

She made many translations before the advent of Protestantism. In England alone between the years 700 and 1300 there were at least ten translations in whole or in part. Between 1450, the date of the invention of printing, and 1522, the date of Martin Luther's translation of the New Testament into German, there were 626 printed editions of the Bible, all Catholic, in various languages. Of this number seventeen were in German prior to Luther's, nine before Luther was born! Parts of the Bible are read daily at Mass. Priests have to read their breviaries (made up in a large part from the Bible) daily for from one to two hours. Catholics usually quote from Scripture to prove their doctrines.

Yes, indeed! Catholics are allowed and greatly encouraged to read the Bible. The Church has never prohibited the reading of the Catholic Bible, i.e., those versions in the languages, which have been approved by the bishops of the various countries and have been edited with explanatory notes by Catholic scholars.

#### **Can a person be saved without reading the Bible?**

Yes, as explained in the previous question, it took many years before the Bible was finally put together in the form that it exists today. In addition, in the 1500 years before the printing press was invented, Bibles had to be copied with pen and ink; few people could afford one, and most people could not read.

There is no evidence that Jesus ordered His Apostles to write about His life and teachings, He told us to listen to the Church, and obey her teachings, "He who hears you hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me, and he who rejects me rejects him who sent me." (Lk. 10:16).

#### **Does the Bible speak of a Church?**

Jesus left behind a visible Church with consecrated bishops, possessing authority to teach and preach a set form of doctrine, including faith, repentance, baptism and obedience to the commandments. He actually designated a "prime-minister" to this divinely instituted ecclesiastical organization — Peter, who was to preside over the other officers of the Church and to see to it that her disciplines and doctrines were faithfully obeyed.

No one should deny the chief mission of Christ was to redeem mankind. While on earth, Christ taught a set form of doctrine and founded a visible organization or church, with bishops, priests and deacons to teach and perpetuate this doctrine. It would be unreasonable to suppose Christ established his Church with a positive code of doctrines, principles and ceremonies during his

stay on earth, and then on his departure allow this organization to become corrupt or disappear.

From the Gospel of Matthew, it is evident Christ consecrated his Apostles, endowed them with the Holy Spirit and conferred upon them the power of binding and loosing from sin. Christ then sent them as his special representatives to teach and practice the doctrines they received from him, which he received from the Father (Matt. 20:22-23).

St. Paul, following the example of Christ, ordained Timothy and Titus and sent them to teach, preach and ordain other faithful men in the service of Christ (2 Tim. 1:6; 2:2 and Tit. 1:5). Here then was an organized body of men, divinely appointed and ordained to sustain the Church.

From the declarations of St. Paul and other Apostles, it is clear Christ instructed them and their successors to perpetuate this ecclesiastical organization in order that His Church might be ever visible, immutable and operative. St. Paul wrote: "All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us." (2 Cor. 5:18-20)

Christ became incarnate for the express purpose of saving mankind. He intended to accomplish this by teaching His holy truths and preserving and transmitting them to future generations through an organized Church. Christ ordained that his Church — its institutions, its popes and its authority — should exist uninterruptedly from the days of the Apostles until the end of time. John narrates the words of Christ: "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide; so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you" (John 15:16).

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Pamphlet 304

## The Bible: A Catholic Perspective

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#### **Is the Bible and the Bible alone sufficient to teach us the Gospel of Christ?**

The Catholic answer is a decisive "No!" Indeed, it is only by the divine authority of the Catholic Church that Christians know that the Scripture is the word of God and what books belong in the Bible. The Bible is not its own witness. It is like a will without a signature. It is infallible only because of and to the extent of the Church's infallible witness. Deny the Church's infallible witness, and the Bible is at once reduced to the level of ordinary literature and devoid of divine inspiration. The Catholic Church alone infallibly guarantees the authenticity of the Bible, the contents of the Canon, and the inspiration of the seventy-three books of Holy Scripture. St. Augustine, in the fifth century said, "I would not believe the Gospel unless moved thereto by the authority of the Church." The Bible, therefore, is the infallible and inspired word of God only inasmuch as the interpretation of the infallible Church makes it so.

It is important to understand that the Bible was never intended to take the place of the living, infallible teacher, the Church, but was written to explain or insist upon a teaching that had already been taught. "So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ" (Rom. 10:17) The Catholic Church, a divine, living, infallible voice, guarantees to everyone, not merely the written word, but also the unwritten teaching of Sacred Tradition.

#### **Doesn't the Bible really explain itself?**

No. The very fact that Christianity today is divided into so many sects, contradicting one another in essential things, and each claiming to draw the true meaning out of the Bible, is proof that the Bible is not always easily understood.

In reading the Bible we must be guided by the Church, its divine interpreter. Speaking of St. Paul's epistles, St. Peter says, "There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures" (2 Pet. 3:16). We see the results of the false premise of private interpretation all around us.

Thousands of denominations exist in the name of Christianity, each claiming to be guided by the Holy Spirit, yet, they are divided and contradict one another.

If the Holy Spirit guided all these groups, they would all believe as one Church. The Holy Spirit does not inspire contradictions.

**Did Jesus appoint an authority on earth to preserve and to explain with certainty the true sense of His teaching?**

Yes, Jesus established a visible Church, with St. Peter and his successors to be the teachers of the Church, whose faith would not fail, and with whom the spirit of truth would abide forever.

The New Testament witness to the Church may be summarized as follows: the Church is created by God, is the Body of Christ, Who is her Head (cf. Eph. and Col.), and is indwelt and empowered by the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:3, 22, especially 14; 2:22; 1 Cor. 3:16). Jesus entrusted His teachings to the Apostles, chosen by means of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:2), and to their successors (1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6). The Holy Spirit guides the Church (Jn. 16:13) and helps her guard the deposit of sound doctrine (2 Tim. 1:13ff.), which includes her authentic role of teaching in the name of Christ. The Church's existence is drawn from the Person of Christ (Eph. 2:16-18), is born of one baptism (Eph. 4:5), is fed with one Bread (1 Cor. 10:17) and is a single people (Gal. 3:28) for whom human division is forbidden (Eph. 2:14ff; 1 Cor. 12:13; Col. 3:11; Gal. 3:28). The Church is a gathering of sinners who are somehow being made holy and perfect because of Christ's love for her (Eph. 5:26-27).

**How do we benefit from the fact that Jesus provided an infallible teacher to explain the Bible?**

The benefit of such a teacher is that doubts are cleared up about certain texts and portions of the Bible, that all disputes, which cause sects and divisions, are finally settled and the truth and one Church are maintained. Without this infallible teacher there would be as many religions as there are opinions, life-long doubts, rejection of some parts of the Bible and an uncertainty about everything, and finally rationalism and unbelief.

**When was the Bible gathered and published in the present canon or set of books?**

For the first hundred years, at least, of its history the Church's Scriptures, in the precise sense of the word, consisted exclusively of the Old Testament. For the Church as a whole, it was a Christian book, which

spoke of the Savior on every page. Nor did this reverence for it diminish when, in the later decades of the second century, the New Testament writings won their way to recognition as inspired Scripture. Throughout the whole patristic age, as indeed in all subsequent Christian centuries, the Old Testament was accepted as the word of God, an unimpeachable sourcebook of saving doctrine. The Old Testament, which passed into the hands of Christians, was not the original Hebrew version, but the Greek translation known as the Septuagint. Begun at Alexandria, Egypt about the middle of the third century B.C., this became the Bible of the Greek-speaking Jews of the Dispersion, and most of the Scriptural quotations found in the New Testament are based upon it rather than the Hebrew. It also became the Old Testament accepted and used by the great majority of Christians.

The first writer to speak unequivocally of a "New" Testament parallel to the Old was Irenaeus. After Irenaeus' time, however, the fully scriptural character of the specifically Christian writings was universally acknowledged, and the description of them as the New Testament.

The necessity of a fixed list, or canon, of New Testament writings became obvious about the middle of the second century. It became a matter of immense concern to the Church that the New Testament, as it was coming to be called, should have the right books. The main point to be observed is that the compilation of the final list of books, and the order in which they were to be arranged, was the result of a very gradual process. While the broad outline of the canon was settled by the end of the second century, different localities continued to maintain their different traditions. Three features of this process should be noted. First, the criterion, which ultimately came to be known, was apostolicity. Unless a book could be shown to come from the pen of an apostle, or at least to have the authority of an apostle behind it, it was peremptorily rejected. Secondly, there were certain books, which hovered for a long time on the fringe of the canon, but in the end failed to be admitted, usually because they lacked this indispensable stamp. Thirdly, some of the books, which were later, included, had to wait a considerable time before achieving universal recognition.

Two documents of prime importance in the history of the canon provide us with the first formal statements of papal authority on the subject. The first is called the *Decretal of Gelasius, de recipiendis et non*

*recipiendis libris*, the essential part of which is now generally attributed to a synod convoked in Rome by Pope Damasus I in the year AD 382. The other is the Canon of Innocent I, sent in the year AD 405 to a Gallican bishop in answer to an inquiry. Both contain all the deuterocanonicals and are identical with the canon listed by the Council of Trent.

The African Church, always a staunch supporter of the contested books, found itself in agreement with Rome on this question. The Synod of Hippo (AD 393), and the third and fourth Councils of Carthage (AD 397 and 419), in which St. Augustine was the leading spirit, found it necessary to deal specifically with the question of the Canon, and drew up identical lists from which no sacred books are excluded. This list became known as the African code.

The Ecumenical Council of Second Nicea in AD 787 ratified the decision made by the Fathers at Hippo and Carthage:

"In the year 418-419, all canons formally made in sixteen councils held at Carthage, one at Melevis, one at Hippo, that were approved of, were read, and received a new sanction from a great number of bishops, then met in Synod in Carthage. This collection is the Code of the African Church, which was always in greatest repute in all Churches next after the Code of the Universal Church."

If doubts remained as to the canonical books, the Councils of Florence and Trent put them to rest. During the Council of Florence (AD 1442), and with its approval, Pope Eugenius IV issued several bulls or decrees. The Council of Trent promulgated the definitive list of Old Testament canon — the same books used by Jesus Christ and His Apostles

**Are Catholics allowed to read the Bible?**

The Bible is the best and greatest book in the world; and of all the people in the world Catholics ought to be the most diligent in their study of this Book of Books. It is the word of God and a revelation of everlasting truth and life. It is also the supreme achievement of all literature.

The Catholic Church is the greatest friend and the divine custodian of the Bible. Her first leaders wrote the New Testament. God inspiring them to do so. She spread it. She protected it from errors in copying, and from those who wished to destroy it. She preserved it unchanged.