

The Papal System – XXXVIII. The Scriptures



Catholic priests burning Bibles

Continued from [The Papal System – XXXVII. The Inquisition.](#)

The early Christians cherished the Bible next to the Saviour; and they used extreme caution to protect it from uninspired additions. Their jealousy on this account prevented them, for a considerable period, from receiving the Second Epistle of Peter, the Second and Third Epistles of John, the Epistle of Jude, the book of Revelation, and the Epistle to the Hebrews, as parts of the inspired writings. Not a few forged documents, claiming divine authority, compelled the primitive Church to be very careful about the works, regarded as the Word of Jehovah. But neither the Apocrypha of the Old Testament, nor the pretended Gospels and Epistles of the New, found a place in the Bible of the early Church.

The Sacred Canon.

Josephus gives the Old Testament books, regarded as inspired in the Saviour's day. According to his testimony they are: "The five books of Moses, which contain his laws and the traditions of the origin of mankind, till his death. This interval of time was little short of three thousand years. But as to the time from the death of Moses till the reign of Artaxerxes, King of Persia, who reigned after Xerxes, the prophets who were after Moses wrote down what was done, in their times, in thirteen books. The remaining four books contain hymns to God and precepts for the conduct of human life. It is true our history has been written since Artaxerxes very particularly, but *has not been esteemed of like authority with the former* by our forefathers, because there has not been an exact succession of prophets since that time." These are substantially the Old Testament and the apocrypha of Protestants; the former worthy of all reverence, the latter as Josephus intimates, uninspired.

Melito, Bishop of Sardis, in the second century, has the same books in his Old Testament canon, which we have, except Nehemiah, Esther, and Lamentations; the two first of which, he probably included in Ezra, and the last in Jeremiah. The catalogue of Origen is almost the same.

About the beginning of the fifth century the New Testament as it is now, and the Old, with a little hesitation about one or two apocryphal books, were received by the churches everywhere.

Scripture Circulation.

Scarcely had the Saviour entered heaven, when his disciples began the work of Scripture translation and circulation. And when we consider their limited means, and the absence of organized effort among them, their success is astonishing. In the first century the Syrian version, known as the Peshito, was made for the Jews of Palestine. About the same time a Latin translation was made for the people of Italy. And versions in the tongue of Old Rome followed each other with such rapidity that Augustine says: "Those who have translated the Bible into Greek can be numbered, but not so the Latin versions, for in the first ages of the Church whoever got hold of a Greek codex ventured to translate it into Latin, however slight his knowledge of either language."

Jerome, in the latter part of the fourth century, at the request of many prominent men, undertook to correct the most popular Latin versions of the New Testament, and to make a new translation of the Old. His work is known as the Latin Vulgate, and was made in the mother tongue of the people for whom it was intended.

A translation was made into the Coptic tongue for the people of Egypt in the third century.

A version was prepared in the fourth century, in the sacred language of the Ethiopians, called the Gees.

A Persian translation was completed about the same time.

Ulfila, after inventing the Gothic alphabet, A.D. 375, translated the Scriptures into the language of that nation.

Panteus, a distinguished Christian, on a visit to India, found disciples in that country with the gospel of Matthew in Hebrew.

The Bible was given, in their own tongue, to Georgians, in the sixth century, and to the Armenians a little later.

The early Christians, when a portion of any nation received the Gospel, immediately made a translation of the Scriptures into their language; so that the Divine Word, as early as the fourth century, was circulated through all nations, "Greek and barbarian, and studied by them as the oracles of God." No age of Bible distribution has ever exceeded the first four centuries, if it has ever equaled them, taking their disadvantages into account.

Alcuin, at the request of Charlemagne, corrected the Vulgate for use in his empire; and, by presenting him with a copy on the anniversary of his accession to the throne, A. D. 801, gave him exquisite delight.

Holy Bede translated John into English in the eighth century for the benefit

of his countrymen.

Hatred of the Bible.

Passing over centuries of gross and ever-growing darkness in the churches, East and West, when Christ was obscured by the glories of Mary, we meet another kind of Christians who dislike the Bible.

In Toulouse, the sacred writings began to enjoy some circulation and much love, in the early part of the thirteenth century. The clergy took the alarm, and, at a council held there A.D. 1229, in the fourteenth canon, they "prohibited laymen to have the books of the Old or New Testament, unless a Psalter, a *Breviary*, and a *Rosary*, and they forbade their *translation in the vulgar tongue*." Possibly, a majority of the ecclesiastics at the synod supposed that the Breviary and Rosary, as well as the Psalter, were inspired writings.

WYCLIFFE'S BIBLE.

What a change from the days of Augustine, when he importuned his friend Jerome to correct the versions in the Latin or vernacular tongue, that the people might have the whole truth as God gave it!

John Wycliffe, an English priest, gave his countrymen the Bible in their native language in A.D. 1380. His preaching and writings produced a profound sensation, and his supporters were numerous. The soldiers, the knights, the nobles, and the thinkers of the nation, who had no pecuniary interest in the corrupt state of the Church, were his sturdy friends. His Bible was productive of immediate and extensive results. Among the clergy, its appearance excited indignation. A canon of Leicester said:

"Master John Wycliffe has translated the Gospel out of Latin into English, which Christ had entrusted to the clergy and doctors of the Church, that they might minister it to the laity, and the weaker sort, according to the state of the times and the wants of men. So that by this means the Gospel is made vulgar, and laid more open to the laity, and even to women who can read, than it used to be even to the most learned of the clergy, and those of the best understanding. And what was before the chief gift of the clergy and doctors of the Church is made forever common to the laity."

In this spirit the clergy lashed the passions of the people against Wycliffe, and had not the powerful Duke of Lancaster and some influential persons protected him, he would have been slain. But after his death the Council of Constance tried and condemned him, and issued the following decree: "Wherefore, the procurator-fiscal, being urgent, and the edict having been set forth, for hearing sentence on this day, this holy synod declares, defines and records, that the same John Wycliffe was a notorious and pertinacious heretic, and that he died in heresy, by anathematizing him, and condemning his memory."

And it decrees and ordains "*that his body and bones* (if they can be

distinguished from the other bodies of the faithful) be dug up and cast away from the Church's burying place, according to the canonical and legitimate appointments." In pursuance of this decree some time after, the bones of the great translator were dug up and *publicly burned!*

The Bible of a Pope condemned.

Sixtus V., a pope of formidable powers, published a Bible in Italian with a bull in the preface recommending its general reading, and declaring the advantages which would result from its perusal. Llorente tells us that after the death of Sixtus it was solemnly condemned by the Spanish inquisition, Even his infallibility could not save it.

The Council of Trent.

This famous ecclesiastical assembly issued decrees about the materials composing the Word of God, and the manner of treating the Bible unknown to any council ever gathered in Christendom. In the Catholic Church its decisions have received a measure of reverence never accorded to the decrees of any other ecclesiastical convention. It makes the

APOCRYPHA AND ALL THE UNWRITTEN TRADITIONS OF THE CHURCH OF EQUAL AUTHORITY
WITH THE SCRIPTURES.

The following is the decree:

"The Holy Ecumenical and General Synod of Trent, lawfully assembled in the Holy Spirit, the same three legates of the Apostolical See presiding, having always in view this object, namely, that all errors being removed, there might be preserved in the Church the purity of the gospel; which was promised before by the prophets in the Holy Scriptures, but which our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, did with his own mouth first declare, and afterwards order to be preached to every creature, by his apostles, as the source of all saving truth and moral discipline, and perceiving that this truth and discipline are contained in written books and in unwritten tradition, which being received by the apostles from the mouth of Christ himself or from the Holy Spirit dictating to the apostles, has reached even to us, as though it were transmitted BY HAND, following the examples of the orthodox fathers, receives and venerates with the same affection and reverence, all the books both of the Old and of the New Testament, since one God is the author of both, and also traditions themselves relating both to faith and morals, which have been, as it were, orally declared either by Christ or by the Holy Spirit, and preserved by continual succession in the Catholic Church. It has thought fit, moreover, to annex to this decree a list of the sacred books, that no doubt may occur to any one as to what are received by the synod. They are the underwritten: of the Old Testament, five of Moses, to wit, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy; Joshua, Judges, Ruth, four of Kings, two of Chronicles, the first of Ezra, and the second, which is called Nehemiah, Tobit, Judith, Esther, Job, the Psalter of David of a hundred and fifty psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Wisdom, Ecclesiastes, Isaiah,

Jeremiah, with Baruch, Ezekiel, Daniel, twelve lesser prophets, to wit, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habbakuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zachariah, Malachi, two of Maccabees, the first and second."

The Catholic canon for the New Testament is the same as our own.

"But if any one shall not receive these books entire, with all their parts, as they are wont to be read in the Catholic Church, and in the old Latin vulgate edition, for sacred and canonical, and shall *knowingly and intentionally despise the traditions aforesaid; let him be accursed.*"

Such is the revelation recognized by the Roman Church: The Holy Scriptures; and the apocryphal books bridging the chasm between the New and Old Testaments, not regarded as of divine authority by Josephus, the Jews, the Saviour, or the early Christians, a batch of writings supposed to have been put in the sacred canon at Trent to give Catholics something like scriptural authority for making prayers and offerings for the dead. When Judas Maccabeus, the celebrated Jewish captain, came to bury some of his own men, who had fallen in battle, he found under their coats things consecrated to idols, and he "made a gathering throughout the company amounting to the sum of two thousand drachms of silver, and he sent it to Jerusalem to offer up a sin-offering, doing therein very well and honestly in that he was mindful of the resurrection; for if he had not hoped that they that were slain would have risen again, it had been superfluous and *vain to pray for the dead*. Wherefore he made a *reconciliation for the dead that they might be delivered from sin.*" 2 Maccab. xii. 43-45.

Here is purgatory, and here are prayers and masses for the dead. Little wonder that "some in the Council of Trent said, that *tradition was the only foundation of the Catholic doctrine,*" for it or any other folly can be found in tradition. But no doctrine in which Catholics differ from Evangelical Protestants can be found in the Bible. And not only is the Apocrypha placed on the same footing as the Bible, but every tradition supposed to have been handed down from the Saviour or his apostles is placed on the same basis.

We would not believe an "unwritten tradition " that pretended to come down from Cicero, Horace, or Sallust. The changes which any statement must undergo, in passing through many hundreds of men, running over eighteen centuries, without a well known record to correct and protect it, are immense. Any statement resting upon such a basis is destitute of the faintest claim upon human credulity.

The Vulgate the only recognized Bible of the Catholic Church.

The decree of the Council of Trent is: "Moreover the same Holy Synod decrees and declares, that this same Old Vulgate edition which has stood the test of so many ages' use in the Church, in public readings, disputings, preachings and expoundings, *be deemed authentic, and that no one on any pretense dare or presume to reject it.*"

When the Council of Trent authenticated the Vulgate it was full of errors.

Neglected for centuries; handed down by ignorant copyists, its mistakes were so numerous and glaring that the council itself, immediately after recognizing its paramount claims, appointed a committee of six to correct it; and it urged them to hasten the work that it might be completed before the synod adjourned.

By "authentic" the fathers of Trent understood that the Vulgate was the only Bible which the Church solemnly recognized as the Word of God. And since the decree of Trent the Romish denomination has had no Bible but the Vulgate; translations in modern languages may receive the approval of individual bishops, but they are destitute of *Church authority*. Even the Vatican codex, confessedly the most valuable copy of the Scriptures in existence, has no ecclesiastical recognition in the Catholic communion,

The Church of the Popes prohibits private Judgment, and settles the Meaning of every Scripture for all Men.

The decision of the Council of Trent is:

"And also for the restraint of wanton wits, it decrees that in matters of faith and morals pertaining to the edifying of Christian doctrine, no one relying on his own prudence shall dare to interpret the Holy Scripture, twisting it to his own meaning against the sense which has been and is held by Holy Mother Church, to whom it belongs to judge concerning the true sense and interpretation of Scripture, nor against the unanimous consent of the fathers, even though such interpretations should never be published. Let those who shall act contrary to this decree be denounced by the ordinaries, and punished with the penalties rightly appointed."

Truly here is comfort. The whole Christian world, in Bible reading, are to be bound in soul, in every faculty, and must take Rome's interpretations of all Scripture, or the dreamy contradictions and absurd follies of the fathers. No man on the Bible must exercise his reason.

Even a Catholic Bible in the Vulgate Tongue is prohibited without a Special License.

A large committee of the Council of Trent composed ten "Rules for prohibited Books." These laws were confirmed by Pius IV., March 24th, 1564, and from them the infamous Index Expurgatorius derived its authoritative existence. The fourth rule is:

"Since it is clear from experience, that if the holy Scriptures are everywhere *indiscriminately permitted in the vulgar tongue, more detriment than profit arises therefrom* by reason of the rashness of men. In this matter let it be at the option of the bishop or inquisitor, so that with the advice of the parish priest, or the confessor, they can permit to them the reading of books translated by Catholic authors in the vulgar tongue, even to such persons, as in their judgment would incur no loss, but obtain an increase of faith and piety from this kind of reading, which power they may have with respect to the Scriptures.

But whosoever shall presume to keep or read them without such power, let him not be able to obtain the absolution of his sins until the books are returned to the ordinary. But the booksellers who shall sell the Bible, written in the vulgar tongue, to any one not having the aforesaid power, or who shall grant it in any other way, shall forfeit the price of the books that it may be converted by the bishop to pious uses; and they shall be subject to other punishments at the discretion of the same bishop, according to the character of the crime. But regulars may not read or buy them unless they have obtained authority from those placed over them."

Richard of Mans declared in the Council of Trent,

"that the doctrines of faith were now so cleared, that we ought no more to learn them out of Scripture, which, it is true, was read heretofore in the Church for the instruction of the people, whereas, now it is read in the Church only to pray, and ought to serve every one for this end only, and not to study. But at the least, the study of it should be prohibited to every one that is not first confirmed in school divinity."

One sometimes is inclined, when he examines such a decree, and such a saying, to ask: *Are these the utterances of the Prince of Darkness and his spirit friends, or the decisions of a conclave of infidels?* No doctrines more offensive to God could be broached in any quarter of the universe, however famed for the antiquity of its rebellion.

The Bible in a *Catholic translation* is a Protestant and dangerous book in the hands of a Romanist, and the holy father and his shrewd friends must guard the papal sheep against such a book at all hazards. — Neither layman nor ecclesiastic in the Church of the Fisherman can be safely entrusted with a book intended for the perusal of the world; the first part of which was written in Hebrew, the vernacular of the Jewish people when the Spirit gave it; and the second in Greek, a language understood in Palestine, Syria, Italy and Greece, when it was penned; at the time the most extensively spoken language among the tongues of our race.

A few years since, Mr. Seymour, an English clergyman, the author of the well-known work, *"Mornings among the Jesuits at Rome,"* sought to purchase a Bible in the Eternal City. For this purpose he visited the book-shop belonging to the Propaganda Fide, the great missionary society of the Catholic Church; then he went to that patronized by the pope; to that connected with the Collegio Romano, and sustained by the order of Jesuits; to that established for the English and other foreigners; to those who sold old and second-hand books; to every bookselling establishment in Rome; and "I found," says he, "that the Holy Scriptures were not for sale. And when I asked each bookseller the reason why he had not such an important volume, the answer was: 'It is prohibited.'"

The only Bible he could find in Rome was Martini's, in twenty-four volumes, at a cost of four pounds, or twenty dollars.

Before the Commissioners of Education appointed by the Government for

Ireland, it was stated in evidence, that of the four hundred students for the priesthood, attending Maynooth College, only ten had Bibles or Testaments, while everyone had a copy of the works of the Jesuits Bailey and Delahogue.

What a strange sight the Church of Christ presents, in banishing the Bible from her schools, colleges, and churches! This is not the Church of Jerome, who spent so much time and toil in perfecting and translating a Bible in the vulgar tongue. *Nor of the early fathers, who made translations for every country where the gospel was received.* The Church of the Bible-haters, which has burned Bibles and those who translated them, and myriads who read them, had no representatives in Christ's day, nor for centuries afterward.

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