

The Bible only: An Invention of the Reformers

The notion of “the Bible only” was invented by the 16th century Reformers who, in rejecting the papacy had nowhere else to look for a “sole rule of faith”.

Contrary to what some say, the Catholic Church has never forbidden its members to read the Bible. However, the Church has at times forbidden the reading of certain erroneous translations, such as the Tyndale and Wycliffe translations which even Protestants never refer to today.

The Bible is a Catholic book nurtured within the influence of the Catholic Church who discerned the Canon. The first Bibles were all produced by Catholics. The first person to translate any part of the Bible into English was the priest, Bede, in the 8th century. Years later, even Martin Luther admitted that without the Catholic Church we would not even have a Bible.

Deutero-canonical Books

The “extra” books at the back of the Catholic Old Testament, known as “*deutero-canonical*” or the Apocrypha (*by Protestants*), are not “*extra*” at all, but have been removed from Protestant Bibles. Catholics and Protestants agree on the number of books in the New Testament.

The early Church Fathers followed the lead of the Apostles in using the “Septuagint” version of the Old Testament (*Greek translation of the Jews of the dispersion made in Alexandria*).

The Fathers peppered their writings with references from the so-called “apocryphal” Old Testament books because Jesus, his Apostles, the New Testament writers and the early Church all used a Bible (*Old Testament*) that included the “Apocrypha” or deutero-canonical books. The Palestine Canon, which excluded these books,

and which Protestant Christians use, had not been formed yet.

Interestingly, among the Dead Sea Scrolls discovered near Qumran in 1947, fragments of the deutero-canonical Old Testament books found in Catholic Bibles, but not in those Protestants use, have been uncovered in Hebrew.

Catholics Study Scripture

Especially since the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), more than ever, Catholics have been encouraged to read the written Word of God. Today there are study groups in many Catholic parishes.

Some will be surprised to learn that of a survey made in America, it was found that in most Evangelical churches 6% of their Sunday services were devoted to Scripture. The fundamentalist church surveyed was found to spend 2% of its Sunday service in Scripture. In Catholic parishes, which use a Sunday Missal containing the Scripture readings, countrywide and indeed worldwide, the use of Scripture was approximately 26% on a Sunday. During weekday celebrations of the Mass, it would be approximately 20%.

What is evident is that the Catholic Church holds the Scripture in very high regard. And individual Catholics are more and more studying the Scriptures, unlike some other unfortunate periods of history. All would be better served if non-Catholic Christians would freely acknowledge the fact.

Written by John Lee and Frank Bompas
Printed with ecclesiastical approval

Pope John Paul II Society of Evangelists
P. O. Box 5584, Bakersfield, California 93388
E-mail: info@pjpiisoe.org Phone: 661 393-3239
www.pjpiisoe.org
Pamphlet 012

The Bible or the Church: Both or Neither?

Some Christians following Martin Luther’s erroneous belief at the time of the Reformation, claim that the “Bible alone” (Latin: “*Sola Scriptura*”), is the sole source of revealed Christian truth. That is not correct.

Authentic Christian revelation has been entrusted by Christ to His Church through the process of Sacred Tradition. This does not mean “human tradition” which nullifies the Word of God (Mt 15:6-9). However, nowhere does the Bible state that it is the sole rule of faith. In fact, 1 Tim 3:15 states that the Church is “the pillar and foundation” of the truth.

Scripture Alone is Not Sufficient

2 Tim 3:17, which some Christians quote to prove the Bible as the sole rule of faith, does not say that the Bible is all we need for salvation. Although it is profitable, the text does not say that Scripture is sufficient. It says that the Bible is indeed inspired, but it does not say that **ONLY** the Bible is inspired. Also the text refers to the Old Testament.

The aid of Sacred Tradition (the Oral Word that is not in the Bible, the “written Word”) is also required. See 2 Thess 2:15.

When Paul, in writing in 2 Tim 3:15 refers to the Scriptures which Timothy was taught from infancy, he is referring to the Old Testament. A good part of the New Testament was not written when these words were written by St. Paul, and none of the New Testament books were placed in the Canon (official list) of the Bible yet.

The first official Canon of the Bible was only discerned, by St. Athanasius in his “*Festal Letter*” of 367 AD, by the bishops of the Catholic Church at a Council held probably at Rome (382 AD) under Pope Damasus, and at the 4th century

Councils of Hippo (393 AD) and Carthage (397 AD.) The Catholic Church was preaching the good news of salvation for about three centuries before it discerned from among the many manuscripts in circulation which ones were truly inspired and were to become part of what we call the New Testament. Very few people could read at that time so the Bible was not of much use to believers.

The Bible Actually Denies That it is the Sole Rule of Faith

John tells us that not everything concerning Christ's work is in Scripture (Jn 21:25). Paul writes in 2 Tim 2:2: "What you have heard from me before many witnesses, entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." Nowhere is there any mention of writing the truths down for posterity.

That is not to say that the Bible is not important. It is God's love letter, given to us by the Church. It was the 4th century biblical scholar, St. Jerome, who wrote: "Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ".

The Oral Word is Supplemented by the Written Word

The Church in the person of the Apostles was given the authority by Christ to teach (Mt 28:19). This was done by preaching – oral instruction: "See how faith comes from hearing through Christ's Word (written and oral) (Rom 10:17). It is a mistake to limit Christ's Word to the Written Word only, or to suggest that all the teachings were reduced to writing. God, through Isaiah, promised a living voice in the Church (Is 59:21): "And this Word is none other than the gospel which has been preached to you"(1 Peter 1:25).

Note the word "preached", that is, oral. It would not be "supplanted" by a written word like the Bible. Supplemented, yes, but not supplanted. The New Testament is a "reflection" of what the

Catholic Church had been teaching for the previous four centuries.

The Church is Protected by the Spirit from Error

The truths have been given primarily to the teachers of the Church (Eph 3:5), who with Christ form the foundation of the Church (Eph 2:20). The Church is guided by the Holy Spirit Who protects her teaching from corruption (Jn 14:16-17).

The "traditions" referred to by Jesus in Mt 15:3 were "human customs", as were those mentioned by Paul in Col 2:8. In Mt 15:6-9 Jesus was condemning the Pharisees who were making pretended dedication of their goods to the Temple so that they could avoid using them to support their aged parents. By doing this they dodged the commandment to "honor your father and your mother" (Ex 20:12).

Elsewhere Jesus instructed us to abide by traditions that are not contrary to God's commandments: "Do and observe what they (the Pharisees, the leaders occupying the chair of Moses) tell you, but do not imitate their (hypocritical) actions." (Mt 23:2-3). Of Sacred Tradition, Paul, in 2 Thess 3:6, tells us: "... Live according to the traditions we have passed on". Also 1 Cor 11:2: "You have done well maintaining the traditions just as I passed them on to you".

The Jews of old also believed in Sacred Tradition. There is no mention of the "chair of Moses" in the Old Testament, yet the disciples knew exactly what Jesus meant in referring to it (Mt 23:2-3). Paul is clear in 2 Thess 2:15: "So then brethren, hold on to the Traditions you have been taught, either by word of mouth or what is written".

The Magisterium (teaching authority) at the Service of the Word

The teaching authority, or "Magisterium" of the

Catholic Church is at the service of the Word of God, not above it. For "there are many things in Scripture that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures to their destruction" (2 Peter 3:16). The Book of Proverbs states: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not unto your own understanding" (Prov 3:5-6). See also Luke 10:16. In 2 Peter 1:20 we read: "... We must be most careful to remember that the interpretation of scriptural prophecy is never a matter for the individual." In Acts 8:30-31, St. Luke writes: "When Philip ran up he heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked: 'Do you understand what you are reading?' 'How can I', he replied, 'unless I have someone to guide me?'" And Neh. 8:8 has it: "And Ezra read the law of God, translating and giving the sense, so that the people understood what was read".

This has been the practice of the Catholic Church since the time of the Fathers of the Church (generations of holy men immediately following the Apostles, such as St. Clement (*third bishop of Rome after St. Peter*) (see his "Epistle to the Corinthians, 42:1-5, 80 AD).

The text from John 5:39: "Search the Scriptures" is no proof that the Bible is to be the sole rule of faith. With these words, Jesus was referring the Pharisees to the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament, pointing to Him as the Messiah.

The fact that the Bereans "welcomed the Word with all eagerness and examined the Scriptures day by day" (Acts 17:11) is no proof that all Christian truths are in the Bible. They had been taught Christianity orally in the normal way and were checking to see if its' claims matched the Old Testament prophecies. The text does not mean that early Christians were using the Bible as a checklist for Christian truths.