

Was Martin Luther Justified in Changing the Bible's Contents

One of the major platforms that the Protestant Reformation used to gain support was to make the teachings available to the middle class by publishing the Bible in the vernacular instead of Latin.

Ironically, it was the Catholic Church who approved the first translation of the Bible into the vernacular: Saint Jerome translated the mostly Greek texts into the Latin that was, at the time, the official language of the Empire. This translation was even called "Biblia Vulgata," or "common library." Today it is normally simply called the "Vulgate." Very few people could read and write during this time, and those that could would have been considered the "intellectual elite." Being the official language of the empire, nearly all the intellectual elite would have known Latin.

A) A Brief History:

With the final fall of Rome in 476 A.D., Latin was no longer the Language of the King in the official sense. But as the Catholic Church was the only surviving institution that spanned the former empire, and the clergy could all read and write Latin, the Vulgate was still relevant as it could still be read by nearly everyone who could read.

But things change with time. The Church always championed learning, and the middle class slowly grew more literate. As the middle class were more interested in regional concerns (or at most, regions they did business with), they naturally tended to focus more on their own language than a continent-spanning one. But without the printing press, possessing a Bible was outside the means of the average literate person. Writing materials were expensive and the skilled labor needed to transcribe the whole Bible into a single work by hand is no small feat.

By the time the 16th Century rolled around, the time was finally right to reconsider vernacular translations of the Bible. A large, literate middle class existed and the printing press was now common enough to make this effort cost effective. All that was needed was a standardized translation to run in the presses. The Catholic Church was, admittedly, slow to appreciate this fact. But life improved in other ways and, as to be expected, comfort led to envy of what one does not have (Materialism), then to resentment and finally to suspicion. An inability to see for themselves what the Bible said was the root of one such suspicion. Those who opposed the Catholic Church in the 16th Century alleged that the Catholic clergy were perverting scripture to suit their own political goals and none would be the wiser.

In all fairness to Martin Luther and other fathers of the Reformation, this was perhaps the darkest days in the Catholic Church's history - even worse than the pedophile scandals of today. As the only institution to survive the Western Roman Empire (which included all of Europe with modern day Germany representing the approximate Eastern-most area of influence), the office of the Pope became something it was never intended to be: the head of state of a massive Earthly empire. The Pope's role as a spiritual leader frequently suffered from Earthly responsibilities and the temptations that come from these responsibilities. Several of the Popes of that era even lived lives of blatant and open mortal sin.

The founding fathers of Protestantism decided that the solution, in no small part, would be to make the Bible available to the masses. This, they decided, would allow individuals to read the Bible for themselves and therefore no longer have to rely on the Catholic Church for guidance.

In all fairness to the Catholic Church, the printing press was a relatively new invention (it was invented in 1440 A.D. - Martin Luther posted his 95 Theses only two generations later in 1517). While 77 years seems like an eternity in today's world (where technological wonders take place every day), in those days that was pretty quick. The economic realities of the time meant that it was only around Martin Luther's time that large numbers of inexpensive books were available for the middle class to read. It must also be remembered that it was largely through the efforts of the Church that the middle class had any opportunity to learn to read in the first place.

Furthermore, the Church, contrary to popular propaganda, never officially banned translations into the vernacular. While the Church did indeed burn *some* translations (Pope Innocent III being perhaps the most infamous example of this), such orders always seemed to be directed at specific translations rather than a general assault on the practice itself. It is possible, but not proven, that a few local (and corrupted) Bishops may have ordered some Bibles to be burned as a political move. But even that does not change the fact that most were destroyed because of serious errors in translations rather than an attempt to keep the masses ignorant.

It is very likely that, had Martin Luther and the others chosen to stay in the Church, they could have successfully pushed for a mass printing of the Bible in the vernacular. The fact remains, however, that they left over theological grounds (some of which will be discussed here) instead of educational ones. They kept their promise to make the Bible available to the masses, and the Catholic Church soon followed suit.

But here we are, more than 500 years after the Theses were posted. Were Martin Luther and the others right that the Church was deliberately misleading the masses? Has the Christian faith benefited from everyone being their own "priest?" I do not believe this to be true for either case, although the second is not a "yes/no" type of issue and I will talk about it in depth.

B) Problems Concerning Translations:

To get an idea of what is involved in translating the Bible, consider the New American Bible (NAB, which has since been updated to the New American Bible Revised Edition, or NABRE, with very minor changes). When the American Bishops sought and approved of a new vernacular Bible for the United States as directed by the Second Vatican Council, a massive undertaking consisting of 119 scholars (including 20 secular experts) organized into 14 committees produced the New American Bible after years of work by translating extant texts (oldest known and surviving texts) from four languages. The NAB, with entire pages dedicated to providing background information on each book, and copious footnotes to assist in understanding the text, is approximately 1400 pages long. Much of these notes, especially those from the Old Testament, specifically address why text was translated as it was and to give great insight as to problems faced in such an effort. One word can have several meanings. Several extant copies of the same scripture may exist yet are worded slightly differently (a common problem when writing is done by hand). Some extant copies are very different from each other (some 2nd Century versions of Mark Chapter 16 only have 9 verses while others have 20!). The meanings of idioms and symbols are often lost to the modern reader and must be researched to discover their true intent. The Bible is professed to be "true" as a whole, so all scripture interpretation must somehow fit into the big picture of this whole (this is where Church dogma plays a big part). The list of issues goes on and on. It is not enough to translate the Bible with a two language dictionary, one must also master the culture and history of each writer, consider his original audience, and consider the scripture's place and dignity within the Bible as a whole.

C) Choosing Which Source to Translate:

1) The Old Testament: One may be tempted to think that the ancient Jews had everything in order and written in proper Greek, all ready for simple translation. Wrong. The Ancient Jews, of course, preferred Hebrew but were greatly influenced by Egyptian and Aramaic languages. Jesus Himself spoke using Aramaic words frequently (especially in the Gospel of Mark, but most notably his given name to Simon: Cephas is an alternate spelling for Kepha which is Aramaic for "sizable rock," one suitable for the foundation of a Church. Petros is the Greek equivalent for Kepha). Furthermore, the Jews had three classifications of written scripture: the Torah (law, also called Pentateuch), the Nevim (prophets) and Keuvim (writings). There was also oral tradition, which was eventually compiled into a 844 page collection called the Mishnah.

To make matters more confusing, perhaps the greatest linguistic challenge to the Jewish faith took place after Alexander the Great conquered Israel. Having to adapt to the Greek trading industry (which spanned the whole Mediterranean Sea and extended East to India), Jews migrated away from Israel and the use of Hebrew dropped off so much that many no longer spoke it. It was because of this change that, by legend, Ptolemy II Philadelphus ordered the Septuagint to be printed sometime around the 4th and/or 3rd Century B.C.. Its name means "seventy," and represents the six Jewish scribes from each of the twelve tribes of Israel tasked to translate scripture into Greek independent of each other (this is actually 72 scribes, at some point the name was simplified). It was, naturally, written in Greek, the vernacular of the trade industry. At this time, the Keuvim was divided into "history" and "poetry." Ten additions were made during the 400 years before Jesus was born, which, with the original Septuagint, is commonly known as "The Greek Old Testament" by Christians. The Greek Old Testament included all the books the Catholic Old Testament does, plus three others: 3 and 4 Maccabees and the Prayer of Manesseh (although 1 and 2 Esdras were renamed as Ezra and Nehemiah respectively). The Eastern Orthodox Churches are the only major Christian group that includes these three books, plus they have 3 Esdras which was not included in the Greek Old Testament.

The Greek Old Testament was quite popular among 1st Century Jews, and it is this version that is so often quoted in the New Testament. This is almost always why New Testament quotes from the Old Testament are slightly different from what is actually seen in the Old Testament (at least for Bibles printed since the mid twentieth century). Most modern translations of the Old Testament now use oldest extant text (usually Hebrew) instead of the Greek translations the apostles were using.

2) The New Testament: Truth to be told, every book in the New Testament, even the Gospels, has to some degree been challenged as being authentic. The "official" reason for such challenges usually has little to do with the content itself, but rather as to whether or not the books were actually written by the person believed to have written them. For example, was Matthew written by the apostle Saint Matthew or someone else? Considering not only the low literacy rate in the 1st Century Roman Empire, but also the incriminating evidence that possessing such literature can provide in criminal cases (remember, Christianity was a capital offense for 300 years), this should not be surprising. Also, while the emphasis of this section is on the New Testament, it is necessary to address the Old Testament additions as well as the selection process took place simultaneously.

The Muratorian Canon of 170 A.D. (the oldest known list of "inspired" books, its age suggested by the mention of Pope Pius I as being the recent Pope) included twenty-three New Testament books and the Book of Wisdom. The original document clearly included more at one time, but the portion containing the Old Testament books (with the exception of the Book of Wisdom) has been lost, and the text ends abruptly (suggesting more information on New Testament books). It either mentions or

implies all of the current New Testament books except Hebrews, James and 1 & 2 Peter, and one of the Epistles of John. The Canon declares four Gospels are inspired, but the first two names (presumably Matthew and Mark) are lost due to damage. The Gospel according to John is attributed to Saint John the Beloved, as are two letters. The First Letter is clearly identified by a quote from the letter, but no clue on which of the other two letters that was accepted is given. The list also includes the Apocalypse of Peter (but it is not clear if it is the Greek or Coptic account), which is not currently accepted by any major Christian faith. At least two letters attributed to Saint Paul (Laodiceans and Alexandrians) were specifically called heretical. The Muratorian Canon was made in the middle of the Roman Persecution of Christians and so it is quite an accomplishment then and a testimony to the legitimacy of the New Testament as is popularly accepted today.

When Emperor Constantine not only removed the criminal charges but actually made Christianity the Empire's official religion, one of the first things the Bishops did was to separate the inspired teaching from the secular teachings within its mythology. An unknown number of texts were available for potential canonization. Some were local texts or works that supplemented more widely accepted ones, some were outright heretical, some did more to entertain than to truly educate and certainly some were theologically sound even if they didn't make the final cut. Those that failed to make the canon easily number in hundreds of titles of texts that are known today, and no doubt thousands existed then that are now lost to history. I hope the need to limit so many texts to a manageable number is obvious: only a relative few are needed to create a core set of beliefs, and such beliefs needed to have the authority of God (hence the term inspired). The early Church, when deciding what books to include, always asked the question "what are we really about" and chose books based on this criteria. While the origin of such documents (both Old and New Testament) was certainly important, origin alone meant nothing if it didn't promote what Christianity was about. "Gospels" that focused on miracles suggest Jesus was a circus performer instead of a savior (something quite opposite to the Jesus in the four accepted Gospels), so they were likewise dropped. Some works might have been theologically sound, but if the same thing was said by someone with greater authority, then why have the duplication? Of course, anything that went against the teachings of the early Church were rejected out of hand. The earliest splintering of the Church, such as the Coptic Church, took place because of disagreements over this, but the overwhelming number of Bishops were in accord at the end of the process. The reasons to drop consideration for a given text are almost as numerous as the number of texts to be considered, but I hope these examples give a clue as to the seriousness involved in the decisions.

The Council of Laodicea in 363 A.D. restricted any scriptural reading (both Old and New Testament) in Church to only be from books that now comprise the (Catholic) Bible. The 27 New Testament books were proclaimed canon by Bishop Athanasius (Bishop of Alexandria) in 367 A.D. It is believed (but not conclusively proved) that Pope Damasus I actually ratified the same list of books as canon in 382 A.D. after a council in Rome that year. This Biblical list was formally canonized by the Council of Hippo in 393 A.D. and again by the Council of Carthage in 397 (both councils were greatly influenced by scholar Saint Augustine). In 405 A.D., Pope Innocent I ratified this canon. The Council of Trent in the 16th Century yet again validated the inspirational nature of the Catholic Bible in response to the Reformation, which was again ratified at that time.

As can be inferred, these early councils only rejected one book from the Muratorian Canon (the Apocalypse of Peter) and added four other works (remember, one of the two remaining letters of St. John was accepted by the Muratorian Canon; it is just uncertain which one). None of the texts of the Canon specifically mentioned as being heretical were included. Three (possibly four) major councils, an influential Bishop's recommendation and at least two (possibly three) ratifications by a Pope have

supported this list of books. Since the 4th Century, the only texts rejected by the Catholics that have been included in a major Christian faith are the three remaining books from the Greek Old Testament (**Topic C.1**). Likewise, no serious effort to remove any of these final 27 books of the New Testament has ever proved successful. Yet this is not for a want of trying.

Except for three of the Gospels and (to the best of my knowledge) the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans, every book in the New Testament has come under question at least once in one major Protestant split or another. The Gospel according to St. John has been called "antilegomena" (see **Topic F**) as it is so different than the Synoptic Gospels, but I do not believe this has gained any widespread support outside the various heresies that deny the divinity of Jesus. In 500 years or so of challenges, no major Christian denomination has found a rational reason to remove or add to these New Testament books. Even Martin Luther eventually relented on the four New Testament books he originally questioned (two of which, it should be noted, *were* identified by the Muratorian Canon as being authentic, again **Topic F**).

And the reason these efforts fail is obvious. While it is true the ultimate authorship of nearly all these books fails to meet the exacting standards of what we consider "proof" today, there is no evidence to support any other theory, only skepticism. Furthermore, what evidence *does* exist invariably supports the existing theories even if fails to conclusively prove them. For example, while many copies of the Gospels written during the 2nd Century do not bear a name (a protective measure against the law), those that do, without exception, all bear the appropriate name with which we are familiar today. This suggests that the Gospels were written by persons well known to and accepted by the early Christians, as opposed to being written anonymously and later given random names.

It should also be pointed out that, even though it is reasonable to claim that all New Testament books were originally written in Greek, Hebrew was still the native language. Of the original apostles, only Saint Matthew would have been likely to personally pen his own Gospel. Saints Paul and Luke also probably wrote their own works in Greek. But the others were probably written by scribes (such as Saint Mark penning the teachings of Saint Peter's oral Gospel). One of the biggest controversies involving translation error comes from this fact.

Ancient Hebrew had no word for "cousins." Such relations were often called "brothers" or "brethren." This usage was transferred to the Greek writings. Being unaware of this writing style is the biggest reason why people today mistakenly believe that Saint Joseph had children by Saint Mary after the birth of Jesus, or at least by other wives. The fact Jesus entrusted Saint John to care for His mother at the crucifixion (John 19:26-27) instead of His supposed siblings is proof of this fallacy. Based on the commandment to "Honor your father and your mother" (Exodus 20:12 and again in Deuteronomy 5:16) and demanded by Jewish tradition, such a gesture by Jesus would have been meaningless legally.

D) The Case for Accurate Translation:

Until the 1900's, the Catholic Church would base all vernacular translations on the Vulgate while most Protestants would translate from the "original" Greek. Both approaches held good and bad aspects. For the Catholics, it became an issue of translating a translation, but it did benefit from St. Jerome being much closer (historically) to the linguistic styles of the original authors. For the Protestants, their translations were more correct in the literal sense, but often failed to capture the intended meanings accurately. Both suffered from using the Greek Old Testament as opposed to original Hebrew texts.

Starting in 1901, U.S. Catholics would read from the American Standard Version at Mass, which was based on the 17th Century King James Bible (yet accusations of "twisting" the Word still persisted). At this time, the scientific method was starting to be applied to the translation of ancient texts. In the 1950's, the Revised Standard Version became the official Bible for Catholics in the U.S., and it used the latest scientific methods to translate extant copies. This was perhaps the first major effort to translate original Hebrew texts directly to English. This was done again in the 1980's (see **Topic B**) for the NAB. Likewise, major Protestant efforts to update their own Bibles used the same methods and the differences between them and the Catholic Church continually grow smaller and smaller. While each Church would have occasion to choose a specific wording that best fits its dogma, such choices are still rational and legitimate translations.

1) Minor Changes in Translation: Except for the more traditional Churches who, like Catholics, have a formalized Liturgy, very few Protestants endorse an official version of the Bible for their services. Church members often bring their own Bibles, which may or may not be the same as the one the minister or preacher will use. Even Bibles provided by the Church for the congregation are usually ones that were donated to the Church, and vary greatly in version and edition. The alternatives are to either have some members not be able to follow the sermon, or spend a lot of Church funds on matching Bibles. And as for ministers and preachers who use social media to spread or apologize the Word, any attempt to have standardized scriptural readings from the audience is automatically doomed to fail. This is why it is common for a minister or preacher to identify the version *and* edition of the Bible he is using. Minor differences in the reading are understood and accepted as still being legitimate as opposed to a deliberate misquoting of scripture. The desire of Protestants (as a whole) to ensure that no one organization dominates the translation of scripture means *de facto* that Protestants accept minor variations in translations as still being legitimate.

This being understood, Protestants cannot criticize the Catholic translation on the basis of minor differences. And to their credit, the only criticisms I have ever heard concerning minor issues of translations have not come from mainstream Protestants, but rather from those who either only accept the Bible they grew up with as legitimate or from those who have taken it upon themselves to do their own translating. These two groups, in turn, don't normally attack the Catholic translation in particular, but rather the whole volume of Christian Bibles other than their own. For those who only believe the Bible they grew up with, I just want to point out that they are assuming they have the right Bible by the luck of being born into the right family, not by rational argument. But the second group, those who do their own translations, I find these interpretations to be quite suspect.

2) Independent Translations: There are those who do their own translations and would have one believe that they are the only ones who really know what the original texts say. They claim that, as amateurs working on their own, did a better job than the 100+ scholars who translated the New American Bible or the unknown thousands who translated other versions throughout Christendom. The fact that many of them proudly claim to have translated the "original Greek" of the *Old Testament* further undermines their credibility, as they clearly don't even know what their subject matter is.

Now, don't get me wrong. The history of Christianity is filled with amateurs making massive contributions to the faith. Furthermore, if done with humility instead of pride, then this is a fantastic way to learn things of the faith few ever will get a chance to do. But the sheer volume of the Bible itself, complicated by issues of having to master at least four languages, needing to understanding the context behind the writings and having to choose which ancient text to use when they disagree on exact wording is no small matter. I daresay one would have to recluse himself like a hermit for decades to have a valid translation completed.

I also have noted that those who translate the Bible on their own seem to be as much at odds with fellow independent translators as they are with mainstream Christians. Even if one considers the possibility that one these independents actually did create the "true" translation as God intended whereas so many others failed, the next question to be answered is why did God, who is believed to be both omnipotent and who desires us to know the truth about Him, limit this revelation to only a single person after 2,000 years of Christian history had past? And even if we presuppose *that* to be true, why has God, with the same power and desire, not allowed this version of the Bible to become more well known and accepted once it was discovered? To blame this on Satan corrupting the Church (a fairly common explanation) implies that God's plans can be thwarted by the devil.

This leaves one last loose end to tie up concerning the question of the Catholic Church deliberately corrupting scripture. Since the mainstream Protestant Churches have *de facto* admitted that *minor* differences are not grounds for apostasy, there comes the issue of *major* changes to the Bible. There are two such changes as made by Martin Luther and many others since his time: the apocrypha and the antilegomena.

E) The Issue of the Lost Books of the Bible:

Now therefore, Israel, hear the statutes and ordinances I am teaching you to observe, that you may live, and may enter in and take possession of the land which the LORD, the God of your ancestors, is giving you. In your observance of the commandments of the LORD, your God, which I am commanding you, you shall not add to what I command you nor subtract from it.

-Deuteronomy 4:1-2

1) The Apocrypha: When the Temple was destroyed in 70 A.D. (well after Christianity had fully broken away from Judaism), the heart of the Jewish religion, being able to offer sacrifice at the Temple, was gone. Jewish religious leaders were forced to reexamine their faith. One major change was to remove several books (the three identified in **Topic C.1**, as well as 1 & 2 Maccabees, Judith, Tobit, Baruch, Sirach, and Wisdom) and parts of two others (Esther and Daniel). This was done on grounds that they could only find these teachings in the Septuagint, not in extant copies written in Ancient Hebrew. Naturally, books written after the original Septuagint but found in the Greek Old Testament would, by definition, be excluded regardless of if Hebrew texts could be found or not. Their line of thought was that, if it wasn't in Ancient Hebrew when the Septuagint was made, then it was not authentically inspired. It was a matter of origin, not content. For reasons unknown to me, they clearly assumed that God had not spoken to them since the conquest of Alexander the Great, as their criteria categorically denied such writings. Martin Luther agreed with this line of reasoning and relocated these books from the Old Testament to an appendix. On theological grounds, Luther claimed that there was "harmony" among all the rest of the books of the Bible, but that these works didn't fit quite so well.

While defenders of Luther will say that Luther never removed these books (Bible societies that grew up in Protestant countries ultimately did this), they are really splitting hairs. The common Catholic claim that Luther removed the books is really just an oversimplification, not a falsehood. These societies did not take it upon themselves to remove Old Testament books based on their own reasons, but rather endorsed Luther's reason and took it to its logical conclusion. If the "apocrypha" is not really part of the Bible but instead complementary reading, then what need is there to actually include it with the Bible proper?

2) The Historical Existence of the Apocrypha: Fragments of Sirach have been found in at least three archaeological sites and Tobit was found in another since Martin Luther's time. Most recently, in 1946 A.D. the so-called Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered revealing historical evidence that Baruch also existed in Ancient Hebrew. The faith and fidelity the Catholic Church placed in them overall seems justified. The remaining four books are known to have been written between 100 and 200 years before the birth of Jesus. Although the oldest known copies for three of them are Greek (Saint Jerome found an older version in Arabic that he translated to Latin for the Vulgate), the literary styles suggest that they were originally written in Hebrew even if copies of such can't be found.

The last four books were clearly written after the original Septuagint was written, but age alone does not necessarily deny them from being inspired by God. One can easily defend the notion that Saint John the Baptist was the last prophet of the Old Testament as he was unquestionably the final prophet of the Old Covenant. And these four books predated him by several generations.

3) The Testimony of Jesus and Apostles:

and that from infancy *you have known [the] sacred scriptures*, which are capable of giving you wisdom for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. *All scripture is inspired by God* and is useful for teaching, or refutation, for correction, and for training in righteousness.
-2 Timothy 3:15-16 (italics mine)

The early Christians were mostly converts from Judaism (Gentiles were rapidly converting as well, but still a minority until later in the 2nd Century). It is surprising that, if the early Christians thought there was a conflict between the "apocrypha" and the New Covenant, that they wouldn't have rejected it before the Jews did. Nowhere in the Gospels does Jesus condemn them. Instead, we have Jesus saying: "Do not think that I have come to abolish *the law or the prophets*. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. Amen, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, *not the smallest letter or the smallest part of a letter will pass from the law*, until all things have taken place. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do so will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever obeys and teaches these commandments will be called greatest in the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:17-19, italics mine). There are those who think this only applied to the parts of the Old Testament that foreshadowed the arrival of Jesus. Not so. In the time of Jesus, "the law and the prophets" and similar phrases were common expressions that meant "the *entire* written tradition." In Luke (24:44), Jesus refers to "the law, prophets and psalms," which was a common way to explain the traditional three divisions of the Hebrew written tradition (**Topic C.1**).

We also don't see any indication in the Epistles. Many of the letters warn against false teachings and false prophets, yet nowhere do we see any part of the Greek Old Testament being called out as false. And one certainly cannot challenge the authority of the letter writers: Saints Peter, John and Matthew were apostles from the beginning of the Ministry of Jesus. Saint James was a close relative and follower of Jesus and the first Bishop of Jerusalem. Saint Jude was the brother of James and, although little is known of him, it stands to reason that his credentials would have been similar to his more popular bother. Saint Paul, an apostle even if a latecomer, was one of the best educated scripture scholars of his time and wrote extensively to reconcile the Gospel with the Old Testament (particularly his Letter to the Hebrews). Saints Mark and Luke were close disciples of Saints Peter and Paul, and it is theorized that Mark actually knew Jesus at the end of His ministry and included himself anonymously in the Gospel (Mark 14:51-52).

Now, I agree that this logic also brings into question the Greek Old Testament books the Catholics left out. I have no direct answer to this. All I can say is that much greater minds than mine with more time to study the question have pondered this as well (**Topic C.2**). After 2000 years for such contemplation to take place, only the Orthodox Churches (which collectively represent 10% of the Christian population) have seen fit to include them. I choose not to defend a position no one is attacking.

4) Fitting the Apocrypha with the New Testament: The claim that these books do not fit with the rest of the Bible is simply not true. There are many connections. In John 9:32, we see the passage: "It is unheard of that anyone ever opened the eyes of a *person born blind*." (italics mine) This is a reference to Tobit, who was born with sight, went blind later in life but was ultimately able to see again. Jesus had outdone the Old Testament by giving sight to one who had never seen before.

Wisdom 2:12-20 reads like it could be the minutes taken at any meeting where Jewish religious leaders conspired against Jesus, yet it is believed to have been written at least 100 years before the birth of Jesus:

Let us beset the just one, because he is obnoxious to us; he sets himself against our doings, Reproaches us for transgressions of the law and charges us with violations of our training. He professes to have knowledge of God and styles himself a child of the Lord. To us he is the censure of our thoughts; merely to see him is a hardship for us, Because his life is not like other men's and different are his ways. He judges us debased; he holds aloof from our paths as from things impure. He calls blest the destiny of the just and boasts that God is his Father. Let us see whether his words be true; let us find out what will happen to him. For if the just one be the son of God, he will defend him and deliver him from the hand of his foes. With revilement and torture let us put him to the test that we may have proof of his greatness and try his patience. Let us condemn him to a shameful death; for according to his own words, God will take care of him.

Also consider the Sadducees, who did not believe in the after life, when they tried to trick Jesus in Luke 20:27-40. They posed a question that involved seven brothers taking turns marrying a woman only to die shortly afterwards so the next brother would have to marry her in accordance with the law found in Deuteronomy 25:5-10. Being learned men of the Jewish religion, they certainly would have *known* of 2 Maccabees 7 (whole chapter) even if they denied its inspired nature. Only the relationship of the seven brothers to the woman really changed, as in Maccabees they were her children (who, in lieu of the widowed mother being able to marry her late husband's brothers, would instead have been responsible for her care in keeping with the general commandment of honoring one's parents). Other than that, the parallels between the two are all too obvious: both involve seven brothers and a widow, both focus on the brother's responsibilities to care for the woman and their inability to do so, both have all the brothers die and both deal with the afterlife. This was a specific challenge to Jesus, an effort to stump him on an impossibility for the afterlife without bigamy (a practice demonstrated several times in the Old Testament but never endorsed: Genesis 2:23-24 was always the marriage ideal that was imperfectly followed).

I cannot possibly extrapolate every single connection that exists between the apocrypha and the rest of the Bible, but I hope the examples I gave are proof enough to show that these Old Testament books did indeed play a part in the public ministry of Jesus, and their impact was readily identified by the early Christians.

F) The Antilegomena: Four books in the New Testament (Hebrews, James, Jude and the Book of Revelation) were called "antilegomena" (literally "spoken against," used to mean "text whose authority

is in dispute") by Martin Luther. He considered them questionable on grounds that they provided information that was not included in the Gospels.

While Catholics, Orthodox and most traditional Protestant Churches support the idea that all 27 books of the New Testament are inspired, there are many Christians (and even some Churches) who still hold onto this theory: that some books don't hold as much value as the others. What do we base our value off of? Our own personal preferences or the fact that after millennia of questioning (especially the last 500 years), no significant change has ever been successfully endorsed? As mentioned earlier, it seems almost every book but Romans and the synoptic Gospels has been questioned at one time or another by Protestants. It seems to me that the very inconsistency of applying "value" to the antilegomena argument is the biggest detractor to this concept. But I can take it one step further.

If we look for "truth," then we can certainly suggest that some things are more important than others without discarding the less valuable. One type of food might be healthier than another, but that fact by itself does not mean that the less healthy food does not provide nourishment, even nourishment enough to survive. Yet when the antilegomena argument is used in debate, it is invariably used to discredit an inconvenient scripture. As an example, for those who try to separate "good deeds" from "faith" (something Jesus Himself claims is not possible, see John 3:36), they invariably call the Letter of Saint James antilegomena because verse 2:24 specifically states: See how a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. Actually, half of the entire chapter (2:14-26) pursues this concept with very sound reasoning.

I would hope the fundamental problem with this use of the antilegomena is obvious, but sometimes it needs to be pointed out anyway. By suggesting a Biblical source is right *some* of the time as opposed to *all* of the time makes it completely useless. How does one judge what is correct as opposed to, at best, "incomplete." In my experience, the answer is invariably the same one Martin Luther gave: "harmony with the rest of the Bible." But what does "harmony" mean? The polite answer is "because it's not supported elsewhere (particularly not supported by the Gospels)." As can be seen in my above example, a questionable verse of James actually was supported by the Gospel, but even if this were not the case, so what?

If we assume that a given passage is only held to be true if it is collaborated elsewhere, then it is redundant and therefore unneeded. Where does that place the Gospel according to Saint John (which does occasionally come under attack)? But without Saint John's Gospel, the very divinity of Jesus can be legitimately questioned. Without this Gospel and its unique message, Jesus may indeed be what non-Christians make Him out to be: either a wise man or (at best) a mere prophet. If we take Martin Luther's logic to its conclusion, we would remove every book from the Bible but one, as the others would either be wrong or unnecessary. Which book would be the one to remain behind?

Furthermore, to suggest a work cannot be "inspired" because of its unique message seems counter to the Jewish and Christian faiths as a whole. If the message in the Bible could not be credible because of its uniqueness, why have the Bible itself? The world certainly did not need a message on how to live a better life. Hinduism predated Moses by about 700 years. Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Confucius and other great philosophers had told mankind a great way to live long before Jesus came around.

Even Martin Luther softened his stance on attempting to remove the four books he wanted to remove. But while he relented on the antilegomena personally, he left a legacy of allowing Protestants

to question any Catholic teaching they are uncomfortable with. I'm not suggesting that it is wrong to question a position based on reason, only that it's wrong to casually dismiss any evidence that is contrary to one's point of view. This is called "Volunterism," (a belief that something is true because one wants it to be true) a cancerous philosophy that is currently having a disastrous impact on today's young adults. It is quite easy to believe what you want to believe about salvation when you feel free to question the authority of any scripture not to your liking. I wish I could say this childish "theology" was limited to the lunatic fringe (and it usually is), but I have seen highly-educated and well-respected people essentially do the same thing.

G) Self-Educating Christians:

Then the angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, "Get up and head south on the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza, the desert route." So he got up and set out. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, that is, the queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury, who had come to Jerusalem to worship, and was returning home. Seated in his chariot, *he was reading the prophet Isaiah*. The Spirit said to Philip, "Go and join up with that chariot." Philip ran up and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and said, "*Do you understand what you are reading?*" He replied, "*How can I, unless someone instructs me?*" So he invited Philip to get in and sit with him.
-Acts of the Apostles 8:26-31 (italics mine)

The last question to consider is if making the Bible available in the vernacular so that everyone can be their own "priest" would be a good thing. This is really a mixed question and a simple answer will not suffice. In short, I will say that printing the Bible in the vernacular certainly *was* a good thing. I don't see how any rational person can deny the importance of one learning his own faith on his own time. Likewise, I doubt any rational argument could be made suggesting that personal reading of the Bible does not help in learning of the faith. The real question, however, is if this is *enough* to learn the faith. I believe the Bible itself says "no," and for good reason.

In the scripture above, the eunuch was *reading* scripture, but *did not understand*. This is clearly *not* a case of him being illiterate, nor of not having scripture available in the vernacular. It is only with the help of a teacher (Saint Philip) that the eunuch is finally able to learn and gain faith. At least some level of outside instruction is needed to gain faith.

1) Point of View is Important: To understand the Bible today, one can essentially take one of two views: either one can look at it from the perspective of a First Century Jew, or as a 21st Century Elitist. Any other perspective ignores *both* the thought processes of the authors as well as the needs of the contemporary reader. The Catholic Church looks at it from the perspective of the First Century Jew, which Jesus, all of the apostles and nearly all of the original Christians were. The reasoning is that, by understanding how scripture was applied to the needs of that time, it can be properly interpreted for the needs of today. We do not live as First Century Jews did, therefore we need to learn their culture to properly understand the author's perspective. Since most of us don't have the time to read (much less understand) the nearly 900 page Mishnah (not to mention the 3,225 pages of commentary that built up around it in the past 2,000 years, which, along with the Mishnah, is collectively called the Talmud), we must rely again on teachers of the faith.

The Catholic Church has long been a defender of this view, and Dr. Bryant Pitre's books

concerning the Jewish origins of Catholic beliefs (notably of the Eucharist and of the Virgin Mary) are very good examples of how this process works. One should note that Dr. Pitre never claims a controversial interpretation of the Bible with his logic alone. There is always mention of a Protestant apologist who has arrived at the same conclusion as he. In a couple choice cases, it was a breakthrough made by a Protestant studying Jewish history that actually gave Dr. Pitre an insight he was missing on his own!

The dangers of learning the Bible from a 21st Century Elitist perspective is painfully obvious; one only needs to look. For the sophisticated, Christianity becomes watered down into Spirituality in efforts to make it "fit" the world today, until there is hardly any evidence of Jesus or His teachings left at all. It appears to me that Spirituality (essentially a doubt of God but not of the Supernatural) leads to Agnosticism (a doubt of anything Supernatural) and finally to Atheism (a belief against the Supernatural). In contrast, those who do resist the world's views in the name of Jesus but without a First Century Jewish perspective (and they seem to be the most vocal of all modern Christians) preach such a simplistic gospel that it's no wonder it is not being taken seriously by scientifically minded Atheists (or much of the general public either, to be honest). In neither case do I believe ill intent is the motivation, at least not for most of them. I believe this is because a unique and fundamental element of Christianity is being violated when the perspective changes: the union of the Ritual with the Philosophical.

Without a firm teaching of the absolute Philosophical truths of Christianity grounded in the Jewish Rituals whose context they were made in, it is natural for the more sophisticated to absorb other world views without a basis to judge these views for their intended practical merits. For the less sophisticated, the opposite is true and the Philosophy is mistaken as Ritual: they latch onto a few key passages of scripture and defend them against any and all logic (including other passages in the Bible). They are fearful that even the slightest change of their theological views will damn their souls. It is the purpose of a teacher to guide acolytes against both of these treacherous perils.

2) Biblical Evidence of Extra-Biblical Knowledge: I also want to point to the Gospel according to John 20:30-31: Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of [his] disciples that *are not written in this book*. But these are written *that you may [come to] believe* that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in his name. (italics mine) We see a similar message just one chapter later, which is incidentally the very last verse of the gospels (John 21:25): There are also many other things that Jesus did, but if these were to be described individually, I do not think the whole world would contain the books that would be written.) Clearly, not all the teachings of Jesus made it to the Gospels. Now, I don't want to get into a pointless debate over which of the teachings of Jesus should or should not have been in the Gospels, but there are two very important and intertwined lessons to be learned from these two passages. The first is that the teachings included in Saint John's Gospel were chosen for the specific purpose of helping one *to believe in Jesus as the Messiah*. The second is that a great wealth of other teachings do exist *outside* the Bible.

In regards to the first point, we see that the Gospels are not an end in themselves, but the beginning of a journey. For one to believe, one must have faith. Faith, as described by Jesus several times, is like a seed. Seeds need to grow; they are useless when stagnant. Reading the Gospels is to plant the seed of faith, but growth still requires more. The Epistles go a long way in providing growth, but even this is not enough: Therefore, brothers, stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught, either by *an oral statement* or by a letter of ours. (2 Thessalonians 2:15, italics mine). We see something similar in 1 Corinthians 11:2: I praise you because you remember me in everything and *hold fast to the traditions*, just as I handed them on to you. (italics mine) The sin of Sloth is real and mortal. It

applies to intellectual endeavors (called Acedia) as well as to the physical. It is not enough for one to simply read the Bible and be done with it like one might read the sports page of a newspaper. One must attempt to not only know what the Bible *says* (after all, did not the Pharisees and Sadducees succeed spectacularly in this regard?), but attempt to understand what it *means* to the best of one's ability.

3) Sola Scriptura: In opposition to the need of extra-Biblical sources, the matter of Sola Scriptura (scripture alone) needs to be addressed. Fortunately, much has already been said. Many Protestants believe that, since the Bible is true, it is all one needs. I've already provided examples of scripture that needs outside sources to be understood properly (or even to be understood at all). More can easily be found if one looks. Consider the story of the angel Michael hiding the body of Moses from Satan (Jude 1:9). This comes from a Jewish legend *The Assumption of Moses* which was never intended to be scripture anymore than *Casey at the Bat* was intended to recite Baseball history. Here, we see scripture referring to something outside of scripture to help illustrate a point (in this particular case, Michael, despite being God's chosen champion *against* Lucifer, still did not take it upon himself to be the ultimate *judge* of Lucifer). We also see Hebrews 11:5 referring to the popular Book of Enoch (in this case, illustrating the faithfulness of Enoch before the Great Flood). Yet it is easy to see why Enoch, despite being popular, is not considered inspired by any mainstream Church. Although much can be learned there on why God allows the wicked to have dominion over the weak for a time, the main focus is on the conflict between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, with the author clearly being a Pharisee. I find it hard to justify a manifesto of one religious sect against another as being "inspired" myself, especially since Jesus found so much occasion to condemn the teachings of both sides. But these two examples are innocent. One can easily be a true Christian without these fun facts and the color they add to the faith. A very insidious threat does exist, however, for those who don't leave the comfort zone of the Bible.

I recently read an article providing seven "facts" why the death of Jesus was *not* a sacrifice. This of course ignores all the explicit scriptural mentions by Saint Paul and others of this *being* a sacrifice. I can only suppose that the author believed that such references were only written for dramatic effect instead of ritual and spiritual truth, but he could also simply decide the Letters in question were antilegomena and avoid this problem altogether. But I did find at least some of his arguments interesting. This author obviously knew more than most do about the life and times of Jesus, but he clearly didn't know enough. His main argument was that Jesus on the cross was not a sacrifice because it did not involve a priest, altar, offering prayer or liturgy. The fact he knew this impressed me. For a First Century Jew who just happened to walk by and see Jesus on the cross, this argument is absolutely correct. It was just one more horrible execution among so many others.

But for those who *heard* the Gospel and *knew* Jewish tradition, it *was* a proper sacrifice. All four Gospels provide all the proof needed, but one needs to know some extra-Biblical information to understand their significance. Jesus identifies himself many times as a priest (mainly through Old Testament symbolism), so He *was* priest as well as sacrifice. As Jesus said (with modifications to properly usher in the New Covenant) the *liturgy* of the Passover Meal, where He simultaneously *offered* Himself to God. The liturgy was prescribed by Moses in Exodus 12:24-27. Likewise, the meal table would have been easily understood as the "altar" for this particular ritual. But, this alone does not help us. The Ritual ended some hours (possibly days, but I'm not going to discuss that theory here) before the crucifixion took place. These were two separate events that happened to roughly coincide with each other. Or did they?

If we look at the accounts of the Last Supper, particularly Saint John's and to a lesser extent

Saint Luke's, we see Jesus doing things not mentioned in Exodus. Was Jesus making this up or is there something else to it? If we look at the Mishnah, we will see that the Jews would follow the Passover ritual that included everything mentioned in the Gospels ... and more. In particular, that the Passover meal *would not end until the last cup was drunk*, and that this cup would contain *wine*. This was no small matter to a devout Jew in the First Century. Another thing we see in the Mishnah is that, in a case of mandatory charity, Jews were required to take into their homes those too poor to afford all four cups themselves for their Ritual. Much could be left out or modified to accommodate one's ability to perform the Ritual, but not the four cups. Yet Jesus famously did not drink the final cup during the Passover Meal.

As we read the various accounts of his Passion, we see Jesus refusing several offers of wine, including one that was traditionally given to a condemned man (Matthew 27:34). It contained myrrh to deaden the pain (again, this fun fact is outside the Bible but would have been well known to First Century Jews). There is no scripture denying Jesus this mercy, so why did He refuse? Especially since He was offered myrrh as a birthday present by the Magi. Would not taking it at His death have a symbolic meaning connecting it to His birth and point to His imminent Resurrection? But then we come to the final moments of Jesus, when he finally drinks some vinegar (which is spoiled wine and sometimes translated as such) and says "It is finished" (John 19:28-30). Now, "it" can legitimately mean several things here: His life, His mission, the redemptive plan for man, and maybe more. But all these interpretations also point to another "it": the completion of the sacrifice. If the Passover sacrificial Ritual was not completed, then no other interpretation matters anyway, because the death was not a sacrifice. By drinking the wine as He expired, the greatly extended Passover sacrificial Ritual was finally completed.

While many fun facts justifiably are not considered inspired, to completely dismiss them out of hand is a terrible mistake. At best, much flavor of the faith is lost. At worst, serious heresies can take root through ignorance. When the early Church set about canonizing the Bible, they didn't simply hope they guessed right while going over a long list. God spoke to them in no small part through the traditions they already believed to be true and, indeed, were practiced by Jesus who fulfilled the "law and prophets" perfectly. Martin Luther and others have denied these outside sources based on *Sola Scriptura*. Many others have spent a lot of time and worry second-guessing their faith only to return to the *status quo* feeling unsatisfied, while still others have gone on the path to heresy.

Conclusions: While it was indeed a dark time for Catholicism during the events that led up to the Protestant Reformation, there is no evidence that the Church was deliberately trying to keep the "secrets" of the Bible from its followers. After 500 years of Protestant efforts to bring the Word into the vernacular, Protestants have validated what the Catholic Church had already been saying. The Protestant argument against Catholic Bibles now only lies in the seven Old Testament books that were removed by Martin Luther and in the cancerous legacy of questioning the validity of any New Testament book that goes against one's personal beliefs. While Protestants have proven that a devout life is possible without these books, they are nonetheless missing important parts of God's revelation. The argument of "harmony" and "uniqueness" is more of a personal opinion than true theological reasoning, yet it always seems to be the heart of any discussion to remove books accepted by the Early Church. *Sola Scriptura* has, however, denied essential facts of the faith that is leading to increased Spiritualism among the intellectual and great apostasies among the common people.

Martin Luther's efforts to get the faithful to learn for themselves was certainly a laudable one: But Moses answered him, "Are you jealous for my sake? If only all the people of the LORD were prophets! If only the LORD would bestow his spirit on them!" (Numbers 11:29). Encouraging a vernacular Bible is an

invaluable tool for this job, but it is just one tool. A proper understanding of the faith requires a teacher and the full range of tools available.

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