that we reject what the papalists demand for themselves, for they want us simply to receive any and all interpretations which they thrust on us out of the shrine of the papal heart or from the decrees of the prelates of the church, without clear and certain proofs and documentation from the Holy Scripture. For this is not a part of the apostolic tradition, as we have already shown.⁵⁶

The fifth kind of Traditions are those dogmas "which are not set forth in so many letters and syllables in Scripture but are brought together from clear testimonies of Scripture by way of good, certain, firm, and clear reasoning."⁵⁷ Such dogmas as the Trinity and infant baptism are illustrative of this kind of Traditions. With regard to infant baptism, for example, Chemnitz remarks:

Therefore Origen and Augustine affirm that infant baptism is an apostolic tradition. This we accept. But let us look back at the issue of our dispute with the papalists about traditions, namely, whether they affirm that it is such a tradition which cannot be proved by any testimony of Scripture. These letters and syllables are indeed not found in the Scripture: "Infants are to be baptized; the apostles baptized infants." But when the fathers say that infant

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 246.

⁵⁶Ibid., pp. 247-48.

⁵⁷Examen, Locus II, Section V, p. 249.

baptism is a tradition, they prove and confirm this with certain and clear testimonies of Scripture.⁵⁸

The sixth kind of Traditions consists of the catholic consensus of the fathers. The criterion here, as elsewhere, is whether or not these same fathers agree with the Scriptures. Those of their teachings which do are to be held in high regard, while those which do not must be rejected. This is especially true with regard to religious controversies, as Chemnitz writes: "For it is the opinion of the men on our side that in religious controversies the Word of God itself is the judge and that the confession of the true church is added later."⁵⁹ That this is true, Chemnitz reiterates, is obvious from the writings of the fathers themselves. For example, Augustine, in Letter No. 19, to Jerome, writes:

Other writers (besides the canonical) I read in such a way that, no matter how great they are in holiness or learning, I do not consider a thing true because they have thought it so but because they have been able to persuade me either through other canonical authors or by some credible reason that they do not depart from the truth.⁶⁰

Or Basil, who says in a homily against the Sabellians and Arius: "I shall hand on what I have learned from the divine Scripture."⁶¹ Or Athanasius, in his De humanitate Verbi: "We have drawn this from the divinely inspired teachers who have read the sacred books."⁶²

The seventh kind of Traditions is that:

Where the ancients make mention of the unwritten traditions, they do not actually understand dogmas of faith without, beside, and

⁵⁸Ibid., pp. 249-50.

⁵⁹Examen, Locus II, Section VI, p. 256.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 259.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 258.

⁶²Ibid.

beyond Scripture which are to be accepted even though they cannot be proved by any testimony of Scripture, but they speak of certain ancient rites and customs which they traced back to the apostles because of their antiquity.⁶³

These are not, therefore, articles of faith but such rites as to make the sign of the cross, to turn toward the east in prayer, the blessing of the water of Baptism, and of the person baptized, the anointing with oil, the threefold immersion, the renunciation of Satan in Baptism, and the like. Chemnitz points out that these rites were added to the church for the purpose of edification, order, and decorum, and come under the heading of adiaphora. He adds that these are to be done in Christian freedom as they are not binding. As Augustine writes: "Whatever is commanded that does not hinder faith or good morals is to be considered an indifferent thing and observed for the benefit of those among whom one lives."⁶⁴

The last kind of Traditions is the one concerning which, Chemnitz writes, "the papalists fight most of all."⁶⁵ These are the Traditions "which pertain both to faith and morals and which cannot be proved with any testimony of Scripture but which the Synod of Trent nevertheless commands to be received and venerated with the same reverence and devotion as the Scripture itself."⁶⁶ As the Romanist Peter a Soto writes: "It is an infallible Catholic rule: Whatever the Roman Church believes,

⁶³Examen, Locus II, Section VII, p. 267.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 271.

⁶⁵Examen, Locus II, Section VIII, p. 272.

⁶⁶Ibid., pp. 272-73.

holds, and observes, even if it is not contained in the Scriptures, that was handed down by the apostles."⁶⁷ Examples of these Traditions are:

The offering of the sacrifice of the altar, the anointing with chrism, the invocation of the saints, the merits of works, the primacy of the Roman pontiff, the consecration of the water in Baptism, the whole sacrament of confirmation, the elements, words, and effects of the sacraments of ordination, of matrimony, and of extreme unction, prayers for the dead, the enumeration of sins to be made to the priest, the necessity of satisfaction.⁶⁸

Thus the controversy about Traditions, Chemnitz asserts, is not about indifferent things but about matters of greatest importance. And he offers further and more detailed proof in the following general observations.

First of all, Chemnitz desires to make plain:

. . . how dangerous it is for the church, and how destructive for the faith, to receive and venerate traditions concerning dogmas which cannot be proved with any testimony of Scripture with the same devotion and reverence as those things which are handed down and proved with sure and clear testimonies of the Scripture.⁶⁹

He shows that even while the apostles were alive, in their absence false prophets invented many corruptions under the pretense that they had been handed down orally by the apostles. Thus it was that the apostles wrote their teachings down. Paul himself wrote to the Colossians from prison: "See to it that no one makes a prey of you by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition."⁷⁰ Likewise after the times of the apostles, heretics tried to foist false teaching on the church under the pretense and name of unwritten Traditions. As Irenaeus declares: "When they are

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 273.

⁶⁸Ibid.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 275.

⁷⁰Ibid.

convicted from the Scriptures, they turn and accuse the Scriptures themselves that the truth cannot be found from them by those who do not know the tradition, for this was delivered not through writings but by the living voice. . ."⁷¹

Secondly:

. . . not only have the seduced heretics seduced others through the pretense and name of the unwritten traditions, but that also excellent men in the church who were not evil were nevertheless deceived, since they attributed too much beside the Scripture to the unwritten traditions.⁷²

Eusebius tells of Papias:

Papias adds seeming contradictions and certain other things as having been told to him "as from unwritten tradition"; also certain strange parables and doctrines of the Savior and some other incredible things, among which is also the chiliastic opinion.⁷³

Eusebius finds the reason for Papias' errors not in an evil nature or motivation, but in the fact that he was gifted with only a modest measure of judgment.

Thirdly, "some of the ancients quote many things from the apocryphal, or spurious, writings under the title of traditions."⁷⁴ Thus Clement of Alexandria in his Stromata, Book 2, proves from the Shepherd of Hermas that the apostles after their death preached to those who had previously died in unbelief and converted them. And Tertullian and Basil say it is an apostolic Tradition to sign all things with the sign of the cross made in the air with the fingers, but this comes from the gospel of

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²Ibid., p. 278.

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 284.

Nicodemus. Another Tradition asserts that Enoch and Elias will return before the Last Day and will battle with the Antichrist. But this is also taken from the apocryphal gospel of Nicodemus.

Fourthly:

The fathers referred quite a few older customs, when their origin could not be readily shown, immediately back to the apostles, as handed down by them, in order that their authority might be greater; but that these did not have the apostles as their authors can be clearly proved from the writings of the ancients.⁷⁵

Thus, Epiphanius claims the church has the custom of fasting on Wednesday and Friday from the Tradition of the apostles. And Ambrose, Jerome, and others ascribe the forty-day fast to a Tradition of the apostles. But Augustine, Irenaeus, and others deny these Traditions. Likewise, Epiphanius says against Aerius that there is a constitution of the apostles in which they give directions also about fast days, and that nothing is to be taken but bread, salt, and water. But Socrates shows in detail that this is wrong and not apostolic. Chemnitz adds: "Therefore, it is not to be immediately believed when the fathers affirm without certain proofs that something is a tradition of the apostles."⁷⁶

Fifthly, "many things crept into the locus communis of traditions from the institutions and observance of the Montanists. Therefore, watchful judgment is necessary lest we accept Montanist traditions as apostolic."⁷⁷ Montanus had taught (and had been declared a heretic for so teaching) that besides the doctrine of the Old and New Testament "the customs delivered by the Paraclete are necessary, because Christ had said

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 288.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 289.

⁷⁷Examen, p. 293.

that the apostles had not been able to bear all things, but that many things had been reserved for the Paraclete."⁷⁸ Some of the Traditions so "revealed" by the Paraclete to Montanus also found their way into the writings of Tertullian, who often mixed apostolic Traditions with those of Montanus. These false Traditions were alluded to by later fathers without making the proper distinction between them and genuine apostolic Traditions, which in turn were quoted by the papalists in order to support various of their doctrines and church practices. Among these were the superiority of the celibate life, prescribed fasts, the spiritual efficacy of such acts as the anointing in Baptism, the signing with the cross, and the laying on of hands, and the teaching that absolution is not valid unless the canonical satisfactions have been completely performed. Therefore, because Tertullian was a Montanist, the Traditions he enumerates which cannot be proven from Scripture should be held as suspect and uncertain as to their apostolic nature.

Sixthly:

The papalists have and fight for so many such traditions for which they cannot even bring forth any testimonies from approved writings of the ancients, but are compelled either to invent or use apocryphal, corrupted, or spurious writings falsely ascribed to ancient men.⁷⁹

The purpose of this falsification, of course, is the strengthening of the papal kingdom. The following are some of the most blatant examples:

There are found in the books of the councils epistles and many extensive writings of the first and ablest popes, who were renowned for both learning and piety. Into these writings they have so impudently inserted the whole state of the papal kingdom as it now is that the fraud clearly appears they are counterfeit and

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 299.

spurious. The judgment of Erasmus on these epistles is well known. There are also the judgments of others, who show the falsification both from the phrasing and from the circumstances of the times, as well as from the matters themselves. . .

The writings of Clement of Rome, with the exception of the Epistle to the Corinthians, were recognized as spurious already in the time of Eusebius. . . There are indeed many writings published under the name of Clement, and new ones are being put forth daily which try to draw the cloak of apostolic tradition over papalist corruptions, abuses, and superstitions. For from there Andrada tries to prove that holy water and salt is an apostolic tradition.

The legends of the saints have already begun, on account of their too palpable shamelessness, to be despised by both the learned and the common people. Therefore they pretend that lately there was found a very old writing concerning the lives of the apostles, whose author they have made Abdias, a Babylonian. . . In it Thomas appears after his death and preaches; in it Matthew. . . teaches that one must enter heaven through merits. There Matthew also institutes the 40-day fast and the fasts of certain other times; he also forbids the eating of flesh on certain days. There Andrew says: "Also for the dead we lay hold on Thy goodness, Lord." There Thomas admonishes certain matrons who were converted to Christ to renounce the conjugal custom and to vow perpetual chastity. . . And such utterly shameless lies, invented under the title of apostolic traditions, they want us to accept and venerate with equal devotion and reverence as the Holy Scripture itself.⁸⁰

Chemnitz points out, in conclusion, that every one of these lies and fabrications was put forth as true apostolic tradition "for the purpose of strengthening the state of the papal kingdom."⁸¹

Finally, Chemnitz observes:

The papalists are not afraid to refer many things to the traditions of the apostles about which it can be shown from papalist writers themselves that they were instituted by, and had their origin from, other much later authors.⁸²

And he adds:

If anyone manifests any doubt whether the whole canon of the Mass together with the other theatrical pomp is from apostolic tradition, he is struck down by the anathema. But it can be shown from papalist

⁸⁰Ibid., pp. 300-01.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 300.

⁸²Ibid., p. 304.

writers that for over 600 years Roman pontiffs labored in adding, until the idol of the papalist Mass sewn together by various sly strokes, was completed.⁸³

For example, Alexander ordered water to be mixed with the wine in the celebration of the Eucharist; he also instituted the holy water and the salt, Telesphorus instituted the forty-day fast; Sylvester instituted the confirmation of children and assigned the anointing to the bishops; Felix IV instituted that the sick should be anointed before death; Syricius added the memory and invocation of the saints to the Mass; Pelagius added the annual memorials of the dead to the Mass, and so on.

Chemnitz concludes:

This account concerning the papalist traditions I wanted to arrange in a simple order, so that the reader might be able to consider more correctly what a catchall of corruptions and superstitions that decree of the Synod of Trent is which commands us to receive and venerate the unwritten traditions with the same devotion and reverence as the very Word of God comprehended in the Holy Scriptures.⁸⁴

⁸³Ibid.

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 305.

CHAPTER IV

THE CANON

In Section VI, "Concerning the Canonical Books, or the Canonical Scripture," Chemnitz addresses himself to three questions: (1) Why is Scripture called canonical? (2) By whom and how was the canon of Scripture established? (3) Which are the canonical books, and which are the apocryphal?

In answering the first question, Chemnitz tells us that undoubtedly the term canonical came from Paul, who wrote in Gal. 6:16: "Peace and mercy be upon all who walk by this canon, or rule." Or in Phil. 3:16, where he wrote: "Walk by the same canon, or rule." Likewise in 2 Cor. 10:13 Paul calls the apostolic doctrine a "canon," taking the term from Ps. 19:4: "Their 'rule' has gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world," which comes from the Hebrew word meaning "canon," or "rule," referring to a line, or rope, which is held to a building in order that it will not depart from the true plan but will be completed and finished according to a certain order and necessary plan.⁸⁵ Chemnitz then compares this definition to the doctrine of the apostles:

This is a most pleasing metaphor which is applied to the doctrine of the apostles. For the church is the house of the living God, the building of which is from God, and the builders are the ministers of the Word. In order that through the ministry of the Word, or the preaching of the doctrine, the building may be correctly begun and be

⁸⁵Examen, Locus I, Section VI, p. 169.

completed and finished in the right order and proper manner, a certain canon, or rule, is necessary, according to which the builders perform their work, in order that the building may not depart from the right order and proper plan. This rule is the doctrine of the apostles, Ps. 19. But because this doctrine, as much as is sufficient and necessary, is contained in writing, the Scripture is called canonical, the canonical books, or the canon of Scripture, because it is such a rule, to which the building of the faith of the church must be formed and fitted, so that whatever agrees with this rule is judged to be right, sound, and apostolic, and whatever does not square with it, but departs or errs from that rule, either by too much or by too little, is rightly judged to be spurious, corrupted, erroneous.⁸⁶

Thus this canon, or rule, comes first from God, who revealed it to mankind from the beginning of the world through the patriarchs and prophets, through Christ and the apostles. And because this doctrine was committed to writings by the will of God, the Scripture is called canonical. Chemnitz then quotes, among others, Augustine, who uses the term "canon" in its meaning as "that part of the scale which is fastened to the middle of the weighing beam, shaped like a tongue, and shows either the balance, or that there is too much or too little."⁸⁷ In his De baptismo contra Donatistas, Book II, chapter VI, Augustine writes:

Let us not bring forth deceptive scales with which we may weigh out what we want and how we want, according to our own will, saying: "This is heavy, this is light"; but let us bring forward the divine scales from the Holy Scriptures, as from the treasuries of the Lord, and by it weigh what is heavier; or rather let us not weigh, but let us recognize what has been weighed by the Lord.⁸⁸

The second question concerns the authority of canonical Scripture. The papalists, particularly Pighius, asserted that Scripture has this authority from the Church, and this because the Church was able to reject gospels written by apostles (Matthias, Bartholomew, Thomas, Andrew, and

⁸⁶ Ibid., pp. 169-70.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 170.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

others), while on the other hand was able to give canonical authority to such gospels as Mark and Luke, who were not apostles. Chemnitz, in opposing their contention, argues that the canonical authority of Scripture was not a gift of the church, but rather inheres in the fact that it is divinely inspired, 2 Tim. 3:16: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God"; that is, that it was not brought forth by the will of men but that the men of God, moved by the Holy Ghost, both spoke and wrote, 2 Peter 1:21: "Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." And he adds:

But in order that this whole necessary matter might be firmly established against all impostures, God chose certain definite persons that they should write and adorned them with many divine testimonies that there should be no doubt that what they wrote was divinely inspired.⁸⁹

Not only this, but the testimony of the primitive church concerning which books are canonical and which are not, Chemnitz relates, is a certain testimony, primarily for three reasons: (1) The primitive church knew the authors and could thereby voice for their apostolic character; (2) The primitive church was still close enough to the happenings that were reported; and (3) The primitive church was qualified to judge whether the writings actually tallied with the oral preaching of the apostles--the preaching which was still vividly remembered.⁹⁰ Therefore, even if the authority of the canonical Scripture did not proceed chiefly from the Holy Spirit, which it did, the primitive church's selection of the canon is more to be believed than the church at a later date. And the truth of the

⁸⁹Ibid., p. 176.

⁹⁰Werner Elert, The Structure of Lutheranism, trans. Walter A. Hansen (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1962), 1:193.

matter is that the Roman Church at Trent included books in its canon which the primitive church had judged to be apocryphal. And to clear the matter up of why Mark and Luke, who were not apostles, were selected as canonical, Chemnitz quotes Augustine: "They wrote at a time in which they earned the approval not only of the church of Christ but also of the apostles themselves who were still living."⁹¹

Why, then, did the papalists include the apocryphal books in their selection of the canon? Chiefly "in order to show what testimonies and proofs it will use for the confirmation of dogmas and the restoration of morals."⁹² Thus it was done in order to provide Scriptural proofs for doctrine which could not be proved from the old canon, and in fact in many cases went against the clear teachings of Scripture. In order to protect their decree in this matter, the Romanists went so far as to pronounce the anathema on all those who refuse to accept the apocryphal books as part of the canon. Chemnitz concludes: "Therefore the anathema will be on Eusebius, Jerome, Origen, Melito, and on the whole apostolic and ancient church"⁹³ Should the apocryphal books, therefore, be thrown out of the church? Chemnitz says by no means; they can be used for the edification of the faithful, but they are not to be used for the confirmation of the dogmas of the churches.

This brings us to the third question: which are the canonical books, and which are the apocryphal? Chemnitz, following the testimony of Jerome, judges those books to be canonical which have a sure and

⁹¹Examen, p. 178.

⁹²Ibid., p. 188.

⁹³Ibid.

certain testimony for their authority from the first and ancient church. The apocryphal books, on the other hand, are those considering which there was entertained some doubt by the primitive church as to their authority. His main concern is to judge the canonicity of the books contained in the Vulgate edition of the Bible, whether they are all of equal authority, as the Council of Trent had decreed they were.

Of the books of the Old Testament, Chemnitz numbers as apocryphal, that is, not to be treated as canonical: The Book of Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, Judith, Tobit, the third and fourth books of Ezra, Baruch, The Epistle of Jeremiah, The Books of the Maccabees, and minor portions in Esther and Daniel.

Why does he list them as apocryphal? Chemnitz gives two reasons why they were judged so by the primitive church:

- 1) . . . because some of them were written after the time of the prophets, when the people of Israel no longer had prophets such as the old ones had been; and they were written by men who did not have divine testimonies like the prophets for the certainty and authority of their doctrine.
- 2) . . . because, although some of these books indeed bear the name of prophets, they had no reliable witness that they had been written by those to whom they were ascribed.⁹⁴

Of the books of the New Testament, Chemnitz lists the following as those which did not possess a sufficiently reliable, firm and harmonious testimony as to their authority from the primitive church. He quotes Eusebius to prove his point:

The writings which are not considered to be undoubted but which are spoken against, although they were known to many, are these: The Epistle of James, that of Jude, 2 Peter, and 2 and 3 John; the

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 185.

Apocalypse of John some reject while others number it with the certain and undoubted writings.⁹⁵

The reasons why the primitive church was unable to give these books equal authority with the rest of the New Testament books are listed by Chemnitz as follows:

- 1) . . . because among the ancients there were not found sufficiently sure testimonies concerning the attestation of the first apostolic church.
- 2) . . . because it was not wholly certain from the witness of the first and ancient church whether these books had been written by those under whose name they were published, but they were judged to have been published by others under the name of apostles.
- 3) . . . since some of the most ancient writers had ascribed some of these books to apostles, others, however, had contradicted, this matter, as it was not indubitably certain, was left in doubt.⁹⁶

Therefore, Chemnitz reasons, the whole matter depends on sure and certain testimonies of the first and ancient church, and where they are lacking (as Chemnitz demonstrates time and again by testimonies from Eusebius, Jerome, Origen, Augustine, and Cyprian), the later church, "as it cannot make genuine books out of spurious ones, so also it cannot make certain writings out of doubtful ones without clear and firm proofs."⁹⁷

The fact that the Council of Trent had not even bothered to demonstrate such proofs but, ignoring the testimony of the ancient church, simply declared these books to be of equal authority, particularly galled Chemnitz. He writes:

All antiquity answers that it is not certain but that it was doubted because of the contradictions of many. Tridentine arrogance however threatens anathema if anyone does not receive them as of equal, yes,

⁹⁵Ibid.

⁹⁶Ibid., p. 187.

⁹⁷Ibid.

as of the same certainty and authority as the other books, about which there never was any doubt. Why should we be surprised, therefore, that some papalist parasites assert that the pope can establish new articles of faith, since in this place he is not afraid to fabricate a new canonical Scripture? As a result there can no longer be any doubt who it is, who, sitting in the temple of God, is exalted above all that is called God. (2 Thess. 2:4)⁹⁸

Chemnitz then traces the development of the present state in the Catholic Church in this regard. First of all, he writes, "they began gradually to add the other books, which are called apocrypha by Jerome, to the authority of the canonical books."⁹⁹ Secondly, they began "to cite many things from the spurious and rejected writings as if from traditions."¹⁰⁰ Thirdly, at about the time of Gregory a beginning was made to say that "the councils were to be accepted and venerated like the gospels."¹⁰¹ Fourthly, a note in Distinction 15, in the chapter beginning Nol., says: "Augustine speaks after the manner of those times when the writings of the fathers were not yet considered authentic, but today all things are commanded to be held, down to the last iota."¹⁰² Fifthly, they falsified Augustine's statement in De doctrina Christiana, Book II, chapter VIII, interpreting it as follows in Distinction 19, in the chapter beginning In Canonicis: "Among the canonical writings those are to be preferred which the Apostolic See (that is, the Roman) has, and from it others were entitled to receive epistles."¹⁰³ It is here, Chemnitz points

⁹⁸Ibid., p. 189.

⁹⁹Ibid., p. 190.

¹⁰⁰Ibid.

¹⁰¹Ibid.

¹⁰²Ibid.

¹⁰³Ibid.

out, that the decretal letters of the Roman pontiffs are not only placed on a level with the canonical Scripture but actually placed above it, and this occurs through a falsification of something Augustine does not say, Finally, Chemnitz writes:

Because it might appear to our era to be too crude if these things, namely, the councils, fathers, and decrees of the popes, are made equal to the Gospel, a new strategem has now been invented, that whatever the papal church believes and observes must be called, and believed to be, apostolic tradition, although it cannot be proved by any testimony of Scripture. And these are the truly "guileless" proof passages of the papalists, from which they can prove anything they like without trouble.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴Ibid.

CHAPTER V

THE VULGATE

Section VII, "Concerning the Version, or Translation, of Scripture into Other Languages," is concerned chiefly with two problems:

- 1) Because they dispute only concerning the Latin editions, they condemn indirectly, as elsewhere they do openly, the translation of the Scripture into other native and popular languages.
- 2) They make only the old and common Latin edition authentic so that no one may dare or presume under any pretext whatever to reject it in sermons, readings, disputations, or expositions.¹⁰⁵

With regard to the first point, Chemnitz argues that the Scriptural evidence is quite clear; God did not give Scripture so as to be read by a chosen few, those few who could understand Latin. For example, when Hebrew was no longer understood by others, Holy Scripture began to be translated into other languages, so that the message of God's salvation could be imparted to all men. Thus Daniel and Ezra began to write down some things in the Chaldaic dialect and later the entire Old Testament was translated into the Syriac, or Chaldaic language. And when Greek became the common language of many countries, the Old Testament was translated into the Greek. Likewise, Christ Himself used the words of Scripture in the Syriac dialect on the cross. And the New Testament was begun through the sending of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost and was dedicated to the languages of different nations, and later of all nations ("Go ye,

¹⁰⁵Examen, Locus I, Section VII, p. 196.

therefore, and teach all nations. . ." Matt. 28:19), for whom salvation was intended. And Chemnitz concludes, somewhat wryly, "However, it had slipped my mind that the faith of the papalists stands outside of and beyond the Scripture; therefore, they are able to teach without a translation of Scripture into vernacular languages."¹⁰⁶

Concerning the second point of dispute Chemnitz writes:

The other chief point of this decree is concerning the old and common Latin edition which we certainly do not reject or condemn outright (for it must be given its due, whoever may have been the translator, for much of the translation is not bad).¹⁰⁷

What Chemnitz does condemn outright, however, are the errors of the Vulgate edition and the stubborn clinging of the papalists to those errors. And he points out a long list of these, some of which are:

For example, they argue that the intercession and protection of Mary can be proved from the corruption of Gen. 3:15: "She shall bruise the head of his serpent," although the Hebrew, the Chaldean, the Greek and all of antiquity read and interpret not She, but He, referring to the promised Seed, Christ Himself.¹⁰⁸

Chemnitz gives another example when he writes:

They prove the sacrifice of the Mass from this, that the old translation has (Gen. 14:18): "Melchisedek sacrificed bread and wine, for he was a priest," although the Hebrew has neither the word "sacrifice" nor the causal connection "for."¹⁰⁹

In yet another example Chemnitz writes: "Again, they mitigate original sin from the passage where God says: 'The imagination of the heart is only evil,' putting it in the Vulgate, 'The thinking of the human heart

¹⁰⁶Ibid., p. 200.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., p. 201.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., p. 205.

¹⁰⁹Ibid.

is intent upon or prone to evil."¹¹⁰ And again, Chemnitz points out that in order that

all things which they decree in their councils are to be accepted as oracles of the Holy Spirit they can prove from the corrupted text in the Vulgate, John 14:26: "The Holy Spirit will suggest to you all things whatever I shall say to you." But the Greek has: "Whatever I have said to you," not "shall say."¹¹¹

Chemnitz concludes by addressing an ironic question to the reader: "What do you think now, reader? Certainly the Council of Trent has its own reasons for making the common Latin edition of the Bible authentic in the manner shown above."¹¹²

¹¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹¹Ibid.

¹¹²Ibid., p. 206.

CHAPTER VI

THE INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE

Section VIII, "Concerning the Interpretation of the Scripture," pertains to the Council of Trent's decree that "holy mother Church" alone has the right and authority to interpret the Scriptures. In assaulting this assertion of the Roman Church, Chemnitz launches a four-pronged attack. In the first place he writes:

They contend that the gift of interpretation is so bound to the regular succession of the bishops that whenever anyone is brought to that throne, all his interpretations must at once be received and respected as legitimate, true, sound, and as having authority because of the privileged place which they occupy. Thus they say that the pope has all rights in the shrine of his heart, even if he is ignorant and so forgetful that he forgets even himself; also that he may give his will as the reason for the things he wants; that he can change the form of the sacraments which were handed down by the apostles; that he can decree things contrary to the epistles of Paul; that he can make dispensations contrary to the first four councils and contrary to the words of the Gospel, etc. I think Andrada will recognize the very words of the canonists.¹¹³

That this is false, responds Chemnitz, can be seen in 1 Cor. 12:11, where Paul discusses the gift of interpretation, and expressly says: "All these are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills." Chemnitz points out, in addition, that the entire history of the Old Testament shows that God often passed over the regular high priests and priests and raised up prophets, interpreters of His will, from elsewhere and frequently from other tribes.

¹¹³ Examen, Locus I, Section VIII, p. 209.

In the second place he writes:

Out of the gift of interpretation they make a kind of dictatorial authority, so that it is not necessary for them to prove the interpretation by showing sure and firm reasons and principles of interpretation, but without examination, without investigation and judgment, they want us to swear to that sense which those thrust on us who arrogate to themselves the right of interpretation without a sign that they have the Spirit.¹¹⁴

Yet Paul says in 1 Thess. 5:21: "Test everything, hold fast what is good." And referring to Acts 17:11-12, Chemnitz reasons: "When Paul was interpreting the Scriptures, the Bereans first search the Scriptures, whether these things are so, and when they see that the interpretation agrees with Scripture, they approve and accept it."¹¹⁵ True to form, Chemnitz also appeals to the testimony of the fathers of the church. He quotes Origen, who writes in Homily 17 on Exodus: "We must not only apply diligence to learn the sacred writings but must also beseech the Lord that He would Himself take the sealed book and see fit to open it; for it is He who opens the minds that the Scriptures may be understood."¹¹⁶ And in Homily 8 on Joshua he writes: "To explain these things we need the grace of the Holy Spirit."¹¹⁷ Likewise Chemnitz refers to Hilary who says the best reader of Scripture is one who does not carry the understanding of what is said to the Scripture but who carries it away from the Scripture.¹¹⁸

There is therefore no dictatorial or pontifical authority of interpretation in the church, Chemnitz concludes, but there are definite rules

¹¹⁴Ibid., pp. 209-10.

¹¹⁵Ibid., p. 210.

¹¹⁶Ibid.

¹¹⁷Ibid.

¹¹⁸Ibid., p. 208.

according to which interpretation must be carried out, as the church has the right to judge in this regard. And he adds:

But the papalists take this right of interpretation to themselves, so that by one and the same stroke they both exempt themselves from the labor of proving and take away from the church the privilege of judging. This is what we fight against in this canon.¹¹⁹

In the third place, Chemnitz criticizes the papalists for their habit of taking only from the fathers that which will support their own corruptions of doctrine. He would rather they follow Jerome in his intention to "read the ancients, to test everything, to retain what is good, and not to depart from the faith of the catholic church."¹²⁰ And Chemnitz adds:

This freedom in the matter of interpretation must by all means be retained in the church in order that the interpretations of any person whatever may be read with judgment and freely be examined according to the sources and foundations. Nor must any interpretation of Scripture be condemned because it disagrees with some of the ancients, so long as it is in agreement with the words of Scripture, the circumstances of the text, and the analogy of the faith¹²¹

In the fourth place, "the papalists depart from the clear meaning of Scripture and give themselves the right to interpret it as they please, despite its being against the clear meaning of Scripture."¹²² And what is their intent? Chemnitz answers:

By this strategy they seek to escape the clearest passages concerning justifying faith, concerning the sins which remain in the regenerate, concerning the imperfection of good works in this life, free will, the intercession of Christ, etc.¹²³

¹¹⁹Ibid., p. 211.

¹²⁰Ibid., p. 212.

¹²¹Ibid., p. 213.

¹²²Ibid.

¹²³Ibid.

And he gives as examples: "When Christ says: 'Drink of it, all of you,' they add their own interpretation: 'Not all, but only the priests.' When Paul says, Heb. 13:4: 'Marriage is honorable in all,' they say, 'Not in all, but only in the laity.'"¹²⁴ Paul calls this sort of doctrines "doctrines of demons," and Chemnitz concludes Section VIII and his Locus De Sacra Scriptura with these words:

Andrada marvels that men who do not have the gift of interpretation themselves should be able or willing to judge concerning interpretations. We know indeed that there are degrees and that not all have the same power of discernment in the church. We know also that no one should be wiser than is proper. Yet it is known how the fathers trusted the judgment of the people for whom they interpreted the Scriptures in their sermons. For the interpreter must show the reasons and bases of his interpretation so clearly and certainly that also others who themselves do not have the gift of interpretation may be able to understand and grasp them. In this way the eunuch recognized that the interpretation of Philip was true. (Acts 8:35-38)¹²⁵

¹²⁴Ibid.

¹²⁵Ibid., p. 216.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

We may well ask at this point, in summing up Chemnitz' refutation of Trent in the Examen, how well did he do? A Jesuit-trained Austrian canon named Francis Leopold von Reissing, who was converted to Lutheranism in the early part of the eighteenth century due to his reading the Examen, wrote of Chemnitz' effort: "What shall I write about Martin Chemnitz, to whom, after God, I owe my conversion, and whose unanswerable Examen Concilii Tridentini puts all papalist libraries to shame . . . ?"¹²⁶

At this point in the paper, it is difficult to disagree with him. In Chapter III, "Scripture and Tradition," Chemnitz effectively establishes the written Word, as opposed to the unwritten Traditions of the Romanists, as the sole source, norm, standard and guide of all matters pertaining to faith and life in the Christian church, as attested to by the Scriptures themselves; in addition, he also undermines the foundation of the Roman appeal to the primacy of the authority of the Roman Church (as the church of Peter the Rock) by making extensive and devastating quotations from the ancient fathers, which identify the true Christian church with the confession of and the adherence to the pure doctrine of the Holy Scriptures. In Chapter IV, "The Canon," Chemnitz unveils the true motivation behind the Tridentine inclusion in Scripture of apocryphal and doubtful books,

¹²⁶Piepkorn, p. 33.

and that is to substantiate and support doctrines and pronouncements of the Roman Church which cannot be proven from Scripture and which are used by the Romanists to strengthen the power and authority of the papal rule. In Chapter V, "The Vulgate," Chemnitz, on the one hand, reveals the many and blatant corruptions of the Vulgate edition of the Bible, many of which support Romanist doctrine, and, on the other hand, proves that the main purpose of the "Vulgate Decree" was to deny the truth of God's Word to the common man, thus, once again, strengthening the power and authority of the papacy. Finally, in Chapter VI, "The Interpretation of Scripture," Chemnitz shows that the gift of interpretation is not bound to the succession of bishops in the Roman Church, culminating in the pope, but that in most instances the message of Scripture is clear and simple enough to be understood by even the uneducated.

It seems as if Chemnitz' case is irrefutable. Nevertheless, in order to give the Romanists the opportunity of a fair reply, we go on in Part III to examine the arguments against Chemnitz by the Jesuit Robert Bellarmine, the chief Roman defender of the canons and decrees of the Council of Trent.

PART III

BELLARMINI'S RESPONSE TO CHEMNITZ--THE CONTROVERSIES--

AND CHEMNITZ' DEFENSE OF HIMSELF

CHAPTER I

A SHORT LIFE OF BELLARMINO

Roberto Francesco Romolo Bellarmino (Bellarmine) was born at Montepulciano, in Tuscany, on 4 October 1542. His father was Vincenzo Bellarmino, his mother Cinthia Cervini, the sister of Cardinal Marcello Cervini, who was prominent at the Council of Trent and who became Pope Marcellus II in 1555. His father destined him for a political career, hoping in this way to restore the family name, which had fallen on hard times, but his mother wanted him to enter the Jesuit order, and her influence prevailed. Accordingly, he was brought up at the newly-founded Jesuit college in his hometown, and entered the Society of Jesus in 1560. The next three years were spent studying philosophy at the Roman College, after which he taught the humanities, first at Florence, then at Mondovi, where he was introduced to and became proficient in Greek. His systematic study of theology began at Padua in 1567, where his teachers were Thomists, the Jesuits not yet having had time to develop a theology of their own.

In 1569 Bellarmine was sent to Louvain, then the most famous Roman Catholic university. He was ordained in 1570. He taught theology from the Summa Theologiae of Thomas Aquinas in the Jesuit house of studies, and began the groundwork for his major work, the Controversies. The University of Louvain represented the Catholic Church's front-line of defense

against the Protestants.¹ The atmosphere was one of practical defensive scholarship rather than of calm speculation or the reasoned development of dogmas securely held.² Taking advantage of this atmosphere, Bellarmine devoted his energy to the study of Scripture, church history, and patristics in order to systematize church doctrine against the attacks of the Reformers. He also wrote a Hebrew grammar and compiled a patristic work, De Scriptoribus ecclesiasticis.

In 1576 he was recalled to Italy and entrusted with the chair of Controversies recently founded at the Roman College. He devoted eleven years to this work and out of his lectures grew his most famous work, Disputationes de controversiis christianae fidei. The Controversies was the earliest attempt to systematize the various controversies of the time, and made an immense impression throughout Europe, running through thirty editions in twenty years, and being primarily responsible for the formation of special chairs in England and Germany to provide replies to it.³ It seems also to have occasioned the return of many to the Roman Church.

In 1588 Bellarmine was appointed spiritual director of the Roman College. Out of his catechetical lessons to lay brothers and students came the small catechism for children, Dottrina christiana breve, and the catechism for teachers, Dichiarazione piu copiosa della dottrina christiana,

¹New Catholic Encyclopedia, 1967 ed., s.v. "St. Robert Bellarmine," by J. Friske.

²Ibid.

³James A. Magner, "Blessed Robert Bellarmine, S.J.--Controversialist," The Catholic World 123 (May 1926):180.

both of which were approved by Clement VII and which remained popular until Vatican Council I (1869-70).⁴

In 1590 Bellarmine was informed that Pope Sixtus V, who had warmly accepted the dedication of the Controversies, intended to put its first volume on the Index, because he had discovered that it gave the Pope not a direct but only an indirect power over temporals. This, however, was averted due to Sixtus' death and the new Pope, Gregory XIV, even gave the Controversies a special approbation. At about this time, too, Bellarmine sat on the final commission for the revision of the Vulgate text which had been desired by the Council of Trent. Unfortunately, Pope Sixtus himself, who was unskilled in revisions of this kind, had introduced alterations of his own into the revision, which were grossly incorrect, and had gone so far as to have a copy of this edition printed and partially distributed, together with the proposed Bull enforcing its use.⁵ Sixtus, however, died before it could be formally introduced and his immediate successors quickly proceeded to remove the mistakes and call in the defective copy. One problem yet remained; namely, how to substitute a more correct edition without having such an action speak ill of the name of Sixtus. Bellarmine proposed that the new edition should remain in the name of Sixtus, with a prefatory explanation that, because of some small typographical and editorial errors which had inadvertently crept in, Sixtus had himself resolved that a new impression should be undertaken. His suggestion was accepted and the changes were made, Bellarmine himself writing the explanatory preface.

⁴New Catholic Encyclopedia.

⁵The Catholic Encyclopedia, 1907 ed., s.v. "Bellarmine," by Sydney F. Smith.

After serving as rector of the Roman College (1592), provincial of the Jesuit's Neapolitan province (1594), and theologian to Clement VIII (1597), he was made a cardinal by the same Pope in 1599. At the turn of the century he became involved in the controversy between the Thomists and the Molinists concerning the nature of the concord between efficacious grace and human liberty. His advice was to refrain from deciding the doctrinal question authoritatively; instead, it should be discussed further in the schools, the disputants on either side being strictly forbidden to indulge in censures or condemnations of their adversaries.⁶ At first Clement VIII agreed with him, but later disagreed and, Bellarmine's presence then being an embarrassment, appointed Bellarmine to the Archbishopric of Capua to get him out of the way.⁷ When Clement VIII died in 1605, Bellarmine was recalled to Rome by Paul V to serve the Church at large.

Bellarmino spent the next few years in controversies involving papal power; against the Republic of Venice over clerical immunities (1606-7); against King James I of England over the divine right of kings and the English oath of allegiance (1607-9); and against the Gallicanism of William Barclay and Roger Widdrington in 1610, which occasioned Bellarmine's famous Tractatus de potestate Summi Pontificis in rebus temporalibus adversus Oulielmum Barclaeum.

The last major controversy of Bellarmine's life came in 1616 when he was ordered to admonish Galileo, whom he admired, after the Holy Office had condemned the heliocentric theory of Copernicus as being contrary to

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

Scripture. Bellarmine lived to see one more conclave, that which elected Gregory XV, in February of 1621. In the summer of the same year, due to his failing health, he was allowed to retire to Sant' Andrea in order to prepare for the end.⁸

The process for his canonization was begun in 1627 but was delayed for political reasons until 1930. In 1931 he was declared a Doctor of the Church by Pius XI.

⁸Ibid.

CHAPTER II

INTRODUCTION TO THE CONTROVERSIES

Bellarmino's Controversies are made up of four volumes. The first volume treats of the Word of God, of Christ, and of the pope; the second of the authority of councils, and of the Church; the third of the sacraments; and the fourth of grace, free will, justification, and good works. The present study is primarily concerned with the second volume, dealing with the authority of councils and the Church, which Bellarmine sets against the authority of Holy Scripture.

In the preface to the second volume, Bellarmine relates the primary objective of this undertaking as follows: "I shall expound, discuss, and refute the contrary arguments of Luther, Calvin, Heshusius, and Chemnitz, who are our chief opponents in this matter, and also lay bare their lies, frauds, and impostures."⁹ In so doing, he uses as a principle of order the Apostle's Creed. The Creed, he mentions at the beginning of the Controversies, has undergone successive heretical fire over the centuries, and strangely enough, the attacks have followed a roughly chronological sequence: the first articles, dealing with God's own nature, were challenged first, then those which expressed faith in the person of Christ,

⁹James Broderick, Robert Bellarmine, 2 vols. (London, New York, Toronto: Longmans, Green and Co., 1950), 1:351

and finally, from Luther's day onward, the articles at the end of the Creed, "I believe in the holy Catholic Church and the forgiveness of sins."¹⁰

As Bellarmine's polemic represents a rebuttal of the position of Chemnitz, the chapter headings in Part III are identical to those in Part II, that is, III. Scripture and Tradition; IV. The Canon; V. The Vulgate; and VI. The Interpretation of Scripture.

¹⁰Marvin R. O'Connell, The Counter Reformation (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), p. 358.

CHAPTER III

SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION

We assert that the whole necessary doctrine, whether regarding faith or practice, is not expressly contained in scripture; and consequently that, besides the written word of God, we require also the unwritten word of God, that is, divine and apostolic traditions.¹¹

In these words Bellarmine reaffirms the Tridentine decree on Scripture and Tradition and, in addition, defines the state of the question as it exists between Protestants and Catholics.

What Bellarmine calls divine Traditions are those which Christ Himself instituted, but which nevertheless are not found in Scripture; these are in particular all those things which pertain to the matter and form of the sacraments.¹² What he calls apostolic Traditions are those which the apostles prescribed with the authority of the Holy Ghost, although they did not make any mention of them in their epistles.¹³ As examples he lists the fast of Lent, the Ember days, and many others. He also numbers among the Traditions ecclesiastical ones, which by degrees, and by the consent

¹¹William Whitaker, A Disputation on Holy Scripture, trans. William Fitzgerald (Cambridge, England: The University Press, 1849), p. 501.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid.

of nations, obtained the force of laws, although they have nothing to do with the formation and definition of doctrine.¹⁴ He declines to give any examples.

In the same manner as Trent, Bellarmine gives the unwritten Traditions parity with Scripture, his reason being that the authority of the word of God does not depend upon its being written, but upon its having proceeded from God. Beyond the formulations of Trent, he enumerates many kinds of unwritten Traditions. Some are matters of faith, such as that Mary was always a virgin and that there are only four Gospels and no more.¹⁵ Others concern morals, such as the sign of the cross, the celebration of festival days, and so on. Perpetual Traditions are never to have an end; while temporary ones belong to those legal ceremonies which the Christians observed for a while to enable the church, composed of Jews and Gentiles, to unite into one body.¹⁶ Universal Traditions are observed everywhere, such as Easter and Pentecost; particular Traditions, on the other hand, only certain churches observe, such as fasting on Saturday which occurs in the Roman Church.¹⁷ Necessary Traditions are delivered in the form of a precept, as that Easter is to be celebrated on a Sunday, whereas free Traditions are delivered in the form of advice, such as the sprinkling of holy water.¹⁸

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 502.

¹⁶Whitaker, pp. 502-3.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 503.

¹⁸Ibid.

In addition, Bellarmine proposes five rules whereby true and genuine Traditions of the apostles may be distinguished. It is upon these rules that the foundation of Bellarmine's entire argumentation rests (as well as by a use of reason separated from the superior to Scripture) and which represents his essential disagreement with Chemnitz and his substantiation of Trent. Bellarmine raises the edifice of his argumentation on the foundation of the authority of the Roman Catholic Church; Chemnitz raises his on the foundation of the authority of Holy Scripture.

His first rule is that whatever the universal church holds as an article of faith, and which is not found in the Bible, is without any doubt apostolical, because the church cannot err.¹⁹ He argues that the church cannot err, first of all, because it is the ground of truth, secondly, because Christ said the gates of hell will not prevail against the rock upon which the church is built.²⁰ His second rule is similar to the first: when the universal church observes anything of such a nature as that it could not be instituted by anyone but God, and yet is nowhere found mentioned in Scripture, it must be believed to have been instituted by Christ Himself and delivered down to His apostles, as the church can no more err in act than in belief.²¹ His third rule states that whatever the universal church has observed through all former times and ages is apostolic, even though it is of such a nature as that it might have been instituted by the church.²² The fourth rule says that when the doctors of the

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Whitaker, pp. 505-6.

²²Ibid., p. 507.

church, whether assembled in council, or writing it in their books, affirm something to have descended from apostolical authority, it is to be held apostolical.²³ His fifth rule asserts that that is to be held and deemed undoubtedly apostolic, which is esteemed as such in those churches wherein there is an unbroken succession of bishops from the apostles.²⁴ Where Trent had sought to veil somewhat the intrusion of the authority of the church via Traditions into an area (doctrine and morals) where Scripture had once reigned supreme, Bellarmine removes the veil completely and exhibits the real feelings of the majority party at Trent and solidifies the general opinion that apostolic Traditions are not only to be considered on an equal level with the Scriptures but in actuality on a high level than the written Word. But in order to effectively promulgate and defend this opinion, it was necessary for Bellarmine to attack the authority of Scripture by proving, first of all, that Scripture is not absolutely necessary to the life of the church and, secondly, that Scripture is insufficient without the unwritten Traditions.

With regard to the necessity of Scripture, Bellarmine argues in the first place that there was no Scripture from Adam to Moses and yet there was then the word of God and pure religion; and that therefore the Scriptures are not absolutely necessary.²⁵ His proof is drawn from Gen. 18:19, where God says, "I know that Abraham will teach his children," while there is no mention of Scripture in the book of Genesis. Thus, he asserts, religion was preserved pure for two thousand years before Christ

²³Ibid., p. 509.

²⁴Ibid., p. 510.

²⁵Ibid., p. 516.

without Scriptures: Why then might it not have been preserved also for fifteen hundred years after Christ? Chemnitz answers that the very reason for the institution of Scripture (see also Part Two, Section II) was because "the purity of the Word was finally not preserved faithfully by traditions of the living voice but corrupted and adulterated, yes, in the end wholly lost."²⁶ For example, God revealed Himself and His will to Adam, who was appointed by God to be "bishop for his time," in order that through the testimony of Adam the heavenly doctrine might be spread by the living voice and transmitted to posterity without corruptions.²⁷ Yet not long after this revelation, Cain and his assembly departed from the purity of the Word of God. And after the death of Adam, not only the descendants of Cain but also the sons of God, who had accepted the Traditions of the heavenly doctrine, corrupted their ways,

among which corruptions the foremost was without doubt the adulteration of the Word of God. For God says: "My Spirit shall not strive in man forever," and He adds the reason: "Because they are flesh, and the imagination of the human heart is evil."²⁸

Likewise Chemnitz points to the falling away from God's Word by the descendants of Noah, the descendants of the sons of Jacob, and so on throughout the history of the Old Testament.

Bellarmino proceeds to the second age of the church, between Moses and Christ, during which time the Scriptures were written and received, but which Scriptures Bellarmino nevertheless maintains to have been unnecessary in that, although the Jews used to read the Scriptures, yet they

²⁶Examen, Locus I, Section II, p. 50.

²⁷Ibid., p. 49.

²⁸Ibid.

used Tradition more than Scriptures, as appears from Ps. 44:1,2 and 78:3,4, where we read that fathers related the works of God to their children; and from Deuteronomy 6:20, where the fathers are commanded to tell their children, when their children should ask them, what great things God had done in their behalf.²⁹

Aside from the fact that these particular passages are taken out of context of the whole Scripture, in which the reader is often directed to the written Word, Chemnitz replies by condemning the false Traditions of the Jews as Christ did, who also directed the Pharisees not to the Traditions of "the men of old" but to the written Word. And Chemnitz quotes the apostle Peter, who writes in 1 Peter 1:16-18:

You were ransomed from the futile ways which you inherited from the tradition of your fathers not with gold or silver but with the precious blood of the Lamb without blemish, Christ; therefore, be holy in all your conduct, as it is written.³⁰

In addition, Chemnitz shows that even in Old Testament times, when controversies arose, they were settled by means of the words of Scripture. Thus when at the time of Ahaz the Altar of the Lord had been removed and the altar of Damascus put in place of it and the greatest corruptions ruled, which were put forth as if they were revelations, Isaiah (Is. 8:20) writes: "To the teaching and to the testimony! But if they speak not according to this word, there will be no dawn for them."³¹ And when Jehoshaphat set about restoring the true religion which had been corrupted with superstitions, he sent out to teach the

²⁹Whitaker, p. 518.

³⁰Examen, Locus I, Section III, p. 66.

³¹Examen, Locus I, Section II, p. 60.

people of Judah some of his princes, priests, and Levites, who used the rule and norm of Scripture to restore the purity of the doctrine of the fathers, as is written in 2 Chron. 17:7-9: "Having the book of the law of the Lord with them, they went about through all the cities of Judah and taught among the people."³²

Bellarmino then argues that the Jews made greater use of Tradition than of Scripture out of necessity due to the fact that at that time the Scriptures were not yet reduced into the form of books but were scattered about in loose papers, because the priests and Levites were neglectful of their duty to such a degree that sometimes the whole Scripture disappeared, as is plain from 2 Kings 22, where we read of a volume of the law being found.³³ But after the captivity, Ezra reduced the Scriptures into the form of books and added many things, such as the piece about the death of Moses at the end of Deuteronomy.³⁴

Again we have an example of Bellarmine taking a passage of Scripture out of context and making an unwarranted assumption based on that passage. It is clear from chapters 21-23, far from being the fault of negligent priests and Levites, the disappearance of the Law (that is, the autograph copy of Moses himself) was the result of Manasseh's and Amon's zeal to follow after idolatry and lead the people with them. According to Chemnitz, "they hid the book of the Law of the Lord, lest it should be publicly read to the people every seventh year, as Moses had commanded."³⁵ In

³²Ibid.

³³Whitaker.

³⁴Ibid., pp. 518-19.

³⁵Examen.

addition, Bellarmine can in no way argue that the whole Scripture had disappeared as there were manuscript copies in use at that time, although not to any great extent due to the policies of Manasseh and his son Amon.

Bellarmino moves on to the third age of the church, beginning with Christ's coming, and argues that the church was without Scriptures even for many years after Christ.³⁶ That this argument is ridiculous is obvious, realizing that the Old Testament Scripture was in common usage then, in fact, was often quoted by Christ, and that the writing of the New Testament Scripture was not begun immediately in that:

. . . it had to be confirmed over against the slanders and contradictions of Jews and Gentiles by the preaching of the apostles with signs and wonders throughout the whole world, and it had to be approved by the assent of believing people in all lands, that we might be certain that those things which were written are not doubtful, uncertain, or not sure enough, but as Luke says, accomplished (Luke 1:1), that is, confirmed by God through apostles and approved by the first believers throughout the whole world as of the greatest reliability.³⁷

Bellarmino next tries to prove that Scripture is insufficient. He reasons that if Christ or His apostles had intended to restrain the word of God to the compendious form of Scripture, then Christ would have commanded the evangelists and apostles to write, and they would somewhere have indicated that they wrote in pursuance of the Lord's injunction.³⁸ But we read nowhere of this, he asserts, therefore they never designed to do this.

Apparently Bellarmine did not look at Scripture closely enough, for Chemnitz refers to 1 Cor. 14:37, where Paul writes: "If anyone thinks that

³⁶Whitaker, p. 519.

³⁷Examen, Locus I, Section IV, p. 80.

³⁸Whitaker, p. 526.

he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord."³⁹ In addition, the Scriptures have ample testimony that they were written at God's command, in the person of the Holy Spirit, as Chemnitz writes:

The canonical Scripture has its eminent authority chiefly from this, that it is divinely inspired, 2 Tim. 3:16, that is, that it was not brought forth by the will of men but that men of God, moved by the Holy Spirit, both spoke and wrote, 2 Peter 1:21.⁴⁰

In the second place, Bellarmine points out that there are many things which we cannot be ignorant of that are nowhere found in the Scriptures; therefore, all things necessary are not contained in the Scriptures.⁴¹ As examples, he cites such things as that we must believe that the essential parts of all the sacraments were instituted by Christ: but no such thing is found in Scripture, except with respect to two, or three at the most; or he says that it is necessary to believe that Mary continued a virgin always, but this is not certain from the Scriptures.⁴²

Chemnitz would undoubtedly applaud Bellarmine for his admission that these two doctrines cannot be found in Scripture, but would also hasten to criticize him for promulgating doctrines merely on the Roman Church's say so. As Chemnitz writes:

But when that body of men which has the title of the church departs from the true doctrine of the Word of God, it does not follow on that account, either that the sound doctrine is false, or that the errors,

³⁹Examen, p. 121.

⁴⁰Examen, Locus I, Section VI, p. 176.

⁴¹Whitaker, p. 529.

⁴²Ibid., p. 538.

which that body of men holds, are the truth; but this follows, that the body of men, when it no longer has the true doctrine, is not the true church.⁴³

Having proven to his satisfaction that the Scriptures are both insufficient and unnecessary, Bellarmine attempts to prove the existence of some true unwritten Traditions. His first argument is taken from what has already been said and argued, that is, if Scripture does not contain all necessary things, then there is some unwritten word: otherwise God would not have provided for His church, if anything necessary were wanting.⁴⁴ This argument, however, has sufficiently been obviated by Chemnitz, so we will move on to Bellarmine's second argument, which is taken from the authority of Scripture. Bellarmine quotes John 16:2, where Christ says to His disciples: "I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now," from which he concludes that there are many unwritten Traditions, because the Lord said many things which are not written.⁴⁵

Concerning this passage Chemnitz responds by quoting Augustine, who writes:

Since the evangelists kept silence, who among us can say that it was this or that, or, if he dares to say it, how will he prove it? Who is so boastful and rash as to affirm, without divine testimony, even though he should speak the truth, what are the things which the Holy Spirit did not want to write through the evangelists? Which one of us does this without incurring the worst charge of rashness, which is not a mark either of prophetic or of apostolic authority?⁴⁶

Bellarmino also quotes John 21:25: "There are also many other things which Jesus did, the which if they should be written one by one, I

⁴³Examen, Locus I, Section V, p. 163.

⁴⁴Whitaker, p. 542.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Examen, Locus I, Section IV, pp. 94-95.

suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written."⁴⁷

But Chemnitz rejoins that John also wrote: "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name."⁴⁸ And he explains further:

John affirms that that part of the doctrine of Christ which is necessary and sufficient for true faith and salvation has been written. Therefore it is clear that though not everything . . . was written, nevertheless, whatever of the doctrine and miracles of Christ is necessary and sufficient for true faith and eternal life has been written.⁴⁹

A third quotation by Bellarmine is taken from 2 Thess. 2:15, where the apostle says: "Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which you have been taught, whether by our word or epistle."⁵⁰ Thus, Bellarmine reasons, it is plain that all things are not written.

Of this objection Chemnitz writes:

. . . Paul said this at the time when the books of the New Testament were first beginning to be written and not yet all of them had been published. But toward the end of his life, when the books of the New Testament had been written and published, he speaks of the Scripture in such a way that he makes the tradition and the Scripture equal, so that whoever has the one has also the other; and this he does because the same thing was written which had been transmitted orally.⁵¹

Finally, Bellarmine quotes 2 John 12, where John writes: "Having many things to write to you, I would not write with paper and ink; but I trust shortly to see you, and to speak with you face to face, that our

⁴⁷Whitaker, p. 545.

⁴⁸Examen, p. 93.

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Whitaker, p. 551.

⁵¹Examen, p. 139.

joy may be full."⁵² Therefore, says Bellarmine, John said many things to the disciples which are nowhere found in the Scriptures.

Chemnitz answers:

The genuine apostle John speaks in an altogether different manner in the First Epistle, which is clearly "authentic," namely, that he is writing that old commandment which they had received from the beginning. But concerning the author of the two later epistles there has always been doubt among the ancients. Therefore let that stand which Jerome says concerning the Apocrypha from the judgment of antiquity, that for the confirmation of the things which come into controversy, testimonies neither can nor should be taken from them. And since the author of these epistles did not want to write many of the things he mentions, we answer with the words of Augustine: "Who, therefore, will say that it is this or that; or, if he dares to say it, how will he prove it?"⁵³

Bellarmino's third argument depends entirely on the testimony and authority of general councils. He proposes three councils, the first Nicean, the second Nicean, and that of Constantinople, the eighth general.

As to the first council of Nicea, he says that Theodoret, Book I, chapter 8, writes plainly, that Arius was condemned in that council by unwritten Tradition: For even the Arians themselves alleged some things from Scripture; therefore, they were condemned not by Scripture, but by traditive doctrine.⁵⁴

Yet, as Chemnitz points out, Theodoret writes, Book I, chapter 7, concerning the resolution of controversies by the council, that Constantine himself said:

For the books of the evangelists and apostles and the oracles of the ancient prophets plainly teach us what we are to think concerning

⁵²Whitaker, p. 558.

⁵³Examen, pp. 147-48.

⁵⁴Whitaker, p. 562.

divine matters. Therefore let us cease our hostile discord and take the solutions of the questions out of the divinely inspired sayings.⁵⁵

In addition, Athanasius shows in the second discourse of Contra Arianos that most of what Arius alleged came not from Scripture but from unwritten Traditions.⁵⁶ And even if the council had refuted Arius in part from the evidence of unwritten Tradition, it was plainly in accord with Scriptural teachings, as the sole rule and norm for all decisions of the council was Scripture itself.

Bellarmino also adduces the second council of Nicea, in which these words occur: "Many things are observed by us without the authority of Scripture, as for example, the worship of images," and the eighth general council of Constantinople, where the fathers of the council say that they hold the apostolic and ecclesiastical Traditions along with Scriptures.⁵⁷

Both of these councils are for Chemnitz illustrative of how the church had fallen from the true doctrine of the Word of God observed in the earliest councils of the church, for the first council of Nicea took place in the year 325, whereas the latter two councils took place in the years 787 and 879-80 respectively. Thus the statements in these councils that militate against the Word of God are no more authoritative for Chemnitz than those of Trent, as he writes:

Therefore it is right, and must of necessity be done according to the commandment of God, that we examine the decrees of the councils according to the norm of sacred Scripture, as the saying of Jerome has it: "That is the doctrine of the Holy Spirit which is set forth

⁵⁵ Examen, Locus I, Lection V, pp. 153-54.

⁵⁶ Examen, Locus II, Section VII, p. 277.

⁵⁷ Whitaker, p. 564.

in the canonical books. If the councils pronounce anything against this, I consider it wicked."⁵⁸

Bellarmino's fourth argument is founded upon testimonies from the fathers, of which we will examine three. His first example is that of Polycarp, of whom Eusebius, Book 5, chapter 20, relates that Irenaeus says that Polycarp liked to repeat by heart many things which he had heard from the apostles concerning our Lord, and which he had written not on paper, but on his heart.⁵⁹

Chemnitz, however, responds:

But Irenaeus immediately adds that Polycarp had said those things which he had received from those who had themselves seen the Word of life were "all in agreement with Holy Scriptures." This is truly a golden statement of Irenaeus, which correctly explains how most of the statements of the ancients concerning traditions must be understood.⁶⁰

Bellarmino next produces a testimony from Basil, who, in his De Spirit., chapter 27, writes (in a definition strikingly similar to the partim-partim formula of Trent): "Those things which we observe and teach we have received partly from the written teaching, and partly delivered to us in a mystery from the tradition of the apostles."⁶¹

But elsewhere, Chemnitz writes in explanation, Basil also writes:

I would like very much to pass this on to my hearers in the same simple way in which I received it handed down to me; but since you (the Sabellians and Arius) surround me as judges rather than as pupils, it is necessary that we, as in a court trial, prolong our

⁵⁸Examen, Preface, p. 31.

⁵⁹Whitaker, p. 581.

⁶⁰Examen, Locus II, Section I, pp. 225-26.

⁶¹Whitaker, p. 588.

reply. But we urge that you seek to hear from us not what pleases you but what pleases the Lord and agrees with the Scriptures and is not contrary to the fathers.⁶²

Finally, Bellarmine quotes Tertullian's remark in his book of Prescriptions against heresies, which he wrote before he became a Montanist, and in which he says that we should dispute against the heretics out of Tradition, and not out of the Scriptures.⁶³

But when this assertion by Tertullian is put in its proper context, as Chemnitz does, we find Tertullian really saying the following:

I report these things from Irenaeus and Tertullian in order that it may be clear for what reason and purpose these fathers appealed to the traditions. Because the heretics did not accept certain Scriptures, or did not accept them completely, and accused them either of not being right or of containing contradictory statements or of being insufficient, so that the truth could not be found from them alone, therefore, says Tertullian, we must not appeal to the Scriptures nor rest our battle upon them, since no victory or only an uncertain one can be gained from them against such heretics . . . And he adds the reason, that it must be proved first with whom the truth of Scripture is found before appeal is made to the Scriptures themselves.⁶⁴

Bellarmino's fifth argument is taken from the testimony of heretics, from which he concludes: Because the heretics of all times have rejected Traditions, those who despise Traditions are heretics.⁶⁵

Yet Chemnitz, as he proves in De Traditionibus, does not reject Traditions per se, but only those that disagree with the Scriptures. In addition, it is manifestly untrue that the heretics of all times have

⁶²Examen, Locus II, Section VI, pp. 257-58.

⁶³Whitaker, p. 601.

⁶⁴Examen, Locus II, Section III, p. 234.

⁶⁵Whitaker, p. 610.

rejected Traditions; in fact, the very opposite is more often the case, as Chemnitz has shown time and again in reference to the Jews, the heretics of the ancient church, and the Romanists themselves.

CHAPTER IV

THE CANON

Bellarmino reaffirms the Tridentine decree on the canonical Scriptures, defending in particular the canonicity of Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, Baruch, Ecclesiasticus, and first and second Maccabees on the authority of certain councils and fathers. The issue connected with the authority of certain of the New Testament books (James, Jude, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, and the Apocalypse of John) he simply ignores.

Among the councils he cites are the third council of Carthage, which was later confirmed by Pope Leo IV, the sixth general council at Constantinople, the council of Florence, under Pope Eugenius IV, the council of Trent, under Pope Paul III, and a council of seventy bishops called by Pope Gelasius.⁶⁶

Chemnitz, of course, has already shown that the canonical books have their authority from the fact that they are divinely inspired and that therefore, they are not dependent upon the judgment of either councils or popes. In addition, the above named books do not possess a sure and certain testimony for their canonicity from the first and ancient church; therefore, no amount of later councils or papal pronouncements can reverse the testimony of the ancient church, which church was closest to the time

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 39.

of the apostles themselves and thus could judge correctly and certainly as to the canon. The earliest council cited by Bellarmine is that of Carthage in 418.

Among the fathers he cites are Pope Innocent I, in his third Epistle to Exuperius of Thoulouse, Augustine, Book 2, chapter 8, De Doctrina Christiana, and Isidore of Seville, Etymolog., Book 6, chapter 1.⁶⁷

Chemnitz arrays against these the testimony of such as Origen, Tertullian, Eusebius, Cyprian, Jerome, and Augustine, whose quotation by Bellarmine from De Doctrina Christiana has already been shown in this paper (Part Two, Section II) to have been falsified. In any event, Bellarmine is unable to come up with any really authoritative evidence from either council, father or pope, much less from the Scriptures themselves.

⁶⁷Ibid.

CHAPTER V

THE VULGATE

Bellarmino begins by attempting to prove that the authentic edition of the Scriptures used in the church should not be the Hebrew and Greek originals but the old Latin Vulgate edition approved by the Council of Trent.

His first argument to that end states that from the time of Gregory the Great, the whole Latin church used this one Latin edition alone.⁶⁸ That this statement is manifestly untrue Chemnitz shows by quoting Augustine, who, in his De doctrina Christiana, Book II, chapter XI, writes:

People of the Latin tongue need two wings for an understanding of the divine Scriptures, one Hebrew and the other Greek, in order that they may have recourse to the original models if the infinite variety of the Latin translators has caused some doubt.⁶⁹

His second argument states that the Vulgate edition authenticated by the Council of Trent is the same one that Augustine, Damasus, Isidore, Rabanus, Bernard, and others both commended and followed.⁷⁰ But Chemnitz shows this statement to be false in that the Vulgate edition authenticated by the Council of Trent differs in many places from the Latin edition

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 135.

⁶⁹Examen, Locus I, Section VII, pp. 203-4.

⁷⁰Whitaker, p. 137.

translated by Jerome in the fourth century, which eventually became the standard edition of the church. Chemnitz writes:

If, therefore, there is debate about the antiquity of the Latin version, that certainly which is now the common one will not be the oldest; for it is attributed to Jerome as far as the books of the Old Testament are concerned. And yet Jerome himself, in matters of the Hebrew, renders and interprets many things differently than we now read in the Vulgate edition. We have Jerome's version of the Psalter and Ecclesiastes; but in the Vulgate we have far other versions of these books. Jerome confesses that he had emended the four Evangelists by a comparison of the Greek codices, and yet when he translates Matthew, he criticizes certain things in the Vulgate (an earlier Latin edition, which Jerome revised), as he also does in the Epistles of Paul. And what do we suppose happened to the Vulgate edition after the times of Jerome through the carelessness of sleepy copyists, when the study of languages lay buried?⁷¹

In addition, while it is true that Augustine, Isidore, and the rest praised Jerome's version, they also, like Jerome himself, preferred the Hebrew and Greek originals, as can be seen from the testimony of Augustine given in response to Bellarmine's first argument above.

Bellarmino's third argument reasons that just as the Hebrews had an authentic Scripture in their language and the Greeks had one in theirs, so also should the Latin church have one in theirs.⁷² This argument, too, is easily disposed of, as both the Hebrew and Greek represent the original languages in which the Scriptures were authored, while the Latin is only a translation of the Hebrew and Greek. Thus the Latin edition of the Scriptures must always be dependent upon the Hebrew and Greek originals, as Augustine reiterates in chapter XV, Book II of De doctrina Christiana: "With respect to the books of the New Testament there is no doubt that we

⁷¹Examen, p. 202.

⁷²Whitaker, p. 138.

ought to believe the Greek text when anything is amiss in the manifold Latin versions."⁷³

Bellarmino next attempts to prove that no other versions of Scripture are necessary than the Hebrew, Greek and Latin Vulgate editions; in other words, there is no necessity whatever for translations of the Scriptures into the vernacular. His first argument is taken from the Old Testament, from which he reasons that from the times of Ezra the Hebrew language ceased to be the vulgar tongue among the people of God, yet the Scriptures in the church after that time remained in the Hebrew.⁷⁴ He proves this by stating that the Jews who lived in Babylon forgot their own language and learned the Chaldee and from that time the Chaldee or Syriac became their mother tongue. His Scriptural proof is drawn from the eighth chapter of Nehemiah, which recounts the reading of the Law to the people by Ezra and the Levites. In verse eight it says: "And so they read the scroll of God's Law clearly, giving the meaning, and the people understood what was read." Bellarmine reasons that the people were unable to understand the words of the Law; therefore they were ignorant of the Hebrew tongue. This, however, is untrue. In the very same chapter, in verse three, it is plainly stated: "And he (Ezra) read from it (the Law) before the Water Gate from early morning till noon, to the men and women who could understand. And all the people listened to the scroll of the Law." So that it was not the words of the Law that the people needed to have explained to them but the sense or meaning of the Scripture itself. Thus Hebrew remained the vernacular tongue of the Jews both before and

⁷³Examen, p. 204.

⁷⁴Whitaker, pp. 211-13.

after the captivity period in Babylon, and the Scriptures were understood by the common people, contrary to Bellarmine's assertion.

His second argument is taken from the example and practice of the apostles, who, Bellarmine points out, founded churches and preached the Gospel in the whole world yet they did not write either the Gospels or Epistles in the languages of those people, but only in Greek.⁷⁵ Chemnitz, however, points out that the reason why the apostles found it preferable to write the Gospels and Epistles only in Greek is that

its use was then very widespread, as can be gathered from Cicero's oration in behalf of Archias. For he says: "If anyone thinks that a less glorious benefit is received from Greek verses than from Latin, he errs greatly, because Greek literature is read among all nations, while Latin is contained in its own limited confines."⁷⁶

In addition, it would hardly have been convenient (or necessarily profitable) for the apostles to have written their Epistles and Gospels in a multitude of different languages considering the lack of time they had for such things, which could far more easily be done by full-time translators.

Bellarmino's third argument states that what the universal church has held and observed is right; now, the universal church has ever confined itself to these three languages, Hebrew, Greek and Latin in the common and public use of the Scriptures; therefore, no other versions are necessary.⁷⁷ Chemnitz answers:

Certainly the majesty of the heavenly doctrine was not violated when on Pentecost it was transmitted and set forth in various uncultured languages. Therefore it will also not be tarnished by translation into any language, no matter how uncultured it is held to be, if the rendering is true and sound. For the languages of all nations have

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 216.

⁷⁶Examen, p. 199.

⁷⁷Whitaker, p. 219.

been sanctified by the Holy Spirit that they may sound forth the wonderful works of God, as we read in Acts 2:11; Rom. 14:11; Is. 66:16-20. Thus Jerome somewhere testifies that he had translated the Scripture into the Dalmatian language.⁷⁸

Bellarmino's fourth argument proceeds from the reason of the thing itself. It is requisite, he says, that the public use of Scripture should be in some language most common to all men, for the sake of preserving the unity of the church. But at present, there is no language more common than the Latin.⁷⁹ In response, Chemnitz simply points out that it is entirely false that "at present, there is no language more common than the Latin," as he writes that "the use of the Latin language has ceased to be common and popular"⁸⁰

Bellarmino's final argument against the translation of the Scriptures into the vernacular is supported by testimonies from the fathers. First, from Basil, as Theodoret relates it, Book IV, chapter XIX, who said to the prefect of the imperial kitchen, ignorantly babbling about dogmas of theology: "It is your business to mind your sauces, not to cook the divine oracles."⁸¹ And second, from Jerome, who wrote: "Skill in the Scriptures is the only art all claim for themselves"⁸² These are undoubtedly wise sayings, warning Christians not to prate and babble about theological dogmas that are out of one's depth. But do they argue against the translation of Scripture into the vernacular? By no means. If this

⁷⁸Examen, pp. 200-201.

⁷⁹Whitaker, p. 226.

⁸⁰Examen, p. 199.

⁸¹Whitaker, p. 231.

⁸²Ibid.

were true, it would be difficult to understand the fact that Jerome himself translated the Scriptures into the Dalmatian language for all the common people to hear and read.

CHAPTER VI

THE INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE

In order to defend and promulgate the interpretive sovereignty of the Roman Catholic Church, Bellarmine sets out to prove, first of all, that Scripture, in and by itself, is obscure, and secondly, that therefore, a supreme and infallible judge, above, over, and outside Scripture, is necessary to its proper understanding.

His first argument proving the obscurity of Scripture is taken from Scripture itself. Thus he quotes Psalm 119:34: "Give me understanding, and I will search your law," and reasons that this passage shows that David was ignorant of many things.⁸³

In truth, however, as Chemnitz points out, what this passage really shows is that any understanding of God's Word must come from God Himself,

because the unspiritual man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, (while) the spiritual judges all things (1 Cor. 2:15), therefore the illumination of the Holy Spirit is necessary for finding and judging the true meaning of Scripture. And our heavenly Father will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him (Luke 11:13). . . . So David prays in Psalm 119.⁸⁴

Bellarmino also quotes Acts 8:31, which concerns the eunuch, who, despite being a pious man and studious of Scripture, when asked by Philip

⁸³Ibid., p. 367.

⁸⁴Examen, Locus I, Section VIII, p. 210.

if he understood what he was reading, replied: "How can I understand, unless some man declare it to me?"⁸⁵ Therefore, says Bellarmine, the Scriptures need interpretation. Chemnitz is willing to agree with Bellarmine in this regard to a certain extent, but not without qualifications. In the first place, Chemnitz states,

many passages in Scripture are indeed set forth in plain and clear words which require no farfetched interpretation but explain themselves. . . and in these passages which are stated clearly and plainly in the Scripture all those things are found which define the faith and morals for living.⁸⁶

Therefore, the above passage does not prove the whole of Scripture to be obscure. In the second place, Chemnitz adds:

However, there are besides many difficult and obscure statements in Scripture, whose sense cannot be grasped by anyone at the first glance. Yet, lest they should have been put into the Scripture in vain or should give occasion for error, God wanted the gift of interpretation to be present in the church.⁸⁷

Thus it is that in the above passage Philip was one who possessed the God-given gift of interpretation, as Chemnitz explains:

And when he (the eunuch) understood that Philip, who had the gift of interpretation, had been sent to him by God, he gratefully received him into his chariot and conferred with him about the meaning of the passage in Isaiah.⁸⁸

Where the Scriptures are obscure, God sends men with the gift of interpretation to make clear their meaning.

Finally, Bellarmine turns to 2 Peter 3:16, where he says that Peter himself admits (concerning Paul's epistles) that "some things in

⁸⁵Whitaker, p. 368.

⁸⁶Examen, p. 207.

⁸⁷Ibid.

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 208.

them are hard to understand."⁸⁹ It's no wonder that Bellarmine fails to quote the entire verse, for it reads: "He (Paul) talks about this (the Second Coming of Christ) in all his letters. Some things in them are hard to understand, and those who are ignorant and not well grounded misinterpret them as they do the rest of the Bible, and so they destroy themselves." They are so hard to understand that they are misinterpreted not by Peter, as Bellarmine implies, but by "those who are ignorant and not well grounded." So, too, it seems, Bellarmine wishes to deceive the ignorant by taking passages like the above out of their proper context.

Bellarmino's second argument is taken from the common consent of the fathers, of whom we will quote two. First, he cites Irenaeus, who in his second book against heresies, chapter 47, writes: "Likewise in the Scriptures we understand some things and some things we commit to God."⁹⁰ Here Chemnitz simply brings in another statement of Irenaeus, which explains the meaning of the first quotation: "Granted that there are many obscure and figurative passages of Scripture, the rule itself of the truth is set forth openly in the Holy Scriptures."⁹¹

Second, Bellarmine cites Augustine, who, in his third Epistle to Volusianus, writes:

So great is the depth of the Scripture of the Christians that I would daily advance in them if I would try to learn them alone from early childhood until decrepit old age in complete leisure, with the greatest zeal, and with superior intelligence. . .⁹²

⁸⁹Whitaker, p. 369.

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 370.

⁹¹Examen, Locus I, Section V, p. 165.

⁹²Whitaker, p. 374.

This, too, is supposed to prove the Scriptures to be obscure and difficult to understand. But Chemnitz shows by this same quotation, in the very next sentence, which Bellarmine conveniently leaves out, Augustine's real meaning in the words: "not for this reason, that one attains in them to what is necessary for salvation with such great difficulty. . ."⁹³

When the quotation is set within its proper context, it immediately becomes clear that Bellarmine, once again, is trying to deceive his readers.

We come now to Bellarmine's arguments proving the necessity of a supreme and infallible judge, above, over, and outside Scripture, to interpret Scripture. His first argument comes out of Scripture itself. For example, from the Old Testament, Bellarmine adduces Ex. 18:13,26, explaining that after the people of God were reduced to the form of a church, Moses sat as their supreme judge; and afterwards, too, although other judges were established, yet Moses reserved the more difficult cases for his own decisions; therefore, Bellarmine concludes, there ought also to be in the modern church one common tribunal (the bishops) and one supreme judge (the pope) of all controversies, from whom no appeal is permitted.⁹⁴ Chemnitz certainly agrees that there ought to be a supreme judge of all controversies in the church. This judge, however, is not the pope, as Bellarmine supposes, but the Scriptures, as Chemnitz had already proven by numerous examples. In addition, the above reference from Exodus in no way proves otherwise. In the first place, Moses was a prophet with extraordinary gifts from God, commended to the people of Israel by

⁹³ Examen, p. 166.

⁹⁴ Whitaker, p. 416.

divine testimonies, and sent immediately by God Himself.⁹⁵ The pope can boast of no such attributes or marks of authority from God. In the second place, it was Aaron, not Moses, who occupied the chief place among the priests, as Chemnitz reiterates: "And the whole history of the Old Testament shows that God often passed over the regular high priests and priests and raised up prophets, interpreters of His will, from elsewhere, and frequently from other tribes."⁹⁶ Thus the pope cannot claim his authority by means of successive priestly office established and sustained by God throughout the ages. And in the third place, Moses himself commanded that, after his death, the church uphold the Scriptures as the supreme judge in all controversies (Deut. 31:10-13).⁹⁷ Concerning this command Chemnitz writes:

They were commanded to be the guardians of the Scripture, in which God by His divine inspiration had caused to be committed to writing the heavenly doctrine, which had been committed to the patriarchs from the beginning of the world and which had been revealed to Moses. . . . If they departed from the commandments of God, this Scripture was to be a testimony (Deut. 31:26). Therefore Moses commanded a copy of the Law to be written, that it might be canon, norm, and rule from which they were not to depart. . . . (Deut. 17:18-20).⁹⁸

Bellarmino also quotes Ezek. 13:3: "Woe to the foolish prophets, that follow their own spirit," as evidence of the necessity of having the pope as the one supreme judge in the church.⁹⁹ This passage, however, proves nothing in this regard, as Chemnitz shows that following one's own

⁹⁵Examen, Locus I, Section II, p. 54.

⁹⁶Examen, Locus I, Section VIII, p. 209.

⁹⁷Examen, Locus I, Section II, p. 55.

⁹⁸Ibid., pp. 55-56.

⁹⁹Whitaker, p. 424.

private spirit and following the clear teachings of Scripture are two entirely different things:

This also is certain, that no one should rely on his own wisdom in the interpretation of the Scripture . . . for it is clearly written in 2 Peter 1:20: "The Scripture is not a matter of one's private interpretation." And whoever twists the Holy Scripture . . . according to his preconceived opinions does this to his own destruction (2 Peter 3:16). The best reader of the Scripture . . . is one who does not carry the understanding of what is said to the Scripture but who carries it away from the Scripture. We also gratefully and reverently use the labors of the fathers who by their commentaries have profitably clarified many passages of Scripture. And we confess that we are greatly confirmed by the testimonies of the ancient church in the true and sound understanding of the Scripture. Nor do we approve of it if someone invents for himself a meaning which conflicts with all antiquity, and for which there are clearly no testimonies of the church.¹⁰⁰

On the contrary, the above passage from Ezekiel speaks directly against the popes, not for them.

Bellarmino moves next to the New Testament, where, for example, he cites Matt. 18:17: "If he will not listen to the church, treat him like a pagan and a tax collector."¹⁰¹ Here again, we find Bellarmine taking a passage out of context. Matthew 18 nowhere speaks of the interpretation of Scripture but treats rather of the forgiveness of sins and brotherly correction and admonition, as is indicated in verses 15, 16, and the first part of 17, which Bellarmine deletes from his citation:

If your brother sins against you, go, and when you're alone with him, show him how he is wrong. If he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he won't listen, take one or two with you so that you have two or three witnesses for everything. If he won't listen to them, tell it to the church.

Bellarmino's second argument is taken from the practice of the church in councils and the testimonies of some of the popes, emperors, and

¹⁰⁰ Examen, Locus I, Section VIII, pp. 208-9.

¹⁰¹ Whitaker, p. 426.

fathers. Because Bellarmine's argumentation based upon councils, popes, and emperors has been adequately refuted elsewhere, we will simply present his arguments based upon the testimonies of some of the earlier and more authoritative church fathers. The first of these is Athanasius, who, in his Epistle to the Hermits, speaking of the Arian Constantius, says: "When was it ever heard that the judgment of the church received its authority from the emperor?"¹⁰² This is a most incredible statement, coming as it does immediately after Bellarmine has adduced the testimonies of several of the emperors. Apparently, he considers it correct to adduce the testimonies of the emperors whenever the authority of the papal rule is called into question. In any event, his citation from Athanasius says nothing to support the authority of the pope as the supreme judge of the church. But Chemnitz can adduce direct support from Athanasius for the authority of the Scriptures, as Athanasius, in Contra gentes, writes: "The holy and divinely inspired Scriptures suffice for all instruction in the truth."¹⁰³ Secondly, Bellarmine adduces Tertullian, from his book Prescriptions against heresies, where he teaches that we should not dispute against heretics out of Scripture.¹⁰⁴ This very same argument from Tertullian was used by Bellarmine in his defense of unwritten Traditions in Section I; therefore, we will not refute it again here. Thirdly, Bellarmine quotes Augustine, who, in his first book against Cresconius the grammarian, chapter 33, says: "Let him who fears he may be deceived, consult the church."¹⁰⁵

¹⁰²Ibid., p. 439.

¹⁰³Examen, Locus I, Section V, p. 152.

¹⁰⁴Whitaker, pp. 440-41.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., p. 442.

And what does Augustine mean here by the church? Chemnitz provides the answer in this quotation from Augustine, from De unitate ecclesiae, chapter 3: "Let us not hear: This I say, this you say; but thus says the Lord. Surely it is the books of the Lord on whose authority we both agree and which we both believe. There let us seek the church, there let us discuss our case."¹⁰⁶ Likewise: "Whatever they may adduce, and wherever they may quote from, let us rather, if we are His sheep, hear the voice of our Shepherd. Therefore let us search for the church in the sacred canonical Scriptures."¹⁰⁷

Bellarmino's final argument is drawn from the reason of the thing. God, he points out, was not ignorant that there would be in his church at all times many controversies and difficult questions concerning the faith. Therefore he would not have well provided in things necessary for his church, if he had not established and left it some judge of these controversies.¹⁰⁸ This form of reasoning is perfectly agreeable to Chemnitz, as it argues well for the Scriptures as that very judge of the church, which has sufficiently been proven both in the above statements by Augustine and in many other places, as well, by means of Chemnitz' numerous examples.

¹⁰⁶ Examen, p. 157.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Whitaker, p. 444.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

It is all too obvious from the preceding chapters that Bellarmine's refutation of Chemnitz fails in its basic intent to establish and defend the authority of the Roman Church over against that of the Holy Scriptures. In Chapter III, "Scripture and Tradition," Bellarmine fails, on the one hand, to prove that the Scriptures by themselves are insufficient and unnecessary and, on the other hand, to establish the necessity of unwritten Traditions outside the Scriptures. In Chapter IV, "The Canon," he is unable to substantiate the Tridentine inclusion of apocryphal and doubted books (as seen by the ancient church) into the canon. In Chapter V, "The Vulgate," he neither proves the authenticity of the Vulgate nor disproves the need for vernacular translations. And in Chapter VI, "The Interpretation of Scripture," he fails both in proving the Scriptures to be obscure and in showing the pope to be the supreme judge and interpreter of the Scriptures.

The reasons for Bellarmine's failures are equally obvious. On many occasions his references, whether from the Scriptures or the church fathers, are taken so grossly out of context as to suggest deliberate falsification. On other occasions, his arguments based on the decisions of councils and the affirmations of both popes and emperors are one-sided and historically uncritical. And on still other occasions his appeal to necessary reasoning is representative of an attempt to evade the real issues and

objections of Chemnitz to the decrees of Trent based on the clear testimony of both the Scriptures and the ancient fathers.

In any event, it cannot be denied that the Romanists have been allowed their say. But it also cannot be denied that, once again, Chemnitz has prevailed against them and, more importantly, the Word has prevailed with him.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

In summing up Chemnitz' contribution to the church in his defense of Holy Scripture as the source and norm of Christian faith and life, one cannot help but be impressed, even awed, by the exegetical and theological acumen demonstrated time and time again by his knowledge of Scripture, his grasp of the fathers of the ancient church, his perception of the errors and abuses of the Romanists, as well as by his magnificent and comprehensive defense against them, not to mention the admiration due him because of the strength of his faith and the firmness of his principles.

In addition, his is a contribution that can by no means be limited in its current application to ecumenical dialogues with the Roman Catholic Church, although his criticisms of that Church's doctrine are still valid today and must be taken into account in any such dialogues. But above all, it is hoped that Chemnitz will be honored in this present age because he stood on God's Word. And that in so doing he will be remembered in what he wrote by being read, especially since the Examen and De Duabus Naturis are now readily available in English translations, as well as Dr. Klug's fine analysis of Chemnitz' theology in his book From Luther to Chemnitz. And that, finally, his ideas, Christ-centered and Scripture-centered as they are, will continue to find themselves reflected in Missouri Synod doctrine as well as among her members.

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