

HOLY SCRIPTURE

By D.B. Knox

The Protestant Faith

There is a well-known saying, first coined by Chillingworth in the 17th century, that the Bible and the Bible only is the religion of Protestants. This is true; so that when we hear Evangelist Billy Graham quoting scriptures with his favourite phrase, 'the Bible says', we should recall that it is in keeping with historical protestantism to appeal to the very words of the Bible as a guide to what we should believe and how we should live. Of course, this attitude to Scripture is not confined to protestantism. It goes to the very roots of Christianity. We have only to recollect the example of our Lord Jesus Christ to confirm this. When He was tempted by the Devil in the wilderness, three times over He rebuffed the temptation by quoting scripture, introducing it by the phrase "It is written", or as we would put it in modern English, "the Bible says". "It is written", this is the final court of appeal.

The Bible was written by the Spirit of God to guide our thoughts and direct our actions. "Whatever was written aforetime", says St. Paul, "was written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope." Writing later to his friend Timothy he commended him because he had known the Scriptures from his earliest childhood. The Apostle described the Bible as "able to make you wise unto salvation through the faith which is in Christ Jesus", and he added, "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work." (2 Tim.3:16).

The rediscovery of the Bible and its teaching was, as is well-known, the mainspring and the basis of the Reformation in the 16th century. It was through reading the Bible in his monastery at Wittenburg that Martin Luther discovered the truth about the way of salvation. In the centuries immediately before the Reformation the Bible was a little known Book, and the ecclesiastical authorities of those days discouraged the reading of it. You will remember that the man who translated our English Bible from the Greek and Hebrew originals, William Tyndale, was not able to obtain his bishop's permission to translate it in England and had to escape to the Continent, and remained in hiding there while he carried on the important

work of translating the Bible into English, a translation which underlies the Bible we still use today. After ten years when his work of translation was almost completed, he was betrayed, condemned and burnt at the stake for this work of translating the Bible.

Christians have traditionally been united in their estimate of the character and place of the Bible. The matter could not be put better than it was at the Roman Catholic Vatican Council of 1870 which affirmed that the Bible has God as its Author; or, more recently in the encyclical of Pope Pius XII in 1943 who declared that "the Divine Inspiration of the Scripture exclude all error, as God, Who is the supreme truth, is necessarily unable to be the author of any error whatsoever." This is the ancient, unchanged faith of the Church and is shared by Protestant and Roman Catholic alike. However, though the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches agree that the Bible is God's very Word written and of supreme authority, in practice the Roman Catholic Church has largely ceased to draw its doctrine from the life-giving springs of Holy Scripture. There are several factors which have contributed to this. They may all be summed up by saying that church tradition is regarded as of equal authority to the written scripture.

Firstly, the Roman Catholic Church has added to the Bible the Apocrypha as equally authoritative as the rest of scripture. Now the Apocrypha are books found in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, which are not to be found in the original Hebrew. There were, thus, not in the Old Testament Bible which our Lord used and so they are excluded from the Bible by the Protestant denominations, but they are accepted as fully authoritative by the Roman Catholic denomination. Thus the Council of Trent anathematizes those who do not receive these books as a true part of Holy Scripture. Nevertheless, as I say, these books were not in the Bible used by our Lord Jesus Christ or by His apostles or by the Jewish Church of that time. That is why Protestants do not accept the Apocrypha as scripture for they have not divine authority. Although the books of the Apocrypha had been written by the time of Jesus, He never used them, yet

He was the Son of God. He would not have ignored God's Word! Josephus, a Jewish writer of the first century, makes clear that the Apocrypha was not in the Bible used in the Church of Palestine in his day, that is, in the days of Jesus; nor was the Apocrypha in the Bible used by the early Church. A testimony to this is the statement of St. Cyril of Jerusalem. Now St. Cyril, Bishop of Jerusalem, is described in the Roman Catholic Missal as follows: "He lived in the fourth century; his catechetical instructions given to the catechumens on the elements of the faith are among the most precious documents of Catholic teaching in that century". In these catechetical instructions (in lecture 4, section 17) Bishop Cyril emphasised the supreme authority of Holy Scripture. He said "Do not believe me because I tell you these things, unless you receive from the Holy Scripture the proof of what is set forth. For this salvation which is of our faith is not by ingenious reasonings, but by proof from the Holy Scriptures" and in section 35 of his lectures he explicitly condemned the reading of the Apocrypha, saying "have nothing to do with these uncertain books. Study earnestly only those which we read confidently". Similarly, St. Jerome, a prince amongst ancient expositors, and the translator of the Roman Catholic Vulgate, was quite explicit that the Apocrypha ought not to be included in Holy Scripture alongside the Old Testament. It may be asked how the Apocrypha came to be included in the Old Testament. This took place in the Dark Ages when Europe was over-run with Barbarians and when, as a consequence, knowledge of the Greek and Hebrew languages was largely lost, and so it was easier for the churchmen of those days to confuse the genuine Hebrew scriptures with the addition of the Apocrypha.

The result of including the Apocrypha with Scripture is that the unique scriptural doctrines are blunted, as there is a good deal of false doctrine in the Apocryphal books, since though written by pious men they did not have the unerring inspiration of the Holy Spirit, as did the rest of sacred Scripture.

The second reason, which has contributed to the practical neglect of Holy Scripture in the Church of Rome, in spite of the high doctrine of Scripture which it shares with Protestant Churches, is the equating of human tradition with the written Word of God. This has the effect of diluting the doctrines of

Scripture with the erroneous ideas which arise in the natural heart of man; as we saw to the the consequence also of adding the Apocrypha to Scripture. Church tradition, like the Apocrypha, is the product of men, good men tho' they were, and is not directly inspired by the Spirit of God. To include merely human words with the Bible muffles the voice of God in our hearts. However, the Council of Trent stated that it received and venerated with equal affection of piety and reverence not only the books of the Old and New Testaments but also the traditions of the Church. The result of this is that the Bible is swamped with the voluminous traditions, which in so many points are more explicit and detailed than are the statements of Scripture, so that in the upshot, Roman Catholicism looks to tradition rather than to Scripture to shape its doctrines. Thus, its most recent doctrine of the assumption, added to the faith in 1950, has, as Roman Catholics themselves admit, nothing in the Bible to support it. It is entirely based on tradition.

Roman Catholics sometimes object that the Bible is not sufficient and needs to be supplemented by church tradition. To this we may reply not only that the early church knew of no word of God outside the Bible, as my quotation from Cyril of Jerusalem shows, but also, more importantly, the Bible asserts that it is indeed sufficient. St. Paul in 2 Tim. 3:17 three times over emphasised the sufficiency of scripture. A knowledge of it, he says, makes the Christian complete, completely equipped for every good work.

Thirdly, the traditional attitude of the Roman Catholic Church in the past has been to discourage private Bible reading. The Council of Trent decreed "If anyone without the permission of his confessor shall dare to read or possess a copy of sacred Scriptures, translated even by catholic authors, he cannot receive absolution for his sins." At the time of the Reformation it was regarded as evidence of heresy if a person knew by heart passages of Scripture; and although there are signs that this attitude to Bible reading may now be passing, it is still dominant at present with the result that although Roman Catholic documents honour the Bible, in practice the Roman Catholic denomination no longer draws its doctrines from Scripture, nor does it seek to correct its doctrines by Scripture. It does not sit under the Word of God. This use of the Bible to correct our thinking and our

living is perhaps the most fundamental difference which marks off the Protestant from the Roman Catholic denomination. Roman Catholicism is on its own principles unreformable in doctrine. The traditional Roman Catholic attitude to the use of the Bible may be illustrated from the pamphlet "The Bible Alone?" published by the Australian Catholic Truth Society in 1959 (a copy of which was rapidly sent to me through the post by an anonymous listener). On page 27 the writer states "it is not customary in Catholic churches to lay stress on Bible reading.....stress is naturally laid on the fulfilment of necessary duties, attendance at Mass on Sundays, etc.....Outside these basic necessary duties Catholics are encouraged.....to increase their knowledge of their religion by keeping up their catholic reading of religious books, magazines and newspapers."

But there are encouraging signs that this attitude of disparaging the direct reading of the Bible is changing. The Bishops of the Second Vatican Council voted against describing tradition as a second source of the knowledge of God. The Council's Constitution on the liturgy has spoken of the central position that God's Word must occupy in the Christian's worship and an excellent Catholic edition of the Revised Standard Version of Tyndale's New Testament has been published with a foreword from Cardinal Gilroy, concluding "I pray that those who read it and meditate upon its words will come to know, love and serve our one Lord and Master more and more generously.". We would all echo this prayer.

We who have inherited an open Bible, ought to be conscious of this privilege which has been brought with a good deal of conflict and persecution in the past. And not only should we read the Bible as God's Word, but we should obey it, allowing it to reform our thinking and our practise, both in our private lives and homes, as well as in the Church. Above all we should trust the God Who has revealed Himself in it, taking His promises that we read there, as true and trustworthy, and basing our lives on them. By reading the Bible with this attitude, God will speak to us, through it, and we will find in it His way of salvation and we grow more like His character.
