CHAPTER FIVE

SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION (JUNE 1961)

1. **Background**

*More Roman Controversy*

After the February meeting of the TC, the SCDF was charged once again with continuing the work. With the exception of the addition of *Biblicum* rector Ernst Vogt in March, the commission’s membership had remained the same since November, 1960. While John XXIII’s decision to appoint Vogt appeared to settle the controversy once and for all, a number of aftershocks continued nevertheless to disturb the peace. Ottaviani, for example, who had no choice but to admit Vogt to his Preparatory Theological Commission, had prepared a *monitum* in the meantime within his own curial congregation that was to cast a shadow once again on the work of the subcommission. The text appeared for the first time in the course of June, 1961, although it appeared to have been originally intended for March of the same year. Ottaviani’s congregation had investigated complaints directed against Lyonnet and Zerwick, which lead to a short declaration in which the Holy Office expressed its concern for the conscience of the ordinary faithful and potential damage to the truths of the faith. The text warned against calling the historical value of the biblical narratives and the words and deeds of Jesus into question and called upon exegetes

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1 Cardinal Döpfner was left with this impression in May, 1961, when preparing for a personal audience with John XXIII. Diary Döpfner, p. 154: Sonntag, 7.5.: 9h: Rektor Vogt—Biblikum. Der Streit mit Romeo ist im Vordergrund überstanden.

2 Diary Fenton, September 16, 1961: He [Parente] told me that they ran into great difficulty about the *Monitum*. It was meant to appear three months before it actually came out. The Modernists (and he used the word frequently) thought that they had it blocked. Finally, when it appeared, it came as a bad surprise to the Modernists. He told me this: When he and the pope were arguing about the matter, he told the pope that this was not some little unimportant detail. He said that if Our Lord had not given that promise to Peter, that he and the pope should take off their pectoral crosses and quit.
to respect the analogy of faith. Of itself, the monitum contained little to arouse sensation, introduced nothing new or excessive, and did not attack the historical-critical method as such. The same demands had in fact been made in Divino afflante Spiritu and repeated in Humani Generis. In line with the said documents, however, the monitum was also open to interpretation and it quickly became evident—as in the first period of the controversy—that a number of different authors were ready to offer their own reading of the text. One of the more conspicuous of these is the reaction of Cardinal Ruffini, which, in spite of being theologically in line with the Holy Office, nevertheless exhibits a degree of openness to the use of critical methods. This is not surprising, if we bear in mind that the real problem is located elsewhere in the document. The text was in fact provided with a nota bene containing the following statement “Hoc monitum editur consentientibus

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3 Congregatio Sancti Officii, ‘Monitum biblicarum disciplinarum de germana veritate historicæ et objectiva S. Scripturæ, etiam quod dicta et facta Christi Iesu, debite tutanda, 10 iunii 1961,’ AAS 53 (1961), 507. The full text of the monitum reads: Biblicarum disciplinarum studio laudabiter fervente, in variis regionibus sententiae et opiniones circumferuntur, quae in discrimen adducunt germanam veritatem historicam et objectivam Scripturæ Sacrae non modo Veteris Testamenti sicut Summi Pontifex Pius XII in Litteris Encylicis Humani Generis iam deploraverat, verum et Novi, etiam quod dicta et facta Christi Iesu. Cum autem huiusmodi sententiae et opiniones anxios faciæt et Pastores et christifideles, Em.mi Patres, fidei morumque doctrinae tutandae praepositi, omnes, qui de Sacris Libris sive scripto sive verbo agunt, monendos censuerunt ut semper debita cum prudentia ac reverentia tantum argumentum pertractent, et præe oculis semper habeant SS. Patrum doctrinam ac Ecclesiae sensum ac Magisterium, ne fidelium conscientia perturbentur neve fidei veritates laedantur.

4 Peter G. Duncker, ‘Biblical Criticism, Instructions of the Church and Excesses of Form Criticism,’ CBQ 25 (1963), 22–3, interprets the document as an exhortation and as supportive of scientific exegesis, whereas Francesco Spadafora, ‘Un documento notevole per l’esegesi cattolica’, in Palestra del clero 40 (1961), 969–81, uses it for another round of accusations attacking Zerwick’s orthodoxy.

5 Ernesto Ruffini, ‘Generi letterari e ipotesi di lavoro nei recenti studi biblici,’ Oss. Rom. August 24, 1961, where he counters a ‘hypercritical’ spirit in exegesis. Ruffini, a member of the Biblical Commission, acknowledges the need for genre analysis but raises objections against an excessive use of such methodology. He warns against an atomisation of the Scriptures and the questioning of the religious truths contained in them. The latter, he states, is what Steinmann did, and he also implicitly refers to Zerwick and Lyonnet, again: Ci si permetta però, in prossimità del giudizio di Dio, perché anziani, di invitare gli studiosi, che qui abbiamo in qualche modo censurato, a voler riflettere se più che la scienza non sia la mancanza di spirito di umiltà e di obbedienza che li mette un pericolo di perdere la fede, senza della quale è impossibile piacere a Dio. On Ruffini’s attitude, see Joseph Beumer, Die katholische Inspirationslehre zwischen Vatikanum I und II. Kirchliche Dokumente im Lichte der theologischen Diskussion [Stuttgarter Bibelstudien 20] (Stuttgart, 1966), pp. 74–5.