



John Anthony Berry | Viorel Coman (Eds.)

Living Tradition

Continuity and Change as Challenges
to Churches and Theologies

Proceedings of the 21st Academic Consultation
of the Societas Oecumenica



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Beihefte zur Ökumenischen Rundschau Nr. 140



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EVANGELISCHE VERLAGSANSTALT
Leipzig

Bibliographische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek
Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der
Deutschen Nationalbibliographie; detaillierte bibliographische Daten
sind im Internet über <http://dnb.dnb.de> abrufbar.

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Printed in Germany

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This book is printed on ageing resistant paper.

Cover: Kai-Michael Gustmann, Leipzig
Cover image: © MaltaInfoGuide.com
Typesetting: Steffi Glauche, Leipzig
Printing and Binding: BELTZ Grafische Betriebe GmbH, Bad Langensalza

ISBN 978-3-374-07540-9 // eISBN (PDF) 978-3-374-07541-6
www.eva-leipzig.de

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Foreward

After unforeseen postponements due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the 21st Academic Consultation of the *Societas Oecumenica* finally took place on the island of Malta from the 5th to the 10th of May 2022. Its main topic was *Living Tradition: Continuity and Change as Challenges to Churches and Theologies*. Members and friends of the *Societas Oecumenica* gathered at the Archbishop's Seminary in Rabat to reflect on the ecumenical significance of Tradition and the challenges posed to churches and theologies by its twin principles: continuity and change. The goal of the 21st Academic Consultation was to offer churches, academia, and society insights into how our respective identities as Christians, largely shaped by a critical conversation with what has been passed down to us, impact our reconciliation process. The keynote papers and some of the presentations during the short paper sessions are included in this volume.

The foundation of our discussion begins with the richness stemming from the diversity of Christian traditions. Christianity, as we know it, is far from being a monolithic faith. Instead, it comprises a multitude of denominations and traditions, including Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Protestantism, Anglicanism, and many others. Each of these traditions boasts its own unique expressions of theology, liturgy, and doctrine. These distinctions often find their roots in historical developments and interpretations of scripture. Moreover, an essential aspect to consider is the awareness of both unity and disunity within the Christian history. Christianity's timeline is punctuated by periods of unity and disunity. In its early years, the Christian Church experienced relative cohesion, but the passage of time witnessed the emergence of theological and doctrinal disparities, ultimately leading to schisms and the establishment of distinct traditions.

This academic gathering provided an opportune moment for participants to advocate for dialogue, understanding, and collaboration among

various churches and traditions, all in pursuit of a grander objective: enhanced Christian unity, particularly concerning the concept of tradition. Over the course of five days, there was a concerted effort to nurture an appreciation and comprehension of the diverse traditions present within Christianity. This endeavour required acknowledging the profound diversity in theological and liturgical practices while simultaneously seeking common ground and shared beliefs. Throughout the presentations, a recurring theme was the identification of commonalities and shared tradition. This involved reaching consensus on fundamental Christian doctrines, such as the Nicene Creed, the divinity of Christ, and the authority of scripture. These shared elements served as the bedrock upon which unity and collaboration could be built.

Concurrently, it was evident that due regard was given to the necessity of respecting differences. While the pursuit of unity was paramount, it remained equally important to honor the unique theological and liturgical heritages that each tradition brought to the table. It was made clear that unity, within this context, did not necessitate uniformity; diversity, in fact, had the potential to enrich the broader Christian community. A more in-depth examination of bilateral and multilateral Dialogues proved to be enlightening. These dialogues, specifically designed to address theological discrepancies and explore avenues to overcome historical divisions, were deemed invaluable in the pursuit of unity.

The consultation underscored not only the significance of theological discussions but also the importance of practical cooperation. It became apparent that Christian witness in the world could be most impactful when churches from various traditions collaborated on issues of social justice, humanitarian efforts, and joint worship services. This practical demonstration illustrated a genuine commitment to unity in action. That said, it is essential to acknowledge that challenges persist, and there is still much ground to cover. Achieving complete ecumenical unity remains a complex and formidable objective. Nevertheless, the relationship between churches and their ecumenical understanding of tradition involves a concerted effort to champion unity, cooperation, and understanding among Christian traditions while upholding their theological and liturgical diversity. It is a journey aimed at advancing Christian unity by recognizing and embracing both commonalities and differences within the broader tapestry of Christianity.

The volume opens with the lecture delivered by *John Anthony Berry* (University of Malta), the then President of the *Societas Oecumenica*, at our Consultation in Malta. Berry starts by explaining Tradition as a theo-

logical concept. Then he refers to the three main challenges faced by Tradition: the misunderstanding of Tradition; the rejection of Tradition; and the challenges and opportunities of pluralism. Towards the end of his lecture, Berry analyzes Tradition in connection to orthodoxy and orthopraxis. His final reflections emphasised that Tradition and hope are intimately linked.

The first section of the volume – *Theologies of Tradition: Handling Continuity in Different Churches and Denominations* – investigates how different Christian churches and denominations understand Tradition. *Alina Pătru* (Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu) engages with the Orthodox understating of Tradition as it is articulated by three major neo-patristic theologians: Georges Florovsky, Vladimir Lossky, and Dumitru Stăniloae. *Joseph Famerée* (Université Catholique de Louvain) details the Roman Catholic understanding of Tradition considering the teaching of Vatican II. Particularly relevant is Famerée’s remark that it is the vocation of the entire people of God to safeguard the Catholic Church’s continuity with the Tradition coming from the Apostles. *Jennifer Wasmuth* (University of Göttingen) explores the dialectical understanding of Tradition in Lutheranism: Tradition is preserved via a negation of Tradition. Her presentation engages with various Protestant authors: from Martin Luther and Philipp Melancthon to modern and contemporary theologians. *Markus Iff* (Theologische Hochschule Ewersbach) addressed the topic of continuity and Tradition from the perspective of Protestant Free Churches. Iff explains that even though Free Churches do not elaborate a clear understanding of the notion of Tradition, they see themselves as faithful to the heritage of the biblical and apostolic traditions. Such a continuity is provided by a series of principles of hermeneutical, liturgical, ecclesiological, and spiritual nature.

The second section – *Captivities of Tradition: Dealing with Traditionalism and Fundamentalism* – offers ecumenical responses to the many challenges posed to churches and their quest for unity by unhealthy forms of attachment to Tradition and traditions. Both chapters in this section address the question of how Tradition and traditions are to be understood as to avoid fundamentalism and the excessive adherence to a past-oriented outlook on life. *Rade Kisić* (University of Belgrade) deals with the phenomena of traditionalism and fundamentalism in Eastern Orthodoxy, showing that the eschatological orientation of Christian Tradition calls into question any resistance to change, novelty, and renewal. *Ivana Noble* (Charles University) looks at the misinterpretation of life-bearing Tradition in times of crisis, which confronted Christianity with various forms of fun-

damentalism, populist ideologies, and conspiracy theories. Noble argues that the spiritual practice of discernment helps Christians distinguish between what is life-bearing in a Tradition and what is not. She claims that, if the concept of ›living Tradition‹ proved to be helpful in the past, today's churches and societies need to embrace a ›discerning Tradition‹.

The third section – *Changing Traditions: Preserving Identity Through Discontinuities* – brings forth case studies to exemplify how various churches experience and reflect on changes in their ecclesial life and theology. *Riccardo Burigana* (L'Istituto di Studi Ecumenici, Venice) reflects on the ecumenical debate on Tradition during the Second Vatican Council, particular attention being given to the drafting process of *Dei Verbum* and to the Fourth Assembly of Faith and Constitution in Montreal (1963). *Rolf Pöhler* (Theologische Hochschule Friedensau) discusses the topic of continuity and change from a Free Church perspective. He looks at the search for identity amidst changes and discontinuities in three distinct free church communities: the German Baptist Church, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and the New Apostolic Church. *Evgeny Pilipenko* (SS. Cyril and Methodius Theological Institute of Postgraduate Studies, Moscow) addresses the issue of doctrinal development in Orthodox Christianity. The questions he answered in his contribution are related to the agent of doctrinal development and the compatibility between doctrinal development and ecclesial unity. In their joint chapter, *Myriam Wijlens* (University of Erfurt) and *Simone Sinn* (WCC/Ecumenical Institute of Bossey) reflect on change in moral discernment processes, with particular emphasis on insights provided by the 2021 study document *Churches and Moral Discernment: Facilitating Dialogue to Build Koinonia* by the Faith and Order Commission.

The fourth section – *Dynamics of Tradition: Living Faith in Changing Times* – seeks ecumenical answers to the many challenges faced by Christians in changing contexts. *Kati Tervo-Niemelä* (University of Eastern Finland) focuses on continuity and discontinuity of faith in families based on the result of a research project that gathered information from five countries: Finland, Germany, Italy, Hungary, and Canada. She looks at the factors that explain continuity and discontinuity of faith by using mixed methods, which rely on survey data collection and three-generation family interviews. In his response to the chapter by Tervo-Niemelä, *Mark Joseph Zammit* (University of Malta) highlights the fact that two interwoven elements are involved in the process of faith transmission in families: Tradition and culture. For their successful transmission from one generation to another, a few aspects need to be considered: the human person as

agent of both; their historical and progressive nature; the importance of the community as people of God in the transmission of Tradition and culture. *James Hawkey* (Westminster Abbey) shows that, even though a lot of ecumenical progress on the issue of Tradition has been realised over the past decades, much more needs to be done so that churches can find coherence between their internal lives as churches and the way they relate externally with one another. Only by doing so, a united Christian voice can emerge to deal with the many challenges of contemporary societies. The respondent to Hawkey's paper, *Adalberto Mainardi* (Monastic Communities of Bose and Celiole), stresses, among other things, that particular attention should be given to the theme of ecumenical tradition. An ecumenical tradition is not a tradition among the many traditions of Christian churches; it is rather a way of re-orienting all Christian traditions, without getting rid of their legitimate diversity.

The fifth section includes the concluding lecture delivered by *William Henn* OFM Cap (Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome) in Malta, which explores the role of Tradition in ecumenical dialogues. Henn refers to the ecumenical efforts of overcoming the dichotomy between Scripture and Tradition, to the effective employment of Tradition in inter-Christian dialogues, the role of Tradition in the WCC document *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (2013), as well as to criteria for discerning authentic Tradition, which is a human-divine reality, from false traditions, which are merely human constructions.

The central theme of our consultation in Malta was discussed in small groups during the short paper presentations. Some of the presentations are published in the final section of the volume. *Clare Amos* takes the biblical stories of the transfiguration as a starting point to argue that it offers a creative way of valuing Tradition without being held captive by it. In her contribution, *Elisabeth Maikranz* focuses on the relationship between Tradition and Scripture as described by the Lutheran theologian Wolfhart Panenberg and the Roman Catholic theologian Walter Kasper. *Heikki Repo* examines the reception of BEM document by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ELCF). At the same time, Repo pays attention to the Eucharistic development of the epiclesis in the theology of the ELCF. *Andrés Valencia Pérez* investigates the relationship between pneumatology, tradition, and ecclesial renewal in the works of Yves Congar. *Gregory Ryan* examines what the concept of receptive ecumenism might have to offer in implementing Pope Francis's vision of a synodal Church. *Dorianne Buttigieg* explores how witnesses to Tradition are received within the context of an ecumenical martyrology. The focus of this inquiry is whether

certain saints celebrated in one tradition can be embraced by other traditions. *Artur Ilharco Galvão* reflects on Tradition considering Alasdair MacIntyre's insights. He shows that a living Tradition needs to create a solid dialogue between its past and future dimension, as well as to open itself critically to contemporary challenge. *Simon Haug* offers new insights into the notion of Tradition from a Free Church perspective. In her contribution, *Erica P.M. Meijers* engages with the intimate link between liturgy and diakonia in the public mission of the Church. The chapter by *Susana Vilas Boas* claims that openness to diversity and plurality should be a fundamental principal of the Christian understanding of Tradition. *Praveen Joy Saldanha* analyses Nicholas Afanasiev's Eucharistic vision of the Church by emphasizing his reflections on the living ecclesiological Tradition of the first three centuries of Christian history. *Marina Stojanović* examines the concept of development of Tradition considering the testimony of Greek patristic authors such as Ignatius of Antioch, Hippolytus, Origen, Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, and Maximus the Confessor. *Mihai Iordache* discusses the topic of the purification of passions in the works of Maximus the Confessor, with particular attention to the complexity and the stage of this spiritual process. Last but not least, *Dimitrios Keramidis* engages with Christos Yannaras' hermeneutics of East-West relationships in an attempt to re-define the boundaries of Orthodoxy.

We would like to express our gratitude to all the contributors to this volume, who took the time to turn their keynote papers and short paper presentations into articles. At the same time, we are grateful to Charlò Camilleri and Warren Borg-Ebejer, who have carefully checked the English of the manuscript, especially the texts whose authors have a different mother tongue. And finally, we would like to thank the Evangelische Verlagsanstalt Leipzig for including this volume in the series of »Beihefte zur Ökumenischen Rundschau«.

Valletta/Leuven, August 2023
John Anthony Berry and Viorel Coman

The Breadth of Tradition: Giving the Past a Future

John Anthony Berry

»Tradition and novelty are not in opposition, but in harmony. They are not in antithesis, but in counterpoint. They are two faces of history and life. One is seed and root, the other is branches and leaves. One is ancient truth, the other is new revelation of truth. Both must hold hands to reach the ultimate goal«. ¹

– Gianfranco Ravasi

Societas Oecumenica could not have chosen a better place than Malta, an island full of traditions, beliefs and practices to discuss a theme that necessarily involves continuity and renewal. The Maltese islands too witnessed development starting with its first colonisers, the Phoenicians in 8th century BC, and ending with the British in the 20th century. Independence was granted in 1964, however the formal withdrawal of the British troops and the Royal Navy from Malta took place in 1979. The Gospel reached the Maltese shores two millennia ago through the figure of St Paul, the apostle of the Gentiles. His providential shipwreck in around 60 A.D., as recorded in the Books of Acts, chapter 28, led the islanders to embark on a journey of faith, moving from pagan worship for almost four thousand years or even before, to wholeheartedly embracing Christianity.

It is opportune to have decided to hold this ecumenical consultation on »Living Tradition« in Malta, particularly given its uninterrupted 2000-year Christian tradition. ² Things were neither plain nor simple, and terms like ›continuity‹ and ›rupture‹ undoubtedly fit perfectly in the conference discourse. Nevertheless, the Christian traditions of the Maltese archipelago are as ancient as those of Ephesus, Jerusalem, Corinth, and Rome itself. Over the course of its five-day conference, the aim was to explore how the initiative of the ecumenical endeavour cannot proceed without tradi-

¹ GIANFRANCO RAVASI, »Mattutino«, *Avvenire*, 21 Marzo 1998.

² STANLEY FIORINI AND HORATIO C. R. VELLA, *New XII Century Evidence for the Pauline Tradition and Christianity in the Maltese Islands: The Cult of St Paul in the Christian Churches and in the Maltese Tradition*, ed. J. Azzopardi, Malta: PEG, 2006.

tion, and how a sense of a ›living tradition‹ is crucial in striving for Christian unity. In other words, tradition is an inescapable aspect of a fully biblical Christian faith.

An official drive for Christian unity in Malta is traceable to the early 1960s with the foundation of an ecumenical group of ministers from various denominations. An Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission was also established in Malta in 1967. The first ever-ecumenical service in Malta took place on 27 December 1968, five days prior to the celebration of the World Day of Peace (1 January 1969). The Roman Catholic Ecumenical Commission was established in October 1977, while the Malta Ecumenical Council or as is popularly known as »Christians Together in Malta« was founded in 1995.

This examination on the extent of tradition coincides with the 50th anniversary of the »Malta Report« issued by the Lutheran/Roman Catholic Study Commission appointed by the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity and the Executive Committee of the Lutheran World Federation. It was the fruit of five sessions, the last one held in Malta at San Anton's Presidential Palace.³ Under the general theme of »The Gospel and the Church«, this commission discussed the theological questions that are of essential significance for the relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran Federation. It had studied the biblical-theological question of the gospel and its transmission in the New Testament; the role churches have in finding a new unity in common service to the world; the structures of the Church and the questions of papal primacy and intercommunion.

The 21st consultation, bringing together a significant number of ecumenical participants and taking place in the south of the Mediterranean Sea, signifies yet another significant moment in the history of *Societas Oecumenica* as well as in that of local ecumenism. Over the past two centuries in Malta, commendable relations have developed among different Christian denominations, including Catholics, Anglicans, Presbyterians, and Methodists. In recent years, this ecumenical presence has continued to strengthen with the inclusion of other groups such as Evangelicals, Baptists, Pentecostals, Adventists, as well as various Orthodox denominations, including the Romanian, Bulgarian, Greek, Coptic, Russian, Serbian, Geor-

³ The fifth session held February 21–26, 1971. At the time, Jan Willebrands was President of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, while André Appel was the General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation.

gian, and Ethiopian communities. Similarly, for this study, representatives from diverse churches and denominations unite as peers and companions to delve into the intricacies of the concept of tradition.

The last meeting in Ludwigshafen took place in 2018. At that meeting, the theme »On Nations and the Churches: Ecumenical Responses to Nationalism and Migration« was discussed.⁴ When the time came to hold the following consultation, it had to be postponed. Everyone waited for better times, but as soon as one devastating storm subsided, another one broke out. It may be thought that things improved, at least in terms of COVID-19; however, there is an equally terrible manifestation of evil going on: Europe is at war. One dream has been replaced by yet another dream. All still remember, when in 2020, when coronavirus swept over us, and things did not remain all the same. In these last years and months, ecumenical efforts have been put to a test. The way of dealing and treating each other has changed. Churches found themselves in the same boat. It compels the discovery of a new style of solidarity. In fact, somehow, COVID-19 fostered and promoted a better mode of mutual understanding. A time of crisis slowly changed into a time of opportunities!

Gradually, there has been a notable emergence of joint initiatives, joint declarations, joint actions, and various ecumenical strategies aimed at assisting all individuals affected in various ways. The described scenario aligns with the chosen theme of »living tradition«. While churches may have maintained their distinct divergences and traditions, contemporary circumstances are fostering practical collaboration and the ongoing pursuit of Christian unity, both visible and otherwise.⁵ The conference places its emphasis on four sub-themes: (i) »Theologies of tradition« i.e. how *continuity* has been handled in different churches and denominations; (ii) »Captivities of tradition« i.e. how *resistance* often disguises itself in the form of traditionalism, fundamentalism and the like; (iii) »Changing traditions« i.e. how *identity* is preserved paradoxically through discontinuity or discontinuities; and lastly (iv) the »Dynamics of tradition«, i.e. how the Christian *faith* lives on in changing times.

⁴ JELLE CREAMERS and ULRIKE LINK-WIECZOREK, On Nations and The Churches: Ecumenical Responses to Nationalisms and Migration: Proceedings of the 20th Academic Consultation of the Societas Oecumenica, Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2020.

⁵ DANIEL CIOBOTEA (Metropolitan), Confessing the Truth in Love. Orthodox Perceptions of Life, Mission and Unity. Iasi: Trinitas, 2001, 157.

The emphasis on ›Living tradition‹ can be attributed to several key reasons. Firstly, it serves as a means to explore the significance of tradition within the context of ecumenical relations and theology.⁶ While many recognize the critical importance of discerning Scripture as a foundation for systematic theological development, the need for a similar critical discernment of tradition has not yet fully materialized or become readily apparent. A thoughtful examination of this theme aims to secure a promising future for previous theological reflections and ecclesial experiences. Secondly, it facilitates an understanding of tradition in relation to the Holy Spirit, who imparts dynamism and vitality to the Church, making it a living and integral part of the life of the Trinity. By incorporating the term ›living‹, the intention is to emphasize a more profound appreciation of the true essence

⁶ There is plenty of literature on Tradition: JEAN-GEORGES BOEGLIN, *La Question de la Tradition dans la théologie catholique contemporaine*, Paris: Cerf, 1998; YVES CONGAR, *The Meaning of Tradition*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004; IDEM, *Tradition and the life of the Church*, London: Burns & Oates, 1964; COLBY DICKINSON, LIEVEN BOEVE, TERRENCE MERRIGAN, *The Shaping of Tradition: Context and Normativity*, Leuven: Peeters, 2013; Henri de Lubac, ›Il problema dello sviluppo del dogma‹, in Idem, *Mistica e mistero cristiano. La fede cristiana*, Milano 1979, 227–251; JOSEF R. GEISELMANN, ›Scripture, Tradition, and the Church: An Ecumenical Problem‹, *Christianity Divided*, ed. D. Callahan, H. Oberman, and D. O’Hanlon, S. J., New York: Sheed and Ward, 1961; THOMAS GUARINO, ›Vincent of Lerins and the Hermeneutical Question‹, in *Gregorianum* 75/3 (1994), 491–523; RICHARD PATRICK CROSLAND HANSON, *Tradition in the Early Church*, London: S.C.M. Press, 1962; WALTER KASPER, ›La successione apostolica nel ministero episcopale come problema ecumenico‹, in: ›Salesianum‹ 59 (1997) 397–408; WALTER KASPER, ›Tradizione come principio di conoscenza teologica‹, in Idem, *Teologia e Chiesa*, Brescia 1989, 74–103; HENRI HOLSTEIN, *La tradition dans l’église*, Paris: Grasset, 1960; LUIS E. LADARIA, ›Che cos’è un dogma? Il problema del dogma nella teologia attuale‹, in K. H. Neufeld (a c. di), *Problemi e prospettive di teologia dogmatica*, Brescia 1983, 97–119; EMMANUEL LANNE, *Tradition et communion des Eglises. Recueil d’éludes*. (Bibliotheca ETL, 129). Leuven, Leuven University Press – Peeters, 1997; PETER LENGSELD, ›Tradition, Écriture et Église dans le dialogue oecuménique‹, Paris 1964; IDEM, ›Tradizione e Bibbia: Loro rapporto‹, in J. Feiner – M. Löhrer (a c. di), *Mysterium Salutis*, 1, Brescia 1968, 1, pp. 609–648; IDEM, ›Tradizione durante al tempo costitutivo della rivelazione‹, in J. Feiner – M. Löhrer (a c. di), *Mysterium Salutis*, 1, Brescia 1968, pp. 326–384; GEORGE LINDBECK, ›The Problem of Doctrinal Development and Contemporary Protestant Theology‹, *Concilium* 1/3 (1967): 64–72; ANDREA MILANO, *Il problema della ›Tradizione‹. A proposito di Vincenzo di Lerino*, in ›Rassegna di teologia‹ 37 (1966) pp. 395–406; GEORGE H. TAVARD, KENNETH HAGEN, MARC R. ALEXANDER, *The Quadrilog: Tradition and the Future of Ecumenism: Essays in Honour of George H. Tavard*, Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1994.

of ›tradition‹. Thirdly, it underscores the significance of shared faith and unwavering allegiance to the apostolic tradition as a foundation for unity and communion.⁷ The ability to trace the origins of the Church enhances our comprehension of Christian identity and the ecclesial mission in the broader context of the world. This paper follows a structured approach with three key steps, centering around three terms, all commencing with the letter ›c‹: (1) the *concept* of tradition; (2) the *challenges* confronting tradition, and (3) *considerations* to contemplate as guiding principles throughout the discussions.

1. Tradition as a Theological Concept

This paper intends to clarify the etymology and context of tradition; the distinctions of tradition in theology, and then makes a slight reference to tradition in ecumenical dialogue. The title itself, »The Breadth of Tradition«, not only implies that tradition encompasses a diverse spectrum of beliefs, practices, customs, and knowledge, but also conveys the extensive and all-encompassing character of tradition within a specific context.⁸

1.1 Etymology

The word ›tradition‹ comes from the Latin ›traditio‹, the noun of the verb *tradere*. This has two main meanings: (1) that of ›handing over‹, (*tradire*) and (2) that of ›handing down‹ i.e., ›to transmit‹, ›to communicate‹ and ›to teach‹.⁹ Christian Latin used the term ›traditio‹ to translate the Greek word ›paradosis‹ derived from the verb ›para-didomi‹. This verb occurs very frequently in the New Testament, more than 120 times and the noun ›paradosis‹ is also well attested.¹⁰ The exploration begins with an etymological reference precisely because it underscores that the question of tradition should not be approached with a static perspective limited to the

⁷ Eastern Orthodox – Oriental Orthodox Agreement 1990, accessed on 21 June 2011, http://www.antiochian.net/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=653&Itemid=63

⁸ See ASSOCIAZIONE TEOLOGICA ITALIANA (ed.), *Fare teologia nella tradizione*, Milano: Glossa, 2014.

⁹ YVES CONGAR, *The Meaning of Tradition*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004, 9.

¹⁰ In Hebrew, ›tradition‹ is called *massora* (or *massoreth*), from the verb ›masar‹ i. e. to transmit, hence the ›Masoretic text‹ of the Bible, i. e. the text transmitted.

past. Instead, it should be viewed from a dynamic standpoint as a process of communication.¹¹

To understand tradition in its specific biblical sense, one must look at biblical revelation itself. Tradition has to do with the strictly historical imprint of revelation. The historical process of revelation – that God spoke out (Hebrews 1:1,2) – is the basis of all tradition. In this sense, tradition is implicit in the very event of revelation and entails the existence of the Church. Revelation stopped with the last Apostle, however tradition is unstoppable, as long as it continues to be *paradosis*, that is *traditio*.

In theological discourse, tradition is discussed in terms of two subjects. The *transcendent* subject of the tradition is therefore God himself, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In particular, the Holy Spirit is attributed the action of *inspiration* and *assistance*. The *historical* subject is the Church, understood as an organic reality, with all its components (people of God, pastors, teachers, prophets), in the unity of charity that bears fruit in holiness and in the use of the proper means of proclamation (ministry of the word). The theological definition highlights the *Christological* foundation of tradition, as well as its *pneumatological* and *ecclesiological* character. Moreover, one must distinguish between ›Tradition‹ and ›traditions‹, that is, between the permanent and constitutive elements of the Church, and adaptations to the cultures and conditions of the times.¹²

The transmission of revelation is not static, but alive, susceptible to development. The Church is at the service of this word of salvation. She cannot dispose of it as she pleases, but she must guard it, expound it, live it and transmit it faithfully. It must allow itself to be guided, judged and

¹¹ In Greek, the lemma παράδοσις (*paradosis*), ending in -σις (-sis), inherently conveys the concept of process and continuity rather than the final and finite acquisition of the result of an action (e. g., breathe > breath; greet > greeting). In Latin, ›Traditio‹, ending in -itio (similar to -atio), translated into English as -ition or -ation, also reflects this idea of ›action‹ rather than an acquired result. In the most evident and fundamental outcome of Tradition, Scripture, this process is eloquently summarized by Gregory the Great in his ›Moralia in Iob‹, 20.1: »Scriptura cum legentibus crescit«. Even through the use of the participle »legens« (reading), Gregory demonstrates that Scripture is meant to be read continuously and in a living manner. The fact that »legentibus« is plural implies a variety, if not a multitude, of modes of reading.

¹² Indeed, faith, in its threefold dimension – professed, celebrated and witnessed – does not thrive, if disconnected from the concrete situations of the people of God. See JOHN ANTHONY BERRY, Yves Congar's Vision of Faith, Rome: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2019.

purified by it (conversion) on its journey through history (continuous reform). In this light, as Congar emphasized, genuine tradition is not characterized by servitude, but by fidelity.¹³

1.2 General Distinctions

The concept of tradition in the history of theology has been explained through various main distinctions. These distinctions include the following Latin terms: *Traditio subiectiva*, pertaining to the subject or the one who transmits; *Traditio obiectiva*, concerned with the content or the object transmitted; and *Traditio activa*, encompassing the action or the act of transmitting. The subjects from which the tradition originates can vary, including: *Traditio divina*, where God (including Christ and the Spirit) is the subject; *Traditio apostolica*, often referred to as divino-apostolica, with the apostles as the subject; *Traditio ecclesiastica*, originating from the post-apostolic Church; and *Traditio humana*, sometimes carrying negative connotations, rooted in human involvement.¹⁴

The contents of tradition exhibit diversity, leading to the emergence of various categories: *Traditio dogmatica*, focused on matters of faith; *Traditio moralis*, addressing moral content; *Traditio theologica*, encompassing the doctrines of theologians and diverse theological schools; *Traditio consuetudinialis*, associated with rites and customs of significant antiquity, often implicitly approved; and *Traditio realis*, dealing with the *res*, or the tangible reality signified by words, encompassing aspects such as the life of faith and grace. Different types of tradition are also distinguished: including *Traditio constitutiva*, which pertains to the apostolic period; *Traditio inhaesiva*, characterised by content derived from the Scriptures;¹⁵ and *Traditio declarativa vel interpretativa*, which involves the explanation, illustration, and interpretation of scriptural content.

¹³ CONGAR, *The Meaning of Tradition*, 3.

¹⁴ CONGAR, *The Meaning of Tradition*, 9–46.

¹⁵ In 2 Timothy 3:16, the author uses the verb θεόπνευστος, *theopneustos* (breathed or breathing God) for all Scripture. The adjectival verbal form can lend itself to a passive as well as an active meaning: breathed by God (if the middle-passive form is considered) or God-breathing (if the active form is considered). If the Spirit of God is present both actively and passively, then it is Tradition that has to be »handed on«. Biblical Tradition, put to writing in Scripture, receives the Breath/Spirit of God (passive aspect) as well as it ›breathes‹, inspires God to us!

1.3 The Concept of Tradition in Ecumenical Dialogues

Tradition, understood as the living transmission of the Gospel in the Church and by the Church, through the work of the Holy Spirit, can be considered a datum accepted by all Christian confessions. One may wish to differentiate between the Gospel *by* Jesus, and the Gospel *about* Jesus. Since the 1960s, the theme of tradition has entered all ecumenical dialogues, abandoning the polemical and sterile opposition between Scripture and Tradition. The distinction between Tradition, with a capital T, and traditions has proved very fruitful. On the one hand, Tradition was described as »a faithful memory«, »actualisation in the present« and »hope in the future«. On the other hand, »traditions« were normally divided in two: some are certainly a manifestation of the Spirit and therefore a richness for the whole Church; others may rather be »human traditions«, or even deviations from the original message. Nevertheless, among the various confessions, there is as yet no common criteria for distinguishing Tradition from particular traditions or deviations. This represents a highly significant yet challenging differentiation, serving as a point of disagreement among various denominations.

Moreover, the relationship between Tradition and Scripture has been seen in a new light.¹⁶ Scripture is, in one aspect, a product of Tradition at multiple levels. From a historical perspective, the Scriptural canon was not finalized until the early 5th century AD. On the other hand, Scripture is considered as the supreme norm of faith that cannot be separated from a work of interpretation, as guided by the Holy Spirit, in the context of the ecclesial *communio*.¹⁷ Here too, however, the authority of the church is

¹⁶ It's also worth acknowledging that Scripture, in a certain sense, emerges as a result of Tradition on multiple levels. From a historical perspective, the Scripture's canon wasn't finalized until the early 5th century AD. St. Irenaeus testifies to this, in approximately A.D. 180: »If the apostles themselves had left us no Scripture, would it not be necessary to follow ›the order of Tradition‹ that they have transmitted to those to whom they entrusted the churches? It is precisely to this order that many barbaric nations, who believe in Christ, have given their assent; they possess that salvation written ›without ink‹ or paper ›by the Holy Spirit in their hearts‹ (2 Cor 3:3), and they keep the ancient tradition most carefully, believing«. *Adversus Haereses* 3, 4, 1 and 2 (PG 7:856).

¹⁷ VATICAN II, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, 18 November 1965; RONALD D. WITHERUP, *The Word of God at Vatican II: Exploring Dei verbum*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota, 2014.

conceived differently in the various confessions. Let us now, identify a few challenges in our reflection of tradition.

2 The Challenges to Tradition

The complexities surrounding the challenges to Tradition are evident in contemporary discussions. Three notable examples illuminate these challenges. Firstly, there exists a pervasive *misunderstanding* of tradition that often leads to misinterpretations. This misunderstanding can arise from a lack of historical context or a failure to grasp the nuanced evolution of tradition over time. Secondly, there is the issue of outright *rejection* of tradition in some quarters, as it is viewed as a hindrance to progress or as a source of oppression. This rejection can sometimes stem from a desire for a clean break or a rupture with the past. Finally, the challenge of pluralism introduces an additional layer of complexity, where divergent perspectives may prove irreconcilable, or where certain expressions may appear to be in conflict with the principles of the Gospel. These challenges underscore the need for nuanced discussions and a deeper understanding of tradition in the modern world.

2.1 The Misunderstanding of Tradition

To do justice to the reality of tradition, it is crucial to distinguish between tradition and traditionalism. The latter, traditionalism (or conservatism), opposes tradition, as it tends to stifle a living entity, leaving behind only a fossilized remnant. True tradition does not consist in preserving *everything* that was done yesterday, but in transmitting what is *essential*. In order to be able to transmit it, it is necessary to be able to recognise the signs of the times and therefore adapt to certain new conditions of transmission. Only by preventing a misunderstanding of tradition and fostering an authentic awareness of tradition can individuals and churches attain freedom and independence, particularly when confronted by those who assert themselves as its ›guardians‹.

True freedom involves making informed choices while honouring the past.¹⁸ Tradition serves as a framework for exercising freedom, offering guidance without stifling autonomy. Engaging with tradition in a dynamic

¹⁸ PIOTR ROSZAK, »Can the Pope Change Tradition? On Tradition as a Principle of

way fosters autonomy within the context of shared values and history, enabling adaptation to the present and future while respecting the past. It is this freedom that enable churches to grow in communion and in faith. True tradition is a dynamic connection with the mystery of God and His call for unity. This connection is both received and conveyed through words and life, starting from the very beginning.

In the face of a misunderstanding of tradition, individuals may attempt to recover a lost perspective for various reasons. Such an attempt at recovery can easily turn into a mere revival of the past for its own sake. The significance of analysing tradition is that it proposes renewal through some form of dialogue, such that the past represents not an end, but a beginning. The challenge that lies in front of Christians today is to avoid a theology of replacement in part because of its insistence on engagement with the contemporary. *Tradition is not the same as traditionalism* nor is it the mindless repetition of a past no longer understood. Rather, tradition is the handing down and the reception, generation after generation, of unchanging truths that originate in a foundational revelation. The essence remains constant, yet its articulation evolves to ensure it can be received and comprehended; otherwise, it risks becoming lifeless metaphors in the secular landscape of 21st century Western society.

2.2 The Rejection of Tradition

A second significant challenge lies in the crisis of tradition as a hallmark of the modern age.¹⁹ In today's evolving world, there is a prevalent perception that »tradition« has become irrelevant. This is exemplified by the

Progress in the Light of Thomas Aquinas' Theology», in Wroctawski Przegląd Teologiczny / Wrocław Theological Review 29.1 (2021) 251–267.

¹⁹ It is worth mentioning Nietzsche's observation that our era is not particularly favorable to the concept of tradition, to the extent that the word itself can carry a negative connotation in certain circles: »What is attacked deep down today is the instinct and the will of tradition: all institutions that owe their origins to this instinct violate the taste of the modern spirit.- At bottom, nothing is thought and done without the purpose of eradicating this sense for tradition. One considers tradition a fatality; one studies it, recognizes it (as »heredity«), but one does not want it. The tensing of a will over long temporal distances, the selection of the states and valuations that allow one to dispose of future centuries precisely this is antimodern in the highest degree. Which goes to show that it is the disorganizing principles that give our age its character«. See FRIEDRICH WILHELM NIETZSCHE, *Will to Power*, n. 65 (Nov. 1887-March 1888), New York: Vintage Books, 1968, 43. See also GERHARD L. MÜLLER, »La Tradizione come principio proprio della teologia

rejection of the Christian tradition by European policymakers, who consciously aim to sever Europe from its Jewish and Christian roots. These developments are rooted in arguments stemming from European philosophical thought. Theodor W. Adorno, for instance, posits that tradition contradicts rationality, fostering scepticism that tradition is unacceptable to individuals possessing a critical intellect.²⁰

The contemporary landscape is marked by a crisis of modernity and a deliberate shift toward the post-human.²¹ The latter concept manifests in three distinct forms: technocratic, theocratic, and ecological. In the first instance, the aim is to create a superhuman.²² The second form involves the promotion of fundamentalism and subtly rejects the notion of Incarnation. The third form leads to a return to what is often termed »mother nature«. In each of these cases, hope for the historical human, one who champions modernity, is lost. There is a risk of no longer placing faith in continuity and enduring culture. *Technocracy*, especially when it demands efficiency, promptly subdues humanity. *Theocracy* propels us into realms beyond the human, while environmentalism reconnects us with natural cycles.

cattolica« Lecture on 14 June 2015, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/muller/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20150614_tradizione-principio-teologia-cattolica_it.html

²⁰ See JOSEF PIEPER, *Überlieferung. Begriff und Anspruch*, Munich: Kösel, 1970, 43, 45.

²¹ Presently, there is a growing body of literature concerning posthumanism, often referred to as »transhumanism«. See NEIL BADMINGTON, ed., *Posthumanism*, New York: Palgrave, 2000, and his essay »Theorizing Posthumanism«, *Cultural Critique* 53 (2003): 11–27; NICK BOSTROM, »A History of Transhumanist Thought«, *Journal of Evolution and Technology* 14, no. 1 (2005): 1–25; CHRIS HABLES GRAY, *Cyborg Citizen: Politics in the Posthuman Age*, New York: Routledge, 2001; ELAINE L. GRAHAM, *Representations of the Post/Human: Monsters, Aliens, and Others in Popular Culture*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002; NEIL BADMINGTON, *Alien Chic: Posthumanism and the Other Within*, New York: Routledge, 2004; JOEL GARREAU, *Radical Evolution: The Promise and Peril of Enhancing Our Minds, Our Bodies—and What It Means to Be Human*; New York: Random House, 2005, 231–32; DONNA HARAWAY, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, New York: Routledge, 1991; DONNA HARAWAY, »Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s«, *Socialist Review* 80 (1985): 65–107.

²² In this context, one recalls the renowned concept of the »Übermensch« or »Superman«, famously linked to the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. This figure is characterized by the creation of its own values and the pursuit of an authentic life, unburdened by the limitations imposed by conventional religious and moral structures. See FRIEDRICH WILHELM NIETZSCHE, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Capstone, A Wiley Brand, Chichester, West Sussex, 2022.

It is crucial to recognize that tradition extends beyond mere knowledge transfer; it functions as a channel for imparting an entire way of life. When examined closely, tradition does not inherently clash with reason, but rather with the prevailing modern prioritization of rationalism and empiricism, occasionally to the point of excessive self-promotion. In light of this backdrop, it becomes essential to investigate the underlying factors that lead to the exaggerated emphasis on contemporaneity and the »corruption« of Tradition. Now, let us delve into the underlying reasons for this exaggerated emphasis on contemporaneity and the perceived »corruption« of tradition.

2.3 The Challenge of Pluralism

Yet another challenge concerns the method that helps us discern among the potential of the Christian sources. Faced with the vastness of data that Scripture and Tradition provide, only a good theological method helps us focus on one or more categories on the basis of which to understand the datum of faith and discern the various interpretations that have been made of it, judging their validity and authenticity.²³ Vatican II stands tall in this regard for having perceived the potential of the Christian sources and practised an innovative approach, declaring their permanent value, i.e., what the Church understood and expressed at a given moment, could not cancel what had been said before.²⁴

This approach inevitably leads to the problem of the pluralism inherent in the Christian tradition, which can only be dealt with through discernment.²⁵ If, however, pluralism within the Christian tradition is instinctively welcomed as a rich and manifold expression of the one faith, it should not be ignored that it entails the serious problem of discerning the tradition itself, where the different positions are irreconcilable or where some expressions appear questionable in the light of the Gospel. In the modern world characterized by constant and relentless change, tradition is what must be preserved in its unaltered state. It is essential to comprehend the

²³ One may here refer to Bernard Lonergan's expertise on the subject, BERNARD J. F. LONERGAN, *Method in Theology*, edited by Robert M. Doran and John D. Dardosky, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 2017.

²⁴ See DANIELE GIANNOTTI, *I padri della chiesa al concilio Vaticano II. La teologia patristica nella Lumen gentium*, EDB, Bologna 2010.

²⁵ See SIMONA SEGOLONI RUTA, »Teologia dalla tradizione: pluralismo e discernimento«, *Rassegna di Teologia* 53 (2012) 489–493.

fundamental elements inherent in the practice of tradition and its distinguishing characteristics.²⁶

3 Considerations

In the concluding section, this paper aims to highlight the importance of orthopraxis alongside Orthodoxy. It also seeks to delve into the contemporary dynamics of engagement with tradition and to foster a deeper comprehension of the relationship between Tradition and the transcendent, which extends beyond temporal confines. The objective of this segment is to encourage both the churches and individuals to share responsibility in comprehending the profound depth of the concept of living tradition in its entirety.

3.1 Orthodoxy and Orthopraxis

Traditionally, Orthodoxy (ορθο and δόξα) has often been associated with the concept of »right belief«, signifying a correct comprehension of God's will as revealed in Scripture. Undoubtedly, insights from individuals dedicated to the study of Scripture are utilized. However, two limitations are encountered in this approach. Firstly, it proves insufficient on its own. Secondly, adherence to orthodoxy can result in either inclusion or exclusion within the Church. The Church's objective extends beyond the dichotomy of exclusion and inclusion; it seeks to guide all individuals toward a life in God. In essence, possessing the correct understanding (*orthodoxy*) of God's Word is not adequate; it must also be accompanied by the implementation (*orthopraxis*) of God's guidance.

The point of departure remains ›truth‹ and its upholding. However, there is room for a much-needed paradigm shift: from ›defending‹ or ›safeguarding‹ tradition, the shift is toward ›living‹ and ›experiencing‹ Tradition. Living Tradition entails action, discovery, and renewal, rather

²⁶ MARGARET O'GARA, »Making Peace for Peacemaking«, in *No Turning Back: The Future of Ecumenism*, ed. Michael Vertin, Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014, 15: »There are different levels or kinds of tradition within Roman Catholic life and teaching ... Roman Catholics distinguish between changeable and unchangeable teachings«. »[C]entral teachings like the divinity and humanity of Christ are not changeable, although their formulation could be altered as the church enters different times and cultures«.