

THE BIBLE IS A CATHOLIC BOOK

SHORT STORY OF THE CATHOLIC BIBLE

Some people seem to think there is great significance in the fact that the Catholic Church is not mentioned by name in their Bible. They also challenge Catholics to find the word "Purgatory" in the Scriptures.

It might be mentioned in this connection that neither does the word "Bible" appear anywhere in Holy Scripture.

The word "Bible" is derived from a Greek word meaning "the books" — which is precisely what the Bible is — a collection of books officially recognized by the Catholic Church as containing the Inspired Word of God.

These books are generally divided into those of the Old and the New Testaments. The word "testament" does not necessarily mean a written document wherein a person provides for the disposition of his property after death, but rather an agreement or covenant. The Old Testament records the dealings of God with His chosen people through the Patriarchs and Moses. It contains the account of the agreement, the covenant, between God and man before the coming of the Messiah when the Jews were expectantly awaiting their promised Redeemer. It is a record of the history and aspirations of that people, of the prophecies which were progressively given to them, of their God-given Law and of the counsel and wisdom of their most learned men.

The New Testament

The New Testament comprises those books which were written after the coming of Jesus Christ and in which we find the fulfillment of God's promises and the final covenant between God and His creatures through His Son, Jesus Christ. Its principal interest for us lies in the first four books, the Gospels covering the story of the life of Christ, written by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, Christians of the first century. Two of them, as Apostles, had been intimately associated with Christ throughout His public life. In addition, there are books, chiefly letters, written by Christ's Apostles to the first Christians, giving authoritative information on many points of Christian belief and conduct.

The Jews had carefully preserved and handed down the books of the Old Testament, which had been written at various times throughout their long history, beginning with Moses. There grew up among them a special group of men whose work was accurately to reproduce and preserve their sacred books. The awkward Hebrew characters were scrupulously copied, year after year, word for word, with the scarce and costly writing materials then available.

Into Common Tongues

These books were handed down to each generation as the heritage of inspired books which God had intrusted to His people. Even when large numbers of the Jews left Palestine and began to use foreign languages, as happened at the time of the great Dispersal of the Jews, they were provided with their Scripture. About 250 B.C., the Old Testament was completely translated into Greek, which had become the common language of the Jews in the Western world.

This Greek translation of the Old Testament was the version frequently used by Christ and His Apostles and Christians in early Christian times. Thus it was the Old Testament in Greek of which Paul spoke when he wrote to Timothy: "All scripture, inspired of God, is profitable to teach, to reprove, to correct, to instruct in justice." (II Tim. 3:16.)

But the Jews had many other writings, which were not included in the Old Testament. Only those books which were considered by them to have been written under the direct influence of God were included in their sacred Scripture.

Early Christian Books

The same is true in the case of the Christian New Testament. We know that there were many Christian books in circulation when the New Testament was being written. A great number of these writings, even those mistakenly considered to be inspired, have come down to us. Some of them contain very sublime thoughts and were obviously

written by sincere Christians for a high purpose. Yet they do not appear in the New Testament for they were not inspired by God. Obviously someone made the decision determining which were and which were not to be numbered among the inspired books of the New Testament.

It is a fact of history that this decision was first officially made for all time by a council of Catholic bishops at Carthage in 397 A.D., and which was approved by the Vicar of Christ, the Pope. This decision gave the first clear and undisputed list of all the 27 New Testament Books, which, together with the 46 Old Testament Books, inherited from the Jews, made up the Bible for the Catholic Church from that day until this. Thus the various inspired Books of the Bible were gathered under one cover.

The Old Testament had already been translated into Greek. Greek copies of the books of the New Testament were widespread. But Greek had gradually ceased to be the common language by the fourth century after Christ, and its place had been taken by Latin in the Western world. By that time, Eastern nations had received translations in such languages as Armenian, Syriac, Arabic, etc. It was Pope Damasus I who charged the Scripture scholar, Jerome, to translate the Bible into Latin for the nations of the West.

Monks Copied Scriptures

Previous Latin translations of the Bible had been made for Catholic people, but they were inadequate. Jerome was well equipped for the task. He was one of the most gifted men of his age, familiar with Greek and Latin, and had spent years in Palestine learning Hebrew. He gathered together the best Hebrew and Greek copies of the Bible obtainable and completed the Latin translation known as the "Vulgate" version, which became of common use because written in the common language.

For centuries following — long before there was such a thing as a printed Bible — the Vulgate version remained the standard Bible of the Catholic Church. It was the important duty of Catholic monks and scholars to make copies of it. Special rooms were set aside in monasteries, where the Bible was slowly and laboriously reproduced, sometimes by a whole group copying at the dictation of one, generally by individuals working alone. Printing with movable type was not invented until 1440 and one of the first, and certainly the most famous publication was the Vulgate—the celebrated Gutenberg Bible.

Improved Translations

When the Vulgate translation had been made, Latin had been the language generally used and, for all practical purposes, the national languages so familiar to us today did not exist. With the coming of these national languages in later generations, Latin ceased to be the common tongue. It was then that the necessity arose for translation of the Bible into these popular languages. At first, the Vulgate, as the handiest approved text, was translated into German, English, Spanish, Italian, etc. But with the development of modern research to the languages of olden times, and the discovery of valuable ancient manuscripts of the Bible, Catholic scholars began to study and use these manuscripts; and it has been possible to make improved translations, which are painstakingly correct and authentic.

The modern rapid and economical multiplication of books by the thousands and millions became possible after the introduction of the cylinder press in 1810, the roller press in 1850, and the use of steam and electricity as motive power. Thus in our day and age, the Catholic Bible dating from the earliest Christian times is made available in every nation under the sun.

YES, THE BIBLE IS A CATHOLIC BOOK

Are you among the millions who accept the Bible as the Inspired Word of God?

And how do you know that it is? How do you know where it came from—who wrote it?

No man living today was on earth during the life-time of Christ or His Apostles. None living today heard what the Savior said, or what the Apostles were instructed to teach. We do not hear a voice from Heaven nowadays saying: "Read the Bible; believe in Me and you will be saved."

The plain truth which every sincere person must eventually face is the fact that you can accept the Bible only upon the word of the Catholic Church. The Bible truly is a Catholic book, and it would not be in our possession today but for the Catholic Church.

The Record is Clear

The books of the Old Testament were inherited by the Church from the Jews. And all of the books of the New Testament were written by Catholics, for the use of the Church in carrying out Christ's work for the sanctification and salvation of mankind.

It was the Catholic Church and no other which selected and listed the inspired books of both the Old Testament and the New Testament. It was the Catholic Church which preserved and used the Scriptures in the early centuries and down to our day.

If you can accept the Bible or any part of it as the Inspired Word of God, you can do so only because the Catholic Church says it is.

The Bible did not drop out of Heaven ready-made, all bound and printed in the language we speak and understand. None of the huge printing plants which today publish the Bible by the millions were in existence in the time of Christ on earth. No typesetter who composes the text of the Bible knows if the words he puts into form are God's Word, unless he accepts the assurance of the Catholic Church that they are such.

The Bible is, of course, the only book whose principal author is God Himself. But somebody had to write the original manuscript. Somebody had to be responsible for protecting the original manuscript from man-made changes affecting the meaning. Fair-minded and sensible people eventually have to admit that this responsibility has been with the Catholic Church from the very beginning.

Since the invention of printing, many versions of the Bible have been published. But they are not all the Bible as written and preserved by the Catholic Church. Books and sections of books of the Old Testament which are still in the Catholic Bible, have been deleted from others. Books are given different names ... many of the Psalms are numbered differently ... proper names have not the same spelling ... the text is often changed from the Catholic original.

When we realize that the writing of the Bible covered a span of 1500 years between the writing of the first book of the Old Testament and the last book of the New Testament ... and that the whole Bible contains 73 books and almost as many authors ... we are forced to realize that the Bible, besides being the Inspired Word of God, also represents a monumental human effort and solicitude, which is preserved in the Catholic Bible — the Douay version — which anyone can order, at reasonable cost, from a mail-order catalog.

THOUSANDS OF CHRISTIANS DIED—AND NONE SAW THE BIBLE

Some people seem to think that, even in the time of Christ's Apostles, Christians lived and died with the complete Bible in their hands. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The last part of the New Testament was not written by the Apostle John until some sixty years after the crucifixion of Christ. There was no Bible in anything resembling its complete form until several hundreds of years had passed. Yet during these years, Christ's Church had spread throughout the world ... millions of Christians had gone to their Maker ... thousands upon thousands of martyrs had given up their lives for the Catholic Faith.

The plain fact of the matter is: the Catholic Church and the Catholic Faith existed before the Catholic Bible, or any other Bible. People became Catholics through the teaching of the Apostles and missionaries whom the Apostles ordained. They believed the truths as Christ commanded, were baptized and died enjoying the fruits of Christ's Redemption, long before they ever saw or read —or could possibly see or read — a single inspired sentence of the New Testament. This for the simple reason that the Church existed long before the New Testament!

Christ's Church

How then did they become Catholics? In the same way, of course, that people become Catholics today — by being taught God's revealed truth, His plan of salvation, by the Church Christ instituted for that purpose.

As far as anyone knows, Jesus Christ Himself never wrote more than a few words in the dust of the earth. There is no evidence that He ordered His followers to write and publish His teaching. His definite and plain command was: "Go and teach all nations ... preach the Gospel to every creature... he that hears you, hears Me."

And this was what His Apostles did. They spread Christ's Church throughout the world, not by writing the New Testament, not by presenting people with copies of the Old Testament, but by teaching everyone the doctrines, the death and resurrection of Christ, the Savior of the world.

Taught Without Bible

The books of the New Testament were written to meet special needs and were not then, and are not now, absolutely necessary for the teaching Christ intended men to believe.

The lives of the Apostles were not long, nor could they travel everywhere. To have a reliable account of Christ's life, His deeds and doctrines, some of the Apostles, Matthew and John, who had first-hand information, made an inspired written record in the Gospels which they have left us. Even in their lifetime, incorrect and unfaithful records and false doctrines began to appear, rendering the character and work of their Master ridiculous. So that it was the avowed purpose of the Evangelist Luke (Luke I, 1) to set forth the true facts in his life of Christ, while Mark, the faithful associate of Peter, recorded the Gospel as it was preached by the leader of the Apostles.

The writers of the New Testament left their Gospels for the use of Christ's Church. One often supplied information that had been omitted by others. Yet none pretended to give a complete and systematic account of Christ's doctrine.

Church Came First

And the same is true of the letters which the Apostles wrote. They were written to meet pressing needs and questions and were addressed to particular individuals and groups in various places. St. Paul wrote to his converts at Ephesus, Corinth and Philippi, to answer their letters or because he had heard that problems had arisen which needed to be settled, situations which needed to be corrected. He wrote to advise and reprove, to encourage and instruct. He wrote to Christians to whom he had taught Christ's doctrine in its entirety. Certainly it was not his intention to set forth in these letters, the entire plan of salvation through Christ.

The books of the New Testament must be given the place they were intended to have ... the place which they deserve — nothing more. The complete Bible came from the Church and is used by the Church, but the Church did not come from the Bible. It existed many years before the Bible was written.

NEWS FROM PALESTINE

You heard the news flashed from India — GANDHI ASSASSINATED!

The report of the death of this leader, whom millions looked upon with reverence and loyalty, was radioed around the world. Newspapers everywhere gave many columns to their on-the-spot reporters. Did anyone doubt the fact of Gandhi's death? Did anyone question the record of his efforts for the betterment of his people? Did anyone dispute the often-published stories of his labors for peace?

No, reasonable and intelligent people accepted the fact of Gandhi's death. They did so because those close to him confirmed the fact—members of his own family and nation. Reporters would not dare to attempt to deceive the world about a matter of such public interest when both the friends and the foes of Gandhi were in a position to know the truth.

The Gospels are History

Why then should anyone question the truth of the news about Christ which came from Palestine? The Saviour of the world, Jesus Christ, had died on the cross to redeem mankind. He had risen from the grave. And the reports of these facts, as given in the four Gospels, gave briefly the chief events of His life and His principal teachings.

Two thousand years from now, people will be able to read the report of Gandhi's death, confident that they are reading the historical truth. And today, almost two thousand years removed from the time of Christ, we can also read the Gospel story of Christ, confident that we are reading facts and historical truth.

It has been abundantly proved that truthful, competent eye-witnesses saw and wrote down the events of the life of Christ. Others got the truth from reliable eyewitnesses and recorded it.

Matthew and John both actually saw the events concerning which they wrote. Both were with Christ throughout His public life. They saw the miracles He performed and they heard His teaching. Mark and Luke were not eye-witnesses, but they were in close contact with the Apostles, who witnessed the events they described. And they were careful to verify the facts they relate from other eye-witnesses.

Martyrs to the Faith

That the Apostles themselves were convinced of the truth of the story they told, cannot be doubted. Some of them gave up their lives rather than deny it. It is not likely that these men would have suffered death for the sake of a story which they had written, but which they knew to be a fake.

A careful examination of the Gospels will show that their authors were well acquainted with the events they record, or, at least, in close contact with those who witnessed them. After the death of Christ — thirty-five years at the most — the whole land was devastated with war following the rebellion of the Jews against the Romans. This caused so many and such great changes that the conditions described in the Gospels no longer existed.

This prevented any plausible forgery of the Gospels. No one could have portrayed so accurately and in such detail, the political, social and religious conditions prevailing at the time of Christ unless he had lived in those times or was in close contact with others who had. Modern scholars fail to discover the slightest error on the part of the writers of the Gospels in their descriptions of any of these conditions.

They Knew The Truth

The first Christians were in a position to know the truth. They would not have accepted the Gospels, which imposed so great a restraint upon human nature, nor would they have practiced Christianity at a time when to be a Christian put one in danger of almost certain death, if they had not been convinced that the Gospels contained facts. Many of these early Christians were versed in literature, had trained minds and were of the highest intellectual attainment. We can be sure that they did not accept the Gospels as genuine without the most searching investigation.

But the enemies of Christianity provide what is perhaps the most convincing evidence of all. Even in the days when the Gospels were written, these enemies were numerous and clever. They used every possible argument against the Church and, had the Gospels been forgeries, or their authors deceivers, they would certainly have seized upon that fact to discredit Christians and Christianity. The fact that no such charge of forgery was ever leveled against the Gospels by these early critics of Christ and His teaching, is proof that the Gospels are genuine and historical reports.

Gospels Passed Along

The original manuscripts of the Gospels are no longer in existence, of course. They were written on perishable material and were in such constant use that they eventually wore out or were destroyed. But they were held in such high esteem, that many careful copies of them were made. Some 3,800 ancient manuscript copies of the Gospels or portions of them exist today and are in agreement with regard to everything excepting minor details. They agree with numerous quotations from the Gospels found in the works of early Christian writers who were much closer to the originals than we are.

We do not know out of our own personal experience that there ever was a George Washington. Some of our young men fought in World War II who cannot testify of their own knowledge that there was a World War I. They know these things because of historical records that have been preserved and passed along. We can be equally sure that the Gospels, as we read them in the Catholic Bible, are genuine books of Christian history and the events related in them are true and can be accepted with complete trust and confidence.

Holy Scripture, as preserved by the Catholic Church down through the centuries, is the historical proof that Christ lived and died for us, and that he left us beliefs and rules to live by.

Of what value is the Bible? Shall we value it for the comfort and hope it gives ... for the sublimity of the thoughts it expresses ... for its majestic style as literature?

These and other appeals that the Bible may have are secondary to its real value. Its primary value is as the meeting place of the mind of God and the mind of man.

The Catholic Church highly esteems the Bible solely because God speaks to us through it. He uses it to unveil many truths He wishes us to know. He makes known His divine will in our regard — His love for men and His hatred for sin. But if we have before us God's own statement in the Bible, and still draw out of it meanings that God never intended it to have, we may proclaim ourselves "Bible Christians" to our heart's delight, but we are not.

It is vain to pour over the inspired pages, unless we pierce through the words and get at their true sense. And if we do not arrive at their true meaning, they become a positive danger and a source of confusion and disunity. When anyone, through ignorance, pride or lack of consideration, attaches a false meaning to any passage of the Scripture, he transforms the words of truth into a source of spiritual ruin. He is then not only insisting on what is in itself false, which is bad enough, but also claiming the authority of God in support of error.

There is nothing more important than to arrive at the genuine meaning of the Bible. The Scriptures are valuable, but only when what we learn from them is truth. The only certain source of correct interpretation is the Catholic Church, which Christ Himself created and commissioned to teach His Word to all nations —without error—for all time.

WHY BELIEVE THE BIBLE?

Catholics have no difficulty answering that question. We believe the Bible because God is its Author and the Catholic Church is its publisher.

That Moses wrote the first book of the Bible and the Apostle John wrote the last, are facts of history —facts guaranteed by historical evidence — the same kind of evidence that leads us to accept Caesar as the author of the Gallic wars.

But why do we accept the Bible as having the all-knowing and all-loving God for its Author?

If God, Who spoke through the mouths of the prophets, wrote through the hands of inspired men ... if He mysteriously collaborated with human authors as His instruments in so doing ... He alone could make the fact known. And He has made it known. He has revealed the fact that the Bible is an inspired book, but He did not reveal how this inspiration took place.

A Matter of Faith

It is always easier to describe the appearance of things than to explain the complex factors behind them. There are unexplained agencies in the familiar world about us—in electricity, in seeds, and in light. A child can turn on the radio, but the ablest scientist cannot adequately explain the inner nature of the electricity that transmits the sound. Yet no one, for all of that, denies that he heard the sound. And no one can reasonably deny that God inspired the human authors of the books of the Bible merely because we cannot fully understand how He did so.

Christ Himself gave us something of a description of inspiration when He said to His Apostles: " ... do not be anxious how or what you are to speak; for what you are to speak will be given you in that hour. For it is not you who are speaking, but the Spirit of your Father, who speaks through you." (Matthew 10:19, 20) . The Apostles speak, but they say what is given them to say. They speak, yet it is God Who speaks through them.

God moved the human writers, enlightened their minds as they wrote, directed and assisted them to write what He wished — and no more.

Thus the human authors of the Bible wrote their own thoughts, but God gave them these thoughts. They wrote and it was God writing through them. Each book of the Bible has two authors acting as one: God as the principal Author, man as His instrument. This does not mean that one part of the book was written by God and the other part by men. The whole book came from both God and man, but from each in a different manner — from God as its source, from men as its channel.

Easy to Understand

This is the reason why Catholics always have believed the Bible. They know that Christ spoke constantly of the Old Testament and always as the book of God—as containing God's word. They know that Peter wrote: " ... the Scripture must be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke by the mouth of David" ... that Paul told Timothy: "All Scripture, inspired of God, is profitable to teach, to reprove, to correct, to instruct in justice ..." They know that when the list of inspired books was first officially published, the Catholic Church taught that Holy Scripture was the Inspired Word of God ... and that the Church teaches the same truth today.

It is the Church, commissioned by Christ to teach us to observe all things whatsoever He had commanded, that gives every Catholic the assurance that the Bible is a divinely inspired book. The Bible itself does not give certain proof of its own inspiration.

An Act of God

We cannot be certain that the Scriptures are inspired unless we learn it from some other reliable source. Anything can be written on paper. It is not enough for the author of a book to claim in its pages that he is inspired by God to make it so. Unless there is some evident proof of the inspiration of Scripture independent of Scripture itself, it would be folly to accept only the Bible's own claim.

It must be remembered that inspiration is an act of God. It is not a public and external act as were the miracles of Christ, which witnesses could observe and which can be proved like any other historical fact. Inspiration was an entirely internal act — God's influence on the mental faculties, on the minds of the inspired writers. This influence was beyond the scrutiny of historical witnesses. Perhaps even the writers themselves were not conscious of the divine impulse which moved them. Only God could make known the fact of inspiration. Did He?

Proved by the Church

It is not an argument that appeals to a reasonable man to say that we know that the Scriptures are inspired because the Holy Spirit bears witness in our hearts. There are reasonable and well-disposed men who have had no such experience.

Early in the history of the Church, the learned Augustine wrote: "I would not believe the Gospels if I were not moved by the authority of the Catholic Church to do so." The same Catholic Church teaches us that the Bible is an inspired book and we believe it. And we have good reason for believing the Catholic Church which is composed of innumerable witnesses linked in unbroken succession from the time of Christ to our time.

The historical facts provable by the Catholic Church are that the Son of God was born among men more than 1900 years ago ... He claimed to be God and proved it by miraculous works traceable only to the omnipotent power of God ... He commissioned men, whom He called His Apostles, to preach His Gospel, and to establish His Church, which would teach His doctrine of salvation to the end of time.

These are facts which can be found in the Bible as authentic history. The Catholic Church is the Church which has historically carried on that mission and which has the divinely-protected authority to testify that the Scripture contains the inspired word of God.

So we believe the Bible because, with God as its Author, it has God's authority behind every page. And we know what books constitute the Bible because the Church which Christ established declared which of the books are inspired, and put the Bible into form as a book.

Differences Between the Douay and King James Versions

1) Protestants admit, as inspired and canonical only those books of the Old Testament which are contained in the Hebrew Bible. (See article "The Seven Missing Books," page 20, of this pamphlet.)

2) In the numbering of the Psalms, the King James Version, following the Hebrew, divides Psalm 9 into two (Psalms 9 and 10), and thereafter its numbering is generally one unit ahead of the Douay, until we reach Psalm 148, when the King James agrees with the Douay, having united Psalms 146 and 147 into one.

3) There is a minor difference in the form of the proper names in the Old Testament. The Douay Version, being a translation of the Vulgate, gives those names ending in *ah* the more classical ending *as*. The King James Version, on the contrary, generally reproduces the Hebrew form of the names.

4) Another minor difference is that of the title of certain books. The first two books of Kings in the Douay Version are called first and second book of Samuel in the King James, and the third and fourth book of Kings in the Douay are the first and second book of Kings in the other. The two books of Paralipomenon in the Douay are styled the two books of Chronicles in the King James. Apocalypse in the Douay is called Revelation in the King James.

Are Catholics Allowed to Read The Bible?

For years, some gullible people have believed that the Catholic Church is opposed to the Bible and does not want Catholics to read it.

How anyone can believe such a thing is difficult to understand in the face of the fact that it was the Catholic Church which gave the Bible to the world.

Christ Himself established His Church for the specific purpose of teaching His truth to the generations to come (Matthew 18:19) (I Timothy, 4:11). To do so has been the constant and unvarying purpose of the Catholic Church since the times of the Apostles.

Approves Bible Reading

The Church always has pointed to the Scriptures as containing the written Word of God. This was true when the Scriptures were written in the original Hebrew and Greek, and is true today where translations into the modern languages are substantially correct and complete. There never has been a decree of the Catholic Church against the reading of the Scriptures in the languages in which they were composed.

The Church approves the reading of the Bible but does not permit Catholics the free use of any and every modern translation of the Bible. That is a different question altogether, and it has an answer which is both reasonable and consistent.

It is the duty of the Church to see that the people receive the true and unadulterated teaching of Christ. A translation of the Bible can be an accurate, exact and fair rendering of the original, or it can be inaccurate, inexact and in many passages misleading and out of harmony with the original. The Church has never forbidden the reading of the Bible in approved translations, but has definitely condemned the reading of imperfect, misleading and pernicious translations.

Preserving Bible

Quotations are often made from decrees of the Catholic Church prohibiting the use of the Bible in modern languages. But, on examination, it will be found that these prohibitions were not concerned with the Bible itself, but with translations which, for one reason or another, were defective and dangerous.

Such restrictions did not exist until the need became apparent in the 13th century. And after that time, with the invention of printing and the resulting multiplication of Bibles, the need for regulation became more important when any Tom, Dick and Harry could publish his version of the Holy Book.

Speaking of early non-Catholic English translations, Disraeli complained: " ... we find abundant errors, reducing the text to nonsense or to blasphemy, making the Scriptures contemptible to the multitude who came to pray and not to scoff." There was good reason behind the rules of the Catholic Church prohibiting the use of translations which abused and misused the word of God.

Nor did the Catholic Church withhold the Bible from the Catholic people by keeping it in Latin. Early in the history of western civilization, those who could read Latin could read the Bible. Those who could not read Latin, could not read at all. Who, then, was deprived of the Bible? Not those who could read Latin, for the Cambridge Modern History (p. 639) states: "No book was more frequently republished than the Latin Vulgate, of which 98 distinct and full editions appeared prior to 1500..." In fact, the Latin Bible was as accessible to all, as it would have been in English.

There were translations of the Bible in the popular languages of the people even before the invention of printing and long before 1530, when, it is claimed, the Bible was first given to the people in German. Previous to that date, more than 70 editions of the Bible had been made in different languages spoken by the people of Europe.

Long Before Luther

Fourteen translations of the Bible into German and five into low Dutch existed before Luther's translation appeared. And before that time, there were Catholic translations in Spanish, Italian and French. There were English translations before the time of Tyndale or Wickliffe.

In view of these facts, it is clear that the Catholic Church did not keep the Bible from the people by producing it in Latin.

Today, the Bible is available in every popular language and can be obtained by anyone. The Catholic Church not only authorizes its circulation, but strongly encourages its study and meditation. All it requires as a preliminary condition is that the popular translation be properly made, and that footnotes explaining the more difficult passages be appended. This is merely a wise precaution against the danger of false meanings being drawn from obscure texts.

ALL RIGHT, PROVE IT BY THE BIBLE"

Have you ever heard people say this in a discussion of Christian belief or practice? It is by no means uncommon.

Some attach an unwarranted importance to the fact that a doctrine has been written in the Bible and can be read in the very words they expect to find there.

Usually the challenge: "Prove it by the Bible!" is made when the discussion deals with a doctrine they decline to accept. For them, the Bible contains all things necessary for salvation and anything not explicitly found in the Bible must necessarily be counterfeit Christian doctrine — an "addition" to the revealed word of God.

The Catholic attitude is different. Our first question is: Did Christ teach it? It is secondary whether or not an inspired author of the Gospels or Epistles wrote it down. We desire Christ's teaching. We need it. And it matters not whether it was written by John or preached by John, it is still Christ's truth.

The Truth of Tradition

If the teachings of Christ were transmitted to us by way of the teaching of the Apostles and their lawful successors, whom Christ promised to protect from error, we have the same need and obligation to accept them that we have to accept those recorded by the inspired authors of the New Testament.

The teaching of Christ, which contained God's revealed truth, preached by the Apostles but not committed to writing in the inspired Scriptures, is what Catholics mean by "tradition." That is what the Bible means when it speaks of that same kind of tradition.

Christ reproached the Scribes and Pharisees for leaving the Commandments of God and holding the tradition of men (Mark 7:8). Such tradition Christ condemned and so does the Catholic Church.

But there is another kind of tradition of which the Bible speaks and which we are obliged to accept: "... hold the traditions which you have learned, whether by word or by our epistle," St. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians (II Thess. 2:14) ; and he leaves us under no doubt whatsoever, since he specifically mentions his written and unwritten word and commands that both be received. Thus even as taught in the days of the Apostles, Christ's doctrine was both unwritten and written by inspired authors. Both are of equal importance and of equal obligation. They are not the traditions of mere men, but an integral part of Christ's teaching—the revealed word of God, transmitted by men, the Apostles and their lawful successors.

To accept only the teachings of Christ as given in the Bible would be to act contrary to the precepts of the Bible itself. Far worse, it would mean depriving ourselves of important truths which Christ communicated to the Apostles and, through them, to His Church.

Much Was Unwritten

Recall the words with which St. John concludes his Gospel: "There are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written each one, the world itself, I think, would not be able to contain the books that should be written." Here was a manifestation of God's plan that all was not to be written in the Bible. The Apostle closes His Gospel with a plain statement that he knows many more things that Christ did, many more words that He uttered, than he put into writing.

The first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles expressly states that Christ employed the forty days which elapsed between His Resurrection and Ascension, in teaching His Apostles: For forty days "appearing to them and speaking of the kingdom of God."

And now where are those heavenly instructions given by the risen Christ to His Apostles? Those instructions which had lasted forty days take up only a few lines in the Scripture; whereas the discourse of our Lord on the eve of His death, a discourse which could have lasted but a few hours, takes up five chapters.

The 40 Days' Instruction

No doubt, the discourses for forty days were of the greatest importance, as the inspired writer says they related to the kingdom of God. And who can doubt that the necessity of giving those instructions was one of the most important reasons why Christ remained among men after His Resurrection?

The history of the Catholic Church shows it at the very beginning with its creed, ceremonies, practices, fasts, holy days and Sacraments. There is no direct mention of many of these things in Scripture, and only remote allusions to a few. It is evident, however, that the Apostles received instruction on those points, which they delivered to the Church and which were written, not in the Scripture, but in the belief and practices of the people from the beginning of the Church. This is tradition originating with Christ.

The Apostles founded the Church, and during a long time, it was supported solely on tradition—their teaching. Both Jews and Gentiles were converted and it was the spoken word which made them Christians. From the very beginning, Christians learned Christ's doctrine, and all the facts relating to the establishment of Christianity without the Bible as we know it.

"... by Word or Epistle"

When error and abuse cropped up, the Apostles, either by preaching or writing, either individually or assembled together, cleared up the facts, dispelled the errors and prescribed to the people that they hold to the traditions which they had been taught, "whether by word or by epistle." The Gospels and the Epistles of the New Testament were written in order that the teachings of the Apostles be preserved. These inspired writings, once declared to be such by the Catholic Church, were presented to the world as containing the revealed word of God.

All the books of the Old Testament are addressed to believers and presuppose the Jewish faith as already known. Likewise all the books of the New Testament are addressed to believers in the Christian faith and presuppose Christ's doctrine already taught and received. Nowhere does the New Testament claim to be the sole source of Christ's teaching. It speaks of Christ's teaching as something already known and simply seeks to explain it, to confirm it and to induce Christians to live up to its high ideals and requirements.

Bible Not Full Truth

The New Testament writings were never meant to be the sole and final authority for Christ's revealed truth. They were never intended as the complete and only source of certain knowledge of Christian faith and duty.

Prove it by the Bible? The Catholic Church proves it from what Christ and His Apostles taught. The Catholic Church was there to hear them and has held fast to their teaching. From the time of Christ Himself, the Church has been teaching "by word or by epistle"—by the unwritten and the written Word of God.

Just as the Apostles did not consider Christ's entire teachings to be contained in the written word, so does the Catholic Church consider the written word—the Bible—to be only a synopsis of the teachings of Christ.

CHRIST DID NOT MAKE BIBLE ONLY AUTHORITY

If Christ intended the Bible to be our sole guide to faith, why did He not see to it that everybody had a copy ... and that all could read and understand it?

We all know that the Bible was not completed for hundreds of years after Christ left the earth. Are we to believe that the Savior left the millions of people who lived in those times without a means of receiving His teaching? Are we to believe that Christ intended all these people to remain in ignorance of His teaching until such time as the Bible could be written?

In Jerusalem alone, 3,000 converts came into the Church after Peter's first sermon (Acts 2:41), and 5,000 more shortly afterward (Acts 4:4). Were there 8,000 copies of the Bible ready to distribute among them, so they could understand Christ's teaching and believe in Him? There were not, of course, either 3,000 copies or 5,000. There was no Bible!

Christ and the Bible

If Christ intended the Bible as the sole means of salvation, why did He not write it Himself? And why did He not miraculously multiply its copies to place it in the hands of all people as He had multiplied a few loaves to feed the people? Why did He not, before leaving the earth, see to it that the Bible was translated into the languages of the whole world, so that all could understand it? And why did He not instantly banish illiteracy and miraculously endow all people with the ability to read, for how else could they understand what was written?

Christ never did command His Apostles to write a book, to translate it into all languages, and to place it in the hands of every living human on the face of the earth. He did not say that all His teachings were to be placed between the covers of such a book, and that all who failed to read it, understand it and believe it would be condemned.

If that had been His intention He would undoubtedly have said so. And having omnipotent power, He would have made it possible. But He did neither. Instead, He gave His teaching to the Apostles and commissioned them to "teach all nations." And He instituted an infallible and everlasting Church to see that these teachings were preserved and taught ever more widely by the successors of the Apostles.

There were uncounted Christians who lived and died, without having seen a Bible—without the ability to read it if they had one in their possession. These millions were saved during all these centuries, not because they were readers of the Bible, but because they were hearers and doers of the spoken word of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which was preached to them by the Catholic Church.

Can anyone believe that God allowed millions to lose their souls during this long span of eighteen centuries — and is allowing many millions to be lost now—simply because they are unable to read? Are we to believe that salvation is reserved only for those who lived after the invention of the printing press?

Even if the Bible contained Christ's complete teaching, think of the vast numbers of people intellectually incapable of understanding it.

And consider the even greater number who ... because of work, illness and other causes ... do not have the time for the reading and study required for even a moderate understanding of the Scriptures.

It is plain that Christ could never have intended to make the Bible as a whole, and the New Testament in particular, the final and only authority for the truths of Christian faith.

THE SEVEN MISSING BOOKS

Did you know that the Catholic Bible contains seven books generally not found in other Bibles? And do you wonder why?

The answer is not that something new has been added to the Bible by the Catholic Church; rather something old has been removed from non-Catholic versions of the Bible.

The books, conspicuous by their absence in modern non-Catholic Bibles, and which should be found in the Old Testament, are the books of Tobias, Judith, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, and the two books of Machabees—and portions of the books of Esther and Daniel.

To understand this matter fully, it must be borne in mind that before the time of Christ, there were two divisions of Jews. Some remained in Palestine and continued to use the Scripture written in Hebrew. Others, scattered throughout foreign lands, particularly in Egypt, were better acquainted with Greek because Greek was then the common language.

For the use of the Greek-speaking Jews, who were numerous in Alexandria and other parts of Egypt, the Old Testament was translated into Greek several centuries before the coming of Christ. And it was these Greek-speaking Jews who, even before the time of Christ, regarded the seven books of which we speak as inspired.

The Jews in Palestine who spoke Hebrew did not rank these books among the inspired books of the Old Testament, either because they were not written in Hebrew, or because they came too late to be placed in the list of inspired books made by Esdras. After the Babylonian captivity, Esdras collected all the inspired books which could then be found. After his time, the books of Baruch, Tobias, Judith and Wisdom, as well as more complete copies of Daniel and Esther, were brought to light. The book of Ecclesiasticus and the two books of Machabees were not yet written when the collection of inspired books was made.

The Apostles used the Scriptures of the Greek-speaking Jews, and it is upon the authority of the Apostles that the Old Testament, with the seven books under consideration, was held to be inspired. To these Apostles, Christ had said: "He who hears you, hears me." And the Apostles used these seven books. The Apostles must have known whether these books were inspired or not, whether they were the word of God or merely the word of man. If they had been only the word of man, the Apostles surely would have eliminated them from the Old Testament.

As they did not do so, but on the contrary, retained these books in the Old Testament ... and as all the editions of the Bible used by their immediate disciples contained these books ... the Catholic Church must hold them to be inspired Scripture. This is not on the authority of the Jews from whom they were inherited, but on the authority of the Apostles.

From the day when the Catholic Church first published the official list of the inspired books of both the Old and the New Testaments, in 397 A.D., there never has been any interruption in the teaching of the Church concerning their inspired source.

These seven books are accepted as inspired Scripture by 500 millions of Catholics spread over the globe. They are called inspired Scripture by the Greek Church, though separated from the Catholic Church. They are held to be inspired Scripture by all the other Oriental Christian sects. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, all editions of the Christian Bible contained these books. Many of the oldest editions of the Protestant Bibles contained them, sometimes listed in the back of the Bible as Apocrypha — not to be considered inspired Scripture.

When the King James version of the Bible, which is still used by many English-speaking non-Catholics, first appeared, it contained these books. Later complaints, however, caused publishers to begin to omit them and by the year 1827, Bible Societies had eliminated them from the Bible altogether.

When a non-Catholic considers his Bible, it would be well for him to ask . . . why were those seven books omitted? It is not justified by the authority of either the Jews or the early Christians.

IS THE BIBLE EASY TO UNDERSTAND?

Can any intelligent person read and interpret and understand the Bible for himself?

Is it true, as many claim, that the inspired pages are so plain, so simple and their contents so clearly expressed, that every man may grasp their meaning without risk of going astray?

The answer is definitely "No!" The Bible contains peculiarities and special idioms of the original Oriental language in which it was written which are difficult enough to understand in themselves. And they are made much more difficult after they are translated into English.

There are expressions, forms of speech, references and allusions to be found in the Bible which belong to ages, countries and nationalities totally different from our own. Most of the manners and customs described have passed away. References are made to habits and practices familiar enough to those who were on the scene when the books were written and which, at that time, threw light upon the text and its meaning. But these things no longer exist.

Other difficulties arise from the sublimity of the subject matter and from the mysterious character of many of the doctrines. This is especially true of the New Testament, which the earthly and worldly-minded person cannot accept according to the obvious sense of the words.

To say that the correct interpretation of the Bible is easy and within the reach of everyone, even of the unlearned and the unwise, is a contradiction of the teaching of the Bible itself. Referring to the epistles of St. Paul, St. Peter writes that in them "there are certain things difficult to understand, which the unlearned and the unstable distort, just as they do the rest of the Scriptures also, to their own destruction." (2 Peter 3:16). Here are stated three facts of important significance.

The first is that the writings of St. Paul contain statements hard to understand. The second is that the other parts of the Bible likewise contain difficult and obscure passages.

The third is that the unlearned and the unstable not merely fail to discover the true meaning of the passages they read, but that they attach false meanings to them, distort their true sense, with the most disastrous consequences to themselves.

When Christ took the bread in His hands at the Last Supper, He said: "This is My Body." Many who undertake personally to interpret the Bible insist that Christ really meant to say: "This is not My Body," but only a figure or memorial of it. When reading the words directed by Christ to His Apostles: "Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven," some interpret the real meaning to be: "Whose sin you shall forgive, they are not forgiven by you at all; but if you preach the Gospel, those who hear you and believe in the Lord, will gain forgiveness merely by their faith in Christ as their Savior."

The Warning of Peter

There are numberless other parts of the Bible which are entirely misinterpreted by people who believe that anyone can interpret the Bible.

If such private interpretation resulted only in error and nothing more, it would not be so bad. But St. Peter forcefully states that it leads to destruction—the loss of salvation. That the obscurities and difficulties pertain to things most important and necessary, is obvious, for St. Peter would not have spoken of them if they concerned neither faith nor salvation.

In the twenty-fourth chapter of St. Luke's Gospel, we meet with a still more remarkable example of the difficulty of correctly interpreting the inspired text and especially prophecy. The two Apostles who met Jesus on their way to Emmaus, were unable to trace step by step the fulfillment of Scripture in the events that had recently occurred. Christ was obliged to interpret the passages for them. "And beginning then with Moses and with all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures, the things referring to himself." (24:27). Their courage revived as "He opened to them the Scriptures" (24:32).

Christ's Authority

The need for an authoritative interpreter is clearly seen when we observe disagreement among Christians as to the precise meaning and force of certain words and sentences in the Bible. When various sects claim opposite meanings for the same Scriptural expressions, it is apparent there is need of authoritative interpretation.

The history of the various denominations which have sprung up around the Catholic Church, shows that their origin in most cases was due to the stubborn determination of proud and headstrong discontents to put their own personal interpretation upon the inspired word of God.

Consider such texts as: "Thou art Peter and upon this rock, I will build My Church" (Matt. 16:18) ; or "Unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he shall not enter the Kingdom of Heaven" (John 3:5). Study these and similar passages in the light of the conflicting views and opinions which have raged and still rage around them. If the meaning of Scripture is really so clear to everyone, how is it that there is no unity of belief, no uniformity of doctrine or practice—nothing but widespread confusion?

And None Agrees!

Facts are stubborn things. And there is no more certain fact, as the divided state of Christians proves, than that there is not unity, but disunity, not order, but disorder when the Scriptures are left to the interpretation of the individual. The warning of St. Peter seems to have fallen on many deaf ears.

Besides containing the doctrines of Christ, the Bible also supplies the laws by which we are to govern our conduct. It may, in fact, be considered the law book of Christian life. This being the case, the question may be asked: If a special human authority is needed to interpret the laws of man, which no one will deny, then surely a divinely constituted authority is needed to interpret the laws of God.

In every civilized state, kingdom and republic throughout the world, we invariably find two things: (1)-a code of laws imposed by the State; (2)-a lawfully constituted tribunal whose duty it is to administer these laws, to interpret Their meaning and to see that they are properly applied. There is no such thing as a country where each citizen is presented with a book of its laws and then left to understand them after his own fashion. In civil affairs, men seem to be considerably shrewder than in spiritual affairs.

"Supreme Court"

If an authoritative interpreter is needed in the civil law, which by comparison is simple and intelligible enough, surely such an authority is immeasurably more required in the case of God's law, with its high code of morals and its sublime and mysterious doctrines.

This is what we have in the Catholic Church —an authority to decide finally and forever all questions concerning the correct meaning, the exact force and value of the Bible which Christ committed to her keeping. The Church interprets the law of God much as the Supreme Court interprets the law of the nation.

Christ promised that the Holy Spirit would remain with the Church forever. As this same Holy Spirit inspired the Bible, there can be no doubt that the Holy Spirit protects the Church from error in teaching the true meaning which the Holy Spirit intended the Bible to have.

God assures us that "the things that are of God, no man knoweth, but the spirit of God." (I Cor. 2:11) . How then can every man be his own instructor and his own guide in the difficult and mysterious teachings of Holy Scripture?

Imprimatur:

✠ JOSEPH E. RITTER

Archbishop of St. Louis

St. Louis, March 8, 1948,

26th Reprinting August, 1961
