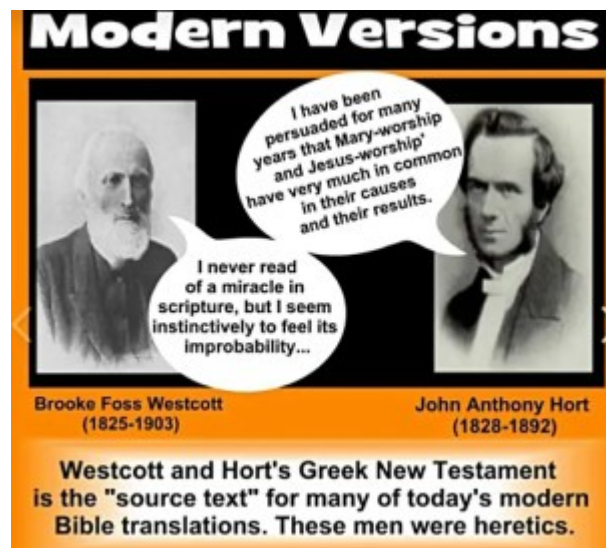


The Modern Versions – Origins and Influences



The 1881 committee that produced the Revised Version, the mother of the majority of today's modern versions, was unimpressed with the weight of the evidence supporting the Received Text, which had been used for English translations by William Tyndale, John Rogers, and Miles Coverdale, as well as later by the 1611 translators.

Roman Catholicism By Lorraine Boettner

Chapter IV Tradition



This is the continuation of the [previous chapter of Roman Catholicism](#) by Lorraine Boettner.

1 What Tradition Is

Protestantism and Roman Catholicism agree that the Bible is the inspired Word of God. But they differ widely in regard to the place that it is to have in the life of the church. Protestantism holds that the Bible alone is the authoritative and sufficient rule of faith and practice. But Romanism holds that the Bible must be supplemented by a great body of tradition consisting

of 14 or 15 apocryphal books or portions of books equivalent to about two thirds the volume of the New Testament, the voluminous writings of the Greek and Latin church fathers, and a huge collection of church council pronouncements and papal decrees as of equal value and authority—a veritable library in itself.

It is very evident that this difference of opinion concerning the authoritative basis of the church is bound to have radical and far-reaching effects. The age-long controversy between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism comes to a head regarding the question of authority. Right here, we believe, *is the basic difference between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism*. And, we may add, we believe that in its use of tradition is to be found the Achilles' heel of Roman Catholicism. For it is in this that Romanism finds the authority for its distinctive doctrines.

Every religious movement that develops some unity, and continues to live, has its traditions. These traditions gather up the beliefs, thinking, practices, and rules of the group, particularly as these are expressed in its doctrinal standards and forms of government. In this manner the movement gives stability to and regulates its own manner of life, and hands that stability and manner of life on to the next generation.

We do not reject all tradition, but rather make judicious use of it insofar as it accords with Scripture and is founded on truth. We should, for instance, treat with respect and study with care the confessions and council pronouncements of the various churches, particularly those of the ancient church and of Reformation days. We should also give careful attention to the confessions and council decisions of the present day churches, scrutinizing most carefully of course those of the denomination to which we belong. But we do not give any church the right to formulate new doctrine or to make decisions contrary to the teaching of Scripture. The history of the church at large shows all too clearly that church leaders and church councils can and do make mistakes, some of them serious. Consequently their decisions should have no authority except as they are based on Scripture.

Protestants differ from Roman Catholics in that they keep these standards strictly subordinate to Scripture, and in that they are ever ready to re-examine them for that purpose. In other words they insist that, in the life of the church, Scripture is primary, and the denominational standards are subordinate or secondary. They thus use their traditions with one controlling caution—they continually ask if this or that aspect of their belief and practice is true to the Bible. They subject every statement of tradition to that test, and they are willing to change any element that fails to meet that test.

In contrast with this, Roman Catholics hold that there are two sources of authority—Scripture, and developing tradition, with the church being the judge of Scripture and therefore able to say authoritatively what the right interpretation of Scripture is. This, in effect, gives three authorities—the Bible, tradition, and the church. The primacy is in the hands of the church since it controls both tradition and the interpretation of Scripture. This, therefore, is the basis on which the Roman system rests. If this can be shown

to be erroneous, it will be seen that the whole system rests on a false basis.

As Roman Catholicism works out in actual practice, the traditions of the church at any time are what the church says they are, Scripture means what the church says it means, and the people are permitted to read the Bible only in an approved version and within the limits of a predetermined interpretation. But when the Christian message is thus shackled by tradition and ecclesiastically dictated interpretation, it ceases to be the free grace of God offered to repentant sinners, and becomes an instrument in the hands of the clergy for the control of the people. In professing to interpret the Bible in the light of tradition, the Roman Church in reality places tradition above the Bible, so that the Roman Catholic is governed, not by the Bible, nor by the Bible and tradition, but by the church itself, which sets up the tradition and says what it means. Theoretically, the Roman Church accepts the Bible, but in practice she does not leave her members free to follow it. The errors that are found in her traditions obscure and nullify much of the truth that she professes to hold. To cite but one example of what this means in actual practice, while the Roman Catholic Church, in professing allegiance to the Bible, must agree with the Protestant churches that there is "one mediator also between God and men, himself man, Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2.5), she introduces a host of other mediators—the Virgin Mary, the priests, and hundreds of saints and angels—which effectively sets aside the truth contained in the Scripture statement.

2 How Tradition Nullifies the Word of God

We give credit to Rome for this: she professes to hold that the Bible is the Word of God. She repudiates and denounces modernism, which in reality is a more or less consistent denial of the supernatural throughout the Christian system and which unfortunately has come to have a strong influence in some Protestant churches. Modernists seek to reduce some of the historical accounts of the Bible, as for example those of the creation of man and of the fall, to mere myths or legends. Also, modernists usually say that the Bible contains the Word of God, but deny that it is in all its parts actually the Word of God.

But having said that, we must point out how Rome also nullifies or destroys the Word. She maintains that alongside of the written Word there is also an unwritten Word, an oral tradition, which was taught by Christ and the apostles but which is not in the Bible, which rather was handed down generation after generation by word of mouth. This unwritten Word of God, it is said, comes to expression in the pronouncements of the church councils and in papal decrees. It takes precedence over the written Word and interprets it. The pope, as God's personal representative on the earth, can legislate for things additional to the Bible as new situations arise.

The Council of Trent, the most authoritative of all Roman councils and the one of greatest historical importance, in the year 1546, declared that the Word of God is contained both in the Bible and in tradition, that the two are of equal authority, and that it is the duty of every Christian to accord them equal veneration and respect. Thus, while modernism takes away from the Word

of God, Romanism adds to it. Both are in error, and each would seem to be about equally bad. It would be hard to say which has done more to undermine true religion.

The untrustworthiness of oral tradition, however, is apparent for several reasons. In the first place, the early Christians, who were closest to Christ and the apostles, and whose testimony therefore would have been most valuable, wrote but very little because of the persecutions to which they were exposed. And what is found in the writings of the second and third centuries has but little reference to the doctrines which at present are in dispute between Protestants and Roman Catholics. Tradition, therefore, for hundreds of years allegedly was transmitted by mere report. And it is this which Rome receives as of equal authority with the written Word. But so unreliable is report that it has become a proverb that "a story never loses in its carriage." In other words, a story seldom retains its original character without addition and exaggeration. Fortunately, we have a remarkable instance in the New Testament itself in which report or tradition circulated a falsehood, showing how easily oral tradition can become corrupted, how in a particular instance it did become corrupted even in the apostolic age. In John 21:21-23 we read: "Peter therefore seeing him (John) saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me. This saying therefore went forth among the brethren, that that disciple should not die: yet Jesus said not unto him, that he should not die; but, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" Surely we cannot build a church on such an insecure foundation as oral tradition!

Furthermore, that the body of tradition is not of divine origin nor apostolic is proved by the fact that some traditions contradict others. The church fathers repeatedly contradict one another. When a Roman Catholic priest is ordained, he solemnly vows to interpret the Scriptures only according to "the unanimous consent of the fathers." But such "unanimous consent" is purely a myth. The fact is they scarcely agree on any doctrine. They contradict each other, and even contradict themselves as they change their minds and affirm what they previously had denied. Augustine, the greatest of the fathers, in his later life wrote a special book in which he set forth his Retractions. Some of the fathers of the second century held that Christ would return shortly and that He would reign personally in Jerusalem for a thousand years. But two of the best known scholars of the early church, Origen (185-254), and Augustine (354-430), wrote against that view. The early fathers condemned the use of images in worship, while later ones approved such use. The early fathers almost unanimously advocated the reading and free use of the Scriptures, while the later ones restricted such reading and use. Gregory the Great, bishop of Rome and the greatest of the early bishops, denounced the assumption of the title of Universal Bishop as anti-Christian. But later popes even to the present day have been very insistent on using that and similar titles which assert universal authority. Where, then, is the universal tradition and unanimous consent of the fathers to papal doctrine?

The men who wrote the books of the Bible were inspired by the Holy Spirit and so were preserved from error. But the traditions of the church fathers, the

church councils, and the popes are of a lower order and contain many errors and contradictions.

Bellarmino (1542-1621), a Jesuit and a noted Roman Catholic writer, divides tradition into three classes—divine, apostolic, and ecclesiastical. Divine traditions are those which it is alleged Christ Himself taught or ordained, which were not written but were handed down generation after generation by word of mouth. Apostolic traditions are those which were taught by the apostles but not written. And ecclesiastical traditions are those council pronouncements and papal decrees which have accumulated through the centuries. We insist, however, that it would have been utterly impossible for those traditions to have been handed down with accuracy generation after generation by word of mouth and in an atmosphere dark with superstition and immorality such as characterized the entire church, laity and priesthood alike, through long periods of its history. And we assert that there is no proof whatever that they were so transmitted. Clearly the bulk of those traditions originated with the monks during the Middle Ages.

When the leaders of the Reformation appealed to Scripture and thundered against the errors of the Roman Church, that church had to defend herself. And since she could not do so from the Bible alone, she resorted to these other writings. The result is that the most prominent doctrines and practices of the Roman Church, such as purgatory, the priesthood, the mass, transubstantiation, prayers for the dead, indulgences, penance, worship of the Virgin Mary, the use of images in worship, holy water, rosary beads, celibacy of priests and nuns, the papacy itself, and numerous others, are founded solely on tradition.

It is on such a basis as this that the Roman Church seeks to establish herself as "the only true church." But when the Roman Catholic layman searches his Bible for confirmation of the distinctive doctrines of his church, he finds either absolute silence or a distinct negative. The Bible, for instance, has nothing to say about the pope or the papacy as an institution, and it is emphatic and uncompromising in its commands against the use of images or idols in worship. It is natural that the Roman Church does not want to give up tradition. It cannot. If it were to give up tradition the whole system would fall to the ground, so much of its doctrine and practice has no other foundation.

Technically, the Roman Church does not claim that the pope receives new revelations or that he is inspired by the Holy Spirit as were the prophets and apostles when they wrote Scripture. In fact it denies that it formulates any new doctrines at all. Rather it insists that in *ex cathedra* pronouncements the Holy Spirit enables the pope to draw out and proclaim what belonged to the original revelation. But it does claim a divine presence of the Holy Spirit in the giving of *ex cathedra* pronouncements and in the formulation of traditions—which we would say is precisely the same in principle as claiming inspiration. At any rate, by this device it professes to maintain the unchangeability of the church while in reality it adds new doctrines.

It is obvious how inaccessible the Roman rule of faith is. No priest has the

rule of his faith, which he vows to accept at ordination, unless he has all these numerous and ponderous volumes. No one could possibly master such a mass of materials, even if they contained no contradictions. And such a rule of faith is utterly beyond the reach of the laity.

3 The Apocrypha

The 14 or 15 books that the Roman Catholic Church adds to the Bible and pronounces equally inspired and authoritative are known as the Apocrypha. These are printed as a part of the Bible and must be accepted by all Roman Catholics as genuine under penalty of mortal sin.

The word Apocrypha is from the Greek *apokrupha*, meaning hidden things, and is used by ecclesiastical writers for matters which are (1) secret or mysterious; or (2) unknown in origin, forged, or spurious; or (3) unrecognized or uncanonical. It is primarily in the sense of spurious or uncanonical that we use the term. The books had this name before they were officially approved by the Council of Trent, and so it is not a name given them by Protestants. They are listed as follows:

1. The First Book of Esdras
2. The Second Book of Esdras
3. Tobit
4. Judith
5. The additions to the book of Esther
6. The Wisdom of Solomon
7. Ecclesiasticus, or the Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach
8. Baruch
9. The Letter of Jeremiah
10. The Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men
11. Susanna
12. Bell and the Dragon
13. The Prayer of Manasseh
14. The First Book of Maccabees
15. The Second Book of Maccabees

Of these only the First and Second Books of Esdras (the latter of which contains an emphatic denial of the value of prayers for the dead, 7:105), and The Prayer of Azariah, were not officially accepted at the Council of Trent. The books accepted add a volume of literature about two thirds the size of the New Testament, or if the entire 15 be included, about 84 percent of the size of the New Testament. By way of comparison, a word count of the Old Testament in the King James Version shows a total of 592,439 words, the New Testament 181,253 words, and the Apocrypha 152,185 words. And since the Apocryphal books are pre-Christian, having been written between the close of the Old Testament and the coming of Christ, the effect of such an addition is to give greater prominence to the Old Testament and therefore to Jewish life and thought, and to decrease relatively the importance of the New Testament.

The Hebrew Old Testament was completed some four hundred years before the time of Christ. In the second century B.C., a Greek translation by Hebrew scholars was made in Alexandria, Egypt, and was called the Septuagint because

the translators numbered 70. There developed an important difference, however, between the Greek translation and the Hebrew canon since the Septuagint contained a dozen or more Apocryphal books interspersed among the books of the Hebrew Bible. But not all copies contained the same books—suggesting that there was no general agreement among the translators as to which of these additional books were authoritative.

The Septuagint translation came into general use in Palestine, and that was the popular version at the time of Christ. But the Palestinian Jews never accepted the Apocryphal additions. And Protestants accept only the 39 books of the Old Testament that were in the Hebrew Bible at the time of Christ.

There is no record that Christ or any of the apostles ever quoted from the Apocryphal books or that they made any reference to them, although they undoubtedly knew of them. There are in the New Testament about 290 direct quotations from and about 370 allusions to passages in the Old Testament; yet among all of those there is not a single reference either by Christ or any of the apostles to the Apocryphal writings. They quote from every major book of the Old Testament and from all but four of the smaller ones. They thus set their stamp of approval upon the Jewish Old Testament. Christ quoted it as authoritative, and said, "The Scriptures cannot be broken" (John 10:35). But the reason that neither He nor the apostles ever once referred to the Apocryphal books is obvious. They did not regard those books as Scripture, and they did not intend that legendary books should become a part of the Bible. Romanists sometimes charge Protestants with having "cut those books out of the Bible." But the record makes it clear that if anyone cut them out, it was Christ Himself.

This is all the more significant when we remember that the language commonly spoken in Palestine in the days of Christ was not Hebrew, but Aramaic, that Greek was one of the spoken languages of Palestine at that time, that bilingual Christians who spoke both Aramaic and Greek probably were in the church from the first, and that Christ Himself probably could speak Greek as well as Aramaic. Furthermore, the New Testament books were written in Greek, and in those books we find that while some of the quotations were from the Old Testament reflecting the direct use of the Hebrew, the prevailing practice was to quote from the Greek of the Septuagint. Hence the writers undoubtedly were familiar with the Apocryphal books and undoubtedly would have made some quotations from them if they had been regarded as Scripture.

So, we find that at the time of Christ there were two versions of the Old Testament current in Palestine, the more liberal Alexandrian Septuagint, including the Apocryphal books, in Greek, and the more conservative Hebrew version which included only the canonical books of the Jews, and that the Roman Catholic Bible follows the Alexandrian while the Protestant Bible follows the Hebrew version.

The loose talk of some Roman Catholic writers about the "Greek Bible," the form of the Septuagint that originated in Alexandria, Egypt, being the Bible of the early church, is no credit to scholarship for it ignores the most important point of all, namely, that so far as the evidence goes, Jesus and the New Testament writers did not consider the Apocryphal books canonical but

instead accepted the Palestinian version of the Old Testament.

Furthermore, Josephus, the noted Jewish historian, about A.D. 90, gave a list of the books of the Jewish law and prophets, but he did not include the Apocryphal books. Other Jewish sources support Josephus. The Apocrypha was rejected by Origen, who is generally acknowledged to have been the most learned man in the church before Augustine, by Tertullian, an outstanding scholar in the early third century, by Athanasius, the champion of orthodoxy at the Council of Nicaea and by Jerome, the translator of the Latin Vulgate which became the authorized Roman Catholic Bible.

Jerome declared emphatically that the Apocrypha was no part of the Old Testament Scriptures. However, against his wishes and his better judgment, he allowed himself to be persuaded by two of his bishop friends who admired the books of Tobit and Judith to make a hurried translation of those. He is said to have translated the former at one sitting, and neither of them received the careful attention that had been given to the books which he considered canonical. But it is unfortunate that he did make the translations, for they were later bound up with his Vulgate, and served to encourage the addition of other Apocryphal books. Augustine alone of the prominent scholars in the early church was willing to give the Apocrypha a place in the Bible, but it is not certain that he considered it authoritative in all cases. Yet in spite of all of these things, the 53 bishops of the Council of Trent, in the year 1546, pronounced the Apocryphal books canonical and deserving "equal veneration" with the books of the Bible.

Even within the Roman Church, opinion regarding the canonicity of the Apocrypha has been divided. We have pointed out that Jerome categorically denied that it formed any part of the inspired Scriptures. Cardinal Cajetan, Luther's opponent at Augsburg in 1518, in his Commentary on all the Authentic Historical Books of the Old Testament, which he dedicated in 1532 to pope Clement VII, approved the Hebrew canon as over against the Alexandrian. And within the Council of Trent itself several of its members were opposed to the inclusion of these books in the Bible. Thus, even within the papacy, the Apocrypha was not considered canonical until the Council of Trent added it to the Old Testament and pronounced it so—nearly 2,000 years after the Old Testament was completed and closed.

Dr. Harris writing on this subject says:

"Pope Gregory the Great declared that First Maccabees, an Apocryphal book, is not canonical. Cardinal Zomenes, in his Polyglot Bible just before the Council of Trent, excluded the Apocrypha and his work was approved by pope Leo X. Could these popes have been mistaken or not? If they were correct, the decision of the Council of Trent was wrong. If they were wrong where is a pope's infallibility as a teacher of doctrine?" (*Fundamental Protestant Doctrines*, I, p. 4).

The real reason for the addition of the Apocryphal books to the Bible by the Roman Church, as we have said, is to be found in connection with events at the time of the Reformation. The Reformers vigorously attacked doctrines which they regarded as unscriptural. The doctrine of purgatory in particular

was in need of defense, and the Roman scholars thought they found support in 2 Maccabees 12:40-45, which tells of the work of Judas Maccabeus, who after a battle sent money to Jerusalem to offer a sacrifice for soldiers who had died while guilty of the sin of idolatry. But, as we shall show when we discuss the doctrine of purgatory, this passage really does not support the Roman Catholic position at all. For idolatry is a mortal sin, and according to Roman Catholic doctrine, those dying in mortal sin go directly to hell. Only those who are guilty of venial sin go to purgatory and so only they can be helped by masses and prayers. This again illustrates the desperate nature of the search for support of the distinctive Roman Catholic doctrines.

4 The Nature of the Apocryphal Books

What, then, is the nature of these books that have caused so much dispute? In the first place they are useful in giving a history of Judaism as it existed between the close of the Old Testament and the opening of the New Testament, and in that regard they are on a par with the writings of Josephus and Philo and other authors of the time. They do not give a continuous history, but particularly in 1 and 2 Maccabees they narrate important phases of Jewish history. Most of the books, however, must be classed as religious novels, pious fiction, abounding in repetitions and trivial details which are of little interest to the average reader. They contain doctrines that are unscriptural, and stories that are fantastic and incredible. The colorful tale of Tobit, for instance, is clearly fictitious, written by a pious Jew about 190-170 B.C., and intended to provide religious and moral instruction in the form of an adventure story. Judith, another popular story, is also clearly fictitious. Ecclesiasticus has historical value in that it pictures many aspects of the Judaism of Palestine during the second century B.C.

But none of the writers claim inspiration for their works, and some explicitly disclaim it (Prologue to Ecclesiasticus; 1 Maccabees 4:46, 9:27; 2 Maccabees 2:23, 15:38). They add nothing essential either to the record of God's dealings with His people Israel as recorded in the Old Testament, or to the Christian Gospel as recorded in the New Testament.

Some examples of the numerous errors in these books are: Judith, chapter 1, vv. 1-7, calls Nebuchadnezzar king of the Assyrians and declares that he reigned in Nineveh. But we know that he was king of Babylon (Daniel 4:4-6,30). In Tobit an angel is represented as telling a lie, claiming that he is Azarius, the son of Ananias. But an angel is a created spirit and cannot be the son of any human being. The book of Baruch purports to have been written by a man of that name who was secretary to Jeremiah (1:1). But he quotes from Daniel, and the book of Daniel was not written until long after the time of Jeremiah, for Jeremiah wrote at the beginning of the 70-year captivity and Daniel at its close.

In answer to the question as to why these books were never accepted by the Jews as canonical, Dr. Edward J. Young, Professor of Old Testament in Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, says:

"The answer must be that these books were never regarded as divinely inspired. ... Both Judith and Tobit contain historical, chronological and

geographical errors. The books justify falsehood and deception and make salvation to depend upon works of merit. Almsgiving, for example, is said to deliver from death (Tobit 12:9, 4:10, 14:10-11).

"Judith lives a life of falsehood and deception in which she is represented as assisted by God (9:10,13). Ecclesiasticus and the Wisdom of Solomon inculcate a morality based on expediency. Wisdom teaches the creation of the world out of pre-existent matter (7:17). Ecclesiasticus teaches that giving of alms makes atonement for sin (3:3), and in 1 Maccabees there are historical and geographical errors. This is not to deny many fine and commendable things in the Apocrypha, but the books nevertheless show themselves at points to be at variance with divinely revealed truth. They were consequently never adopted by the Jews as canonical" (*Revelation and the Bible*, p. 167).

Dr. Allan MacRae, Professor of Old Testament in Faith Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, says:

"The so-called Apocryphal books of the Old Testament are books written by godly Jews and containing only their fallible human ideas. They are in no sense the Word of God, nor can they ever become the Word of God. The Jews did not consider these books as part of the Word of God. Jesus Christ did not set His seal upon them as He did upon the actual books of the Old Testament. They are never quoted in the New Testament. There is no evidence that any of the apostles ever considered any of the books as, in any sense, a part of the Word of God.

"It is true that many people in the Middle Ages became confused and thought that some of these books were part of the Word of God. This is because they were included in copies of the Vulgate. However, the man who translated the Vulgate into Latin from the original Hebrew never intended that they should be so included. St. Jerome, the learned translator of the Vulgate, wrote an introduction in which he strongly and clearly expressed his belief that only the books that are today included in our Old Testament belonged in the Bible, and that the so-called Apocrypha are in no sense a portion of God's Word."

The Westminster Confession of Faith, which presents the views of the Presbyterian and Reformed churches, in a statement not designed to forbid reading of the books of the Apocrypha, but to differentiate between their proper and improper use, says:

"The books commonly called Apocryphal, not being of divine inspiration, are no part of the Canon of Scripture; and therefore are of no authority in the Church of God, nor to be otherwise approved, or made use of, than other human writings" (Ch. 1, sec. 3).

The Lutheran Church in Germany made no official pronouncement regarding the Apocrypha, but in the Bible prepared by Martin Luther, which for centuries remained the standard Bible of the Lutheran churches at home and abroad, it was included but was printed at the end of the Old Testament and in smaller print, which was generally understood to mean that it was considered as of secondary importance as compared with the Old and New Testament.

The Church of England and the Episcopal Church in the United States do not accept the Apocrypha as fully canonical, but they do include some readings from those books in their church manual—which indicates that they assign

those readings a position higher than they give to the good writings of outstanding church leaders and near equal authority with the Old and New Testament. The sixth of the Thirty-nine Articles calls the Apocryphal treatises books which "the Church doth read for example of life and instruction of manners; but yet doth it not apply them to establish any doctrine."

The position of the Eastern Orthodox Church is not clear. It has debated the issue through its long history, but has made no final decision. In practice it has tended to accept the Apocrypha as authoritative, but it has not subjected itself to the rigid ecclesiastical control of doctrine as has the Roman Church, and the result is that some church fathers and theologians quote it authoritatively while others reject it. The Septuagint version of the Old Testament is still in use in the Eastern Orthodox Church.

The British and Foreign Bible Society, in 1827, ruled against including the Apocrypha in its Bibles, and the American Bible Society has followed that example. Nearly all Protestant churches today oppose the use of the Apocrypha.

There were also a considerable number of New Testament Apocryphal books which at times circulated among the Jews or the Christians or both. These were written during the period from the second to the eighth century, and were designed primarily to supplement, or in some instances to correct, the canonical books. Dr. Bruce M. Metzger, Professor of New Testament in Princeton Theological Seminary, says concerning these books:

"Because the four Gospels say little of Jesus' infancy, childhood, and early manhood, and are silent altogether regarding His experiences during the three days in the tomb, several Apocryphal gospels were produced to satisfy the pious curiosity of Christians regarding these two periods of Jesus' life. ... Still other gospels were written to support heretical doctrines, such as Docetism (the view that Jesus only seemed to be human) in the Gospel of the Egyptians, or to minimize the guilt of Pilate, such as the Gospel according to Peter and the Gospel of Nicodemus. ...

"The most cogent proof that these books are intrinsically on a different plane from the books of the New Testament is afforded by reading them side by side with the books of the New Testament and allowing each to make its own impression. Then, in the words of M. R. James, 'it will very quickly be seen that there is no question of anyone's having excluded them from the New Testament: they have done that for themselves.' ... The authors did not hesitate to elaborate marvelous tales, and, in the credulous temper of that age, almost anything was believed" (Introduction to the Apocrypha, pp. 249-250, 262- 263).

Some of the New Testament Apocryphal or pseudonymous books were: The General Epistle of Barnabas, First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians, Second Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians, Apostolic Constitutions, First Book of Hermas, Second Book of Hermas, Third Book of Hermas, various epistles of Ignatius, the Gospel of the Infancy of the Savior, a mutilated and altered Gospel of John, and the Gospel of the Nativity of Mary.

These spurious writings, however, were never included in the Roman Catholic Bible. The Council of Trent evidently selected only books that would help them in their controversy with the Reformers, and none of these gave promise of doing that. Furthermore, these books are important, not as a reliable source of historical information about the age with which they purport to deal (that is, the first centuries of the Christian era), but because of what they reveal about the age in which they were produced, showing something of the legend, folklore, ignorance, and superstition so prevalent in that age in which many of the distinctive doctrines of the Roman Church have their roots. That such tales could have been believed shows the depth of the ignorance and superstition to which the people were accustomed.

5 The Vulgate and Modern Translations

The official Bible of the Roman Catholic Church is the Latin translation of Jerome, called the *Vulgate* (meaning "common"). Jerome was commissioned by Bishop Damasus near the close of the fourth century to prepare a standard Latin version of the Bible, and his purpose was to put the Bible into the common language of the people in accurate, readable form. Had the Roman Catholic Church continued to promote the study of the Bible by the common people how different might have the course of church and world history! But unfortunately that course was reversed by later popes, the Bible was withheld from the people, and to a large extent even from the priests. Only in recent years has Rome given the Bible to the people in some countries, and then mostly because of Protestant pressure.

The church historian, A. M. Renwick, of Edinburgh, Scotland, in his book, *The Story of the Church*, says: "Jerome (340-420), one of the most interesting and picturesque figures in church history, was born in northern Dalmatia (now Yugoslavia). He produced the Latin Vulgate Version of the Bible, which, even today, is the only version recognized as authentic by the Roman Church. ... He spent thirty-four years at Bethlehem, where he lived mostly in a cave as a hermit and carried out his immense literary and scholarly labors" (p. 5).

The Roman Church seems to hold the Latin Vulgate translation of about A.D. 400, to be infallible. The Council of Trent decreed: "If any one receive not, as sacred and canonical, the said books entire with all their parts... as they are contained in the Old Latin Vulgate edition... let him be anathema!" The Vatican Council of 1870 (the council that set forth the doctrine of the infallibility of the pope) reaffirmed the declaration of the Council of Trent that "these books of the Old Testament and New Testament are to be received as sacred and canonical, in their integrity, with all their parts, as they are enumerated in the decree of the said council, and are contained in the ancient Latin edition of the Vulgate," adding that "they contain revelation, with no admixture of error" (Chapter II).

In the year 1590 Sixtus V issued an edition of the Vulgate which he declared to be final, and prohibited under an anathema the publication of any new editions thereafter unless they should be exactly like that one. However, he died soon after, and scholars found numerous errors in his edition. Two years later a new edition was published under Pope Clement VIII, and that is the one in general use today. Clearly Sixtus V was in error—another example of

the absurdity of that doctrine which holds that the pope is infallible in matters of faith and morals. This doctrine of the authority or infallibility of the Vulgate has caused Roman scholars much difficulty in recent years, because many errors have been pointed out and are now acknowledged by all scholars.

The Roman Catholic Douay version of the Bible (New Testament, 1582, and Old Testament, 1609) was made from the Latin Vulgate, as are the Roman Catholic translations into modern languages. The recent Confraternity version of the New Testament (1941) carries the notation "Translated from the Latin Vulgate." The inaccuracies of Jerome's Vulgate are legion, as measured by present day scholarship, and the text has not been revised for centuries. So even the best of present day Roman Catholic versions, according to the notation on its own flyleaf, is a translation of a translation—an English translation of a Latin translation of the original Greek.

Roman Catholics pride themselves on a long history. Yet how much more accurate are the Protestant translations of the Bible! Protestant scholars go back to the original Greek and Hebrew Scriptures, which are much older than the Vulgate to which Roman Catholics are bound, and they use all the aids that modern scholarship and research can provide. Yet the priests tell their people that it is a mortal sin to read a Protestant Bible, and they destroy Protestant Bibles wherever possible, allegedly on the grounds that they contain error! In 1957 a large stock of Bibles in Madrid, Spain, belonging to the British and Foreign Bible Society was seized and burned. Yet as Protestants we would not dream of destroying Roman Catholic Bibles. Rather we acknowledge that despite their limitations they are quite good translations, and that they contain God's truth in clear enough revelation to enlighten any who will read them in a sincere search for truth, that apart from their interpretative notes they are surprisingly like our King James and American Standard versions. After all, the most distinctive features of the Roman Catholic religion come not from their Bibles but from their traditions.

6 The Question of Authority

We have said that the most controversial issue between Protestants and Roman Catholics is the question of authority—*What is the final seat of authority in religion?*—and that Protestants hold that the Bible alone is the final rule of faith and practice, while Roman Catholics hold that it is the Bible and tradition as interpreted by the church. In actual practice the Roman Church, since the infallibility decree of 1870, holds that the final seat of authority is the pope speaking for the church.

But we need only read church history to discover that when another source of authority is placed alongside Scripture as of equal importance, Scripture eventually becomes relegated to the background. Whether that other source be reason, emotion, or tradition, the inevitable result is that it supplants Scripture and causes it gradually to fade away. If that other source be reason, we get rationalism. If it be emotion, we get mysticism. And if it be tradition, we get ecclesiastical dictation or clericalism. In each case the Bible, while still given lip service, is effectually superseded.

At the time of the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther took his stand solidly on the Bible and refused to be moved unless it could be shown that his teaching was contrary to the Bible. Summoned to appear before the Diet of Worms to give an account of his beliefs, the closing words of his masterful address were: "Here I take my stand; I can do no other; so help me, God." It could not be shown that his teaching was contrary to the Bible, and his position was unassailable.

The primary and almost immediate result of the Reformation was to bring the doctrines of Scripture clearly before men's minds as the Reformers based their teaching squarely on the Scriptures to the exclusion of all accumulated tradition. While the Church of Rome declared that "it belongs to the church to judge of the true sense of Scripture," the Reformers, both on the Continent and in England, declared that even lay people, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, can interpret Scripture by diligent and prayerful searching and reading.

It is true, of course, that the person who has not been born again, that is, the one who has not been the object of the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit and who therefore is not a Christian, is not able to understand spiritual truth. This too is clearly taught in Scripture: "Now the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; and he cannot know them, because they are spiritually judged" (1 Corinthians 2:14). But every born again Christian has the gift of the Holy Spirit, and is therefore able to understand the basic essentials of what God has written. It is also true that many people, even among born again believers, differ on minor points. But that is because they have not read the Scriptures carefully enough and compared the various parts. The remedy for that is more devoted, patient, diligent Bible study. In any event there is no reference whatever in the Bible that even hints that God has delegated the interpretation of Scripture to any one individual or group of individuals.

If it be asked how the Church of Rome, which contains important elements of truth, has become honeycombed with paganism, how even a professedly Christian church has managed to build up a semi-pagan organization, the answer is that the illegitimate authority that Rome has given to uninspired tradition has produced the effect. That development had an almost exact parallel in the nation of Israel. Israel had the inspired prophets, but she preferred the pleasing and flattering teachings of the false prophets, and so developed a set of traditions which in time came to supplant the true teachings of the prophets. In the teachings and writings of the false prophets the rulers of the Jews found the things they wanted, just as the popes and bishops have found in the man-made traditions of their church things which appeal to their selfish and prideful natures and which gave them what they wanted under the cover of religion. A study of religious errors will show that they have this common characteristic—they consist either of additions to Scripture, or of subtractions from Scripture, or perhaps a mixture of the two.

We do not deny, of course, the statement of the Romanists that much of what Jesus said and did is not recorded in the Gospels. John says plainly: "Many other signs therefore did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: but these things are written that ye may believe

that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in his name" (20:30-31). But we do maintain that that which is written is sufficient. It is Protestant doctrine that the Bible contains all that is necessary to salvation, and no other writings or church pronouncements are to be regarded as having divine authority.

Numerous references set forth the sufficiency of Scripture. Nowhere do we find even a hint that these need to be supplemented by church councils or papal decrees of any kind. Some of these are as follows:

"To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no morning for them" (or as the King James Version says, "it is because there is no light in them") (Isaiah 8:20).

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:18).

"Ye search the scriptures, because ye think that in them ye have eternal life; and these are they which bear witness of me" (John 5:39).

Our Lord proclaimed the infallibility of Scripture, for He said: "The scriptures cannot be broken" (John 10:35).

The brothers of the rich man had sufficient evidence because, said Jesus, "They have Moses and the prophets" (Luke 16:29).

Jesus' rebuke to the Sadducees was, "Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures" (Matthew 22:29).

When Jesus reasoned with His disciples after His resurrection in regard to the purpose and necessity of His death, we are told: "And beginning from Moses and from all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27).

Peter wrote: "And we have the word of prophecy made more sure; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a lamp shining in a dark place. ... For no prophecy ever came by the will of man: but men from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:19,21).

James quoted Scripture in the Council of Jerusalem to settle the question that was at issue (Acts 15:16-18).

Paul repeatedly appealed to Scripture, as when he asks: "For what saith the scripture?" (Romans 4:3). And to Timothy he wrote: "From a babe thou hast known the sacred writings which are able to make thee whole unto salvation" (2 Timothy 3:15).

The diligence of the Bereans in testing all things by Scripture is commended: "Now these were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, examining the scriptures daily, whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11). The Scriptures which the Bereans had were the Old Testament. They compared Paul's teachings about Jesus with what the

Old Testament had predicted. They were not theologians or scholars, but ordinary religious people, and yet the writer of the book of Acts (Luke) implies that by comparing the teachings of the great Apostle Paul with Scripture they were able to determine whether he was right or wrong.

And the book of Revelation pronounces a blessing on both the reader and those who hear: "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of the prophecy, and keep the things that are written therein: for the time is at hand" (1:3).

Thus the sufficiency of Scripture is everywhere assumed. In all these cases our Lord and the New Testament writers referred to Scripture as clear, authoritative, and final. Never once did they say or imply that extra-Scriptural tradition was needed to supplement Scripture, or that any man or group of men was authorized to give authoritative interpretations of Scripture.

7 Tradition Condemned by the Scriptures

In New Testament times the Jews had a great body of tradition, the accumulation of centuries, which they gave precedence over Scripture. But Jesus never mentioned tradition except to condemn it and to warn against it. He rebuked the Pharisees with these words: "Ye leave the commandment of God, and hold fast the tradition of men. ... Ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your tradition... making void the word of God by your tradition" (Mark 7:8,9,13). "And he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition. ... Ye have made void the word of God because of your tradition. ... But in vain do they worship me, teaching as their doctrines the precepts of men" (Matthew 15:3,6,9).

Thus our Lord rebuked the Pharisees for doing precisely what the Church of Rome does today, for substituting a body of human teachings and making it equal to or even superior to the Word of God.

Early in the Old Testament Moses warned against this same danger: "Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish from it, that ye may keep the commandments of Jehovah your God which I command you" (Deuteronomy 4:2). Paul gave a clear warning against the use of tradition: "Take heed lest there shall be any one that maketh spoil of you through his philosophy and with deceit, after the traditions of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ" (Colossians 2:8). And John, in the final book of the New Testament set forth the severe penalty for adding to or taking away from the Word of God: "I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto them, God shall add unto him the plagues which are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life, out of the holy city, which are written in this book" (Revelation 22:18-19).

In the Roman Church of today we have a perfect illustration of the attitude which characterized the Pharisees and scribes, who substituted a body of human teachings and made them equal to or even superior to the Word of God.

In Jesus' day traditionalism had become so perverse and powerful that it finally crucified Him. Religion was so blinded by its own distortions of the Word of God that it took the cross to expose it and upset it and to reveal the truth once more. In a similar way the Church of Rome is following a set of traditions that she has accumulated through the centuries, which by her own pronouncements she has elevated to equal authority with, or even to superiority over the Word of God. Her purpose, of course, is to justify doctrines and practices which have no basis in Scripture, or which are in violation of Scripture commands.

In order for Rome to defend her use of tradition, which admittedly came into use long after the New Testament was completed, it was necessary for her to assert that the authority of the church is superior to that of the Scriptures. Protestantism holds that the Scriptures are the infallible rule of faith and practice, and that the church as an institution and all believers must be governed by that authority. The Church of Rome, on the other hand, holds that she is the supreme authority in matters of faith and practice. She even attempts to say that the Roman Catholic Church produced the Bible, and that the pope as the vicar of Christ on earth has the right to legislate for the church. But such claims are absurd, because the New Testament was completed in the first century of the Christian era while the Roman Catholic Church with its distinctive features and its separate existence did not come into being until about four centuries later. Furthermore, the sin and corruption that have characterized the Roman Church, particularly during the Middle Ages when so many of her doctrines and practices originated, is proof that she is in no sense superior to the Bible but quite the contrary. But because of that teaching, the average Roman Catholic may not be particularly impressed when it is pointed out to him that the doctrines of purgatory, the mass, indulgences, penance, the use of images, etc., are not in Bible or even that they are contrary to the Bible. He believes these things, not because he has Scriptural authority for them, but because the church teaches them. This again shows how pernicious can be the use of tradition.

The reason that the Jews had departed from their Scriptures was that they accepted tradition and the decisions of their councils as their guide of faith. The Roman Church has made the same mistake. She, too, has compromised the truth of the Bible in order to follow tradition. When she began putting herself on a par with Scripture she found it impossible to stop there. The next step was to place herself above Scripture, and she has assumed that position ever since.

8 The Protestant Attitude toward the Bible

The first complete English Bible was translated by John Wycliffe, "the morning star of the Reformation," about 1382. Before his time there was no Bible in English, although a few fragmentary portions had been translated. Wycliffe knew only the Latin Bible, so his version, like the Roman Catholic versions even to the present day, was a translation of a translation. The first English New Testament translated from the original Greek was that of William Tyndale, in 1525-26. That work was made possible through the

publication of the Greek New Testament by Erasmus a few years earlier. But since the church authorities in England (Henry VIII was king and also the head of the church) did not want the people to have the Bible in their own language, Tyndale was forbidden to carry on his work in England. He went instead to Germany, where the work of Luther had provided a hospitable environment for such a venture. His work was completed and published in the city of Worms, in 1526. However, it was condemned by the English government, and in order to gain entrance into England had to be smuggled in a few copies at a time.

But Tyndale eventually paid with his life for his devotion to the Bible. Having taken up residence in Antwerp, Belgium, opposition to his work began and continued until he was arrested and condemned. In 1536 he was put to death by strangling and his body was burned. His dying words were, "O God, open the king of England's eyes." That prayer was answered, and God opened the eyes of Henry VIII. In 1536 there appeared the Miles Coverdale version of the Bible, which also was published outside England, but which circulated with considerable freedom in England. And in 1539 the second edition was published in England and circulated freely. Coverdale was the friend and colleague of Tyndale, and the translation was largely Tyndale's.

The next important translation was the Geneva Bible, translated during the reign of Roman Catholic Queen Mary Tudor by a group of English scholars, exiles in Geneva, Switzerland, hence its name. This became the Bible of the intrepid John Knox and of the early Puritans. It seems to have been the Bible used by Shakespeare. The next important translation was the King James version, published in 1611. This was the Bible usually used by Cromwell's army and the Scottish Covenanters, also used by John Bunyan. It was brought to this country by the Pilgrims and Puritans. To this day it continues to be the most popular of all English versions.

Up until the time of the Reformation the Bible had been a book for priests only. It was written in Latin, and the Roman Church refused to allow it to be translated into the languages of the common people. But when the Reformers came on the scene all of that was changed. Luther translated the entire Bible into German for the people of his native land, and within 25 years of its appearance one hundred editions of the German Bible came off the press. It was also soon translated into most of the vernacular tongues of Europe, and wherever the light of the Reformation went it became the book of the common people. Decrees of popes and church councils gave way to the Word of Life. The Protestant churches of Europe and America have labored earnestly to put the Bible into the hands of the people in their own languages and have urged the people everywhere to read it for themselves. Protestant Bible societies now circulate more copies of the Bible each year than were circulated in the fifteen centuries that preceded the Reformation.

According to the 1983 report of the American Bible Society, about 2,000,000 copies of the complete Bible, Old and New Testaments, are printed in the United States each year, and more than 3,000,000 copies of the New Testament, and many millions of portions of the Bible (at least one book, usually one of the Gospels) are printed each year. And the 1984 report says that the complete Bible is now available in 286 languages and dialects, the New

Testament in 594 more, and some portion of the Bible in 928 more, making a total of 1,808 languages and dialects into which the Bible or some part of it has been translated. Today the Bible is available in whole or in part in the native tongues of probably 96 percent of the people of the world.

Dr. Hugh Thompson Kerr, late Presbyterian minister in Pittsburgh, has well said:

“Protestants have been the pioneers in Bible translation and have organized and supported the great world-encircling Bible societies. They believe that the Bible needs no other interpreter than the Holy Spirit. The Bible read under the guidance of the Holy Spirit is the Christian’s authoritative guide. Protestants therefore claim that they truly represent and interpret Christianity as it is set forth in the Bible. They hold that anyone who will read the Bible prayerfully, with the aid of the best scholarship, will reach the conclusion that Protestantism honestly interprets the teachings and confirms the practice of early Christianity” (booklet, *What Protestants Believe*, p. 8).

And another says:

“The fact is, the Bible was written for the common people. The language of the Old Testament was the language spoken in the homes and market places of the Hebrews. The New Testament Greek was not the classical Greek of an earlier period but the Greek spoken by the common people. It was called the *koine*, which means the common language, what we would call today ‘newspaper language.’ This shows that God intended the common people to understand the Bible. Any man with ordinary intelligence and able to read English can read and learn that Jesus is the Saviour of sinners” (Edward J. Tunis, booklet, *What Rome Teaches*, p. 9).

The Protestant ideal is that everyone should read the Bible. Right here, we believe, is the reason that the Protestant nations—the United States, England, Scotland, Holland, and the Scandinavian nations—have followed one line of development, while the Roman Catholic nations—Italy, Spain, France, and the Latin American nations—have followed a distinctly different pattern. Protestants believe that those who study the Bible in sincerity and with prayer will have no difficulty in understanding its basic truths. The words of Jesus, previously quoted, imply that the common people should know the Bible and that they are able to understand it.

It is virtually axiomatic that where there is an open Bible, men will not long remain in bondage. But by the same token where the Bible is a closed book, men soon find themselves in darkness and servitude. Everywhere it has been the precursor of civilization and liberty, driving out barbarity and despotism as bats and vermin flee from the sunshine. In every land where its free and unrestrained reading has been encouraged, it has dispelled ignorance and superstition.

9 The Roman Catholic Attitude toward the Bible

In contrast with the Protestant attitude toward the Bible, the Roman Church

has traditionally opposed its free use by the people. Even today in the predominantly Roman Catholic countries, it keeps the Bible from the people, or at least makes no effort to provide it for them. The result is that the people in those countries know practically nothing about the Bible except as some Protestant organizations have gone in and distributed copies. In countries where the Roman Church is in keen competition with Protestantism it has allowed the people to have the Bible if there is a demand for it, but it has always insisted strenuously that the version must be the Douay, or more recently the Confraternity, each of which contains a set of notes printed on the same page with the text and giving the Roman Catholic interpretation of disputed passages. Even to this day any other version, even the Bible as such without note or comment, is suspect. The alleged reason is that these versions contain "errors." But the real reason is that the Church of Rome does not want the Bible read apart from her interpretative notes.

The Bible was first officially forbidden to the people by the Church of Rome and placed on the *Index of Forbidden Books* by the Council of Valencia (a cathedral city in southeastern Spain) in the year 1229, with the following decree:

"We prohibit also the permitting of the laity to have the books of the Old and New Testament, unless any one should wish, from a feeling of devotion, to have a psalter or breviary for divine service, or the hours of the blessed Mary. But we strictly forbid them to have the above mentioned books in the vulgar tongue."

Here we see that the Bible was forbidden to the laity, except for the Psalms or breviary (book of devotions), and even then it could be only in Latin—which of course placed it beyond the reach of the common people. That decree was passed at the time the Waldensians were gaining strength, and it was enforced with bitter persecution.

The Council of Trent reaffirmed that decree and prohibited the use of the Scriptures by any member of the church unless he obtained permission from his superior. The decree read as follows:

"In as much as it is manifest, from experience, that if the Holy Bible, translated into the vulgar tongue, be indiscriminately allowed to everyone, the temerity of men will cause more evil than good to arise from it; it is, on this point, referred to the judgment of the bishops, or inquisitors, who may, by the advice of the priest or confessor, permit the reading of the Bible translated into the vulgar tongue by Catholic authors, to those persons whose faith and piety, they apprehend, will be augmented, and not injured by it; and this permission they must have in writing."

To this decree, as to more than a hundred others passed by this council, was attached an anathema against anyone who should dare to violate it, and also penalties were fixed against the illegal possessor or seller of books. Here we observe particularly the statement that the reading of the Bible in the native tongue will do "more evil than good"! Imagine that, as the deliberate teaching of a church professing to be Christian! How insulting to God is such teaching, that His Word as read by the people will do more evil than good!

That attitude toward the Word of God is the mark, not of a true church, but of a false church.

While it has been the policy of the Roman Church to withhold the Bible from the people, Peter, the alleged founder of that church, refers to Scripture as "the word of prophecy made more sure," and likens it to "a lamp shining in a dark place" (2 Peter 1:19). What a blessing it would be to the world if the Roman Church would really follow the teaching of Peter!

Early in the history of Israel God instructed Moses to make the words of the law known and easily accessible to all the people: "And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and thou shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest in the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. ... And thou shalt write them upon the door-posts of thy house, and upon thy gates" (Deuteronomy 6:7-9). Another verse which expresses the preciousness of Scripture and its importance to the individual is Psalm 119:11: "Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee."

Even where permission to read the Bible is granted by the Council of Trent, to those who presumably are so thoroughly indoctrinated with Roman Catholicism that nothing will shake their faith, that permission must be in writing!

Liguori, one of the highest authorities on Canon Law, whose books probably are considered more authoritative and probably are quoted more often than those of any other writer, says: "The Scriptures and books of Controversy may not be permitted in the vulgar tongue, as also they cannot be read without permission."

Four different popes during the eighteenth century made pronouncements against giving the Bible to the people in their own language, typical of which was that of Clement XI (1713) in the Bull Unigenitus: "We strictly forbid them (the laity) to have the books of the Old and New Testament in the vulgar tongue." As for the Encyclical of Leo XIII (1893) on "The Study of the Bible," sometimes quoted by Roman Catholics as a statement urging the laity to study the Bible, it should be observed that (1) the Bible which was cited for study was the Latin Vulgate, which of course was not available to the common people nor understood by them; (2) the statement forbade them to interpret it otherwise than as the church interpreted it; and (3) it did not rescind or modify the prior law of the church which refused the free use of the Scriptures to the laity.

Such was the teaching and practice of the Roman Church for centuries. For one to possess or read the Bible in his native tongue without permission in writing from his superior and under the watchful eye of the bishop was a mortal sin, for which absolution could not be granted until the book was delivered to the priest. As the top-heavy structure of law and ritual developed, the Bible had to be denied to the people. Otherwise they would have seen that it was merely a man-made structure. On the other hand, the Bible had to be preserved as a reference book for the theologians and priests in order to sustain the power of the priesthood by plausible and elastic interpretations of certain texts. But so far as the people were concerned it

might as well have been forgotten. Small wonder it is that ignorance, superstition, poverty, and low moral conditions have been so characteristic of Roman Catholic countries.

In Protestant countries, however, in recent years a considerable change has taken place in Roman Catholic practice, and, shamed into a different attitude because of Protestant criticism, the Roman Church now grants her people the privilege of reading the Bible, and even stocks it in the book stores—using, of course, only the approved versions. The Roman Church does not wish to appear to be the foe of the Bible, so indefensible is that position. An annual “Catholic Bible Week” has been instituted, and indulgences granted for reading the Bible at least fifteen minutes each day. But this appears to be an unnatural emphasis, by no means given with a clear conscience permitted but not looked upon favorably by the authorities in Rome. Significantly, no similar program of Bible reading has been instituted in the predominantly Roman Catholic countries. Only in Protestant countries, and primarily in the United States, is this policy followed. And it certainly comes very late in the long, long history of the Roman Church. One can easily guess what the result would be if for some reason the Protestant influence were removed.

Unfortunately, it still is a mortal sin for a Roman Catholic anywhere to read the King James, American Standard, Revised Standard, or any other Protestant version. So, even the Bible as such remains on the Index of Forbidden Books!¹ It is made fit for a Roman Catholic to read only when it is annotated by an authorized theologian! What St. Paul wrote, if it stands by itself, is on the Index. What was written by St. Peter himself, who according to Roman Catholic tradition was the first pope, is on the Index unless some Roman Catholic annotates his writing. Yet the Roman Church does not claim infallibility for the theologian who annotates it! So here we have the very height of absurdity—it takes the work of a theologian who is not infallible to correct and edit and make lawful and orthodox the text of those who wrote by divine inspiration! The attitude of the Roman Church toward the Bible societies has been one of sustained opposition. Several acts of the popes have been directed exclusively against them. In 1824 Pope Leo XII, in an encyclical letter said: “You are aware, venerable brethren, that a certain society called the Bible society strolls with effrontery throughout the world, which society, contrary to the well-known decree of the Council of Trent, labors with all its might and by every means to translate—or rather to pervert—the Scriptures into the vulgar tongue of every nation. ... We, in conformity with our apostolic duty, exhort you to turn away your flock by all means from these poisonous pastures.” In 1844 Pope Gregory XVI again condemned these societies, and Pope Pius IX, author of the decree of papal infallibility, who died in 1878, denounced “these cunning and infamous societies, which call themselves Bible societies, and give the Scriptures to inexperienced youth.”

¹ Technically the Index was dropped in 1965, but general supervision over books allowed continues through the newly established magazine supervision Nuntius (Herald). The imprimatur remains in force, and gives another effective means of control. Since the Second Vatican Council, restrictions against other versions have been relaxed to some extent.

But in reality who can estimate the vast good that these noble organizations

and their faithful colporteurs have brought to the nations of the world? Most prominent among these have been the British and Foreign Bible Society, the American Bible Society, the Bible Society of Scotland, and that of the Netherlands, which have translated the Scriptures into hundreds of languages and dialects, and which now circulate millions of copies of the Bible every year. Many times Bibles have been publicly burned by the priests. That the real attitude of the Vatican toward the Bible has not changed is shown by the fact that in 1957 the depot of the British and Foreign Bible Society in Madrid, Spain, was closed and its stock of Bibles confiscated and burned. After the Spanish civil war, which brought Franco and the Roman Catholic Church to power, Spanish children returning from hospitable Swiss families with Bibles in their pockets were forced at the Spanish frontier to hand those precious books over to the local priest. Time and again in Colombia during the past ten years Bibles have been taken from Protestants by fanatical Romanist groups and burned, almost always at the instigation of the local priests, usually in communities where new Protestant churches were being formed. The fact remains that only in those countries where Protestantism is dominant does the Bible circulate freely. Think of the popes, who profess to be God's representatives on earth, forbidding their people and all others to read God's own Book of Life! Surely the Church of Rome by such action proves itself apostate and false.

So, for a thousand years, from the early sixth century to the sixteenth century, while the Roman Church held sway, the Bible remained a closed book. The Roman Church, instead of being a kingdom of light, became a kingdom of darkness, promoting ignorance and superstition and holding the people in bondage. In most Roman Catholic countries today the Bible remains a closed book. Only since the time of the Protestant Reformation has it circulated freely in any country.

Among evangelical Christians in the United States there are thousands of classes studying the Bible. But among Roman Catholics such groups are very rare. Even a brief discussion with Roman Catholics will reveal that they know very little about the doctrines or the history of their church, and that they know almost nothing at all about the Bible.

Rome's traditional policy of seeking to limit the circulation of the Bible and of anathematizing or destroying all copies that are not annotated with her distinctive doctrines shows that she is really afraid of it. She is opposed to it because it is opposed to her. The plain fact is that she cannot hold her people when they become spiritually enlightened and discover that her distinctive doctrines are merely man-made inventions.

A curious fact in regard to the Index of Forbidden Books is that the Roman Church permits the reading of some books by ecclesiastical writers outside her fold when those books contain nothing contrary to her doctrines. Even some heathen books are allowed to adults, because of their "elegance and propriety." But not the Bible—unless it carries her interpretation! The traditional attitude of the Roman Catholic Church toward the promotion and study of the Bible has been, we believe, the greatest spiritual and cultural tragedy since the influx of the pagans into the church in the fourth century.

10 Interpreting the Bible

While the Roman Catholic people in the United States have access to the Bible, they are told that they cannot understand it and that it must be interpreted for them by the church speaking through the priest. People ordinarily do not waste their time reading a book that they are persuaded they cannot understand.

The priests in turn are pledged not to interpret the Bible for themselves, but only as the church interprets it, and according to "the unanimous consent of the fathers." But the church has never issued an official commentary giving that interpretation. And as we have pointed out earlier, the unanimous consent of the fathers is purely a myth, for there is scarcely a point of doctrine on which they do not differ. The doctrine of the immaculate conception, for instance, was denied by Anselm, Bonaventura, and Thomas Aquinas, three of the greatest Roman theologians. Yet Rome presumes to teach that Mary was born without sin, and that that is the unanimous teaching of the fathers.

In their insistence on following an official interpretation, the Roman Catholics are pursuing a course similar to that of the Christian Scientists, who also have the Bible but insist that it must be interpreted by Mary Baker Eddy's book, *Science and Health, with Key to the Scriptures*, and that of the Mormons, who likewise have the Bible but interpret it by the *Book of Mormon*.

The practical result of the priests and people being told that they cannot interpret the Bible for themselves is that they read it but very little. Why should they? They cannot understand it. They may read a few pages here and there, but even among the priests there is scarcely one in twenty who reads it from beginning to end and really studies it. Instead the priests spend hours reading their breviaries, books of daily devotions and prayers, as required by their church, but which are of human origin. This practice of representing the Bible as a mysterious book is a part of Rome's over-all program of presenting Christianity as a mystery religion, in which the mass in particular as well as various other practices are set forth as mysteries which are not to be understood but which are to be accepted with implicit faith.

The priests and the people alike look upon the Bible as a mysterious book, and anyway the interpretation is given to them in pope's decrees and church council pronouncements, which are declared to be clearer and more easily understood. Furthermore, these latter supersede Scripture. Experience proves that whenever an interpretation becomes more important than a document, the document becomes buried and the interpretation alone survives. For this reason the average Roman Catholic is faithful to his church but neglects his Bible. Instead of following the teachings of God the priests and people follow the traditions of men.

A fraudulent claim recently put forth by the Knights of Columbus in a series of newspaper and magazine ads designed to appeal to Protestants and others is that the Roman Catholic Church produced the Bible and that we received it from her. Some of her spokesmen attempt to say that the canon of the Bible

was established in the fourth century, by the pope and council of Carthage, in A.D. 397. But that statement is erroneous on two counts. In the first place, there was no pope as such in A.D. 397. It was not until the Council of Chalcedon, in 451, that the bishop of Rome was designated pope, and the authority of the bishop of Rome never has been acknowledged by the Eastern churches. Previous to that time all priests and bishops were called popes (Latin, papa), and in the Eastern churches that title is applied to ordinary priests even to the present day. The Council of Chalcedon attempted to restrict the title exclusively to the bishop of Rome, who at that time was Leo I, and conferred it posthumously on all previous bishops of Rome in order to make it appear that an unbroken succession of popes had proceeded from Peter.

And in the second place, the New Testament was produced during the first century of the Christian era and had assumed its present form centuries before the Roman Catholic Church developed its distinctive characteristics. At that time the Eastern churches were dominant in Christian affairs, and the Church in Rome was relatively insignificant. Gregory I, called Gregory the Great, who was consecrated pope in 590 and died in 604, was in effect the founder of the papal system. He reorganized the church, revised the ritual, restored monastic discipline, attempted to enforce celibacy among the clergy, and extended the authority of the Roman Church into many countries adjacent to Italy. He more than anyone else gave the Roman Church its distinctive form and set the course that it was to follow in its later history.

Furthermore, long before the Council of Carthage, the particular books now found in the New Testament, and only those, had come to be looked upon by the church at large as the inspired and infallible Word of God on the basis of their genuineness and authority. These particular writings, in distinction from all other books of that age, manifest within themselves this genuineness and authority as we read them; and the Council of Carthage did not so much choose the books that were to be accepted in the New Testament, but rather placed its stamp of approval on the selection that by that time, under the providential control of the Holy Spirit, had come to be looked upon by the church as the New Testament canon. The Old Testament canon was completed and had assumed its present form long before the coming of Christ. The Roman Church, of course, had nothing whatever to do with that.

(Continued in [Chapter V Peter](#).)

All chapters of Roman Catholicism By Lorraine Boettner

- [Roman Catholicism By Lorraine Boettner Chapter I Introduction](#)
- [Roman Catholicism By Lorraine Boettner Chapter II The Church](#)
- [Roman Catholicism By Lorraine Boettner Chapter III The Priesthood](#)
- [Roman Catholicism By Lorraine Boettner Chapter IV Tradition](#)
- [Roman Catholicism By Lorraine Boettner Chapter V Peter](#)
- [Roman Catholicism By Lorraine Boettner Section Two Chapter VI The Papacy](#)
- [Roman Catholicism By Lorraine Boettner Chapter VII Mary Part 1](#)
- [Roman Catholicism By Lorraine Boettner Chapter VII Mary Part 2](#)

- [Roman Catholicism By Lorraine Boettner Chapter VIII The Mass](#)
 - [Roman Catholicism By Lorraine Boettner Chapter IX The Confessional](#)
 - [Roman Catholicism By Lorraine Boettner Chapter X Purgatory](#)
 - [Roman Catholicism By Lorraine Boettner Section Three Chapter XI The Infallibility of the Pope](#)
 - [Roman Catholicism By Lorraine Boettner Chapter XII Penance, Indulgences: Salvation by Grace or by Works?](#)
 - [Roman Catholicism By Lorraine Boettner Chapter XIII Ritualism](#)
 - [Roman Catholicism By Lorraine Boettner Chapter XIV Celibacy](#)
 - [Roman Catholicism By Lorraine Boettner Chapter XV Marriage](#)
 - [Roman Catholicism By Lorraine Boettner Section Four Chapter XVI The Parochial School](#)
 - [Roman Catholicism By Lorraine Boettner Chapter XVII By What Moral Standard?](#)
 - [Roman Catholicism By Lorraine Boettner Chapter XVIII Intolerance, Bigotry, Persecution](#)
 - [Roman Catholicism By Lorraine Boettner Chapter XIX A System Tested by its Fruits](#)
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[**Forefathers of the Faith Exposed the REAL Antichrist**](#)



God's people of the past correctly identified the Antichrist. Most of God's people today don't have a clue and are only speculating who it could be.

[**Five Basic Postulates Of Protestantism**](#)



Five basic differences between Bible following Christians and Roman Catholics.

William Tyndale's Concept of the Church



A regular visitor of this website suggested that I post testimonials of the martyrs and saints to inspire us all. The first person that came to mind was William Tyndale.

Quotes about Tyndale from https://www.worldhistory.org/William_Tyndale/

William Tyndale (1494-1536) was a talented English linguist, scholar and priest who was the first to translate the Bible into English. Tyndale objected to the Catholic Church's control of scripture in Latin and the prohibition against an English translation. His work formed the basis of all other English translations of the Bible up through the modern era.

Tyndale is recognized as the first to translate the Bible into English, rather than Wycliffe, because he worked from the original languages, not just the Latin translation, as Wycliffe had done.

Tyndale moved about to maintain safety after Henry VIII (r. 1509-1547) called for his arrest and was well-protected by wealthy merchants in Antwerp when he was betrayed by Henry Phillips, a man he thought was his friend, and imprisoned. He was executed by strangulation and his body burned at the stake in October 1536. Three years later, the English version of the Bible completed by his colleague Myles Coverdale (l. 1488-1569) was published in England with the king's approval. Tyndale and Coverdale are both honored in

the present day as the first to translate the Bible into English even though it is acknowledged that Coverdale largely developed Tyndale's earlier work.

The following is a repost from

<https://www.christianstudylibrary.org/article/william-tyndales-concept-church>

Introduction

A significant contribution to the reformation of the church in England was William Tyndale's translation of the Bible. With no support and little assistance, Tyndale produced an edition of the New Testament in 1526, and published translations of parts of the Old Testament from 1530 until 1534. Having profited from Luther's German translation and the writings of other continental reformers, Tyndale provided a version superior to the one by John Wycliffe. The Romanist clergy, however, noting that Tyndale's translation excluded words that were associated with such customs as penance, ceremonies, and confession to priests, decried the work as "*poison in the vulgar tongue*." And the college of bishops claimed that Tyndale's version would infect the laity with the "*sickness of heresy*." For it saw that Tyndale avoided vocabulary which papal decrees and other authorized documents had used to promote Romanist practices. In fact, wherever it was possible, Tyndale translated the original Greek and Hebrew with English words which had not been forced into false usage by Roman Catholicism.

It is not surprising that Tyndale's translation received much criticism from the Roman Catholic bishops. Especially Thomas More, who was the spokesman for English Roman Catholicism, inveighed against Tyndale.

In 1529 More wrote a treatise, the *Dialogue Concerning Heresies and Matters of Religion*, in which he attacked the vocabulary of the new English Bible. More chided Tyndale for "mistranslating" several words of theological importance: the translator used "love" instead of "charity" for the Greek word *agape*, "senior" or "elder" instead of "priest" for *presbyteros*, and "repentance" instead of "penance" for the Greek *metanoia*. As one biographer observes, More declared Tyndale guilty of deliberately replacing theological terms with words not normally used by theologians.² And More tried to show that by means of these "radical" translations Tyndale was subverting the authority of the church and its doctrines.

Tyndale was obliged to reply to More, and he published *An Answer to Sir Thomas More's Dialogue* in 1531 to defend the vocabulary of his edition.³ The debate between the two scholars was more than academic bickering, for as W. Clebsch notes, "resistance to More's attacks on certain words was for Tyndale philological and literary but above all *theological*."⁴ The upshot of More's arguments was that Tyndale's translation was unauthorized, not sanctioned by the Roman Catholic church. With its unorthodox vocabulary, the English edition posed a threat to the authority of the church. More and Tyndale knew that the new translation of the Bible could become a powerful tool in the hands of the reformers. And More intended to halt the spreading of Tyndale's Bible by criticizing it forcefully.

One word in the new translation which annoyed More considerably was "congregation." Tyndale preferred this word to "church" as a rendering of the Greek *ekklesia* and the Hebrew *qahal* and *edah*. Herein Tyndale was following the lead given by Martin Luther's translation of the Bible into German, in which Luther had avoided the word *Kirche*, preferring instead *Gemeinde*. Both reformers wished to avoid a word which in the popular mind referred to the so-called Holy Roman Church. Yet Tyndale's reasons for avoiding "church" were not merely epigonal, but were based upon his own observations of the government of the church in England, and of spiritual life. After all, it was for the English ploughboy that Tyndale had laboured.

As we investigate Tyndale's concept of the church, we must bear in mind that Tyndale is noted as a translator, not as a theologian. Unlike some of the continental reformers, he did not produce a systematic theology in which the doctrine of the church is exhaustively expounded. His statements about the church are unconnected, and little effort is made therein to link ecclesiology to other doctrines. For the doctrine of the church, Reformed readers are accustomed to turn to Book Four of Calvin's *Institutes*, to Articles 27-30 of the *Belgic Confession*, and to other Reformed confessions. However, because Tyndale was forced to defend, among other things, his translation of *ekklesia* with "congregation," he did write extensively about the church.

An examination of the concept of the church as it was formulated by one of the first English reformers will prove fruitful. Tyndale's writings reflect many scriptural ideas formulated by the continental reformers, especially Martin Luther. Whenever he deemed the thoughts of the other reformers sound, he incorporated them into his own writings, sometimes adapting them to the English setting. Tyndale was influenced also by other writers; John Hus, Huldrych Zwingli, and the followers of Wycliffe, the so-called Lollards, are but a few.⁵ Yet Tyndale does display his own concept of the church, especially as he was forced to develop it in his translation of the Bible. The purpose of this article is to reveal Tyndale's reasons for using "congregation" and not "church" in his English translation of the Bible, and to make some observations about Tyndale's concept of the church. I shall also note those features in Tyndale's ecclesiology which strike me as particularly Reformed, and shall offer some criticism of his ideas. Perhaps an appreciation for Tyndale's writings on the church will serve to sharpen our knowledge of a doctrine which remains relevant at the close of the twentieth century.

Why Tyndale does not use "Church" in his Translations

As we might expect from a translator, Tyndale begins his *Answer* with an exposition of the meaning and usage of the word "church" in sixteenth century England. Tyndale observes that the word is used in different senses, and that some of these were promoted falsely by the Roman Catholic clergy to its own advantage. Since the word "church" may mislead the reader, Tyndale does not use it in his translation.

First Tyndale treats the literal meaning of the word "church":

it signifies a place or house, whither the Christian people were wont in the old time to resort ... to hear the word of doctrine, the law of God, and the faith of our Saviour Jesus Christ.⁶

In short, "church" denotes the building in which the Word of God was preached. Tyndale goes on to describe the church building as it functioned before Roman Catholicism altered it.

In the ancient church building the minister preached the pure Word of God only, and prayed in a tongue that all men understood ... and of him (all) learned to pray at home and everywhere, and to instruct every man his household (11).

Tyndale makes it clear that the function which the building performed in former times was unlike that of the sixteenth century building. He states that for his contemporaries "church" no longer implies the place where the true Gospel is proclaimed. Indeed, he complains that in the so-called church of his age only voices without meaning are heard, and *"we be fallen into such ignorance, that we know of the mercy and promises, which are in Christ, nothing at all"* (11).

Tyndale avoids "church" in his translation because an important connotation of the word – the true preaching of the Gospel – is absent. Although he does not state so explicitly, Tyndale notes that one of the marks of the true church is lacking to the sixteenth century Romanist church. And as an advocate for reform, Tyndale is annoyed that Roman Catholicism had deprived "church" of this fundamental characteristic. It is unfortunate, however, that Tyndale overlooks the fact that the true church of Christ exists beyond human observation. Perhaps the decrepit state of the church in Tyndale's time caused the reformer to think that the true church was not to be found in England. But we may say that the church which preached the gospel of Christ did exist and would always exist: the Word of God is everlasting. Careful and accurate use of the word "church" is therefore appropriate.

Tyndale also avoids "church" in his translation because it had come to signify the Romanist clergy, which he describes pejoratively as *"a multitude of shaven, shorn, and oiled."* According to this apparently common usage the word could refer to the pope, cardinals, legates, bishops, abbots, or monks; indeed, to *"a thousand names of blasphemy and hypocrisies"* (12). In everyday parlance the entire hierarchy within Roman Catholicism was referred to by the word "church." Tyndale offers many examples of this usage; one must suffice. He quotes a commonly heard saying:

You must believe in holy church [i.e. the clergymen], and do as they teach you (12).

Tyndale avoids translating the Greek *ekklesia* or Hebrew *qahal* with "church," because the reader may get the impression that the existence of numerous

Roman Catholic orders is justified by the word "church" in Scripture. Tyndale does not want to give this impression to the innocent reader who may not know that the Bible does not speak of monks, or abbots, or even of popes.

"Church" was used in the sixteenth century as an inclusive term for all those who *call* themselves Christians, *"though their faith be naught, or though they have no faith at all"* (13).² Just as "Christendom" is used in modern times to designate all those who call themselves Christians, so too the word "church" was used in the sixteenth century as a popular term for those who considered themselves Christians, although their thoughts, words and actions perhaps proved otherwise. Again, Tyndale suggests that the writers of the Bible did not employ the word for church in this sense; therefore he excludes "church" from his translation.

Tyndale also points out that the word *"has, or should have, another signification: a congregation; a multitude or a company gathered together in one, of all degrees of people"* (12). In this sense "church" refers to the *people* who are gathered together. And according to Tyndale the nature of that congregation is seen by *"the circumstances thereof."* There may be a holy, righteous congregation, and there may be an ungodly, impious congregation. This distinction is based upon the two uses of *ekklesia* in the New Testament, as Tyndale himself knows well. Like the continental reformers, Tyndale uses Acts 19:32, 39, 41 (where the assembly in Ephesus is called *ekklesia*) as prooftexts that *ekklesia* is not used only to denote an assembly of Christians.

Tyndale explains what he means by a company of ... all degrees of people": "church" is used for "the whole multitude of all them that receive the name of Christ to believe in him and *not for the clergy only* (12).

To the modern reader Tyndale may seem to be stating the obvious, but in sixteenth century England many were led to believe that the church comprised only the Roman Catholic clergy. Tyndale struggles against the misappropriation of the term by one elite group. He offers a host of scriptural evidence which shows that *ekklesia* refers to the body of *all* believers. One text in which we read that the church comprises both the laity and the clergy is Galatians 1:13, where Paul writes that he had persecuted the church of God. Tyndale explains that Paul had tried to destroy *"not the preachers only, but all that believed generally"* (13). Comparing Scripture with Scripture, Tyndale adduces Acts 22:4 as further proof that Paul uses *ekklesia* in Galatians 1 to denote all the members of the church. For there he writes about his persecution of *"men and women"* of the church. Space prevents the discussion of all the other texts which Tyndale mentions in his condemnation of the restrictive use of "church." But the attention which Tyndale paid to this matter reveals to what extent the Roman Catholic hierarchy had appropriated for itself the word "church," and how it had excluded a vast number of believers.

While demonstrating that "church" refers to the laity as well as to the

clergy, Tyndale offers another positive definition: “... *throughout all the Scripture, the church is taken for the whole multitude of them that believe in Christ in that place, in that parish, town, city, province, land, or throughout all the world*” (13). It is noteworthy that he speaks of the church local and the church universal in one breath. This is in keeping with the writings of the church in its early existence, during the apostolic and patristic eras. In one and the same sentence, Tyndale describes the church as the gathering of true believers in one place or throughout the world. It is interesting to note that the sharp distinction which many documents of the continental Reformation, and some modern theologians, have drawn between the local and universal church is not to be found here in Tyndale’s treatise.

It is also interesting to read that Tyndale knows of a more strict usage of “church,” whereby the word refers only to those who have been chosen by God’s eternal decree.

“Sometimes it is taken specially for the elect only; in whose hearts *God* has written his law with His *Holy Spirit*, and given them a feeling faith of the mercy that is in *Christ Jesus* our Lord” (13).

From the words italicized in the quotation one may note that Tyndale describes the body of the elect in terms of the *triune* God. Such language reminds one of Calvin’s definition in Institutes IV.1.7:

Sometimes by the term ‘church’ it means that which is actually in God’s presence, into which no persons are received but those who are children of God by grace of adoption and true members of *Christ* by sanctification of the *Holy Spirit*.

Yet the differences between the two definitions are also telling: Tyndale avoids the word “grace,” opting instead for “mercy;” he gives the law of God a prominent position, and he does not speak explicitly of the sanctification of God’s adopted children. Yet, according to both reformers, the elect are those who have been chosen by God the Father, saved by God the Son, and sanctified by God the Spirit. As we shall observe later, Tyndale knows that a difference exists between God’s elect and the members of the manifest church.

Why Tyndale uses “Congregation” in his Translations

Apart from the reasons stated above, Tyndale has no objection to the word “church.” Indeed, in the *Answer to Sir Thomas More’s Dialogue*, and in other writings, he frequently interchanges “church” and “congregation.” To Tyndale they are, insofar as we are able to tell, synonymous. Yet he is steadfast in his use of “congregation” in the English translations of the Old and New Testaments. And just as Tyndale offers reasons based on philology for the rejection of “church,” so too he offers philological reasons for the use of “congregation.” Yet it should be obvious that the philological debate is merely the tip of a *theological* iceberg, and the diction hides a mass of theological reasons which was destined to collide with the ship of Roman Catholicism.

Tyndale provides philological reasons for his choice of "congregation." The word has a broad range of uses, Tyndale suggests, which reflects the broad range of uses which the Greek word *ekklesia* also possessed in the first century. Like the reformers on the continent, Tyndale knew that the Greek word *ekklesia* had been employed long before the New Testament church was established. It was a common term for the assembly of people at civic functions in Athens and other Greek city-states. Even in the New Testament *ekklesia* is used with this secular meaning; we noted above that in Acts 19:32, 39, 41 Demetrius the silversmith addresses a public assembly (*ekklesia*) in Ephesus. The word "congregation," according to Tyndale, is – like the Greek word – a "*more general term*" (13), and therefore appropriate in this, and similar, contexts.

Tyndale chose "congregation" also in part because Erasmus uses words other than *ecclesia* in his Latin translation of the New Testament. Tyndale reminds his opponent that Erasmus, More's dear friend, also employs unorthodox language in the Latin translation, which had appeared in 1516. Though his tone is less than kind, Tyndale's point is well taken: the Church has no right to impose its language upon Scripture. The Bible is the Word of God. Tyndale knows well, of course, that More and the other clergy saw in "congregation" a purposeful rejection of the language which the church had made standard over generations. Whereas "church" was a word with Roman Catholic associations, "congregation" belonged to the diction of the reformers.

At the conclusion of the philological rebuttal, Tyndale recapitulates the reasons for rejecting "church" from his English translation. "Church" is a word which in the New Testament denoted a place where the Gospel was preached. It did not denote the clergy only, did not exclude the flock of believers, did not refer to Christendom in general, and did not refer to the Roman Catholic hierarchy. Since his contemporaries might understand the word to refer to any, or any number, of these usages, Tyndale chose to avoid it. Tyndale argues positively that in Scripture "church" applied to an assembly of people. The assembly might be secular or sacred. In the early history of the church the word was also used for the body of God's elect, and for the mixed congregation of believers and unbelievers.

Tyndale concludes: in as much as the clergy ... had appropriated unto themselves the term that of right is common to all the congregation of them that believe in Christ ... and brought (the people) into ignorance of the word ..., therefore in the translation of the New Testament, where I found this word *ekklesia*, I interpreted it by this word *congregation* (13).

Tyndale's *Answer to Sir Thomas More's Dialogue* does not end there. After treating the words "church" and "congregation," Tyndale explains his preference for other important words, such as "love", "favour", and "repentance." Thereupon Tyndale gives a lengthy reply to More's defence of the worship of images, pilgrimages, and prayers offered to saints. In several places Tyndale discusses the nature of the church, and shows that the truly

Biblical ecclesiology is that of the reformers, whom More called the “*pestilent sect of Luther and Tyndale*.”

Reformed Elements in Tyndale's Ecclesiology

Introduction

In the treatise, *An Answer to Sir Thomas More's Dialogue*, William Tyndale defends the translation of *ekklesia* in the Bible with “congregation” and not “church.” Tyndale prefers “congregation,” since it does not lead the readers of the English Bible into thinking that the Roman Catholic church with its false doctrines and practices has its foundation in Scripture. Like the reformers on the European continent, Tyndale strives to establish a text of the Bible which is free of associations with Roman Catholicism.

Thomas More, the reader will also recall, in the *Dialogue Concerning Heresies and Matters of Religion*, attacked Tyndale for using unorthodox and revisionist language. It was obvious to all in England that Tyndale's translation reflected many Reformed ideas. And therefore More's treatise was not merely a critical review of the vocabulary of the new English Bible; it charged the “*pestilent sect*” of reformers with heresy. More defended the authority of the pope and the power of church tradition. He strongly restated the Romanist belief that the church is the sole, infallible source of divine truth. He argued that whatever the church states as true, the believers must accept as the Word of God. Indeed, More suggested, the church had existed before Scripture was written, and even since the writing of the Bible, the church has proclaimed other truths that are not contained in Scripture. The church, therefore, determines Scripture and is its only interpreter. Accordingly, More concluded, Tyndale's translation constituted a heretical subversion of the church and its authority. ⁸

In *An Answer to Sir Thomas More*, Tyndale treats many of the “*heresies and matters of religion*” which More had discussed. The translator defends not only the vocabulary of his edition, but also the Reformed criticism of such matters as the position of the pope, the worship of images and relics, and pilgrimages. In discussing these matters, Tyndale has occasion to touch upon the nature and role of the church. The relationship between the church and Scripture, and between the church and Christ its Head, are but two of the topics Tyndale broaches. In so doing, the translator provides us with one of the earliest English documents which promoted the Reformed doctrine of the church. In this article we shall consider some of the attributes of the church as observed by Tyndale. We shall observe the influences of the continental Reformation upon Tyndale's thought, point out the Reformed character of Tyndale's ecclesiology, and shall conclude with some notes of criticism.

The Church is Formed by God's Word

According to Tyndale, one attribute of the church is that it is formed by the preaching of the Word of God.

*"The whole Scripture, and all believing hearts, testify that we are begotten through the Word."*⁹

As proof for this attribute, Tyndale offers Romans 10:14: *"How are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher?"*¹⁰

He explains the text thus, *"Christ must first be preached, ere men can believe in him ... And therefore, in as much as the Word is before faith, and faith makes the congregation, therefore is the Word or Gospel before the congregation"* (24).

In stating that the preaching of the Gospel and the resultant faith are needed for the formation of a church, Tyndale follows the continental reformers. It was Luther who had described the church as *creatura verbi*: a creature of the Word. Tyndale espouses this tenet of the Reformation and refutes the Romanist ecclesiology as expressed by More, according to whom the church is above Scripture and its sole expositor.

In his *Dialogue* More had argued that the Roman Catholic Church is superior to the Bible in part because it *predates* Scripture, and that therefore it alone is able to instruct the laity in the meaning of Scripture and in the doctrine that it expresses. For this reason Tyndale's translation was so hated by the clergy, which realized the English Bible would undermine its authoritative position. But Tyndale, as A.G. Dickens notes, *"firmly believed that the Bible came first and should invariably determine the doctrines, institutions and ceremonies of a Church which had come to bear little or no relation to that of the New Testament."*¹¹ In stating that the church is a product of the preaching of the Word, Tyndale argues that the Church is subservient to the Word, and should conform to it.

Tyndale's reasoning follows that of the continental Reformers. Huldrych Zwingli, for example, had also written about the church's subservience to the Word. One may recall that of the sixty-seven theses which Zwingli published in 1523, several concerned the authority of Scripture.

The first thesis reads: *"All who say that the Gospel is invalid without the confirmation of the church err and slander God."*

Following Zwingli, Tyndale replaces the authority of the Romanist Church with the authority of Scripture. The church must obey the Word of God by which it is formed. There is no divine revelation besides the Word, and the church may not claim to possess truths outside Scripture. In stating that the church is a product of the Gospel, Tyndale refutes More's contention that the church is superior to the Word.

Faith is the Basis of the Church

We read in Romans 10:17, *"So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ."* Tyndale has already argued that the preaching of the Gospel precedes the formation of the church; now he argues that faith in Jesus Christ's saving work, which is granted through the

preaching, is a cornerstone of Christ's church. Tyndale points out that all who are born anew and become children of God, are members of his church. Though one might question Tyndale's exegesis of Matthew 16:18, his statement that *"faith is the rock, whereon Christ built his congregation"* (31) is true. And this faith, Tyndale writes, is the *"foundation, laid of the apostles and the prophets; whereon Paul says (Ephesians 2:20) that we are built, and thereby of the household of God"* (31).

Following the continental reformers, Tyndale emphasizes the role of the saving work of Christ in the formation of the church. Without the satisfaction of Christ for the sins of the world, the church could not exist. After all, the church is Christ's body (Colossians 1:18), *"and every person of the church is a member of Christ"* (Ephesians 5:23b). *Now it is no member of Christ that has not Christ's Spirit in him* (Romans 8:9) (31). Especially Ephesians 5:23b supports Tyndale's argument: *"Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Saviour."* Faith in the expiation of Jesus Christ unites members into one body, and those who do not share in this faith, do not contribute to the unity of Christ's body. It is clear to Tyndale that *"both they that trust in their own works, and they also that put confidence in their own opinions, be fallen from Christ, and err from the way of faith that is in Christ's blood, and therefore are not of Christ's church"* (33-34). *Sola fide* is an important creed of the church.

Such line of reasoning leads Tyndale to the logical conclusion that the Roman Catholic church is not the church of Christ. For *"he that has no faith to be saved through Christ, is not of Christ's church. And the pope believes not to be saved through Christ"* (39), for he teaches to put trust in penance, pilgrimages, ceremonies, and the like – which *"all are the denying of Christ's blood."* (40) Since the pope has replaced Scripture with his own doctrine, and because the pope and the clergy have shown themselves in their conduct to be unholy, the Roman Catholic church cannot be the true church.

On the other hand, all those who *"depart from them unto true Scripture, and unto the faith and living thereof"* (45) form the true church. Members of the true church, Tyndale writes, *"thou shalt always know by their **faith**, examined by Scripture, and by their profession and consent to live according to the law of God"* (45). Evacuation from the false church, from "Babylon," as the Second Helvetic Confession expresses it, is a necessity for all true believers. For Tyndale all believers should depart from the false church, namely, the Roman Catholic church. At a time when the only church in England was the Roman Catholic church as controlled by Henry VIII, even departure from this congregation of Satan was virtually impossible. Notions of forming a true congregation of believers were still in infancy. Nevertheless Tyndale urges those who have faith to leave the Romanist church.

The Church is an Assembly of Sinful Believers

Tyndale's most complete definition of the true church or congregation is expressed in his rebuttal of the Romanist claim that the church cannot err. Thomas More had argued that the Roman Catholic church was infallible. To this Tyndale angrily retorts that if by church More means the Roman Catholic church, then the church certainly does err! And he cites many instances in

which the church of Rome erred from the truth of God's Word.

But as for the question of sin within the true church of Christ, Tyndale posits that, whereas sin exists in all people, God forgives those believers who ask him.

The church is the whole multitude of all repenting sinners that believe in Christ, and put all their trust and confidence in the mercy of God; feeling in their hearts that God for Christ's sake loved them, and will be, or rather is, merciful to them, and forgives them their sins of which they repent; and that he forgives them also all the motions unto sin, of which they fear, lest they should thereby be drawn into sin again (30).

The church consists of believers who are miserable sinners; yet it consists of believers whose sins are forgiven. Quoting 1 John 3:9 ("*no-one born of God commits sin*") and other texts, Tyndale states that the church consists of sinners who ask God for forgiveness and show amendment of life. The church comprises sinful *believers*, who are totally depraved and totally saved.

Tyndale does not forget the role of the Holy Spirit in the sanctification of believers, for he writes that it is the Holy Spirit which "*keeps a man's heart from consenting to sin*" (31). In a sense, Tyndale dares to write, we are not sinners: "Not sinners if you look to the *profession* of our hearts toward the law of God, to our repentance and sorrow that we have, to the promises and mercy in our Saviour Christ, and to our faith."

And yet, Tyndale writes, "*every member of Christ's congregation is a sinner, and sins daily*" (32).

1 John 1:8 reminds us: "*If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves.*"

Sin is a matter of fact, even in the congregation of Christ. "*Sinners we are,*" writes Tyndale, "*if you look to the frailty of our flesh, which is like the weakness of one who is newly recovered out of a great disease, by reason whereof our deeds are imperfect; and by reason whereof also, when occasions be great, we fall into horrible deeds, and the fruit of the sin which remains in our members breaks out*" (32).

Yet, as Tyndale also reminds us, the Holy Spirit helps us in our weaknesses (Romans 8:26).

Hypocrites within the Church

Tyndale also treats the matter of unbelievers within the church. Like the continental reformers, he knows that there are hypocrites within the body of Christ (44). For this attribute of the church the reformers were indebted to Augustine, who had explained (de *Doctrina Christiana*, III, 32) that the church is "mixed": in the church believers mingle with unbelievers. Tyndale calls the church "double," that is, consisting of the "fleshly" and the "spiritual." Just as the disciples of Christ could not look into the heart of

the betrayer Judas, so too one cannot know perfectly what is in the heart of the members of one's congregation. *The Belgic Confession* also speaks of "hypocrites, who are mixed in the Church along with the good and yet are not part of the Church, although they are outwardly in it" (Art. 29). And Calvin, too, would write about those "who have nothing of Christ but the name and outward appearance" (*Institutes* IV.1.7). It is remarkable that already in the first decades of the Reformation in England, the word "church" could convey the nuanced sense of *ecclesia permixta*, the "mingled church."¹²

The Church is the Gathering of the Elect

We noted above that Tyndale describes the church as "double." He applies this sense also to the distinction between the elect of God (the "spiritual") and those not chosen to everlasting life ("the fleshly").

Tyndale explains:

there shall be in the church a fleshly seed of Abraham and a spiritual; a Cain and an Abel; an Ishmael and an Isaac; and Esau and a Jacob ... a great multitude of them that be called, and a small flock of them that be chosen. And the fleshly shall persecute the spiritual (107).

Tyndale sees this attribute of the church in his own times, in which the pope and the Romanists are the "fleshly" who persecute the little flock of Christ. Pretending and believing to be the true church, the Roman Catholics "*go unto their own imaginations*" and "*the manner of service they fetch out of their own brains, and not of the Word of God; and serve God with bodily service*" (107). On the other hand, the body of the elect, "*runneth not unto his own imaginations,*" but seeks the Word of God. And the "*little flock,*" as Tyndale calls the elect, "*receives this testament in his heart, and in it walks and serves God in spirit*" (109). It is not surprising that Tyndale should depict the elect as a small and oppressed group within a large body of so-called believers, for in England the number of true believers must have appeared small in comparison with the large and powerful Romanist Church.

The Church as the Flock of the Shepherd

Of the other attributes of the church discussed in Tyndale's *Answer to Sir Thomas More's Dialogue* one in particular should not be overlooked. In the treatise Tyndale repeatedly refers to the church as "*little flock.*" This Biblical expression had been used by the Lollards before Tyndale, yet the translator appropriates it for his own reasons.¹³ In several places of *An Answer* Tyndale uses the image of the church as a flock of sheep. The church is gathered by the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ.

Tyndale writes, "*God, when He calls a congregation unto his name, sends forth His messengers to call*" (107).

The church is formed by the power of God, and not by the impetus of man. The

"little flock" is formed, guided, and fed by the Shepherd.

The "little flock," because "they have run clean contrary unto that good law, they sorrow and mourn ... But the preacher comforts them, and shows them the testament of Christ's blood ... And the little flock receives this testament in his heart ..." (108).

This image of the church as Christ's flock is, as all well know, a Scriptural image. Therefore, one will not be surprised to learn that it appears in the Second Helvetic Confession and in the writings of the continental reformers. Indeed, the image of the church as flock is used by modern Reformed theologians also: K. Schilder saw in *congregatio* the ongoing, active, church-gathering work of Jesus Christ, the Shepherd.

When one appreciates Tyndale's depiction of the church as the flock of Christ, one understands more fully his reasons for preferring "congregation" to "church" as the translation of *ekklesia* in the English Bible. For the English word "congregation" derives from the Latin word for "flock," *grex*. Tyndale the translator is keenly aware of this etymology of the word, and despite his penchant for non-Latinate words, he employs this one in his translation. It appeals to him for it conveys a meaning which the Biblical expressions for the church also convey. To Tyndale, "congregation" is altogether an appropriate word.

Conclusion

In conclusion, a number of critical observations of Tyndale's ecclesiology are in order. Although Tyndale discusses the nature and the role of the church in *An Answer to Sir Thomas More's Dialogue*, he makes no attempt to present an exhaustive, systematic argument. Important essential and accidental features of the church are lacking to Tyndale's treatise. There is no discussion, for example, of the marks of the true church. Discipline within the church is not treated. There is no explanation of the relationship between the administration of the sacraments and the church. Matters which appear to the post-Reformation churches as crucial to ecclesiology are glossed over by Tyndale.

But one should bear in mind that Tyndale does not claim to put forth a complete doctrine of the church. And perhaps Tyndale's inchoate ecclesiology is to be explained by the circumstances in which he wrote. The reformation of the church in England occurred after Tyndale's death. During his lifetime there were few attempts to reform the church on the scale attempted by Luther and the continental reformers. Tyndale was among the first to begin to call for change in England. By providing an English translation of the Bible Tyndale made the important first step toward reform.

There are many other features of Tyndale's ecclesiology which might be discussed critically; here I shall merely list them. Some have noted a development in the theology of Tyndale which might be called inconsistent. Luther and Calvin also developed their theologies over time, yet their more systematic approach to ecclesiastical reform caused them to be more complete and consistent. There is little evidence that Tyndale envisages a schematic

reform of the church; he appears content to make changes within the existing "multitude." Others have suggested that there is evidence for a development toward legalism in Tyndale's thought.¹⁴ His view of the covenant has been described as that of a contract between parties: Tyndale has been linked to the development of Puritanism. Yet again others have observed an emphasis upon individualism in the theology of Tyndale. Even in the language of Tyndale's English Bible one could criticize the translator. But when all is said and done, it should be acknowledged that the role of William Tyndale in the Reformation of the church in England was not a minor one.

Endnotes←□□

1. ^ Faber zum 70. Geburtstag gewidmet.
2. ^ C.H. Williams, *William Tyndale* (London: Nelson, 1969), 76.
3. ^ The fact that More wrote a nine-volume rebuttal, the *Confutation of Tyndale's Answer* (1532), attests to the gravity of the debate.
4. ^ W. Clebsch, *England's Earliest Protestants* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), 144.
5. ^ The influence of Luther's ecclesiology upon Tyndale is obvious; consider, e.g., Luther's understanding of the church as described by H. Prien, "Grundgedanken der Ekklesiologie beim jungen Luther," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 76, 1985, 96-119. The influence of Lollard writings upon Tyndale's theology is treated by D. Smeeton, *Lollard Themes in the Reformation Theology of William Tyndale* (Kirkville: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1986), esp. 159-220.
6. ^ W. Tyndale, *An Answer to Sir Thomas More's Dialogue*, ed. H. Walter (The Parker Society. Cambridge: University Press, 1850), 11; subsequent quotations from *An Answer* derive from this edition.
7. ^ In the *Institutes* (IV.1.7), Calvin would also refer to this usage of the word: "Often, however, the name "church" designates the whole multitude of men spread over the earth who *profess* to worship one God and Christ" (trans. F.L. Battles, *Calvin. Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Vol. 2 Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1960, 1021. Subsequent quotations of *Institutes* derive from this edition).
8. ^ For a summary of More's *Dialogue* and Tyndale's reply, see W.E. Campbell, *Erasmus, Tyndale and More* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1949), 124-154.
9. ^ W. Tyndale, *An Answer to Sir Tomas More's Dialogue*, ed. H. Walter (The Parker Society. Cambridge: University Press, 1850), 24; future citations of *An Answer* derive from this edition.
10. ^ Tyndale mentions two other texts for proof that believers form a gathering as a result of the preaching: John 15:3, John 17:17.
11. ^ A.G. Dickens, *The English Reformation* (New York: Schocken, 1964), 71.
12. ^ For discussions by other English reformers of the "mingled church" see P. Hughes, *Theology of the English Reformers* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1965), 225-262, esp. 228.
13. ^ For the influence of Lollard ecclesiology upon Tyndale's thought see D.D. Smeeton, *Lollard Themes in the Reformation Theology of William Tyndale* (Kirkville, Missouri: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1986), esp. ch.6.

14. [^] See, e.g., W. Clebsch, *England's Earliest Protestants* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), 168.