"There be two kindes of writings… Divine or Ecclesiasticall": Scripture, Tradition, and Catholicity in the Thought of William Perkins

RICHARD A. MULLER
mullri.emeritus@gmail.com
Calvin Theological Seminary

William Perkins (1558–1602) was one of the prominent formulators of Protestant doctrine at the close of the sixteenth century, whether as a defender of the Elizabethan Settlement, as a representative of early Reformed orthodoxy whose work paralleled that of Continental contemporaries, or as a forbear of later English Puritanism.[1] His views on the use of the church fathers, as formalized in his distinction between divine, ecclesiastical and sometimes also "humane" writings, provide both an index to the impact and relative authority of tradition in early modern English Protestant thought and a partial answer to the debated question of the traditionary roots of English Reformed and Puritan theology.

Perkins's understanding of Scripture and tradition has been examined in several studies. Three of these studies have appealed to Perkins's work as exemplary of Puritan theology.[2] Two studies have either argued an increasing minimalization of the value of the fathers by the English Puritans or contrasted the Puritan reception and use of the church fathers to the significantly greater traditionary content of Laudian and later Anglican theology.[3]

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1. On the life and work of Wiliam Perkins, see William B. Patterson, *William Perkins and the Making of a Protestant England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); and Ian Breward, "The Life and Theology of William Perkins, 1558–1602" (PhD diss., University of Manchester, 1963).

2. Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *To Live Ancient Lives: The Primitivist Dimension in Puritanism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); Anne-Stephane Schäfer, *Auctoritas Patrum? The Reception of the Church Fathers in Puritanism* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2012); and Coleman Ford, "'Everywhere, always, by all': William Perkins and James Ussher on the Constructive Use of the Fathers," *Puritan Reformed Journal* 7, no. 2 (July 2015): 95–111.

3. Bozeman, *To Live Ancient Lives*, 23–32; Jean-Louis Quantin, *The Church of England*

On the other side of the question, one study has concluded that Puritan "iconoclasm" did not extend to the church fathers generally, and the Puritans were "deeply influenced by patristic thought," although they tended to reference the fathers as *testes veritatis* rather than as primary sources of truth.[4] Another has argued (stretching the bounds of what can be considered "Puritan") a respect for and use of the patristic tradition among Puritans as evidenced in the works of William Perkins and James Ussher.[5]

Given the diverse conclusions found in these studies, further attention to Perkins's thought is warranted. One issue in particular can be settled briefly. Perkins's approach to tradition and of the use of the church fathers can only be properly understood when separated from the issue of "Puritanism," given the problem of identifying Puritanism and, by extension, of identifying any particular view of the tradition and the fathers as a "Puritan" view. It is questionable to identify Perkins as a Puritan without significant qualification—and quite mistaken to extend the identification to Ussher. Perkins himself used the term "Puritan" negatively as the equivalent of "Cathar" and noted that it was used together with "Presitian" as an unjustified term of reproach for those who endeavored "to get & keepe the puritie of heart in a good conscience."[6] He never applied the term to himself.

Nor do Perkins's views correspond readily with ecclesial views of those typically identified as Puritans in the Elizabethan era, although his theology generally was highly influential in Puritan circles as well as being representative of the Reformed theology of the Church of England in his time.[7] Accordingly, Perkins's analysis of the problem of Scripture and tradition, including the relevance and use of the fathers to the formulation of Christian

and Christian Antiquity: The Construction of a Confessional Identity in the 17th Century (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 105–14, note on 113; and Jean-Louis Quantin, "The Fathers in Seventeenth Century Anglican Theology," in The Reception of the Church Fathers in the West, ed. Irena Backus (Leiden: Brill, 1997) 2:987–1008.

4. Schäfer, Auctoritas Patrum, 20, 399.

5. Ford, "'Everywhere, always, by all,'" 96, 110–11; also note Ian Breward, "A Neglected Protestant Patrology," in Studia Patristica 17, pt. 1, ed. Elizabeth A. Livingstone (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1982), 352–56.

6. Cf. William Perkins, An Exposition of the Lords Prayer (London: printed for John Legat, 1595); cited from William Perkins, The Works of that Famous and Worthie Minister of Christ, in the Universitie of Cambridge, M. William Perkins (Cambridge: John Legatt, 1612–1613), 1:342, col. 1; and William Perkins, A Godly and Learned Exposition of Christs Sermon in the Mount (Cambridge: printed by Thomas Brooke and Cantrell Legge, 1608); cited from Perkins, Works (1612–1613), 3:15, col. 1.

7. See Patterson, William Perkins, viii–ix, 40, 46–49.

doctrine, is instructive in piecing together a picture of the early modern English reception of the churchly tradition—not only among Puritans but also more broadly among the English Reformed. In this effort, moreover, Perkins's thought evidences distinct parallels with that of various Elizabethan Reformed contemporaries, notably William Whitaker (1548–1595), regius professor of divinity, Cambridge, and chancellor of St. Paul's, London; and Robert Some (1542–1609), master of Peterhouse, Cambridge.[8]

A second issue to be resolved concerns the meaning of the term "tradition" as debated by Perkins and his contemporaries. The term must be set into the context of its late sixteenth-century use and not employed as a general term for the course of Christian teaching as embodied in exegesis, doctrinal statement, and practice. It was typical of early modern usage to deploy a narrower and more specific understanding of tradition, typically looking to individual "traditions" and not to the broad historical trajectory of Christian teaching. In Protestant circles, moreover, the term was closely governed by the usages of *paradosis* in the New Testament.[9] In what follows, Perkins's thought will be shown to exemplify the complexity of the debate over the relationship of Scripture and tradition. Specifically, Perkins will be shown to have advocated the absolute priority of the biblical norm in the formulation of doctrine and the adjudication of controversies while at the same time assuming the value of patristic testimony and the authority of the church in determining practices within the bounds set by Scripture.

Perkins built upon the extant polemic concerning traditions, the use of the fathers, and the narrative of theological and religious decline during the Middle Ages in order to frame a positive pronouncement of the catholicity of Protestantism—one that continued the anti-Roman polemic of the Reformers but also presented a foundational statement concerning the biblical and traditionary nature of Protestant doctrinal formulation. Four of Perkins's works are of particular importance in this regard: *Exposition of*

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8. See F. G. M. Broeyer, "William Whitaker 1548–1595: A Cambridge Professor on the Doctrine of the Church," in *Lines of Contact: Proceedings of the Second Conference of Belgian, British, Irish and Dutch Historians of Universities*, ed. J. M. Fletcher and H. De Ridder-Syomens (Ghent: University of Ghent, 1994), 5, 20; also Edward C. Brooks, "Dialogue and Syllogism in the Sixteenth Century: A Study in the Life and Theology of William Whitaker (ob. 1595)" (PhD diss., University of Leeds, 1971), 100–159; and Peter Lake, "Robert Some and the Ambiguities of Moderation," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 71 (1980): 254–78.

9. See Richard A. Muller, "*Traditio* and *Paradosis* vs. *Humanas Traditiones*: Calvin on the Problem of Tradition," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 33 (2022): 5–29.

the *Symbole or Creed of the Apostles* (1595),[10] *Reformed Catholike* (1597),[11] *A Godly and Learned Exposition upon Christs Sermon in the Mount* (1608), and the *Probleme of the Forged Catholicisme* (1604).[12] Moreover, the argument found in these works was representative of Perkins's era, reflecting not only the position Perkins's English contemporary William Whitaker (1548–1595), but also the positions of continental Reformed writers like Amandus Polanus (1561–1610),[13] Franciscus Junius (1545–1602), Lucas Trelcatius Jr. (1573–1607), and David Pareus (1548–1622).

William Perkins and Protestant Catholicity

William Patterson ably argued that Perkins's works not only reveal the profound connection between English Reformed theology and the thought of the Continental Reformed in the last decades of the sixteenth century, but they also document the insistence of the Church of England that its theology represented the catholic tradition of Western Christianity.[14] As a theologian and apologist of the Church of England, Perkins was concerned not only for the biblical foundation of his theology, but also for the continuity of the teaching of the Church of England—and, certainly, of Reformed Protestantism in general—with the witness of the ancient church, prior to the decline of theology and rise of papal dominance and

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10. William Perkins, *An Exposition of the Symbole or Creed of the Apostles According to the Tenour of the Scriptures, and the Consent of Orthodoxe Fathers of the Church* (Cambridge: John Legatt, 1595); hereinafter cited from Perkins, *Works* (1612–1613), vol. 1.

11. William Perkins, *A Reformed Catholike: or, A Declaration Shewing How Neere We May Come to the Present Church of Rome in Sundrie Points of Religion: and Wherein We must for Ever Depart from Them: with an advertisement to all favourers of the Romane religion, shewing that the said religion is against the Catholike principles and grounds of the Catechisme* (London: John Legat, 1597); hereinafter cited from Perkins, *Works*, vol. 1.

12. Originally in Latin: William Perkins, *Problema de Romanae fidei ementito Catholicismo Estq[ue] antidotum contra Thesaurum Catholicum Iodoci Coccij. Et propaideiae [sic] iuventutis in lectione omnium patrum. Editum post mortem authoris operâ & studio Samuelis Wardi* (Cambridge: Joannes Legat, 1604); in translation, *Probleme of the Forged Catholicisme, or Universalitie of the Romish Religion*, in *Works* (1612–1613), vol. 2; on which, see Breward, "A Neglected Protestant Patrology"; and note Breward, "The Life and Theology of William Perkins, 1558–1602" (PhD diss., University of Manchester, 1963), 110–13.

13. For an account of Polanus on tradition, see Byung Soo Han, *Symphonia Catholica: The Merger of Patristic and Contemporary Sources in the Theological Method of Amandus Polanus (1561–1610)* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015), 95–101.

14. See William B. Patterson, "William Perkins as Apologist for the Church of England," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 57, no. 2 (2006): 252–69; and Rosemary A. Sisson, "William Perkins, Apologist for the Elizabethan Church of England," *Modern Language Review* 47, no. 4 (1952): 495–502.

superstition in the later Middle Ages.[15] He was also concerned to respond to Romanist claims that Protestants had simply abandoned positive recourse to the fathers and councils.[16]

The title page of Perkins's *Exposition of the Symbole* indicates his intention to unfold the creedal doctrines "according to the tenour of the Scripture, and the consent of the Orthodoxe Fathers of the Church."[17] Perkins's choice of words already signals a distinction. The basic doctrinal statement will be "according to the tenour" or general "purpose" or "effect" of Scripture, or "the course of meaning which holds on or continues through something written or spoken," perhaps even implying the legal definition of "tenor" as "exact" or "literal," where "tenour" is understood as the legal document of "tenure" indicating title and rights.[18] This basic understanding of the exact purpose of effect of the doctrine will, however, be conferred with the understandings found in the fathers of the church and their "consent" or agreement in the interpretation.

Perkins adds a further gloss on this approach to the topics — still on the titlepage — by adding a citation from Augustine's (354–430) book of questions on the Gospel of Matthew: "They are good Catholickes, which are sound of faith and life."[19] Perkins drew his definition of "Catholike" as well as his assumptions concerning the decline of true catholicity in the church from Augustine and Vincent of Lerins (d. 445). He cited the famous passages from Vincent's *Commonitorium* that defined the faith of the church catholic as that "which hath been held in all *places*, at all *times*, and of all *professours*," and that counseled a Christian "to beleeve and professe that

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15. Jordan J. Ballor, "Deformation and Reformation: Thomas Aquinas and the Rise of Protestant Scholasticism," in *Aquinas Among the Protestants*, ed. Manfred Svensson and David VanDrunen (Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley Blackwell, 2017): 27–48, here 29–33.

16. Cf., for example see Gregory Martin, *A Discoverie of the Manifold Corruptions of the Holy Scriptures by the Heretikes of Our Daies Specially the English Sectaries, and of their foule dealing herein, by partial & false translations to the advantage of their heresies, in their English Bibles used and authorised since the time of schisme* (Rheims: John Fogny, 1582), sig. av recto–verso.

17. Perkins, *Exposition of the Symbole*, sig. L1r.

18. Cf. John Rider, *Bibliotheca scholastica: A double dictionarie, penned for all those that would haue within short space the vse of the Latin tongue, either to speake, or write* (Oxford: Joseph Barnes, 1589), s.v., Tenor (col. 1481); and note s.v., "tenor" and "tenour" in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., 20 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000–).

19. Perkins, *Exposition of the Symbole*, sig. K5r; citing Augustine, *Quaestionum septemdecim in Evaneslium secundum Matthaeum liber unus*, xi.4 in *PL* 35, col. 1369: "Boni autem catholici sunt, qui et fidem integram sequuntur et mores bonos."

onely, which he knowes the Catholike Church in ancient times did univer-
sally hold."[20]

Augustine, similarly, had asserted the truth of "whatsoever the Church
hath universally, and continually professed" as derived from the Apostolic
"originall."[21] Catholicity, for both Vincent and Augustine, was to be defined
not by a present impression of universality but by the universal recognition,
through time, of the most ancient, apostolic faith. This catholicity, moreover,
stands in contrast to the "faith of the Romane Church…concerning the way
and meanes of salvation": the Romanist rests his teaching not on the truly
ancient faith but on the decisions of the Council of Trent, the Roman Cat-
echism, and "the Missal and Breviary which are reformed and printed by the
command and authoritie of Pope *Pius* the fift."[22] By implication, all of these
recent documents fail to present the ancient faith of the church.

Augustine and Vincent prove the point. Inasmuch as they lived some
twelve hundred years before his own time, Perkins notes that both Augus-
tine and Vincent "held to be ancient…what would seem ancient unto them,"
namely, "such things as were received in the Apostles times."[23]

> Therefore not all *antiquity* of doctrine is to be approved, but that
> onely which *Lirensis*, *Augustine*, *Ambrose*, *Jerome*, *Cyprian*, *&c.* held
> to be of and from antiquitie, and which they commended unto their
> posteritie, as also that *universalitie* is to be accounted true, and only
> that, which took place in all churches in the Apostles times, and in
> the next ages going before *Vincentius* and *Augustine*.[24]

It is clear from Perkins's comment in his *Exposition of the Symbole* that this
view of catholicity applied to the official teachings of the Church of England
in its relation to confessional Protestantism. He identified "the Churches of
Helvetia, and Savoie, and the free cities of Fraunce, and the lowe Countries,
and Scotland…as the true Churches of God" and continued,

> And no lesse must we thinke of our owne Churches in England and
> Ireland. For we holde, beleeve, and maintaine, and preach the true

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20. Perkins, *Probleme*, 486, col. 1; cf. Vincent of Lerins, *The Commonitory*, ii.6; iii.2,
ix.25, in *Nicene Post-Nicene Fathers*, 14 vols., ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand
Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956) series 2, 11:132, 137. Hereinafter NPNF.

21. Perkins, *Probleme*, 486, col. 1, citing Augustine, *On Baptism Against the Donatists*,
IV: xxiv, in *NPNF*, series 1, 4:461.

22. Perkins, *Probleme*, 486, col. 1.

23. Perkins, *Probleme*, 486, col. 1–2.

24. Perkins, *Probleme*, 486, col. 2.

faith, that is, that auncient doctrine of salvation by Christ. Taught and published by the Prophets and Apostles, as the booke of the articles of faith agreed upon in open Parliament doe fully shewe.[25]

Even so, the ultimate measure of catholicity must be the maintenance of the "true faith" and the resultant evidence of its efficacy to salvation—"without which notes none can truely say they are of the Catholike Church. By which we may know the Church of England to be the true visible Church of God, called and sanctified in the truth, Joh. 8:31."[26]

Perkins's words stand in pointed contrast not only to the Roman Catholic claims against the Church of England but also to the Puritan movement of his era, exemplified by the *Admonition to the Parliament* (1572), that characterized the Book of Common Prayer as "an unperfecte booke, culled & picked out of the popish dunghill…. For some & many of the contents therein, be suche as are againste the woord of God." The *Admonition* also contended that the Articles of Religion albeit "using a godly interpretation in a point or two…are either too sparely, or els too darkly set downe."[27] Perkins scattered comments concerning the Book of Common Prayer and the manner of worship in the Church of England evidence no such negative reaction and point toward his positive acceptance of English practice as well as of the Thirty-Nine Articles as belonging to a Reformed catholic confessional consensus.[28] Perkins insisted these documents, as opposed to the Roman declarations, are both true to the ancient faith and observe the principles that he set forth concerning ecclesiastical traditions and ordinances.

Perkins on Catechizing and the Creed

From the more experiential or experimental side of his theological work, Perkins was overtly wary of rote memorization and confession of memorized formulae—neither was sufficient to Christian faith, he insisted. In the prefatory remarks to his early *Foundation of the Christian Religion* (1590), he argued that recitation of the three parts of the catechism (the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed, and the Lord's Prayer) was insufficient if the "meaning of the words" was not grasped and applied

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25. Perkins, *Exposition of the Symbole*, 307, col. 2.
26. Perkins, *Exposition upon the Whole Epistle of Jude*, 482, col. 2.
27. John Fielde and Thomas Wilcox, *An Admonition to the Parliament* (Hemel Hempstead: J. Stroud, 1572), sig. Aviii verso, Ci recto; also in W. H. Frere, and C. E. Douglas, eds., *Puritan Manifestoes: A Study of the Origin of the Puritan Revolt* (London: S. P. C. K., 1907), 21.
28. Patterson, *William Perkins and the Making of a Protestant England*, 57–59, 99–100.

inwardly to the conscience.[29] His *Foundation* was designed as a prologue, grounded in multiple citations of biblical texts, to the understanding of the catechetical topics as outlined in the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed, and Lord's Prayer—motivated not only out of a desire to root out mere recitation but also out a sense of the spiritual ignorance characteristic of contemporary religious life. Beyond memorization, Perkins insisted on the application of Christian teaching "inwardly to…hearts & consciences, and outwardly to…lives & conversations."[30]

Perkins also prefaced his exposition of the Creed, prior to the explanation of the first creedal article as concerning both belief or faith and God, with a fairly extended comment on catechizing and on the nature and use of the Apostles' Creed. He was sensitive to the possible objection that he had begun his exposition of Christian faith without a biblical text, but only with the first words of the Creed, "I beleeve in God, &c."[31] Some of his contemporaries held that catechization should be conducted by the minister of the congregation much as he delivered sermons, setting forth Christian teaching by way of biblical texts. Since the creed is not Scripture, they held that it therefore ought not to be the basis of catechization.[32] Perkins did not deny that catechesis n on the basis of Scripture alone was valid. He even identified it as "commendable." But he also felt justified in taking a different course, noting that ministers have a degree of freedom and even "in the usual course of preaching" may sometimes not "follow a certen text of scripture."[33]

Perkins identified a twofold basis for his own approach to catechizing: "the practise of the Primitive Church" and the biblical mandate expressed

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29. William Perkins, *The Foundation of Christian Religion Gathered into Six Principles* (London: Thomas Orwin, for John Porter, 1590), in *Works* 1, sig. A2v. Note also Leonard T. Grant, "Puritan Catechizing," *Journal of Presbyterian History* 46, no. 2 (1968): 107–27.

30. Perkins, *Foundation*, sig. A2v. Note the contemporary complaint against lack of sound catechizing registered by Robert Cawdry, *A Shorte Snd Fruitefull Treatise, of the Profite and Necessitie of Catechizing* (London: Thomas Dawson, 1580); and see Christopher Haigh, "Puritan Evangelism in the Reign of Elizabeth I," *English Historical Review* 92, no. 362 (1977): 30–58.

31. Perkins, *Exposition of the Symbole*, 121, col. 1. See the descriptions of catechetical methods and texts in Ian M. Green, *The Christian's ABC: Catechisms and Catechizing in England, c. 1530–1740* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 45–169.

32. Perkins does not indicate whose view he opposes. He may have in mind a work like Edward Vaughan, *A Method, or Briefe Instruction* (London: T. Orwin. for W. Holme, 1590), see the preface, third leaf, verso, of the volume.

33. Perkins, *Exposition of the Symbole*, 121, col. 1.

in Hebrews 6:1–3, "Therefore, leaving the doctrine of the beginning of Christ, let us be led forward unto perfection…of the doctrine of baptismes, and laying on of hands, and of the resurrection from the dead, and of eternall judgement."[34] Perkins would also have noted the lengthy annotations at verse 1 in the Geneva Bible that he typically followed in his citations of Scripture. The first of these specifically defined the word "doctrine" as meaning "The first principles of Christian religion, which we call the Catechisme."[35] The second, lengthier note described this basic teaching in the early church as the delivery of "certaine principles of a Catechisme, which comprehend the summe of the doctrine of the Gospel…in a few words," intended as the form of a basic profession of faith at the point of baptism. The annotation also notes that the text of Hebrews indicates two of the basic articles of faith, "the resurrection of the flesh, and the eternal judgement."[36] Several printings of the full Geneva Bible and of the Psalms, beginning in 1578, also included a version of the Book of Common Prayer with its form of confirmation, including the catechetical recitations of the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Decalogue.[37]

As to the question of creeds in general and to the objection that there are several documents identified as creeds, Perkins builds on the meaning of "creed" as belief and argues that there is "but one Creed, as there is but one faith."[38] Although there are several documents, namely the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed, it is not the case that these creeds represent "severall faiths and religions," but only one. The Apostles' Creed takes precedence because it "is most ancient, & principall: all the rest are not new Creedes in substance, but in some points penned

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34. Perkins, *Exposition of the Symbole*, 121, col. 1, referencing Hebrews 1:1–3; the above citation is taken from *The New Testament of our Lord Jesus Christ translated out of Greeke by Theod. Beza*, trans. L. Tomson (London: Christopher Barker, 1576).

35. *The New Testament of our Lord Jesus Christ* (1576), at Hebrews 6:1, note "a" (386).

36. *The New Testament of our Lord Jesus Christ* (1576), at Hebrews 6:1, note "1" (386).

37. See for example, *The Bible: Translated according to the Ebrew and Greeke, and conferred with the best translations in diuers languages* (London: Christopher Barker, 1578), sig. Bv verso–Bvi recto. On these Bibles see Maurice S. Betteridge, "The Bitter Notes: The Geneva Bible and Its Annotations," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 14, no. 1 (1983): 41–62, cited here 44–45; and Ian M. Green, "'Puritan Prayer Books' and 'Geneva Bibles': an Episode in Elizabethan Publishing," *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society* 11, no. 3 (1998): 313–49, argues convincingly against the older theory that the abbreviated forms of the Prayer Book found in these Bibles were the results of "Puritan" editing. This particular annotation cannot in any case be regarded as avowing a specifically "Puritan" perspective.

38. Perkins, *Exposition of the Symbole*, 122, col. 2.

more largely for the exposition of it, that men might better avoid the heresies of their times."[39]

In turning to the original form and purpose of the Creed, Perkins also returns to the issue of catechizing with which he began his exposition. The creed, he avers, was originally the set answer to a question posed to new converts from paganism to the "Primitive Church," namely, "What beleevest thou?"[40] Requirement of a statement of belief from converts prior to baptism was a practice of the earliest church, beginning with the address of Philip to the Ethiopian eunuch: "Philippe saide, *If thou dost beleeve with all thine heart, thou maist* [be baptized]. Then he answered, *I beleeve that Jesus Christ is that Sonne of God.*"[41] Directly borrowing the language of Augustine and reinforcing it by citation of Cassian, Perkins argued that the Apostles' Creed is "a summarie collection of thinges to be beleeved," namely, the *credenda*, "gathered briefly out of the word of God for the helping of memorie and understanding of men."[42] In other words, the Creed is a foundational statement of belief in response to the basic question, "What beleevest thou?"—and as Perkins's defender, Robert Abbot (1560–1617) pointed out, the Creed does not include "principall doctrines beleeved in the Church of *Rome*," such as the Pope is the Vicar of Christ, "that there is a fire of Purgatory," that images of saints ought to be placed in church and worshiped, and that the Mass" is a "propitiatory sacrifice daily offered."[43]

Perkins's assessment of the purpose and relative value of the Creed included recognition that it was not written by the Apostles. Perkins offered three reasons. First and foremost, the Apostles' Creed contains "certaine words & phrases" not found in the genuine apostolic writings, such as, "descended into hell" and "Catholike Church." The latter phrase, Perkins

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39. Perkins, *Exposition of the Symbole*, 122, col. 2.

40. Perkins, *Exposition of the Symbole*, 122, col. 2.

41. Perkins, *Exposition of the Symbole*, 122, col. 2, citing Acts 8:37; note that this verse is omitted from many modern Bibles. Perkins here cites a variant of the Geneva Bible.

42. Perkins, *Exposition of the Symbole*, 122, col. 1, citing Augustine, *Sermo 119, De tempore*, i.e., *In eadem feria de Symbolo*, in *Opera omnia*, ed. Erasmus (Basel: Froben, 1528–1529), 10: 614–17, cited here on 614: "Symbolum est breviter complexa regula fidei, ut mentem instruat nec oneret memoriam, paucis verbis dicatur unde multum acquiratur"; and Cassian, *De incarnatione*, I.vi; in translation, *On the Incarnation of the Lord, against Nestorius*, in *NPNF*, series 2, 11: 555.

43. Robert Abbot, *The Third Part of the Defence of the Reformed Catholike against Doct. Bishops Second part of the Reformation of a Catholike, as the same was first guilefully published vnder that name, conteining only a large and most malicious preface to the reader, and an answer to M. Perkins his aduertisement to Romane Catholicks* (London: George Bishop, 1609), 197.

noted, is clearly post-apostolic and reflects the dispersion of Christianity throughout the world.[44] As to the former phrase, Perkins was well aware of the contemporary controversy concerning its meaning and origin.[45] Further, if the Creed were an actual writing of the Apostles, it would have been identified as part of the canonical Scriptures. And finally, the short apostolic summaries of Christianity, their patterns of "wholesome words" consisted in two parts, faith and love—and the Creed deals only with faith.[46]

If not written by the Apostles, the Creed nonetheless is an "eccleiasticall" writing and a valid summary of the "chiefe and principall points" of apostolic doctrine, conformable to the teachings found in longer form throughout their writings. Although not the actual words of the apostles or in their specific "style and frame," the Creed conveys the "matter" of apostolic teaching.[47] This distinction between words or "style and frame" and the "matter" or substance of what is said will play out in Perkins's further discussion of the difference between Scripture and churchly writings in general: the specific purpose of the creed was not only to gather doctrine out of Scripture but "to make a difference betweene it and other writings, and to shew the authoritie of it."[48] For Perkins, the importance of the Apostles' Creed rested on the assumption that although it was not directly apostolic, it was a valid summary of the most basic apostolic teachings, constructed by the earliest church as a rule to identify the canonical Scripture. Perkins, in short, recognized the relationship of the Creed in content and in purpose to the early rules of faith.[49]

Divine and Ecclesiastical Writings

Perkins's identification of the Apostles' Creed as a churchly document of derived authority raised the issue the kinds of writings "in which the doctrine

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44. Perkins, *Exposition of the Symbole*, 121, col. 2.

45. On the controversy see Dewey D. Wallace, "Puritan and Anglican: The Interpretation of Christ's Descent into Hell in Elizabethan Theology," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 69 (1978): 248–86.; and Jay Shim, "The Interpretation of Christ's Descent into Hades in the Early Seventeenth Century," in *Biblical Interpretation and Doctrinal Formulation: Essay in Honor of Jame De Jong*, eds. Arie C. Leder and Richard A. Muller (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2014), 157–84.

46. Perkins, *Exposition of the Symbole*, 121, col. 2.

47. Perkins, *Exposition of the Symbole*, 121, col. 2.

48. Perkins, *Exposition of the Symbole*, 122, col. 1.

49. Perkins, *Exposition of the Symbole*, Dedicatory Epistle, I, sig. L3r, last paragraph of the dedication, citing, in margin. Augustine, *Sermo 119, De tempore*; and Ambrose, *Sermo 38*, in *Operum divi Ambrosii episcopi Mediolanensis*, ed. Erasmus (Basel: Froben, 1538), 3:335–36.

of the Church is handled."[50] These writings are distinguished into two basic
categories, divine and ecclesiastical—to which can be added a third category
of purely secular or "humane books."[51] The formulation, stated positively by
Perkins, has a polemical edge: Roman Catholic writers distinguished three
kinds of traditions, all (as far as the Council of Trent was concerned) of
normative status: divine in Scripture, apostolic beyond what is found in the
epistles, and ecclesiastical whether written or unwritten.[52] Perkins identi-
fied as strictly apostolic only what is found in the epistles and, accordingly,
argued a twofold divine-ecclesiastical distinction. As Pareus would point
out, inasmuch as the divine are infallible and the ecclesiastical not so, it is in
the ecclesiastical writings that dissension erupts.[53]

By divine writings, Perkins intended only the books of the canoni-
cal Old and New Testaments because they are "divine." The writings of
the prophets and apostles are "absolute and soveraigne" in their authority,
writes Perkins. They are not only "the pure *word of God*" but they are also
"the *scripture of God*,"[54] divine both in their "matter" or substance and in
"the manner of revealing them."[55] Perkins's argument reflects the typical
Reformed orthodox language identifying Scripture in its original languages
as authoritative both *quoad res* and *quoad verba*.[56] Scripture also has a prin-
cipial status, being sufficient in itself, needing no testimony to its authority
from any creature, and not being subject to any censure. Scripture, there-
fore, is "binding" on "the consciences of all men at all times, and…the onely
foundation of faith, and the rule and canon of all truth."[57] Even so, Scripture
is "the supreame and absolute determination & judgement of the controver-
sies of the Church."[58]

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50. Perkins, *Exposition of the Symbole*, 122, col. 1.
51. Perkins, *A Godly and Learned Exposition*, in *Works* 3:225, col. 1–2; cf. David
Pareus, *Collegiorum theologicorum, qvibvs vniversa theologia orthodoxa & omnes prope theologo-
rum controversiae persipcue & varie explicantur. Decuria una: cvm indice tergemino, collegiorum,
Locorum communium & respondentium* (Heidelberg: Jonas Rhodius, 1611), V.iv.16 (p. 547).
52. Cf. William Whitaker, *A Disputation on Holy Scripture, against the Papists, especially
Bellarmine and Stapleton*, ed. and trans. William Fitzgerald (Cambridge: Cambridge Univer-
sity Press, 1849), VI.iii (500–502), citing Bellarmine.
53. Pareus, *Collegiorum theologicorum*, V.iv.14 (p. 547).
54. Perkins, *Exposition of the Symbole*, 122, col. 1.
55. Perkins, *A Godly and Learned Exposition*, 225, col. 1.
56. On this distinction, see Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:269, 283,
326–27, 403, 414–16, 427–28.
57. Perkins, *Exposition of the Symbole*, 122, col. 1.
58. William Perkins, *The Arte of Prophecying, Or, a Treatise Concerning the Sacred
and Onely True Manner and Methode of Preaching first written in Latine by Master William*

This doctrine of Scripture relativizes but does not obliterate the value of ecclesiastical writings or remove the office of interpretation in the church: it only establishes the distinction between divine and ecclesiastical teachings.[59] These are writings of the church that stand in agreement or consent with Scripture. Perkins even goes so far as to state that ecclesiastical writings "may be called the *word* or *truth of God*" to the extent that their "matter or substance" agrees with the written Word of God as set down by the prophets and apostles. Ecclesiastical writings, however, can never be identified as the Scripture of God, namely as divine writings. Here again, Perkins reflects on the distinction between authority *quoad res* and *quoad verba*, a distinction that was typically used to distinguish the authority of the Bible in its original languages as *quoad res* and *quoad verba* from the authority of translations as only *quoad res*. For Perkins, moreover, the distinction also applies to ecclesiastical writings, which although not authoritative in themselves, do have authority *quoad res*, according to matter or substance, as long as they rest on the truth of Scripture. Ecclesiastical writings, therefore, have "authoritie in defining truth and falsehood in matters of religion," not in a sovereign manner, but "subordinate" to Scripture. This subordinate authority, then, does not rest on human preference, not even on the decisions of church councils, but only on the agreement of the ecclesiastical writings with Scripture.[60]

A further distinction must be made among "generall," "particular," and "proper" ecclesiastical writings. The general writings are universal creeds or confessions that belong to the whole church throughout the world, the preeminent general writing being the Apostles' Creed. All of these general ecclesiastical writings "were either made or confirmed by the whole Church; as the Creedes of the Apostles, the Nicene, and of *Athanasius*: and the foure first generall Councels; and these have Catholike allowance, yet not absolute authoritie, but depending on Scripture."[61] The works of the councils and the fathers are to be respected, as written by "worthy men," who were, however, "subject to error."[62]

Perkins; and now faithfully translated into English (for that it containeth many worthie things fit for the knowledge of men of all degrees) by *Thomas Tuke* (London: Felix Kyngston for E. E., 1607), iii, in *Works* 2:647, col. 1; cf. idem, *A Godly and Learned Exposition*, 225, col.1; and note Pareus, *Collegiorum theologicorum*, V.iv.18 (p. 547).

59. Cf. Pareus, *Collegiorum theologicorum*, V.iv.10–12 (546–47).

60. Perkins, *Exposition of the Symbole*, 122, col. 1.

61. Perkins, *A Godly and Learned Exposition*, 225, col. 1.

62. Perkins, *A Godly and Learned Exposition*, 225, col. 2.

The term "particular writings," Perkins reserves to the "Confessions" or to "the Catechismes and Confessions of particular Churches," either written in a corporate manner in the churches or by members and accepted in the church by "generall consent."[63] "Proper writings are the bookes and confessions of private men," namely, works that are the *propria* of individual persons.[64] Like the general ecclesiastical writings, these particular works derive authority from Scripture and consent of the church. Further, "these kinds of bookes may be called *Gods Word*, so farre forth as they agree with Scripture: and yet they are also the word of men, because they were penned by men, and have both order and style from men: and in this regard, that they were partly mens workes, they are not authenticall of themselves, but depend upon the authoritie of Scripture."[65] This threefold approach to ecclesial writings reflects Perkins's assumption that, in the wake of the Reformation, there remained—as the Creed itself indicated—a single Catholic church, but that the universal faith was also represented in and by several particular churches with their own confessional standards.

Perkins also acknowledged the value of "humane bookes," even as he recognized that the church could devise human traditions in matters of practice. These human books, such as those concerned with natural philosophy, civil polity, and the arts, are entirely from human beings, "having both matter and style from men." This purely human origin, however, in no way denies that "many of them contain excellent truths in their kind, yet gathered onely from experience and common reason." What they lack is "that truth, which is *truth according to godlinessse*," and which is found "in Scripture alone."[66]

These distinctions between kinds of works are paralleled by distinctions in authority. The Apostles' Creed, although of less authority than Scripture, carries more authority than either the confessions of particular churches or the proper writings of individual Christians. This relative authority arises because of the presence of the fundamental substance of apostolic preaching in the Apostles' Creed. This relates directly to Perkins's conception of the analogy of faith as a twofold "abridgement or summe" of Scripture concerning belief and practice with the Creed governing "faith"

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63. Perkins, *A Godly and Learned Exposition*, 225, col. 1; cf. Perkins, *Exposition of the Symbole*, 122, col. 1–2.

64. Perkins, *Exposition of the Symbole*, 122, col. 1.

65. Perkins, *A Godly and Learned Exposition*, 225, col. 1–2.

66. Perkins, *A Godly and Learned Exposition*, 225, col. 2.

and the Decalogue governing "practice."[67] Since the Creed draws its authority from Scripture and is "received and approoved by the universall consent of the Catholike Church in all ages," its "meaning and doctrine" cannot be altered. Should a particular church desire to alter the order of its doctrines or express its doctrines in different words, this may not be done without the "catholike consent of the whole Church."[68] The "whole church," of course, would mean the entire Christin community and not merely the Church of England or the Roman Catholic Church.

The case is different with the confessional statements of particular churches: these can be altered by a particular church both in specific doctrinal content and in the words employed "without offence to the Catholike Church."[69] The Apostles' Creed, therefore, stands alone among the particular churches as a standard or norm by which doctrinal statements and interpretations of Scripture are to be adjudicated. This status rests in the Creed "not because it is a rule of it selfe." That status belongs to Scripture alone. The Creed remains a derived norm that draws its authority from Scripture, "with which it agreeth," and having, therefore, given also its antiquity and universality, an authority accorded to no other human writing.[70] There is also a proper place beyond the Creed for human testimonies, in particular "ecclesiaticall" writings: they can be used in order to "convince the conscience of the hearer."[71] Such use, however, notably, of the church fathers, is legitimate only when they "agree with the rule of our faith, and the writings of the Prophets and Apostles."[72] Given the distinction that Perkins makes here between the rule of faith and the writings of the prophets and apostles, he is most probably referring to the Apostles' Creed as the rule of faith—much in accord with the content of early rules of faith proposed by Irenaeus (130–202), Tertullian (150–220), and Hippolytus (170–235).[73]

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67. Perkins, *Arte of Prophecying*, 651, col. 2–652, col. 1.
68. Perkins, *Exposition of the Symbole*, 122, col. 2.
69. Perkins, *Exposition of the Symbole*, 122, col. 2.
70. Perkins, *Exposition of the Symbole*, 122, col. 2.
71. Perkins, *Arte of Prophecying*, 664, col. 1.
72. Perkins, *Probleme*, 487, col. 1.
73. On the development of the rules of faith and the Apostles' Creed, see J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 3rd ed. (London: Longman, 1972; repr. Continuum, 2006). On Perkins's understanding of the rule and analogy of faith, see Perkins, *Exposition of the Symbole*, Dedicatory Epistle, in *Works* 1 sig. L3r.

Tradition and the Problem of Human Traditions

Perkins's approach to the debated problem of tradition and traditions echoes the understanding of Protestants from the Reformation onward, as expressed by formulations of the problem both among the Reformers of the first and second generations and among the writers of the early orthodox era: "Traditions, are doctrines delivered from hand to hand, either by word of mouth, or by writing, beside the written word of God."[74] But authoritative traditions are also eventually written down—and, Perkins recognized, there are traditions even within Scripture.

Thus, as identified by the general definition of something handed down, tradition would include "the very word of God…delivered by tradition. For first, God revealed his will to Adam by word of mouth" and later to the patriarchs "by dreames, and other inspirations," for over two thousand years before the first writing of Scripture by Moses.[75] So also was the New Testament taught by word of mouth—traditions of teaching from Christ or the apostles—until it was later written down either by the apostles or "by others approoved by them."[76] Even the Papists concede that tradition, as referenced by the church fathers, is often a teaching that had been handed down from Christ in the gospels or from the apostles in their epistles.[77]

Even so, there are some biblical truths that have been set down in writing at times distant from their event. There are words and deeds of Moses and the prophets, Christ and the apostles, brought forward by the process of tradition or delivery and recorded in Scripture. There are also words and deeds of Christ and the apostles not written in the canonical books of the New Testament but remembered later and recorded in writings of the early church. For example, in his second epistle to Timothy, Paul identifies the magicians who opposed Moses as Jannes and Jambres, information not found in the Old Testament. The author of the epistle to the Hebrews records Moses saying, "I tremble, and am afraid" while on Mount Sinai, the epistle of Jude tells that the devil struggled with Michael the Archangel over

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74. Perkins, *Reformed Catholike*, 580, col. 2; cf. Whitaker, *Disputation*, VI.i (497); also Franciscus Junius, *Theses theologicae Leydenses*, vi.2, in *Opuscula theologica selecta*, ed. Abraham Kuyper (Amsterdam: F. Muller, 1882), 120; and note Muller, "Not of Private Interpretation," 34–37, 39–40.

75. Perkins, *Reformed Catholike*, 580, col. 2.

76. Perkins, *Reformed Catholike*, 580, col. 2; cf. Franciscus Junius, *Theses theologicae Leydenses*, vi.2, in *Opuscula theologica*, 120.

77. Whitaker, *Disputation*, VI.ii (498).

the body of Moses, and Christians also believe that "the Virgin Marie lived and died a virgin."[78]

Perkins argued that the church fathers understood "the doctrine received in the primitive church, taught by the apostles and recorded in their writings" as "tradition,"[79] which is to say "tradition" in the early church meant primarily the apostolic *paradosis*. The fathers also identified as tradition remembered and recorded doctrines, the "sense" or meaning of which was expressed in Scripture, but not directly stated in the words of the text.[80] Perkins also acknowledged that "in Ecclesiastical writers many worthy sayings of the Apostles and other holy men, are recorded & received of us for truth which neverthelesse are not set downe in the books of the old or new Testament."[81] So called "unwritten traditions," then, are not absolutely unwritten—rather that are not written in Scripture but have been written down by the early fathers, in the counsels, and in "the determinations of the Church." These, however, are not to be given "equall credit with the written word of God."[82] Later on, Vincent of Lerins used "tradition" to indicate "the whole summe of Catholike doctrine,"[83] arguably as preserved in creedal formulation. Perkins did not reject tradition in any of these senses—what was directly biblical he held to be authoritative and what was rightly derived he held as acceptable formulation.[84]

Furthermore, "tradition" is also the term of reference to "ecclesiastike rites" that are rules for the governance of the church and its order, but which are "not pertinent any way to divine worship, or the articles of

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78. Perkins, *Reformed Catholike*, 580, col. 2; cf. 2 Tim. 3:8; Heb. 12:21; Jude 8; similarly, Perkins, *A Godly and Learned Exposition upon the Whole Epistle of Jude, Containing Threescore and Sive Sermons*, in *Works*, 3:540, col. 2.

79. Perkins, *Probleme*, 511, col. 2, citing Cyprian, *Epistle* 74 [73], *Ad Pompeium*, trans. in *ANF* 5:386; also cited in Whitaker, *Disputation*, VI.ii (497).

80. Perkins, *Probleme*, 511, col. 2–512, col.1, citing; Augustine, *De Genesi ad literam*, X.xxiii; cf. *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, trans. John Hammond Taylor (New York: Newman Press, 1982), 2:127, and 284, n95.

81. Perkins, *Reformed Catholike*, 580, col. 2.

82. Perkins, *Reformed Catholike*, 612, col. 1; note that Whitaker, *Disputation*, VI.ii (p. 499), takes the point further and argues that when church fathers like Basil and Pseudo-Dionysius appeal to unwritten traditions, they mean only traditions not written in Scripture, but written down elsewhere: "They call, therefore, those dogmas and points of doctrine nowhere found in scripture, *traditions*." Cf. Schäfer, *Auctorita Patrum*, 17–18, et passim, who too loosely identifies "unwritten traditions with "texts not contained in the biblical canon."

83. Perkins, *Probleme*, 512, col. 1.

84. Perkins, *Reformed Catholike*, 580, col. 2.

faith." These traditions are often called "apostolic" in order to elevate them in importance, although, Perkins notes, many of them cannot be traced back to the apostolic preaching. These traditions cannot be normative in any sense and may not be declared necessary to salvation.[85] Nor can the Roman church justify its claims for a normative tradition or set of traditions inasmuch as it has shown itself unable to decide which of the so-called apostolic extra-biblical traditions known to the early church that it will follow and which it will reject.[86]

Still, there remain legitimate traditions that include "ordinances, rules, or traditions, touching time and place of Gods worship, and touching order and comlinesse to bee used in the same."[87] Perkins's view is much in accord with that of Thomas Cranmer (1489–1556), as framed in the Thirty-Nine Articles—that traditions should be guided by the Word of God, are relative to times and places, and that "Every particular or nationall Churche, hath aucthoritie to ordaine, chaunge, and abolishe ceremonies or rites of the Churche ordeyned onlye by mans aucthoritie, so that all thinges be done to edifyng."[88] Further, the Thirty-Nine Articles also declared that any person who "wyllyngly and purposely" broke with "traditions and ceremonies of the Church, which be not repugnant to the worde of God" and which had been upheld by churchly authority, "ought to be rebuked openly."[89]

In Debate with Rome: Perkins and the Broader Tradition and the Interpretation of Scripture

In accord with the Reformers and his Reformed contemporaries, Perkins did not identify "tradition" in the singular as a cohesive body of doctrine preserved and elaborated by the church over the course of centuries: rather, a tradition is understood to be a particular deliverance concerning doctrine or ecclesial practice.[90] Although they did not use the term "tradition" in its most general sense, Perkins and his Reformed contemporaries

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85. Perkins, *Probleme*, 512, col. 1.
86. Perkins, *Probleme*, 512, col. 1–2.
87. Perkins, *Reformed Catholike*, 581, col. 1.
88. Thirty-Nine Articles, xxxiv, in Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom, with a History and Critical Notes*, 3 vols., 6th ed., revised and enlarged (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1919), 3:509; and cf. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, "Tradition and Traditions in Thomas Cranmer," *Anglican and Episcopal History* 59, no.4 (1990): 467–478.
89. Thirty-Nine Articles, xxxiv (509).
90. On Calvin, see Muller, "*Traditio* and *Paradosis* vs. *Humanas Traditiones*"; among Perkins's contemporaries, note Whitaker, *Disputation*, VI.i–iii (496–503); Junius, *Theses theologicae Leydenses*, vi–vii (120–22).

did have an equivalent identification for the doctrinal content of reliable ecclesiastical writings that could be referenced in support of theological formulation, namely, the "succession of doctrine,"[91] a term posed directly against the Council of Trent and its criterion of succession.[92] The argument for succession in doctrine had already been posed in general by Heinrich Bullinger (1504–1575) and in justification of the English church by John Jewel (1522–1571).[93] When Perkins and his contemporaries stated it, it was already a set-piece in the polemic.

As Perkins's contemporary, Lucas Trelcatius Jr., noted, "Succession of doctrine…is Coincident with the true and essentiall markes of the Church."[94] Perkins dealt with the issue of succession in some detail. In response to the objection that authority in doctrine and practice is vested in those who are "lawfully called, are ordained by them, whose auncestors have beene successively ordained by the Apostles," namely ordained the in Roman succession, Perkins responded that,

> Succession is three-folde, The first is, of persons and doctrine joyntly together: and this was in the primitive Church. The second is, of persons alone, and this may bee among infidels and heretickes. The third is, of doctrine alone. And thus our ministers succeed the Apostles. And this is sufficient. For this Rule must bee remembered, that the power of the Keyes, that is, of order & jurisdiction, is tyed by God, and annexed in the new Testament to doctrine.[95]

There is also, Perkins indicated, the contextual issue of how the appeal to succession reflects the condition of the church. The early church fathers appealed to succession at a time when there was no "breach in the Romane

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91. Cf. the references, above, chapter 3, note 91; and chapter 5, note 66.

92. Cf. *Canones et decreta sacrosancti oecumenici Concilii tridentini sub Paulo III., Iulio III. et Pio IV* (Leipzig: Tauchnitz, 1866), 15; with *Catechismus ex decreto Concilii Tridentini ad parochos Pii V. et Clementis XIII. pont. max.* (Ratisbon: Manz, 1866), *Proemium*, iv (7).

93. Heinrich Bullinger, *The Decades of Henry Bullinger*, ed. Thomas Harding (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1849–1852), 4:30–31; John Jewel, *Defense of the Apology of the Church of England*, in *The Works of John Jewel, Bishop of Salisbury* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1845–1850), 3:339, 348–49; cf. Edward B. Jones, "An Examination of the Anglican Definition of the Church as Expounded by Bishop John Jewel" (PhD diss., University of St. Andrews, 1963), 234–37.

94. Lucas Trelcatius, Jr., *A Briefe Institution of the Commonplaces of Sacred Divinitie*, trans. John Gawen (London: T. P. for Francis Burton, 1610), II. xiv (480).

95. William Perkins, *Commentarie of Exposition upon the Five First Chapters of the Epistle to the Galatians*, in *Works*, 2:171, col. 2–172, col. 1; hereinafter, cited as *Commentarie upon Galatians*.

Church" and "the truth of Apostolike doctrine" was generally recognized. Tertullian recognized that some churches lacked foundation in the original apostolic mission but were nonetheless apostolic "because of the unitie of their doctrine."[96] Accordingly, "Succession in place only, from Peter, and from Christ himselfe, is no certen note of truth…. Succession then in true doctrine, is the only & sure note of true religion."[97] With specific reference to the power of the keys, Perkins argued that this power rests with Christ himself who alone allows it to be exercised by those he has called to ministry. The church "can doe no more but testifie, publish, and declare whome God calleth, by Examination of parties for life and doctrine, by Election, and by Ordination."[98] In agreement with contemporaries in the English church, Perkins posited that ordination itself, properly understood, is not a matter of succession of persons, but of succession in doctrine.[99]

Given this emphasis on true succession as the succession of true doctrine and the assumption of historical decline in the church yielding an admixture of heresies and various unnecessary teachings with Christian truth, Perkins could argue that support for sound teaching and "the restoration of the Church" begun by the Reformers ought to be drawn "out of orthodoxicall writings" not only from the more recent reformist works, "but also from the more ancient Church."[100] Inasmuch as the new heresies were little more than revivals of the old, the old remedies conceived by the "Councils and Fathers" should continue to be consulted as providing remedies for revived heresies.[101]

The problem of tradition for Perkins and his contemporaries, then, did not concern tradition or traditions *per se*, nor was it with the proper use of the succession of faithful doctrinal formulation. Neither did Perkins

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96. Perkins, *Probleme of the Forged Catholicisme*, 599, col. 1.

97. Perkins, *Sermon in the Mount*, 237, col. 2; Perkins, *The Combat Betweene Christ and the Divell displayed: or A commentarie upon the temptations of Christ* (London: Melchisedech Bradwood for E. E., 1606), in *Works*, 3:289, col. 1.

98. Perkins, *Commentarie upon Galatians*, 172, col. 1.

99. Cf. Robert Some, *A Godlie Treatise of the Church* (London: George Bishop, 1582), sig. E4r–E4v, notes that to tie God's grace to "seates and countries" by "personall succession" is a "grosse absurditie"; with William Whitaker, *Praelectiones doctissimi viri Gulielmi Whitakeri nuper sacrae theologiae in academia Cantabrigiensi doctoris…. In quibus tractatur Controuersia de Ecclesia contra Pontificios, inprimis Robertum Bellarminum* (London: John Legat, 1599), q. 5, *De notis ecclesiae* (282–83), similarly detaching succession in doctrine from churchly ordination.

100. Perkins, *Arte of Prophecying*, 651, col. 1.

101. Perkins, *Arte of Prophecying*, 651, col. 1.

make a generalized claim against what he identified as "ecclesiasticall" writings. Rather, the problem was concerned with what Protestants, since the time of the Reformation, had identified as "human traditions," and, indeed, not with all of them. Perkins declared, "many things we hold for truth, not written in the word, if they be not against the word."[102] There are, for example, churchly ordinances or traditions concerning times and places as well as the order and usages to be observed in worship. The church has the power to establish such things, as evidenced by Paul's commendation of the church at Corinth for maintaining the traditions that he had communicated to it and by the decree of the Council of Jerusalem to the Gentile churches that they "abstaine from blood, and from things strangled" as long as "the offence of the Jewes remained."[103] Even so, traditions put in place by "general Councels or particular Synods" must be observed, as long as they "prescribe nothing childish or absurd to bee done," are not "imposed as any part of Gods worship," are "severed from superstition or opinion of merit," and are not too numerous.[104]

What Perkins, in common with other Reformed theologians, identified as the problem were Roman claims made about specific ecclesiastical traditions, whether unwritten or written, whether purportedly apostolic but out of accord with the canonical teachings of the apostles, or decreed by the church on particular occasions. These human traditions were claimed by "the Papists" as necessary beliefs both "profitable and necessarie to salvation."[105] Against this Roman claim, Perkins posed a series of arguments taken from Scripture and the early church. Deuteronomy 4:2, "Thou shalt not adde to the wordes that I command thee, nor take any thing therefrom," provides a clear indication that the written word of God is "sufficient for all doctrines pertaining to salvation." To the objection that the text applies to unwritten words, the context is clear: Moses speaks here only of the written word commanded by God to be delivered in writing,

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102. Perkins, *Reformed Catholike*, 580, col. 2.

103. Perkins, *Reformed Catholike*, 581, col. 1; cf. 1 Cor. 11:2; Acts 15:20; cf. Perkins, *Exposition upon the Whole Epistle of Jude*, 540, col. 2–541, col. 1.

104. Perkins, *Reformed Catholike*, 581, col. 1; cf. Amandus Polanus, *The Substance of Christian Religion, soundly set forth in two bookes, by definitions and partitions, framed according to the rules of a naturall method* (London: R. F. For Iohn Oxenbridge, 1595), 186.

105. Perkins, *Reformed Catholike*, 581, col. 1; cf. John Calvin, *Ioannes Calvinus Iacobo Sadoleto Cardinali, Salutem*, in CO, 5, col. 385–416, in translation, *Calvin's Reply to Sadoleto*, in *Selected Works of John Calvin: Tracts and Letters*, ed. Henry Beveridge and Jules Bonnet (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 1:25–68, here 53.

specifically of the commandments. Similarly, Isaiah 8:20 states, "To the law & to the testimonie. If they speake not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." Again, it is the written word that is "sufficient to resolve all doubts and scruples in conscience whatsoever."[106]

Of the texts cited by Perkins, the most telling is 2 Timothy 3:16–17, "The whole Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable to teach, to improove, to correct, and to instruct in righteousnesse, that the man of God may be absolute, beeing made perfect unto every good worke." This text, Perkins avers, contains two arguments that "proove the sufficiencie of Scripture, without unwritten verities."[107] First, given that Scripture is profitable in each of these four ways, unwritten traditions are clearly "superfluous." Second, the text indicates that the "man of God" will be made "perfect" by Scripture "unto every good worke"—which is to say that it is a sufficient guide to life eternal. Again, unwritten traditions are unnecessary.

Nor, adds Perkins, is this view of the superfluity of unwritten traditions merely an exegetical opinion stated by Protestants. When Christ and the apostles sought confirmation of their teaching, they had recourse to the Scriptures of the Old Testament: they did not confirm their doctrine on the basis of unwritten tradition. This was also the opinion of the ancient church. Tertullian demanded that the heretics of his time defend their views on the basis of Scripture alone and he commented that there was no need for "curiositie" beyond what was given in Christ and stated in the gospel. Jerome (345–420) identified the tradition that "John the Baptist was killed, because hee foretold the comming of Christ" as unsubstantiated and "as easily…contemned as approved" because it was extra-scriptural. Augustine (354–430) even more clearly stated that all things necessary to living well are "plainely set downe in Scripture." And Vincent of Lerins declared that the canon of Scripture "is perfect, and fully sufficient in it selfe for all things."[108] Perkins adds, rhetorically, that if unwritten traditions were actually necessary to salvation, then the writings of the apostles as well as

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106. Perkins, *Reformed Catholike*, 581, col. 1.

107. Perkins, *Reformed Catholike*, 581, col. 2.

108. Perkins, *Reformed Catholike*, 581, col. 2–582, col. 1, citing Tertullian, *De resurrectione carnis*, iii (*ANF*, 3:547); Jerome on Matthew 23; and Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana*, II. ix (*NPNF*, 2:539); Vincent of Lerins, *Commonitorium*, iii; *The Commonitories*, trans. Rudolph E. Morris, in *Fathers of the Church* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1949), 7:269. Note that of these, Vincent adds that although Scripture is perfect, given the many possibilities of interpretation, the ecclesiastical rule of "universality, antiquity, and consent"—belief everywhere, always, and by all—should be followed.

those of the "auntient fathers" must be suspect because they are not always to be believed.[109]

Several arguments were brought by Roman Catholic theologians against these conclusions. Perkins notes first, an objection based on 2 Thessalonians 2:15, "stand fast and keep the instructions [or "traditions"], which ye have been taught, either by word, or by our epistle." Paul may be taken as indicating normative unwritten traditions beside his own written epistle. But this, Perkins argues, may well be the first epistle ever written by Paul, despite its placement in the canon. Some things deemed by Paul to be necessary to salvation may not have been written down when the apostle wrote to the Thessalonians, but, given that these epistles were Paul's earliest writings, those things were most certainly set down in later epistles.[110]

A further objection, resting on the Roman argument that the church preceded Scripture, is that Scripture is only known to be Scripture because of the unwritten tradition that it is the Word of God. Perkins's response relies on the fairly typical Protestant view that Scripture attests to itself—although he does not deny the consent of the church to the canon and authority of the text:

> Scripture prooves it selfe to be Scripture: and yet wee despise not the universall consent or tradition of the church in this case; which though it doe not perswade the conscience, yet is it a notable inducement to moove us to reverence and regard the writings of the Prophets and Apostles. It will be said, where is it written that Scripture is Scripture? I answer, not in any one particular place or booke of Scripture, but in every line and page of the whole Bible, to him that can read with the spirit of discerning, and can discerne the voyce of the true pastour, as the sheepe of Christ can doe.[111]

To the further objection, based on Old Testament references to lost books, like the "booke of the warres of God" (Num. 21:14), that the truths contained in these works must now be handed on by tradition, Perkins agrees that there are lost books. He disagrees, however, that their loss in any way undermines the sufficiency of the remaining canon in conveying the truths necessary to salvation. He also cites Romans 15:4, "whatsoever things were written afore time, were written for our learning, that we may through patience and comfort of the Scriptures [might have hope]," as an indication

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109. Perkins, *Reformed Catholike*, 582, col. 1.
110. Perkins, *Reformed Catholike*, 582, col. 1.
111. Perkins, *Reformed Catholike*, 582, col. 2.

from Paul that the canon is complete sufficient—most probably in agreement with the note in the Geneva Bible that the things "written afore time" is a reference to "Moses and the Prophets." The lost books of the Old Testament appear to have been nothing more than chronicles or in the case of lost books of Solomon, works dealing with philosophy, not with matters of salvation.[112] As for the "Jewish" claim of secret doctrines given to Moses on Mount Sinai that "sundry Papists follow," Moses himself refuted it when he stated that nothing should be added to the law.[113]

Perkins was aware of a Romanist reading of Hebrews 5:12–14, where a distinction was made between those "inexpert in the word of righteousness," who "have need of milke," and those who are "of age" and capable of digesting "strong meate," as a justification for making a distinction between the plain meaning of Scripture for the average Christian and the "strong meate" of "unwritten traditions, a doctrine not delivered unto all, but to those that grow to perfection."[114] The biblical text, Perkins responds, has nothing to do with unwritten traditions and ability of more sophisticated Christians to deal with them. Rather it concerns differences in the manner of "handling and propounding" the same texts:

> For being delivered generally and plainly to the capacitie of the simplest, it is milke: but being handled particularly and largely, and so fitted for men of more understanding, it is strong meat. As for example, the doctrine of the creation, of mans fall, and redemption by Christ, when it is taught overly and plainely, it is milke: but when the depth of the same is thoroughly opened, it is strong meat. And therefore it is a conceit of mans braine, to imagine that some unwritten word is meant by strong meat.[115]

Perkins also opposed to the Romanist claim that there are difficult passages in Scripture, subject to different interpretations, that can only be rightly understood by recourse to the tradition of the church in order "that the true sense may bee determined, and the question ended." In response, he argued that Scripture itself is its own best interpreter according to two basic approaches, "first, by the analogie of faith, which is the summe of religion gathered out of the clearest places of Scripture: secondly, by the circumstances of the place and nature and signification of the words:

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112. Perkins, *Reformed Catholike*, 582, col. 2.
113. Perkins, *Reformed Catholike*, 583, col. 1, referencing Deut. 4:2, without citation.
114. Perkins, *Reformed Catholike*, 583, col. 1.
115. Perkins, *Reformed Catholike*, 583, col. 1.

thirdly by conference of place with place."[116] Perkins's response is not an argument against the use of church fathers or of older readings of a text as aids to interpretation, nor is it a general rejection of written and unwritten traditions—it is a very specific rejection of the use of churchly traditions, either purportedly unwritten or of late written attestation as the primary norms for reading particular passages of Scripture. The objection remains an opposition to "humane traditions" as a prior norm, as if "Gods word [were] not sufficient to comfort and direct."[117]

Conclusion

From Perkins's perspective, the problem of tradition or traditions posed by the Roman Catholic Church was not a problem of tradition in general or of the proper use or application of either the writings of Christian teachers throughout history or of churchly rites and ceremonies, nor was it a question of the use of the broad tradition of interpretation of Scripture as a guide or resource. Rather, it was only of the misuse of the teachings of the broader tradition, notably the writings of the church fathers, and of the normative application of human traditions not grounded in Scripture in the establishment of doctrine and practice. Perkins identified the positive tradition of Christian teaching as a legitimate "succession" of doctrine resting generally on Scripture and more specifically on the apostolic teaching of salvation in Christ as found in the New Testament. Following out the Protestant tendency to use "tradition" with reference to a problematic *paradosis* and "instruction" or "succession of doctrine" was true "tradition" with reference to a biblical and apostolic, *paradosis*.

Perkins's views on Scripture, tradition, and catholicity, following on the views of predecessors like John Calvin (1509–1564) and Bullinger, Cranmer and Jewell, are characteristic of the early modern Reformed understanding of the norms of Christian faith and practice and their churchly context. His understanding does not oblige a neat distinction between Puritan and Anglican, nor does it exhibit the "minimalization" of the fathers that has been claimed of various Puritan writers, but rather evidences a broader pattern, both positive and critical of early modern Protestant reception of the fathers. Together with several contemporary early orthodox writers, Perkins developed and nuanced the Reformed argument concerning tradition to identify kinds of traditions and to state more clearly and fully than the

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116. Perkins, *Reformed Catholike*, 583, col. 1.
117. Contra Quantin, *Church of England and Christian Antiquity*, 54.

Reformers precisely which traditions were acceptable, albeit not necessary for salvation, and which were unacceptable.

Contrary to various narrow and selectively documented views of Protestant approaches to doctrinal authority,[118] Perkins did not pose a rigid or exclusivistic notion of *sola Scriptura* against churchly tradition and summarily reject tradition as such. Rather, he made a far more nuanced distinction between the "divine" writings of ultimate normative value, "ecclesiasticall" writings that offer instruction and advice with various degrees of usefulness, and various problematic "human" traditions and purely secular writings that have no place in the formulation of doctrine and practice. These distinctions enabled a nuanced valuation of tradition that obliged both the narrative of decline from the relative purity of the earliest church and the Protestant assumption of truth maintained in the longer tradition, notably in the church fathers and in some of the argumentation of the "sounder scholastics." Perkins, together with his Reformed contemporaries, absolutely rejected only those merely "human traditions" that had deviated from an obedient interpretation of Scripture and had imposed new norms that constrained the conscience and stood in the way of a full and proper reception of the biblical message.

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118. For example, see Brad S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012), 86–100.