

# From the Heart

A series of essays on basic Catholic doctrines and beliefs

Written by Bill Dunn - Published by Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish, Harwinton, Conn.

Vol. 1 No. 3 ©2008

## Isn't the Bible a Protestant Book?

Many people are under the impression that the Bible is a Protestant book. After all, the Bible is prominently featured in many Protestant churches. People in the pews usually bring their own Bibles to Sunday services; the minister often preaches directly from the Bible; and the majority of Protestant churches have well-attended weekly Bible study classes. In contrast, these activities do not occur in most Catholic parishes.

Additionally, some people go so far as to claim that the Catholic Church rejects the Bible and instead follows man-made traditions. Both of these notions are incorrect.

The Bible is actually a Catholic document. In the early centuries of Christianity, there was no clearly defined "Bible." In other words, a brand new copy of the King James Version did not miraculously appear in the midst of the apostles. During those early years there were many different writings being circulated that people wanted to see included in the sacred Scriptures.

It was not until the late 4th century A.D. that the Catholic Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, finally decided which writings belonged in the canon of Scripture. These decisions were made at two church councils, the Council of Hippo in 393 A.D., and the Council of Carthage in 397 A.D. The very same New Testament found in all Bibles today—Protestant or Catholic—was compiled by the Catholic Church over 16 centuries ago.

The Protestant Reformation began in the year 1517 A.D. The man who started the Reformation, Martin Luther, had some very harsh things to say about Catholicism during his lifetime. But he did acknowledge this about the Catholic Church: "We are obliged to yield many things to the [Catholics]—that they possess the Word of God which we received from them, otherwise we should have known nothing about it."

It is the furthest thing from the truth to claim that the Catholic Church rejects the Bible. In the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, it says: "The Church has always venerated the Scriptures as she venerates the Lord's body" (section 103). To dispel any doubts that the Church considers the Bible not to be divinely inspired, we read: "God is the author of Sacred Scripture" (section 105).

Although many otherwise faithful Catholics are under the impression that the Church does not want lay people to read the Bible, the *Catechism* says this: "Access to Sacred Scripture ought to be open wide to the Christian

faithful" (section 131); and, "Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ" (section 133).

By the way, Catholics who have never read the Bible actually are much more familiar with the sacred texts than they might think. The vast majority of words used during Mass—prayers, antiphons, rites, responses, acclamations, hymns, etc.—are directly from the Bible. And, of course, the first of the two main parts of the Mass, the Liturgy of the Word (the other main part being the Liturgy of the Eucharist), is comprised of the first reading, the responsorial Psalm, the second reading, and the Gospel reading—each of which also is directly from the Bible.

One of the main doctrines of the Protestant Reformation is *sola scriptura* (Latin for "Scripture alone"). This means the sole authority for religious beliefs and practices is the Bible and only the Bible. The thinking is that God has revealed Himself to mankind through one source: the sacred Scriptures.

The Catholic view is that God has revealed Himself to mankind through two sources: the sacred Scriptures AND sacred Tradition, which is the apostolic teachings handed down by Jesus' disciples. So the Catholic Church does not reject the Bible, as some claim; it simply rejects the word *sola*, the idea that the Bible is our sole authority for religious beliefs and practices.

The Bible itself teaches the Catholic view. St. Paul wrote in his second letter to the Thessalonians, "So then, brothers, stand firm and hold fast to the **traditions** that you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by our letter" (2 Thes 2:15). Paul was referring both to the written Word ("...by our letter") and to apostolic oral Tradition ("...by word of mouth").

If asked the question, "What is the pillar and foundation of the truth?", many Protestants might answer, "The Bible, of course." Surprisingly, the Bible itself teaches something different. In 1 Timothy 3:15, we read: "You will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the **church** of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth."

So God's Holy Word, the Bible, says the pillar and foundation of the truth is the Church. And for almost 2,000 years the Catholic Church has been teaching the truth, using both the written Word of God and sacred apostolic Tradition.

All Catholics should be reading the Bible on a regular basis. It is God's holy inspired Word, and it is most definitely a Catholic book.