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The Rule of Faith, the Scripture and Tradition: A Voice in the Discussion on the Doctrine of the Holy Scripture¹

Abstract: The article is a voice in the discussion on the doctrine of Scripture, that is, the theological reflection on the nature, attributes and mission of Scripture. The text shows the close link between the *regula fidei* and Scripture and, at the same time, the impossibility of identifying the rule of faith with the biblical canon. The rule of faith has played a role in establishing the Christian canon and throughout the Church's time serves to protect the message of Scripture. The content expressed in the rule of faith is not derived from hidden Tradition, and Tradition has become the internal principle of the New Testament and the *regula fidei*. The key to Scripture is the faith of the Church, one expression of which is the rule of faith. It allows us to grasp the order of the truths of faith (*harmonia veritatum*) and their hierarchy (*hierarchia veritatum*). The original rule of faith was born out of the reception of divine revelation and, together with Scripture, remains at the service of the New Covenant.

Keywords: doctrine of the Holy Scripture, *regula fidei*, κανὼν τῆς πίστεως, Holy Scripture, rule of faith, Tradition, biblical canon

In Protestant theological reflection, great attention is paid to the development of the so-called doctrine of Scripture.² This means theological reflection on the nature, attributes and mission of Scripture, which in turn results in particular ways of reading

¹ Translated from Polish by Maciej Górnicki.

² Among the rich literature on the doctrine of Scripture, noteworthy are, for example: Work, *Living and Active*; Webster, *Holy Scripture*; Webster, *The Domain of the Word*; Gerhard, *On the Nature of Theology*; Baker – Mourachian, *What is the Bible?*; Nichols – Brandt, *Ancient Word*; Feinberg, *Light in a Dark Place*.

the inspired texts. A Catholic contribution to the doctrine of Scripture could include pointing out the conclusions that result from considering the relationship of Scripture to the rule of faith (Latin: *regula fidei*).³ The rule of faith, in turn, directs attention to Tradition, which is related to both the rule of faith and Scripture. The interrelation of Scripture, Tradition and the rule of faith considered from a theological perspective makes it possible to develop an in-depth doctrine of Scripture, and thus to dismiss overly simplistic conceptions written either from Reformation positions (the axiom of *sola Scriptura* and the consequent material sufficiency of the Bible) or Catholic counter-Reformation positions (Tradition as a material-content “plus” in relation to Scripture).⁴ In this text I would like to show the relationship between the rule of faith and Scripture (points 1–3) and Tradition (points 4–5). This will allow us to draw conclusions about their mutual relationship, which will be found in the conclusion (point 6).

1. Close Relationship Between the Rule of Faith and Scripture

Adolf von Harnack took the position that from the relationship of the rule of faith with Apostolic Tradition, one can infer the bond of the rule of faith with Scripture.⁵ This relationship was also pointed out by Johannes Kunze, who also noted that Tertullian’s statement that heretics who do not keep the rule of faith must not interpret Scripture overshadowed the positive linking of the rule of faith and the canon of Scripture.⁶ Scholars after Kunze began to study

³ The *regula fidei* is referred to, in a somewhat simplistic manner, by Brad East (East, *The Doctrine of Scripture*). This Protestant theologian based his monograph *The Doctrine of Scripture*, as he writes, on catholic assumptions. However, it is not strictly Catholic theology; rather, it is about going beyond Protestant principles and looking at the nature and mission of Scripture from a perspective more common in time and denomination than the thought of Reformation.

⁴ This error was pointed out by Ratzinger as a conciliar expert – cf. Ratzinger, *O naucezaniu II Soboru*, I, 142–143.

⁵ Cf. Armstrong, “From the *κανὼν*,” 34.

⁶ Cf. Armstrong, “From the *κανὼν*,” 37; Kunze, *Glaubensregel*, 2.

the interrelation of κανὼν τῆς ἀληθείας and κανὼν τῶν γραφῶν, moving away from the earlier identification of the rule of faith with the baptismal confession (such a theory was propounded by Theodor Zahn, for example).⁷ Valdemar Ammundsen expressed the conviction that the rule of faith must be closely related to Scripture or even be identified with it or with the main content of the apostolic writings.⁸ Gustave Bardy maintained that the canonical Scripture should be considered the rule of faith.⁹

Jonathan J. Armstrong, summarizing the history of rule of faith studies leading to contradictory conclusions, argues that it is impossible to understand the history of the formation of canonical Scripture without also considering the history of orthodoxy. The rule of faith quoted by Church writers in the second century AD cannot be equated with the New Testament canon referred to by authors in the fourth century. However, κανὼν τῆς ἀληθείας as the predecessor of κανὼν τῶν γραφῶν served as the standard of orthodoxy in the time before the emergence of the canon of Scripture.¹⁰ It seems that the difference between the fourth-century canon and the one accepted two centuries earlier, has been too strongly outlined by the scholar, without outlining enough the role of the still incomplete canon. There is also the lack of any indication of the “third element,” which, after all, must have been the base for both the rule of faith and the New Testament, if one can speak of a transition from the rule to the Christian canon at all.

In any case, the question of the relationship of the rule of faith to Scripture cannot ignore the question of what was considered Scripture in the second century. And whether the *regula fidei* lost its *raison d’être* when the biblical canon was established and approved; in other words, whether the rule of faith ultimately passed into the canon of Scripture, so that from that moment on it was sufficient to refer to κανὼν τῶν γραφῶν alone. Then there would

⁷ Cf. Armstrong, “From the κανὼν,” 32, 37–40.

⁸ Cf. Armstrong, “From the κανὼν,” 40–41.

⁹ Cf. Armstrong, “From the κανὼν,” 41.

¹⁰ Cf. Armstrong, “From the κανὼν,” 47. The author refers to the theses contained in the monograph: Marksches, *Kaiserzeitliche christliche Theologie*.

remain the question of the possible existence of a rule of faith in Scripture itself, which would be written in it from within, as it were. Paul M. Blowers maintains that the theory claiming that the rule of faith is a doctrinal principle internal to Scripture and therefore present in the emerging canon of Scripture can be partially confirmed by the works of Irenaeus and Tertullian.¹¹ The bishop of Lyons saw in the rule of faith a hermeneutical principle, although at the same time he maintained that Scripture was complete and intelligible, and therefore saw Scripture and the rule as closely related.¹² Nevertheless, something must have determined this connection.

Thus, we are faced with a paradox: Scripture, though sufficient and lucid, nevertheless cannot by itself constitute κανὼν τῆς ἀληθείας, since Irenaeus refers to a rule of faith in discussing interpretations of Scripture. This rule of faith expressed the already existing faith of the Church. It should be assumed, in my opinion, that Scripture can be a canon insofar as it is not read apart from the Christian faith that exists and is also assumed in Scripture itself; it is through this faith that it can be itself. In other words, this would point to the rule of faith as the proper interpretation of Scripture, agreeing with its content to such an extent that one can almost be identified with the other. Non-Christian readings of Scripture contradict Scripture itself, make it something it is not, whereas the rule of faith allows Scripture to be Scripture; it makes it possible to preserve the faith expressed in Scripture and abide in it.

In the works of Irenaeus, Tertullian and Clement of Alexandria, the rule of faith remains closely linked to Scripture, as the biblical texts play an essential role for Christian faith and practice.¹³ However, the rule of faith is not so much a summary of Scripture itself, but rather of the Christian faith, which is also expressed in Scripture, and therefore largely overlaps with the rule of faith – it must harmonise with it. Tomas Bokedal rightly states that the rule of faith is the sum of the content not only of the apostolic teaching available in Scripture,

¹¹ Cf. Blowers, “The *Regula Fidei*,” 200.

¹² Cf. Armstrong, “From the κανὼν,” 43 (author quotes Ohme, *Kanon Ekklesiastikos*, 68), 45.

¹³ Cf. Bokedal, “The Rule of Faith,” 248–249.

but also in the (pre)baptismal creeds and patterns of apostolic teaching.¹⁴ Irenaeus relates the rule of faith (rule of truth) to the truth of faith itself. This rule expresses the main doctrines and early structure of the apostolic faith. Although it is related to the Scripture, to which the bishop refers, it focuses on the content (major doctrines) of Scripture and cannot be identical with it.¹⁵ I would say that both the New Testament and the Rule of Faith are expressions of the same Apostolic Tradition, or, in other words, the same faith of the Church as a response to the word of God.¹⁶

If Tertullian believes that heretics are precluded from interpreting Scripture because they do not keep the rule of faith,¹⁷ one should not conclude from this that this rule would be something “artificially” imposed, having its source in Tradition understood as something existing “alongside” Scripture and carrying information additional to it. It should be assumed that from one organic (and therefore not subject to mechanical division into parts) divine revelation flow two currents, Scripture and Tradition, of the transmission of this revelation, both of which from the beginning remain inseparable and largely overlap, but also cannot be completely reduced to each other.¹⁸ Rather, Tertullian’s conviction should be understood to mean that to approach Scripture outside the rule of faith is to fall outside that faith which Scripture proclaims and which lay at the origin of the New Testament. And when the Christian faith is lacking, other beliefs, alien to the ecclesiastical faith, both the one that existed before the creation

¹⁴ Cf. Bokedal, “The Rule of Faith,” 233–234, 246.

¹⁵ Cf. Bokedal, “The Rule of Faith,” 250, 254.

¹⁶ Cf. Williams, *Tradition, Scripture, and Interpretation*, 23: “What the Church believed was canonical prior to that belief taking written, codified forms. In effect, the earliest ‘canons’ or norms of the preaching and defending of the early tradition served as the standard for the canonization of texts.” This thesis is sharply criticised by Seitz (*Character of Christian Scripture*, 192–193, n. 2) because, according to him, such a view ignores the canonical role of the Old Testament in the early Church.

¹⁷ Cf. Armstrong, “From the *κανὼν*,” 37. Cf. Blowers, “The *Regula Fidei*,” 217.

¹⁸ Cf. Ratzinger, *O nauczaniu II Soboru*, II, 679; Zatwardnicki, “One Source of Revelation,” 63–93.

of the New Testament and the one present in it, must appear in its place.¹⁹

The *regula fidei* is born out of a similar need as the New Testament, except that it is required to be more explicit about the essential content of Christianity. The idea is to transmit and reinterpret the Apostolic Tradition in such a way that will be paradigmatic, so to speak, for the Church, and which will consequently become the key to Scripture (and, before that, the measure for establishing canonicity). This is not because the Church “imposed” or “invented” the rule of faith,²⁰ but because the Church’s faith itself, when one wants to express it in a short form other than a simple excerpt of quotations from the Bible, takes the form of a rule of faith that then guides the reading of the inspired books.²¹ The rule of faith, argues Brad East, constitutes a kind of a map for the geography of Scripture in which one might

¹⁹ Fiedrowicz (*Teologia ojców Kościoła*, 200–201) writes that for the Church Fathers, the Bible was not a book with new and just discovered content, yes the subject of the Bible was close to them and known from the living Tradition of the Church. After all, the Church did not owe its existence to the Bible, but already existed before the New Testament was written. Therefore, the Church learns about the content of the New Testament books not first from Scripture, but from the living Tradition that the Church Fathers lived. Augustine, for example, maintained that a sign can only be understood by one who knows its designate. He believed that only cognition of the reality signified by the history-salvific signs (*dicta et facta* of Scripture) could lead to their proper interpretation. Particular statements of Scripture were to be understood only through knowledge of the basic principles formulated in the creed and the double commandment to love God and neighbour.

²⁰ Cf. Ratzinger, *Jezus z Nazaretu*, 112 [*Jesus of Nazareth*, 99]: “Together with ‘apostolic succession’, the early Church discovered (she did *not* invent) two further elements fundamental for her unity: the canon of Scripture and the so-called *regula fidei*, or ‘rule of faith’. This was a short summary – not definitively tied down in every detail to specific linguistic formulations – of the essential content of the faith, which in the early Church’s different baptismal confessions took on a liturgical form. This rule of faith, or creed, constitutes the real ‘hermeneutic’ of Scripture, the key derived from Scripture itself by which the sacred text can be interpreted according to its spirit.” Ratzinger postulated a kind of quadrilateral consisting of the symbols of faith, the liturgy, the episcopate and the Scriptures that retain primacy – cf. Ferdek, “Objawienie w doktrynie,” 179–180.

²¹ According to Robert Sokolowski, the Creed demands Scripture, but also vice versa – Scripture needs an organizing and clarifying Creed. As a summary and systematization of the message of Scripture (an action that is more than repetition

lose one's way.²² Robert Wall writes about the basic theological claims contained in the rule of faith that can be used by the Church to assess the coherence of someone's interpretation of the Bible.²³

2. *Regula Fidei* and the Establishment of the Biblical Canon

Joseph T. Lienhard emphasises that with Irenaeus of Lyons, the existence and acceptance of the New Testament canon are now so well established that the bishop of Lyons himself quotes almost all the books of the New Testament as authoritative.²⁴ As the Jesuit points out, there was a shift “from the very occasional quoting of a few of Jesus' words to a closed, sacred canon of four Gospels,”²⁵ and by 200 AD the New Testament canon already consisted of twenty books (the four Gospels, Acts, the thirteen epistles attributed to Paul as well as 1 Peter and 1 John).²⁶

However, it was not yet a fully formed canon – the Christian Bible as we know it today. As late as Eusebius of Caesarea (born c. 264, died c. 340) did not present an “official” list of canonical books, which is supposed to mean that the canon had not been established by ecclesiastical authority.²⁷ Athanasius of Alexandria (c. 295–373), in his Easter letter of 367, listed the writings to be included in the canon; the Book of Esther and the books of Maccabees are not among them, but all the New Testament books included in today's canon are.²⁸ Lienhard adds that the list of New Testament books at the end of the fourth century was still subject to change, and it was only from the fifth century onward that almost everyone recognised the 27 books as the authoritative New Testament canon.²⁹

or quotation), the symbol of faith is what Scripture alone could not do – cf. Sokolowski, “God's Word and Human Speech,” 194–195.

²² Cf. East, *The Doctrine of Scripture*, 17.

²³ Cf. Wall, “Reading the Bible,” 89.

²⁴ Cf. Lienhard, “Canons and Rules,” 63.

²⁵ Lienhard, “Canons and Rules,” 64.

²⁶ Cf. Lienhard, “Canons and Rules,” 64.

²⁷ Cf. Lienhard, “Canons and Rules,” 65.

²⁸ Cf. Lienhard, “Canons and Rules,” 55, 59, 65.

²⁹ Cf. Lienhard, “Canons and Rules,” 65.

Thus, at the time of Irenaeus' rule of faith, there was not yet a complete Christian canon. Paul M. Blowers writes that the rule of faith was already in place when the biblical canon was still being formed,³⁰ and while the rule remained open to change and refinement, this did not compromise its basic integrity already existing in an era when the term of the "canonicity" of a book was still the subject of debate.³¹ This means that the faith of the Church at that time had not yet been fully expressed in the inspired New Testament writings. On the other hand, this faith was already professed by the Church, otherwise the other books could not be regarded as inspired and expressing this faith. Even more: there would be no Church as an entity that accepted God's revelation if there were no Christian faith as a response to it. To revelation, Joseph Ratzinger wrote, to some extent also belongs the subject who accepts this revelation – and without it, revelation does not exist.³² If, alternatively, there was no rule of faith, immutable as to its essence, then the Church would be left without the norm of its faith, unaware of what she had received. It could even then be questioned that there has really been a reception of revelation because there is no experience (including the experience of divine revelation) uninterpreted, carrying no meaning which would be subsequently communicable in propositional statements.³³ If the revelation was received by faith, then some form of rule of faith is already associated with Christian faith itself. It follows that the other books, which gain ecclesiastical approval later, do not add anything significant to the content of the Church's faith (this, after all, does not have to be necessarily their role). They must also agree with those already accepted, and with the rule of faith. Although the canon is not yet complete, there is already a definite rule of faith to rely on; thus, the rule of faith must include all the key contents of the Christian faith.

³⁰ Cf. Blowers, "The *Regula Fidei*," 199.

³¹ Cf. Blowers, "The *Regula Fidei*," 225–226.

³² Cf. Ratzinger, *Wiara w Piśmie i Tradycji*, 357; Przyślak, "Via biblica," 20; Czaja, "Naczelna zasada," 15. Cf. also: Blaauw, "The Nature of Divine Revelation," 8–9; Wiles, "Revelation and Divine Action," 102.

³³ Cf. O'Collins, *Rethinking Fundamental Theology*, 49–51; Levering, *Engaging the Doctrine*, 15; Daly, "Revelation in the Theology," 41.

The canon of faith, because it was rooted in the apostolic kerygma and expressed the Church's consciousness of faith, became the authoritative point of reference in establishing the biblical canon, writes Michael Fiedrowicz.³⁴ Lienhard even states that "[t]he rule of faith both preceded the canon and guided its formation and its interpretation."³⁵ Without falling into exaggeration, the role of the rule of faith in this process should be acknowledged. If, without knowledge of the definitive canon, we already had a rule of faith, that is, it must have had a greater or lesser part in the formation of the canon (if only such that the later accepted writings of the New Testament could no longer change the structure and content of the rule of faith). The rule of faith was important to the extent that without it we would not have "risks" accepting the other books, because there would have been no certainty that by doing so we would abide in the unadulterated Apostolic Tradition – as, after all, they were not the same as the already existing and accepted writings. It was not possible to rely on mere sameness with the other books, for necessarily since they had to go content-wise beyond those already accepted, it was necessary to grasp congruence in the essentials.

Is it possible that with the establishment of the canonicity of the Christian Bible, the need for a rule of faith disappears, because Scripture itself henceforth plays the role of *κανὼν τῆς πίστεως*? If, in the situation of an incomplete canon, a rule of faith cannot be identified *tout court* with Scripture, and one sees the need to formulate (or use an already formulated) rule of faith that is not reducible to Scripture itself and is not a compendium of biblical quotations, then the formation and approval of a full canon does not change anything here. If the canonization of additional books that have not yet gained widespread acceptance in the second century is done on the basis of the rule of faith, this means that they also cannot change it in something significant and consequently also replace it (they would have to be identical to the rule of faith, which they are not). However, they can open up to a fuller understanding of the revelation given to the Church and accepted by faith, as well as the rule of faith itself,

³⁴ Cf. Fiedrowicz, *Teologia ojców Kościoła*, 192.

³⁵ Lienhard, "Canons and Rules," 68.

without changing its structure and main content.³⁶ They also perform other functions (e.g., parenthesis involving drawing conclusions from doctrine, telling the history of the Church, etc.).

It seems appropriate to speak of the proto-rule as the predecessor of the sacred texts and the rule of faith itself as we know it in the later form, and of the rule appearing in parallel with the process of creation and acceptance of the New Testament books. The content of kerygmatic preaching already constitutes the “proto-rule of faith.” This proclamation results from what one has received himself (directly from God, through the encounter with Christ, or from Tradition, as in Paul’s case). What is important, already in this proto-rule there is everything that is essential – it is hard to imagine, for example, that Church liturgy would not refer to what later became the content of the rule of faith. Lienhard recognises both the New Testament canon (with twenty books by the end of the second century) and the rule of faith as privileged moments in Tradition related to the reception and transmission of received revelation.³⁷ Both would follow from the same faith of the Church. The final formation of the canon would not have been possible without the rule of faith, and at the same time without those New Testament writings that had already been approved as carrying the apostolic message.

According to Robert Grant, from the very beginning the Church had, at least implicitly, a rule of faith or rather embryonic orthodoxy, around which Christians remained united. The scholar lists three such teachings: Jesus of Nazareth really took flesh, was born, died and rose again (against Docetism); the Old Testament is really the word of God and points to Jesus Christ, and the God of the Old Testament, the Creator of the world, the God of Abraham and Yahweh speaking to Moses, is identical with the Father of Jesus Christ; God offers salvation to all, and the mission of the Church is universal and excludes no one.³⁸ It was not so much a question of the measure

³⁶ Cf. Armstrong, “From the *κανὼν*,” 44: “The development of a definitive body of Christian literature came to define the orthodoxy by which the final form of the canon was adjudicated.”

³⁷ Cf. Lienhard, “Canons and Rules,” 69.

³⁸ Cf. Grant, “The New Testament Canon,” 286; Lienhard, “Canons and Rules,” 65–66.

of distinguishing between true and false doctrine, but of the already existing faith of the Church – even if, when juxtaposed with erroneous views, the expression of this faith could take this and not that form (e.g., by means of false presentations or by seeing in the past history of Israel the New Covenant fulfilled, it was possible to highlight what is most essential to the Christian faith and what constitutes its *differentia specifica*). In this sense, it was not heresy that constituted a catalyst for the rule of faith, but conversely, the already existing faith aroused opposition in the form of unorthodox rules.³⁹

The rule of faith is not something “added” to Scripture, external to it, but is a certain doctrinal principle internal to Scripture, hidden inside it. It is only for this reason that the *regula fidei* can be an interpretative key to Scripture, that it has at its origin something that also lies at the genesis of the inspired texts. In my opinion, one should not infer from the conclusion that the rule already exists in the period of the formation of the canon, either that there is a traceable linear process from the rule of faith to the canon (incidentally, the later Creed preserves the structure of the rule of faith and has a similar function⁴⁰), or even that the rule in itself, as a verbal formula, is the measure of the emerging canon (although this is closer to the truth). Rather, the apostolic faith already existing in the Church stood behind both, so that the appearance of the rule and the Christian writings overlap. One should therefore ask where this faith came from. It is the result of real revelation and its experience in the community of the Church. The simultaneous emergence of the Church and the Christian faith is prior to both the New Testament and the rule of faith. In other words:

³⁹ The Bishop of Lyon emphasises (Irenaeus Lugdunensis, *Haer.* III, 4, 3), that the Church had already been active and only later did the heretics appear with their deviations.

⁴⁰ Admittedly, Armstrong writes that after the New Testament canon was established, the Church fathers referred no longer to the rule of faith, but to Scripture in the way they had previously written about the rule of faith (Armstrong, “From the *κανὼν*,” 45–46), but yet, at the same time, symbols of faith are being created as correct – and directed against false – interpretations of the Church’s faith. This would indicate that Scripture further cannot be the sole measure of orthodoxy, and that it needs the Church’s faith expressed outside of Scripture in order for it to fulfill its role – to be itself and not scripture distorted.

the Scriptures and the *regula fidei* are expressions, in different forms, of the same reality present in the Church.

3. Κανών τῆς πίστεως as a Protection of ὑπόθεσις of Scripture

Lienhard expresses the opinion that the development of heresies meant that appealing to Scripture alone could not suffice, as heretics (e.g., Gnostics) referred to the same Scripture but interpreted it differently. A rule of faith would therefore act as a standard for interpreting Scripture.⁴¹ This is not entirely true. The beliefs of the Gnostics were so preposterous that they could be debunked from a position of ordinary common sense and philosophical reason – as Irenaeus did, incidentally, without sparing the heretics the most severe epithets. It was also possible to prove them wrong on the basis of Scripture itself,⁴² and books III and IV of *Adversus Haereses* bear witness to this. It was not, therefore, a dispute between equally plausible interpretations of ambiguous Scripture, so that an “external” arbiter in the form of Tradition or a rule of faith was necessary. Scripture itself contradicted the interpretations of heretics, the rule of faith possibly facilitated the perception of this or sealed the negative assessment given to non-ecclesiastical interpretations of, for example, the Gnostics. The *regula fidei*, which is the ordering of what is believed (and therefore of the Scriptures), made it possible to spot the gems in a mosaic “rearranged” by the Gnostics. It thus served to prove that one interpretation – precisely the extra-ecclesiastical one proposed by the Gnostics – does violence to Scripture, in fact making of it another story contrary to that described in the inspired books. This is what St Irenaeus wrote about it:

[W]ho retains unchangeable in his heart the rule of the truth which he received by means of baptism, will doubtless recognise the names, the expressions, and the parables taken from the Scriptures, but will by no means acknowledge

⁴¹ Cf. Lienhard, “Canons and Rules,” 66.

⁴² Cf. Trevett, “Irenaeus,” 324.

the blasphemous use which these men make of them. For, though he will acknowledge the gems, he will certainly not receive the fox instead of the likeness of the king. But when he has restored every one of the expressions quoted to its proper position, and has fitted it to the body of the truth, he will lay bare, and prove to be without any foundation, the figment of these heretics.⁴³

Paul M. Blowers points out that Irenaeus is far from imposing hermeneutical principles alien to Scripture from the outside; on the contrary, it is precisely the Gnostics, according to him, who do so. The dispute with the Gnostics is a dispute between “our” and “their” history, a clash between two metanarratives. At the same time, the Church’s interpretation of Scripture agrees with the story-line of Scripture itself as belonging to the same larger economy of God (it is about one overarching context encompassing the whole story of God’s self-revelation).⁴⁴ This overarching context also includes the Church, in whose faith Scripture is read properly and whose faith agrees with the message of the inspired books. The Gnostics, according to the author of *Adversus Haereses*, tear out verses and incorporate them into a new narrative, a ὑπόθεσις (Latin: *argumentum*) alien to Scripture, thus compromising the integrity of the true “plot” underlying Scripture. Conversely, the rule of faith reveals the true story-line of the of Scripture, with its content and structure reveals the authentic “plot” of Scripture, and thus also protects God as the author of the economy of salvation, the scholar concludes.⁴⁵

⁴³ Irenaeus Lugdunensis, *Haer.* I, 9, 4 (*AH* 330).

⁴⁴ Cf. Blowers, “The *Regula Fidei*,” 211. Cf. also Fowl, *Theological Interpretation*, 29–30: “[...] what is so striking about Irenaeus’s account of the divine economy and the Rule of Faith is that it is so clearly derived from Scripture.”

⁴⁵ Cf. Blowers, “The *Regula Fidei*,” 211–212; Norris, “Theology and Language,” 289–292. The latter writes about the various meanings of the word ὑπόθεσις; in addition to “presupposition or assumption,” it can also be translated as “the development of events in a drama” (it would be, in other words, “plot”). The author claims that this is how St. Irenaeus understood the term – Norris, “Theology and Language,” 289–290. Cf. Irenaeus Lugdunensis, *Haer.* I, 9, 4. Cf. also: Trevett,

The temptation to use the Bible as a collection of loosely connected elements from which one could build arbitrary constructs of thought is also noted by Fiedrowicz. This is how the Gnostics extracted fragments of Scripture and assembled from them an image corresponding to their speculations. Through the rule of faith, the interrelationships and essential contents of Scripture become legible, and thus the elements are assembled into a single image – into “the body of the Truth” composed of individual members, as the Bishop of Lyons put it. This is made possible by the knowledge of God’s plan of salvation, communicated in the apostolic kerygma and summarised in the *regula fidei*.⁴⁶

For Irenaeus, the particular function of the rule of faith, as Tomas Bokedal notes, was to provide a fundamental hermeneutical strategy for interpreting Scripture. It should be read taking into account the order (τάξις) and the mutual relationship and sequence (εἰρμός) of all the Scriptures. When the Bishop of Lyons wrote about the “body of the Truth” composed of “the members of the Truth,” he meant the connection of the parts to the whole (and vice versa). The very fact of receiving the apostolic teaching through catechesis and baptism would make one capable of understanding Scripture.⁴⁷ It is worth emphasizing here the “body of Truth,” which suggests that an organic Truth has been given to the Church – a Truth in its entirety (“one harmonious melody,” Irenaeus writes). The primacy here is exercised by the salvific-revelatory reality and not by the word testifying to it.⁴⁸ Neither Scripture nor, still less, a rule of faith will articulate the whole Truth, but it will allow the fundamental content

“Ireneusz,” 324 – in the Scripture, according to Irenaeus, “there was order, consistency and construction (*hypothesis*).”

⁴⁶ Cf. Fiedrowicz, *Teologia ojców Kościoła*, 198–199; Irenaeus Lugdunensis, *Haer.* I, 8, 1; I, 9, 4; II, 27.1.

⁴⁷ Cf. Bokedal, “The Rule of Faith,” 239, 250, 254; Irenaeus Lugdunensis, *Haer.* II, 28, 3. Cf. also: Seitz, *The Character of Christian Scripture*, 195–196.

⁴⁸ Cf. the statement of Bengt Hägglund quoted by Bokedal (Bokedal, “The Rule of Faith,” 249): “[...] the Rule of Faith is not constituted first by Scripture, but rather relates to the event of salvation, to which the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures make up the only original testimony.”

to be expressed and indicate the structure of this “body,” which can then be filled with further content.

Thus, it can be said, following Fiedrowicz, that just as, on the one hand, “the most important truths of the rule of faith can be found in Scripture itself, so, on the other hand, the canon of truth is the criterion for interpreting Scripture, since it is to be done on the basis of the *regula* and to be consistent with that *regula*.”⁴⁹ Stephen Fowl points to a kind of circular movement. On the one hand, the diversity of the New Testament is ordered in the light of apostolic faith; on the other hand, this apostolic faith receives its final formulation precisely in the light of the New Testament.⁵⁰ Indeed, this is how the relationship of Scripture to the rule could be seen: the inspired texts fill the structure of the rule of faith with additional content and at the same time harmonise with the most essential contents of the *regula fidei*; it allows them to be recognised, while the New Testament books in turn fill the “mesh” of the *nexus mysteriorum* expressed in the rule of faith.⁵¹

In turn, both the rule and Scripture express revealed truth, only in a different way. Therefore, Fiedrowicz writes, somewhat distorting reality, about “compression” and “expansion” – the rule of faith would be a compression of revealed truth and Scripture an expansion of it.⁵² But neither is the rule of faith merely a compression of God’s revelation (or even of Scripture itself), still less can Scripture be an expansion of revealed truth. The Church guards the one truth as revealed in the Incarnate Word to which the apostles and their writings bear witness, and all individual truths boil down to precisely this one truth, Jesus Christ.⁵³ “[U]niqueness of Christianity is manifested in the event which is Jesus Christ, the culmination of revelation, the fulfilment of God’s promises and the mediator of the encounter between man and God.” Therefore, the One “who ‘has made God known’ (Jn 1:18) is the one, definitive word given to mankind.”⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Fiedrowicz, *Teologia ojców Kościoła*, 193.

⁵⁰ Cf. Fowl, *Theological Interpretation*, 30.

⁵¹ Cf. Zatwardnicki, “Chrystus w *nexus mysteriorum*,” 172.

⁵² Cf. Fiedrowicz, *Teologia ojców Kościoła*, 192–193.

⁵³ Cf. Ratzinger, *O nauczaniu II Soboru*, I, 163 (and almost the same on p. 176).

⁵⁴ Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, no. 14.

The incarnate Word, in which God expresses himself, remains always greater than the words in which he communicates himself, argued Joseph Ratzinger.⁵⁵

Instead of writing about revealed truth, therefore, one should draw attention first of all to the personalistic dimension of revelation itself, in the spirit proposed in *Dei verbum*.⁵⁶ The rule of faith makes it possible to see coherence in the complexity of the biblical testimonies by showing the basic “turning points” of the narrative, thus highlighting the Trinitarian revelation.⁵⁷ The three-part structure of the rule of faith (like the later Creed) indicates that the *regula fidei* is not so much a summary of Scripture⁵⁸ as it is a presentation of the revelation of God in the economy of salvation, and must therefore be understood primarily in a personalistic sense. From the economy we move to theology, but not in abstract considerations, but in the life of individuals and of the community professing faith in the revealed and salvific Triune God. The rule of faith reflects in content and structure the transition from the Old to the New Covenant, which is related to the revelation of the Trinity.

In other words, the rule of faith helps to live on earth what will be fully shared in heaven. Thus, the *regula fidei* has the function of moving from the Book to reality (Christians are not a religion of the Book!). While attesting to the self-revelation of the Triune God in creation and redemption, it simultaneously points to the continuity of God’s action in the life and experience of the Church. Thus the rule

⁵⁵ Cf. Ratzinger, *Jezus z Nazaretu: Studia*, 681. Edith Humphrey expresses her opinion (Humphrey, *Scripture and Tradition*, 60), that even the New Testament is not an end in itself, but functions, like the entire Bible, as a kind of icon showing Christ and drawing toward the life of the Trinity.

⁵⁶ Cf. Vaticanum II, *Dei Verbum*, no. 2–6; Zatwardnicki, *Od teologii objawienia*, 141.

⁵⁷ Cf. Blowers, “The *Regula Fidei*,” 217.

⁵⁸ Seitz (*The Character of Christian Scripture*, 193) warns of a certain error resulting from a failure to take into account that the rule of faith was written at a time when Scripture was primarily the Old Testament – hence the *regula fidei* cannot, in his view, be a summary of all Scripture: “the exegetical and hermeneutical character of the rule is insufficiently grasped, as if the rule were a «gist» (an economic retelling in compressed form) derived from Scriptures’ total witness (by this is meant the OT and the NT together).”

of faith is a construction of a holistic vision in which past, present and future are united in Christ.⁵⁹ In a single synchronic “narrative present” there is a synthesis of creation, redemption and completion, or, at a deeper level still, the creed even connects Divine eternity with human temporality and a post-temporal “eschatological” existence, as Blowers emphasises, following James Heaney.⁶⁰ This “focusing” of the entire God’s economy in a single idea realised “here and now” makes it possible to grasp the relationship of the economic to the immanent Trinity, and thus the rule of faith has the function of man’s encounter with the Triune God. This culmination of *oikovoúia* cannot, let us emphasise, be identified with the emergence of the New Testament, but rather the decisive fact is the emergence of the Church as a subject born of received revelation. The Church is the work of the Trinity and in the Church the Holy Spirit is at work, including acting through Scripture.

4. Tradition, Not Concealed but Manifest, as the Source of the Rule of Faith

In a situation when a controversy appears, Irenaeus states, it would be sufficient to refer to the ancient churches in which the Apostles were active. If they had left no writings, it would have been allowed or even necessary to follow the Tradition handed down to these churches in order to dispel doubts or find a solution to a controversial issue.⁶¹

Suppose there arise a dispute relative to some important question among us, should we not have recourse to the most ancient Churches with which the apostles held constant intercourse, and learn from them what is certain and clear in regard to the present question? For how should it be if the apostles themselves had not left us writings? Would it not be necessary, [in that case,]

⁵⁹ Cf. Blowers, “The *Regula Fidei*,” 202, 218.

⁶⁰ Cf. Blowers, “The *Regula Fidei*,” 222–223. The author refers to an article that I unfortunately do not have access to: Heaney, “Tabor and the Magic Mountain.”

⁶¹ Cf. Lienhard, “Canons and Rules,” 56; Irenaeus Lugdunensis, *Haer.* III, 4, 1.

to follow the course of the tradition which they handed down to those to whom they did commit the Churches?⁶²

Despite this being a hypothetical situation, the bishop's reasoning nevertheless seems to indicate a near-identification of the most essential contents of the Christian faith as reflected in Scripture and preserved in the Tradition of the Church. On the other hand, this cannot mean a disregard for the sacred writings, since Irenaeus refers precisely to them – as actually existing and having apostolic authority. However, as far as essential matters are concerned – and these stand before the court in the fight against heresies – there is agreement between ecclesiastical Tradition and Scripture. There is, of course, no question of some additional, hidden Tradition supplementing Scripture; rather, the conviction resounds in the texts of the author of *Adversus Haereses* that Tradition has been faithfully handed down in the New Testament books, and that the Churches have preserved Apostolic Tradition and abide in it.

Tertullian argued that only where true Christian rule and faith exist, there also Scripture and its interpretation are true. The key to sound exegesis, comments Bokedal, is therefore for Tertullian the ecclesiastical *regula fidei*, which exercises priority over all heretical traditions.⁶³ One should not infer from this that there are two competing traditions, orthodox and heterodox, both alien to Scripture, coming, as it were, from outside it, so that one would have to decide which tradition to trust in order to reinterpret Scripture from its perspective. On the contrary, it is the non-ecclesial tradition that is imposed on Scripture, while the Christian *regula fidei* merely reveals with greater clarity the message of Scripture itself. The *regula fidei* is therefore not a concealed Tradition but is manifest and present in Scripture itself. It exists in the same reality of the New Covenant as the Church; hence, Scripture and the faith of the Church must correspond to each other. Therefore, a proper interpretation of Scripture is not possible apart from the faith of the Church.

⁶² Irenaeus Lugdunensis, *Haer.* III, 4, 1 (AH 417).

⁶³ Cf. Bokedal, "The Rule of Faith," 249.

Irenaeus clearly indicates that the rule of faith is not an extra-biblical tradition when he writes about the importance of “the unadulterated rule of truth” by which salvation can be obtained, and which is accessible in the New Testament writings. For example, Paul’s testimony “is true, and the doctrine of the apostles is open and steadfast, holding nothing in reserve; nor did they teach one set of doctrines in private, and another in public.”⁶⁴ The Bishop of Lyons suggests that John the Evangelist had already established a rule of truth in the Church. Thus, it is emphasised that it is not a matter of a concealed Tradition, but a completely fundamental faith of the Church, which is also explicitly present in the pages of the New Testament:

The disciple of the Lord therefore desiring to put an end to all such doctrines, and to establish the rule of truth in the Church, that there is one Almighty God, who made all things by His Word, both visible and invisible; showing at the same time, that by the Word, through whom God made the creation, He also bestowed salvation on the men included in the creation; thus commenced His teaching in the Gospel: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him, and without Him was nothing made.”⁶⁵

All this obviously does not mean that Tradition adds nothing to Scripture or that it overlaps with it in an absolute way. The point is only that the fundamental content of the Christian faith is available in Scripture and does not need to be “introduced” into it from Tradition. In some aspect, let us add, it is Tradition that must be broader than Scripture, since it is not possible to contain in the written word that reality which the Church lives in Tradition. In turn, not everything that Scripture says must be everywhere and always observed, and as divinely inspired, Scripture is God’s word to the Church, which in turn suggests that in this aspect this Scripture

⁶⁴ Irenaeus Lugdunensis, *Haer.* III, 15, 1 (AH 439).

⁶⁵ Irenaeus Lugdunensis, *Haer.* III, 11, 1 (AH 426).

is something greater than ecclesiastical Tradition. Robert Sokolowski suggested considering the connection between the Church and Scripture on the basis of a reciprocally related part and the whole. In this perspective, both the Church is the whole to Scripture, since the inspired books originated and live only in it, and Scripture is the whole to the Church as a part, since it presents that Church and consolidates it in its essence, and indicates the normative image of the Church to which she is called to conform.⁶⁶

Even though Irenaeus does not close his eyes to the diversity of the biblical account, he nevertheless perceives a fundamental consistency in the “hypothesis” of Scripture, corresponding to the content of the rule of faith. Even more: he takes it for granted wherever there are communities rooted in the Apostolic Tradition.⁶⁷ In them, the “hypothesis” of Scripture agrees with the rule of faith, since both the New Testament and the rule of faith are derived from the same Apostolic Tradition. This again leads us to recognise the close connection of Scripture with the *regula fidei*, but at the same time to dismiss the view that Scripture alone can act as a rule of faith. The latter position, it seems, tends to be formulated by proponents of the *sola Scriptura* principium and serves to confirm this Protestant doctrine formed later, but does not correspond to the more complex reality and history of Christian thought.

In any case Irenaeus’ position is that the main content of faith – differing from what heretics proclaim – can be found in the Tradition itself. It is adhered to even by those barbarians, “who believe in Christ do assent, having salvation written in their hearts by the Spirit, without paper or ink, and, carefully preserving the ancient tradition, believing in one God, the Creator of heaven and earth, and all things therein, by means of Christ Jesus, the Son of God [...]”⁶⁸ The Bishop even states that if to such people the fabrications of the heretics were proclaimed, “they would at once stop their ears, and flee as far off as possible, not enduring even to listen to the blasphemous address. Thus, by means of that ancient tradition of the apostles, they do not

⁶⁶ Cf. Sokolowski, “God’s Word and Human Speech,” 192–193.

⁶⁷ Cf. Blowers, “The *Regula Fidei*,” 213.

⁶⁸ Irenaeus Lugdunensis, *Haer.* III, 4, 2 (*AH* 417).

suffer their mind to conceive anything of the [doctrines suggested by the] portentous language of these teachers, among whom neither Church nor doctrine has ever been established.”⁶⁹

This reasoning serves Irenaeus to show that “our” (Christian) faith agrees with Scripture, while “their” (heretics’) rule does not, and for this reason, the extra-ecclesial interpretation of Scripture contradicts what Scripture conveys; it imposes something on the inspired texts.⁷⁰ However, if there were no Scripture, then the rule of faith could be based on Tradition itself, which once again confirms that the rule was not founded on Scripture alone, but rather expresses the already existing faith of the Church. Being within the Church is sufficient to grasp the essential contents of the Christian faith and to live them, written on the heart and lived out in the Church. Scripture does not add anything essential here, although, as it is related to the faith of the Church and its Apostolic Tradition to which it bears witness, it also secondarily nourishes the rule of faith, and has a much wider role than the *regula fidei* itself.⁷¹ Insofar as Scripture is not merely a “transcription” of Tradition, but also the word of God, it animates the rule of faith and gives it an existential dimension by placing the rule, together with Scripture, also within the dialogical framework of the word of God.

5. Tradition as the Intrinsic Rule of the Canon of Scripture and the Canon of Faith

In the context of Irenaeus’ views, the convictions uttered during the debates of the Council of Trent about the superiority of the Christ event (rendered by the term “Gospel”) in relation to what is written in books, even inspired books, come to mind. Ratzinger’s research shows that the Christ event was distinguished by the *Tridentine* fathers both from the Old Testament (referred to as “Scripture”) and from later

⁶⁹ Irenaeus Lugdunensis, *Haer.* III, 4, 2 (*AH* 417).

⁷⁰ Bokedal (“The Rule of Faith,” 249) notes the priority of the rule of faith over heretical traditions in Tertullian.

⁷¹ Cf. Wall, “Reading the Bible,” 105: “The spiritual calculus is simple: the faithful interpreter who knows Scripture well will more fully learn the Rule’s deep logic and its subtle nuances, which in turn inform a more judicious theological reading.”

history (the revelation of the Spirit in the Church). From this it follows that what we today call Tradition did not exist for those gathered at the Council as one principle, but two: The Gospel only partially capable of being expressed in writing, and the action of the Paraclete in the time of the Church. For the Council fathers, the internal unity of the New Covenant was more important than the division between the written and the non-written. In turn, the writing concerned not only the books but also the hearts of the faithful.⁷² Thus, the New Testament is only part of the New Covenant, even if it testifies to and conveys the main content of the New Covenant, just as the rule of faith does.

It is important to remember that the Bible has a pneumatological genesis (the Spirit's guidance in the Church and the charism of inspiration given to the sacred writers) as well as a Christological-apostolic genesis. It was the Apostles who received from the Lord the mission to preach the Gospel and to communicate God's heavenly gifts. This command was fulfilled in two ways. First "by the Apostles who, by their oral preaching, by example, and by observances (*qui in praedicatione orali, exemplis et institutionibus*) handed on what they had received from the lips of Christ, from living with Him, and from what He did, or what they had learned through the prompting of the Holy Spirit." Secondly, by the hagiographers (the *Vaticanum Secundum* Fathers call them Apostles and apostolic men), "who under the inspiration of the same Holy Spirit committed the message of salvation to writing."⁷³ It is pointed out that the apostolic message was carried out not only by preaching (oral and written), but also by example and observance.

The apostle's statement should be placed in this broad perspective: "you show that you are a letter of Christ, prepared by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts" (2 Cor 3:3 NRSV). When the word of God is communicated (orally, in writing, by Church life), the Holy Spirit works not only in the preacher but also in the hearer

⁷² Cf. Ratzinger, *Wiara w Piśmie i Tradycji*, 370–371.

⁷³ Vaticanum II, *Dei Verbum*, no. 7. Cf. Borto – Kudasiwicz, "Aktualność teologiczno-pastoralna," 378.

of the word, as if “writing” the Gospel on human hearts. It must be assumed that the hagiographer was also “written to” in a similar way, and thus the texts written by him and under the inspiration of the Paraclete corresponded to what was already fixed on “hearts of flesh.”⁷⁴ The hagiographer drew on the whole ecclesiastical Tradition as a response to divine revelation encompassing preaching, teaching, liturgy and life.⁷⁵ Therefore, also the New Testament does not exhaust the reality of the New Covenant, and the main contents of the Christian faith can also be extracted from Tradition and not only from the writings reflecting it.

The New Testament texts are not, of course, merely a “transcription” from the heart of the addressees of the Good News but, thanks to the Holy Spirit, hagiographers are able to recognise the bestowed revelation and to express in the form of words also what the recipients of the word themselves (and even the Church as a whole) could not have spoken. In addition, after the literature of the New Covenant, in which the promises foretold by the prophets have been realised (cf. Ezek 11:19; 36:26; Jer 31:33), has been written down it will stand in the function of the preached word, and thus the Holy Spirit will be able to use the Christian canon to continually write the “letter of Christ” no longer on “tablets of stone” (cf. Deut 9:10–11), but on “living tablets of the heart.”⁷⁶ This could not be done by the rule of faith alone; on the other hand, it can help to do so – by showing the synthesis of the New Testament proclamation and thus making it easier to see the essence of the New Covenant and to give heed to the Good News.

Once again: the inspired texts of the New Testament and the *regula fidei* are expressions of the same Tradition, the same experience of life in the Church. By necessity, therefore, they must coincide to a large extent in terms of content and main ideas, but at the same time they cannot be reduced to one another. The rule of faith does not arise from “Scripture alone,” nor does it pass into “Scripture alone.” Together, the rule of faith and Scripture refer to a reality prior to and

⁷⁴ Langkammer, *Pierwszy i Drugi List*, 126.

⁷⁵ Cf. Hahn, *Covenant and Communion*, 51.

⁷⁶ Cf. Zatwardnicki, *Od teologii objawienia*, 371.

greater than its written expressions, and in this reality they find their meaning. Christian writers invoking the rule of faith were writing at a time when the canon was still forming. But one may ask, what was there before, when no New Testament writing had yet been created? Was there already a rule of faith in existence at that time? In my opinion, it is reasonable to recognise that it goes back to the very beginning, although at that time it had not yet taken the form we know today, as we mentioned before. It can be found in the first Christian writings, which in turn bear witness to the earlier oral preaching and ecclesiastical Tradition that emerged. The rule of faith appears to me to be a “recapitulation” of beliefs born “immediately” (even if it took time to give an account of them in concrete expressions), as a result of the reception of revelation and the reaction to the coming and recognition of Christ in the Holy Spirit, which gave birth to Tradition. This revelation has already produced an effect, which cannot only be dependent on the New Testament or the rule of faith; they in turn perform the function of abiding in the received revelation (so-called dependent revelation⁷⁷). The rule of faith *in nucleo* appears together with the encounter with Christ, there was never an uninterpreted, “non-theological,” Jesus.⁷⁸

It is not an accident that Tertullian mentioned the Trinity in his rule of faith, pointed to the unity of the Old and New Testaments and mentioned the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist. This Latin writer claimed that She (i.e., the Church of Rome) knows only one Lord God – the Creator of the universe, and Jesus Christ, the Son of God the Creator, born of the Virgin Mary. This Church combines the Law and the Prophets with the writings

⁷⁷ Following Gerald O’Collins (*Revelation*, 112, 114–115, 117), we can assume that dependent revelation indicates a continuing relationship or dependence on apostolic witness born of a unique, one-time experience of Jesus in the apostolic generation. The direct witnesses passed on what they experienced (cf. 1 John 1:3), and subsequent generations of Christians receive this apostolic witness from the apostolic Church and through the Scriptures. At the dependent revelation stage, the experience of God’s revelation is mediated through the Church and Scripture, and the Holy Spirit at this time actualises the revelation and mediates the presence of the Lord.

⁷⁸ Cf. O’Collins, *Rethinking Fundamental Theology*, 105.

of the Evangelists and the Apostles, and, according to Tertullian, from this source she drinks her faith, which she seals with water, clothes with the Holy Spirit and nourishes with the Eucharist.⁷⁹

There is an indication here of the genesis and realisation of the Church's faith in Scripture and the sacraments. The same faith that is expressed in the original creeds (and in the later *regula fidei*) is lived out in ecclesial life, which is reflected in the pages of the New Testament. Tertullian's reference to Scripture assumes a connection between the Old Testament and the writings of the evangelists and apostles, which, we should add, were preceded by apostolic preaching and the administration of the sacraments, and in this constituted a comprehensive interpretation of the Old Testament as fulfilled in the New Covenant. Consequently, it must be acknowledged that the hagiographers of the New Testament also abided in this apostolic Tradition, in obedience to the apostolic heard word (preaching) and visible word (sacraments),⁸⁰ and thus accepted the ecclesiastical rule of faith in a version as yet undetermined (or not fully determined).

The primary and vital place of Christian confession was, Ratzinger stressed, the liturgical-sacramental life of the Church. In it the Church realised her faith and experienced the salvific action of the Lord.⁸¹ The symbol of faith at various stages of its development is already present in Scripture and, as Ratzinger notes, the original place of the ecclesial creeds was the sacramental life of the Church, especially baptism. Thus, it is the Church itself that is present in Scripture, and it is the condition (but not the cause) of Scripture, the Bavarian theologian added.⁸² Therefore, it would be appropriate for Tradition

to be recognised as an intrinsic principle of the creation of Scripture, and the gift of inspiration must not be eradicated from

⁷⁹ Cf. Lienhard, "Canons and Rules," 68.

⁸⁰ Cf. Jenson, *Visible Words*.

⁸¹ Cf. Ratzinger, *Wiara w Piśmie i Tradycji*, 331, 387.

⁸² Cf. Ratzinger, *Wiara w Piśmie i Tradycji*, 628. Fiedrowicz (*Teologia ojców Kościoła*, 203–204) writes that before 300 AD, the term "rule of truth" cannot be seen as reduced to a dogmatic standard of truth; "canon" from the earliest times also included the norms of Christian life and Church order.

Tradition. The canon of inspired books should be understood dynamically, as Scripture interpreted according to the *regula fidei*. It was the sacramental context, together with the totality of the experience of the early community, that constituted both the background to the reinterpretation of the Old Testament and the genesis of the New Testament writings. Inspiration accompanied this process of the unfolding emergence of the assembly of God renewed in Christ and the Holy Spirit.⁸³

This relationship of the rule of faith to the life and experience of the Church is worth emphasising. This issue refers to the relationship between the Old and New Testaments, and more specifically to the fulfilment of the Old in the New Covenant. Where in the life of the Church does this “fulfilment” take place? In baptism, which introduces one in the newness – uniting to Christ as Lord and His Ecclesia, and in the Eucharist, both of which are, of course, accompanied by the word. “For you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God” (1 Pet 1:23 NASB). “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word” (Eph 5:25–26). It is in the celebration of the sacraments that the apostolic teaching is proclaimed and what Christ has commanded is celebrated, and above all that His action is experienced *intra mysteriorum celebrationem*. It is the proper milieu for the formulation of creeds – verbal expressions of the “new life” in Christ.

6. Summary and Conclusions

6.1. The Permanent Relationship of *Regula Fidei* and the Biblical Canon

There is a relationship between the rule of faith and the biblical canon. The rule of faith served its purpose when the Christian canon was

⁸³ Zatwardnicki, *Od teologii objawienia*, 395–396.

still being formed. Underlying both the rule and the canon, there must have been a “third element” that determined the passage in the history of Christian orthodoxy from the rule to the canon as the measure of orthodoxy. At the same time, the approval of the canon did not cause the *regula fidei* to completely lose its *raison d’être*. Scripture alone cannot become the only κανὼν τῆς πίστεως, for if the incomplete canon demanded a rule of faith, the formation of the full canon that took place on the basis of the rule of faith can neither change nor replace it, since the books of the Bible are not identical with the *regula fidei*. The doctrine of Scripture must therefore take into account the mutual connection of the rule of faith and Scripture.

All the essential content of the Christian faith is also present in Scripture, the rule of faith is not an “addition” introducing new truths of faith, but an aid to guide the reading of the inspired books.⁸⁴ Scripture alone could not create a rule of faith; the condition for its existence is a Church that has defined the faith it professes in a way that corresponds to its essence. The rule of faith does not arise from “Scripture alone,” nor can it be reduced to Scripture. The inspired New Testament texts and the ecclesiastical *regula fidei* are expressions of the same original Tradition and therefore, as far as content is concerned, must harmonise with each other. Christian Scripture and the *regula fidei* refer to a reality prior to and greater than themselves, in which they find their meaning.

6.2. The Faith of the Church Expressed in the Rule of Faith as the Key to Scripture

It is not so much the rule of faith that is a doctrinal principle internal to Scripture, but rather the faith of the Church as expressed both

⁸⁴ I think this statement somewhat mitigates the assessment of Irenaeus presented in: Norris, “Theology and Language,” 291: “Precisely here, though, Irenaeus’s problem emerges. He wants, like most of us, to have his cake and to eat it. He wants, in effect, to say both that there is a correct hypothesis and that no one really needs it. To phrase the point more carefully: Irenaeus is induced by his Valentinian opponents both to perceive the usefulness – and indeed, in some circumstances, the necessity – of study-guides, and at the same time to distrust such devices profoundly.”

in the rule and in the New Testament, with the original creeds and proto-rule already functioning. Scripture remains canon only in the Christian faith. If Scripture is – is meant to be – alive, it is only in the subject who professes faith, that faith which gave birth to inspired literature. Otherwise, the Bible becomes a document of historic faith, or perhaps only capable of giving birth to that faith. It is the faith of the Church that determines that the content of the rule of faith and Christian Scripture must harmonise.

Scripture has an irreplaceable role in the Church, not least because (but far from only for this reason) the inspired books express the apostolic faith that had already existed (the early Church), was and still is in existence (the apostolic Church). The relationship of the Church's faith to Scripture remains permanent; Scripture cannot be set against the Church. Since the Church's faith precedes the inspired texts of the New Testament (with its understanding of the Old Testament in such and not in any other way), Scripture must be approached with the same faith that stood at the writing of the New Testament; the doctrine of *sola Scriptura*, which breaks this link, must be rejected.⁸⁵ The rule of faith functions as a hermeneutical principle because it has at its origin the same faith of the Church as expressed in the inspired texts. It is therefore not the rule itself but the faith of the Church in the form of the rule of faith that appears as the key to interpreting Scripture.

6.3. The Rule of Faith as the Protection of the Message of Scripture

It is not true that only a rule of faith would make it possible to interpret Scripture in such a way as to be in harmony with the faith of the Church, and that only through it could it be shown that a heretical interpretation was wrong. Scripture itself already contradicted the interpretations of, for example, the Gnostics, although it is true that through the rule of faith it was easier

⁸⁵ In Reformation theology, the idea of the critical independence of Scripture in relation to the Church appears crucial. In Catholic theology, the relative opposition of Scripture and the Church can be made only on the foundation of their inseparable bond – cf. Ratzinger, *Wiara w Piśmie i Tradycji*, 390.

to demonstrate this. The *regula fidei* identified in a striking way that extra-ecclesiastical explanations of Scripture actually create a different story from the ὑποθέσις of the inspired books.

Also, from Tertullian's statements about the priority of the *regula fidei* over heretical traditions, one should not infer that the ecclesiastical rule might be something external to Scripture, coming from a "hidden Tradition" alien to Scripture. On the contrary, it is non-ecclesial traditions that are superimposed on Scripture, and ecclesiastical explicit Tradition is already present in Scripture. The correct interpretation of Scripture is only possible in the faith of the Church because this faith is present from within in Scripture itself. Irenaeus, too, recognised that for communities rooted in Apostolic Tradition, it is obvious that the "plot" of Scripture corresponds to the content of the rule of faith (although they cannot be reduced to one another), because both the New Testament and the rule derive from the same Apostolic Tradition.

The rule of faith allows Scripture to be Scripture, and any non-Christian interpretations of Scripture, done from the perspective of a non-church rule, make Scripture something it is not. To approach Scripture outside the rule of faith is to approach it outside the faith of the Church, which lay at the origin of the New Testament and the Christian reading of the Old Testament. Then the place of ecclesiastical rule is taken by a rule alien to ecclesiastical and biblical faith, imposing its narrative on Scripture.

6.4. *Regula Fidei* in the Service of *Harmonia Veritatum* and *Hierarchia Veritatum*

The rule of faith is a summary, not of Scripture, but of the Christian faith as a response to the word of God. It expresses the main doctrines and the structure of the apostolic faith. The rule of faith facilitates preserving a certain order that already exists in Scripture itself, so that the individual passages can be read in their interconnectedness, proper sequence and overall context. This suggests the need to take into account a kind of canonical exegesis, but including not only the *harmonia veritatum*, but also the *hierarchia veritatum*, as indicated by Irenaeus' term "body of Truth." This overall context

(a mosaic, to use the metaphor of the Bishop of Lyons again) was taken over with the faith received from the Church at the time of baptism and catechesis, and was present in the entirety of Church life.

If there is already a certain orientation in Scripture itself, it is in turn more easily grasped through the *regula fidei*. The rule, incidentally, smooths out the more complex history of God's relationship with mankind and closes certain "blind alleys" which may have found their way into the inspired books at a given stage of the economy of revelation due to human frailty, and which, in the overall context of God's intention being realised, ceased to have any meaning other than a provisional statement later demanding the "correctio" it received through a concluding summary.⁸⁶ Thus, the *regula fidei* constitutes simultaneously a call for a reinterpretation of the doctrine of the truth and holiness of the Scriptures.

6.5. Κανὼν τῆς πίστεως as the Result of the Reception of God's Revelation

Within an overarching context encompassing the whole economy of God, there is not only Scripture but also the Church, or more precisely, Scripture in the Church and the Church with Scripture. Scripture is not the only expression of the Church's faith. The Church could function, at least for a time, without the New Testament or even without a strict rule of faith, but not without the faith (and the Jewish scriptures interpreted in its light), which by its very nature had to be able to be expressed in verbal formulas, communicable with baptism, preaching and probably during the liturgical proclamation of the word of God.⁸⁷

The rule of faith functioned at a time when the faith of the Church had not yet found full expression in the inspired writings of the New

⁸⁶ Cf. Lohfink, "Jak rozumieć Pismo," 37–38.

⁸⁷ The apostle Paul thanks God "for when you were slaves to sin, you gave heartfelt obedience to the precepts of that doctrine to which you were committed" (Rom 6:17). The apostle's use of "the expression '*typos* of doctrine' says that there is a clear, content-defined form of the statements of faith that the Church gives to individual believers" – Fiedrowicz, *Teologia ojców Kościoła*, 213.

Testament. The faith had already existed, for without faith it would be impossible to speak of the reception of divine revelation and, consequently, of the emergence of the Church. The faith of the Church is prior to both the New Testament writings and the rule of faith, although it should be added immediately that there has never been a faith without some expression (if only in the form of reinterpretations of the Old Testament and formulas recognising the unique status of Jesus). In its essence, the rule of faith remained constant from the beginning, as the experience of divine revelation was properly interpreted and expressed in propositional claims. The recognition of the canonicity of the other biblical books therefore had to take into account the rule of faith, the basic content and structure of which could not be altered by later approved writings.

The existence of a “proto-rule” preceding both the sacred texts and the *regula fidei* itself in its later form can be assumed. Such a proto-rule would already have been present in apostolic proclamation and the liturgical-sacramental life of the Church. The basic proto-doctrine resulted from the acceptance of the self-revelation of God in Christ. Probably, the rule of faith in its earliest form was born “at once,” it represents one of the unveiling stages of Tradition as the reception of God’s revelation in Christ and the Holy Spirit. The Christian faith was determined by the encounter with Christ, and this alone constituted the rule of faith *in nucleo*. Scripture and the rule of faith have an indispensable role in the period of dependent revelation. The doctrine of Scripture should be combined with the theology of revelation, and its reception by the Church.

6.6. Scripture and the *Regula Fidei* in the Service of the New Covenant

In accordance with the perspective of the Fathers of the Council of Trent, Tradition is not a single principle (which could be contrasted with Scripture) but exists as two principles: the event of Christ called the Gospel and the activity of the Paraclete in the time of the Church. The unity of the New Covenant cannot be negated by the division between the written (in writing and in the heart) and the unwritten. In this light, both the Scripture and the rule of faith can only be part

of the New Covenant, an expression of the main content resulting from the event of Christ.

The New Testament is not a second testament coming after the first, for since the New Covenant is the fulfilment of the Old Testament, the role of the New Testament writings is also different. The relationship of the creeds to the sacramental life sheds light on the *locus* of experiencing the fulfilment of the Old Testament. Primacy belongs at all times to the reality of the New Covenant, which cannot be exhausted in the sacred writings, but which the inspired literature serves. The doctrine of Scripture (including the theology of inspiration) should take into account the relationship of the word to the sacrament.

Both the rule of faith and the Scriptures correspond to the “writing” on the heart, but the authors, inspired by the Holy Spirit, not only “transcribed” from the heart, but also expressed what the recipients of the word of God themselves or even the Church as a whole were unable to do. Thus, the Christian canon brings something new to the rule of faith being an expression of the Church’s faith. The rule of faith alone would not be capable of continuing to write the “letter of Christ” on human hearts, but it can serve this mission of the canonical Scripture together with it. Scripture, although it does not add anything essential to the rule of faith, performs a broader function, inscribing the rule, incidentally, within the dialogical framework of the word of God.

6.7. The Manifest and Prior Tradition as the Source of the New Testament and the Rule of Faith

The Holy Spirit wrote on the “living tablets of the hearts” of believers, including hagiographers, who abode in the ecclesial Tradition being a response to divine revelation encompassing preaching, teaching, liturgy and life. Both the New Testament and the ecclesial creeds (and the subsequent rule of faith) are therefore also linked to the celebration of the sacraments, in which the Church’s faith was realised and the experience of the Lord’s salvific action became possible. All this is reflected in the New Testament books, which as a result refer to and serve this wider reality. Consequently, Tradition must be

recognised as the inner principle of the formation of the Christian canon of Scripture and the principle of biblical interpretation.⁸⁸

It is not Scripture that is the source of the Christian faith, for even without Scripture it would be possible, according to Irenaeus, to abide in the Apostolic Tradition guarded in the Church. (Incidentally, this means that the rule of faith could not have originated from Scripture alone. Also, the hagiographers as addressees of apostolic preaching and members of the Church abided in apostolic Tradition). Thanks to the “principle of succession,” the main contents of the faith could be extracted from Tradition alone. Christians have salvation written in their hearts and uphold the ancient Apostolic Tradition, different from the inventions of heretics. Abiding in the Church is sufficient to grasp the essential contents of the faith and to live them.

The content of the rule of faith coincides with the content of Scripture and can be derived from Tradition. The author of *Adversus Haereses* does not suggest a “hidden Tradition,” as if it was to supplement Scripture, but rather argues that the main contents of the Christian faith contained in Scripture and preserved in the Tradition of the Church agree with each other. This serves the Bishop of Lyons to justify the Church’s interpretation of Scripture, not to relativise its sufficiency. Irenaeus reaches for Scripture, which appears to him as authoritative and reflecting the faith and apostolic teaching in a manifest way, so that the salvific rule of truth is already available in the New Testament writings themselves.

6.8. The Personalistic Dimension of *Regula Fidei* and the Christian Canon

Both through its content and its corresponding structure, the rule of faith protected faith in the author and director of the economy of salvation, in which God himself gave himself to humanity (the transition from the economic Trinity to the immanent Trinity).

⁸⁸ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, no. 29: “[T]he primary setting for scriptural interpretation is the life of the Church. This is not to uphold the ecclesial context as an extrinsic rule to which exegetes must submit, but rather is something demanded by the very nature of the Scriptures and the way they gradually came into being.”

The rule of faith serves the transition from the Book to reality, as it points to the continuity of God's action in the Church. The *regula fidei* constitutes a construction of an overarching vision, by pointing to the synthesis of creation, redemption and glorious fulfilment, and linking God's eternity to His action in time and eschatology.

The rule of faith is characterised by a personalistic dimension derived from God's self-revelation. Neither the Scripture nor the rule of faith are capable of announce the whole Truth of revealed reality (the ultimate word of God is, after all, the living Word made man), but they make it possible to express the essential contents and identify the structure of the whole. The rule of faith points to the main truths of the Christian faith and thus structures the apostolic message, whereas the inspired books illuminate the rule of faith and fill the "mesh" of the *nexus mysteriorum* with additional content. Ultimately, both the rule and the Scripture are inscribed within the goal attested in them, that is, the realisation of the divine *oikouménē*. The rule of faith, by its relationship to Scripture, proves indirectly that Scripture also remains at the service of the relationship with the Holy Trinity.⁸⁹

Reguła wiary a Pismo i Tradycja. Głos w dyskusji na temat doktryny Pisma Świętego

Abstrakt: Artykuł jest głosem w dyskusji na temat doktryny Pisma Świętego, czyli teologicznej refleksji nad naturą, atrybutami i misją Pisma Świętego. W tekście ukazano bliski związek *regula fidei* z Pismem Świętym, a zarazem niemożliwość utożsamienia reguły wiary z kanonem biblijnym. Reguła wiary odegrała rolę w ustaleniu chrześcijańskiego kanonu i w całym czasie Kościoła służy ochronie przesłania Pisma Świętego. Treści wyrażone w regule wiary nie pochodzą z ukrytej Tradycji, zaś Tradycja stała się wewnętrzną zasadą Nowego Testamentu i *regula fidei*. Kluczem do Pisma Świętego jest wiara Kościoła, której jednym z wyrazów jest reguła wiary. Pozwala ona uchwyć porządek prawd wiary (*harmonia veritatum*) oraz ich hierarchię (*hierarchia veritatum*). Pierwotna reguła wiary zrodziła się w wyniku recepcji objawienia Bożego i razem z Pismem Świętym pozostaje na służbie Nowego Przymierza.

Słowa kluczowe: doktryna Pisma Świętego, *regula fidei*, *καὶ ὡν τῆς πίστεως*, Pismo Święte, reguła wiary, Tradycja, kanon biblijny

⁸⁹ This connection between Scripture and the self-revelation of the Triune One was emphasised by John Webster – cf. Zatwardnicki, "Objawienie – uświęcenie – natchnienie."

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