

Catholic UPDATE

C0499

The BIBLE

How the Many Versions Came About

CHOOSING A BIBLE can be a challenge for Catholics. The selection at a bookstore will include at least a half dozen different English translations. Participants in Bible study groups may find one member reading a passage from the *New American Bible* another from the *New Revised Standard Version*, while someone else scans the *Jerusalem Bible*.

This variety of English translations can help readers discover the richness of the sacred Scriptures, but it also can be confusing. If three different versions translate the same biblical passage in three different ways, readers may wonder if anyone really knows what the passage means. In this *Update* we will look at how the various translations came about and how they differ from each other.



Early Translations

Christians have read translations of the Bible almost from the beginning of the Christian movement. The earliest translation was the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) called the Septuagint. It was produced by Jewish scholars during the third century before Christ. Christians began to translate the Aramaic sayings of Jesus and other early Christian materials into Greek, which were incorporated into the writings of the New Testament.

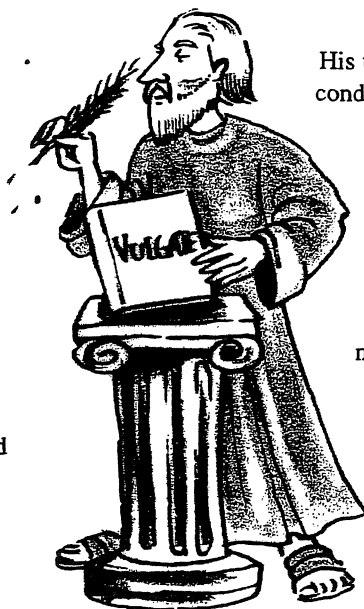
The earliest translations of the Bible into a language other than Greek were the result of the Church's missionary activity. Although Greek was the common language of most of the Mediterranean world, the Christian message traveled to places where other languages were read and spoken.

By the end of the second century, the Gospel had reached Edessa (Syria). Since the common language there was Syriac, it became necessary to translate the Greek New Testament into that language.

By the end of the fourth century the Church had spread throughout the Roman Empire, where the major language was Latin. St. Jerome, himself a Scripture scholar, saw the need for a Bible that could be read more widely in the Latin-speaking world. He created a Latin translation that became known as the Vulgate. *Vulgate* is Latin for "common" or "everyday."

Now in English

An English version of the entire Bible was produced by John Wycliffe between 1380 and 1382. He translated from Latin to English. But by now the Vulgate had nearly a thousand-year tradition in the West.



His translation was condemned and its copies burned.

In 1525, William Tyndale completed a translation of the New Testament, this time working from Greek. This version, too, ran afoul of Church authorities. It was suppressed and its translator put to death.

Yet an English translation was an idea whose time had come. As the English Church was being reorganized at the time of King Henry VIII, Sir Thomas Cromwell officially approved the English translation made by Miles Coverdale,

which was based on the work of Tyndale.

On February 10, 1604, King James I of England ordered that a new and better translation of the Bible be made, and a group of scholars was named to begin the work. This "new" Bible was to be translated directly from the Hebrew and Greek. The result was the most influential English translation used by Protestants and Anglicans, the King James Version of 1611.

Of interest to English-speaking Catholics is the translation from the Vulgate completed by George Martin, an Oxford biblical scholar, under the sponsorship of William (Cardinal) Allen. Cardinal Allen was forced to leave England in 1565. He established a college in Douay, France, to train Catholic missionary priests for the conversion of England. The translation appeared in two French cities, Douay and Rheims, in 1609-1610. Hence this English version is known as Douay-Rheims. This translation was used by English-speaking Catholics for over

The Most Common English Translations

Catholic biblical scholars encourage Catholics to use a Catholic edition, but, in a spirit of ecumenism, to feel comfortable with other translations as well. If you feel the choices are just too many, you may feel most comfortable with the *New American Bible*, which is used at Mass and other Catholic worship. You might also consult with your parish religious education staff or priests, or with a knowledgeable clerk at a Catholic bookstore.



Revised Standard Version (RSV). This translation is based upon a revision of the standard King James Version and is still a literal translation. It remains a standard for good Bible study because of its fidelity to the original text, but it retains some antiquated expressions in English and makes no attempt at inclusive language. There is a Catholic edition of the RSV.



New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). This is a wholly redone translation in line with the RSV but with sensitivity to inclusive language for human beings. It retains traditional language for God. Although it is fairly literal in its translation, the English expressions have been updated to reflect current American cultural preferences. There is a Catholic edition.



New American Bible with Revised New Testament and Psalms (NAB-RNT). This has become the standard American

concerned. This is the translation used in the Lectionary for Mass and other Catholic worship in the United States and many other English-speaking countries.



Catholic Study Bible. This is an edition of the *New American Bible* that appeared in 1990. It incorporates the text of the NAB with a commentary—reading guide—written by noted American Catholic biblical scholars. This edition has an excellent cross-reference system between the text and the commentary. It is a helpful, user-friendly tool for Bible study groups.



New International Version (NIV). Unlike the preceding versions, this is not a revision. This version is intended to be ecumenical and to appeal to a broad range of English-speaking people. The translation is considered somewhat more conservative than the NRSV. Its language is suitable for private study, public reading, and young people's Bible studies. There is no Catholic edition of the NIV.



Today's English Version (TEV)/Good News Bible. This translation was commissioned by the American Bible Society and completed between 1976 and 1979. It appears in the widely used *Good News Bible* and other editions. The purpose was to produce an accurate, original translation of the Bible in simple, clear, unambiguous English. Sentences were translated meaning-for-meaning in an

350 years, until the New American Bible replaced it gradually in the early 1970's.

Better manuscripts, better translations

For over 250 years, the King James (or Authorized) Version was virtually the only one used by English-speaking Protestants; English-speaking Roman Catholics used the Douay-Rheims Version. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a few new English translations began to appear. Then, after the Second World War, the pace accelerated dramatically. Between 1952 and 1989, at least 26 English translations of the complete Bible rolled off the presses. There were a variety of reasons for this.

First, because of archaeological discoveries, biblical scholars now have much better Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic manuscripts on which

to base translations. The original texts, now two or three thousand years old, had all been copied by hand and circulated among synagogues and churches throughout the ancient world. Along the way, originals were lost and translators had to rely on copies, which sometimes contained mistakes and changes.

By comparing thousands of older manuscripts scholars have been able to establish a text of the Greek New Testament

that is more accurate than the one used for older translations.

In addition to using more ancient manuscripts, scholars now know more about biblical languages and cultures than ever before.



Archaeological discoveries of ancient documents and inscriptions have helped clarify a number of passages.

A final reason for the variety of new translations today is that the English language itself has changed over the centuries. To illustrate, let us roll back the clock to 1382, when John Wycliffe published the first complete English translation of the Bible. His version of Matthew 2:16 read: "Thanne Eroude seynge that he has disseyued of the astomyenes, was full wrooth; and he sent and slewe alle the children that weren in Bethlehem." The language is scarcely intelligible to us anymore.

We move ahead to 1611 when the King James Version appeared and the verse reads: "Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wrath, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem...." The language still seems archaic, but at least we can understand it. Compare that to 1946, when the Revised Standard Ver-

✎ **Contemporary English Version (CEV).** This is a new translation, in "clear, everyday language," published in 1995 by the American Bible Society. A major goal of this translation is sensitivity to the hearers of God's word. It employs contemporary English that is more colloquial in nature. There is no Catholic edition.

✎ **Revised English Bible (REB).** This is a major revision of the *New English Bible (NEB)*. This version was commissioned by the Anglican churches of Great Britain and is primarily a product of British scholarship. The translators rendered the original biblical languages into contemporary English on a meaning-for-meaning basis. It is readable and useful for study purposes. There is no Catholic edition.

✎ **New Jerusalem Bible (NJB).** First published in 1985, it and its predecessor the *Jerusalem Bible (JB)*, published in 1966, were inspired by French translations of the Bible by Dominican Catholic scholars at the L'Ecole Biblique in Jerusalem. The English version is based on the original Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek texts, but adopts the general outlook of its French counterpart. The text is the most poetic of the translations we are considering. Its poetic character lends itself to prayer. This Catholic Bible is also justifiably praised for its extensive footnotes and informative background material.

✎ **New King James Version (NKJV).** Completed in 1982, is an attempt to update the King James Version without signifi-

New Testament work on the 16th-century Greek text, rather than on the evidence of older Greek manuscripts. There is no Catholic edition.

✎ **New Testament and Psalms: An Inclusive Language Version.** This is an adaptation of the NRSV that employs radically gender-inclusive language. Some have dubbed it the "PC Bible" (for Political Correctness). For example, the title used by Jesus, "son of man," becomes "child of the human one," and the Lord's Prayer begins with the address, "Father-Mother." The result of this approach is a clumsy and at times offensive translation. Scripture scholar Bishop Donald Trautman of Erie, Pennsylvania, then chairman of the U.S. Bishops' Committee on Liturgy, said of the translation when it came out in 1995: "It is a most irresponsible translation that offends the doctrine of the Church and the revealed truth of Father, Son and Holy Spirit."

✎ **Condensations and paraphrases.** Finally, mention should be made of the immensely popular *The Way*, the *Living Bible*, and *The Reader's Digest Bible*. *The Way* and the *Living Bible* are not a translations but are paraphrases of the biblical text. Paraphrases are not reliable for Bible study, but they can be nonetheless inspiring and easy to understand. A successor to the *Living Bible* is the *New Living Translation*. Though a real translation and not a paraphrase, it has tendencies to translate text along the lines of predetermined judgments.

The Reader's Digest Bible (1982), on the other hand, is truly a condensation of the Bible. It has clipped out all repetition in the Bible. Unfortunately, the result is a distortion of the text because repetition is

sion translated it: "Then Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, was in a furious rage, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem...."

Finally, we fast-forward to 1986, when the *New American Bible* translated it: "When Herod realized that he had been deceived by the magi, he became furious. He ordered the massacre of all the boys in Bethlehem...." At last we feel like the text is speaking our language!

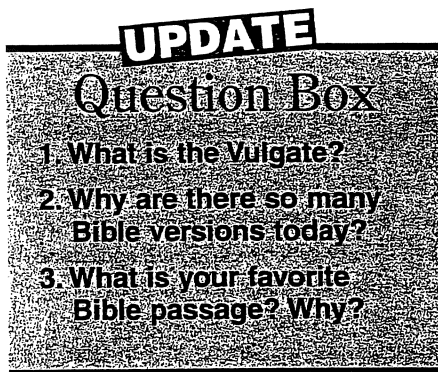
How translation happens

People who translate the ancient Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek texts into modern English are concerned with two things: accuracy and readability. Consider, for example, how Philippians 1:12 sounds if we simply substitute English words for the Greek ones: "To know now you brethren I want that the things to me rather for the advancement of the gospel have come." Translators must decide how to turn it into a readable English sentence.

Some try to translate the text word-for-word as much as possible, adjusting the word order and making other changes only as necessary. This approach works quite well for the Philippians passage quoted above. With only a few modifications, the sentence reads: "Now I want you to know, brethren, that the things (which have happened) to me have come for the advancement of the gospel."

Others try to translate the texts meaning-for-meaning, rather than word-for-word. For example, Psalm 16:7 literally says in Hebrew: "I will bless the Lord who counsels me; even at night my kidneys instruct me." Most English speakers would find it peculiar, if not humorous, to think of people being instructed at night by their kidneys. However, we often speak of knowing something "in our hearts." Therefore, all English translations render the passage with the word *heart* instead of *kidneys*. "In the night also my heart instructs me" would then preserve the meaning but not the exact words of the Hebrew text.

Concern for theological clarity also affects translations. This is reflected in the various translations of Isaiah 7:14, a vigorously disputed passage. The Hebrew



Therefore the New Revised Standard Version and several others read, "the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel."

Others sharply disagree with this translation, since Isaiah 7:14 is quoted in Greek in Matthew's Gospel, where the word *virgin* is used, and the Isaiah passage provides vital support for belief in the virginal conception of Jesus. Therefore, the *New American Bible* and several others read, "The virgin shall be with child, and bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel."

Modern Bible translations: Catholic and Protestant

When talking about Bible translations, the questions Catholics often ask are: Why do we have 73 books in the Bible, no more no less? And why don't Catholic and Protestant Bibles contain the same number of inspired books? These questions raise the problem of the biblical canon. Originally, a canon (from the Greek *kanon*) meant a rod or stick that one used to measure length, and hence a criterion or standard.

Catholics and Protestants accept the same 27 inspired books as making up the New Testament. But when we turn to the Old Testament, some significant differences emerge.

The decision finally determining the exact number of books accepted as inspired Scripture for Catholics was not made until the Council of Trent in 1546. The Council fathers accepted 46 Old Testament books, following what appeared to them as a firm tradition of the Church from ancient times. The leaders of the Protestant Reformation, on the other hand, rejected some books agreed upon at Trent.

sections of Esther and Daniel not considered inspired Scriptures by Protestants. Protestants call these seven books the apocryphal books. Catholics, however, call these same disputed books deuterocanonical.

Fortunately, today, modern translations of the Bible are published in Catholic editions. These translations will include an *imprimatur* (assurance of a Catholic bishop that the text is in line with Catholic teaching) and the seven deuterocanonical books.

Selecting a modern translation

When you select a modern English translation of the Bible, keep a couple of questions in mind. Do you want a translation that generally translates the text word-for-word or one that renders it meaning-for-meaning? What kind of English style do you read comfortably? Try reading sample passages in two or three different translations to get a feel for their use of English. This can be done by a trip to the library or bookstore.

The sheer number of translations available today doesn't have to be confusing. Choosing a Bible depends on the likes and interests of the reader. There is no one best version. ■

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by Raymond E. Brown, S.S.

The Fundamentalist Challenge

Suggestions for a Catholic Response



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A questioner once asked me: Is it so bad that a Catholic becomes a biblical fundamentalist? Wouldn't a fundamentalist still believe in many basic doctrines of the Christian faith and have a solid moral code? The answer is yes, but biblical fundamentalism, despite what it can preserve, really distorts the challenge of Jesus Christ. It provides an absolute certainty based on a belief that every word in the Bible really has been dictated by God and one needs only hold to the literal meaning. It does not recognize that every word in the Bible, even though inspired by God, has been written by human beings who had limitations.

The message of the Incarnation is that there is no way to avoid the interplay of the divine and the human in approaching God. Biblical literalism, since it makes all divine, supplies a false certitude that often unconsciously confuses the human limitation with the divine mes-

sage. A literalist interpretation destroys the very nature of the Bible as a human expression of divine revelation.

One must understand that only human beings speak words. Therefore the very valid description of the Bible as "God's word" has both the divine element ("God's") and the human ("word").

Some 'don'ts' and 'do's'

Those familiar with what works and what doesn't work in responding to fundamentalist challenges have come up with the following bits of wisdom.

Don't waste time arguing over individual biblical texts with fundamentalists. The question is a much larger one of an overall view of religion, of Christianity and of the nature of the Bible.

Don't attack fundamentalists as if they were fools.

"The Roman Catholic Church considers itself a biblical Church."

Often biblical literalism is an attitude of self-defense even on the part of extremely intelligent people. They want to preserve their faith in God, and this seems to them the only way. They will understand your attacks on them as an attack on their faith. Indeed, were you to be successful in convincing an intelligent biblical fundamentalist that the position is wrong, you might be surprised to find that the former fundamentalist does not become a more moderate Christian but an atheist.

Some fundamentalists are very well informed about biblical technicalities, such as languages. There are occasionally evangelists who know a lot more about the Bible than the average Catholic priest or mainline Protestant minister.

Don't be sure that your standard arguments against fundamentalism will work. Biblical fundamentalists have developed careful defenses against the contrary arguments that they have encountered. For instance, if you triumphantly point to the fossil argument supporting evolution, you may be surprised to find a fundamentalist who maintains that God created the world with fossils already in it and that therefore such fossils tell us nothing about the antiquity of the world.

An important "do" is to present the Bible in an intelligent, nonliteralist way. There is no use moaning about the number of fundamentalist media preachers if we have no one in the media presenting the Bible in a sensible, nonliteral manner based on modern biblical approaches, and not simply using the text as a jumping-off point for a pietistic homily. When fundamentalists are the only ones to offer people knowledge about the Bible, people will go to fundamentalists. A very solid, scholarly approach to the Bible can be spiritually nourishing and mentally satisfying. Catholics must encourage that in the media.

One might object that on the Catholic scene there is a shortage of priests and that some priests are not good expositors of the Bible. Then one must capitalize on the real interest among the laity who should be tapped and professionally prepared for this service. If as a Church we recognize this as a major problem, then we should mobilize our forces in order to supply intelligent biblical leadership among Catholics.

Effective teaching of the Bible is not a challenge that affects Roman Catholics alone, and so there is no reason why the mainline Protestant Churches and Roman Catholics cannot join in a common effort to present the Bible intelligently in the media. Some of the Protestant Churches have developed excellent textbooks for reading the Bible.

The fear of loss of Roman Catholic doctrine if we cooperate with Protestants in such biblical exposition is largely exaggerated. Indeed, if such cooperation were sponsored by various Church leaders, I think they would all recognize that the essential issue is to communicate a basic, intelligent approach to the Bible. It would respect Christian doctrine on which we all agree.

Ten challenges and responses

Often Roman Catholics become a bit tongue-tied when the teachings of their faith are challenged by biblical fundamentalists. Many Catholics are very articulate in explaining the doctrines of their faith—the Mass, the sacraments, the papacy, Mary and the saints—in the words and phrases remembered from their catechism. But nothing in their training equips them to handle the objections that such beliefs are *nonbiblical*. Their first reaction to a fundamentalist probing may be to respond in terms of Church teaching—a response that confirms the fundamentalist in the opinion that Catholic beliefs are totally foreign to the Bible. It might help if Catholics were able to speak about these issues in biblical language that fundamentalists might understand.

Consequently, I have written out 10 responses to 10 challenges often raised by fundamentalists against Catholic positions. I have tried to formulate these responses so that they present the Catholic positions *in terms of biblical faith*.

Obviously, there may be more than one way to phrase the Catholic responses from a biblical perspective. I think my wordings, which I have tested on friends, are accurate: but I don't pretend that they exhaust the full meaning of Catholic faith on the subjects discussed. I am treating only aspects of those subjects that are of most concern to biblical fundamentalists.

I have tried to put the 10 challenges in everyday language—just the way you might hear them in a conversation with a Christian fundamentalist at your front door or during a lunch break at work. The challenges are in the form of questions reflecting *how fundamentalists understand Catholic positions* that bother them.

1. Why don't Catholics see the Scriptures as containing the fullness of God's revelation instead of always running to the teaching authority of the Catholic Church for God's truth?

The Roman Catholic Church considers itself a biblical Church in the sense that it acknowledges and proclaims the Bible to be God's word. In the teachings of Moses and the prophets, and in the teachings of Jesus proclaimed by the apostles, *to which the Scriptures bear witness*, the Catholic Church confesses that God has revealed himself to humankind in a unique way. It acknowledges the sufficiency of the revelation witnessed by the Bible in the sense that no new revealer or no new special revelations are necessary for men and women to find the will of God and the grace of salvation.

If great attention has been given to the teaching of the ongoing Church in Roman Catholicism, that teaching is not presented in terms of a new revelation but as the result of the Church's continuing task to proclaim the biblical revelation in light of new problems in new generations. In carrying on that task, the Church regards itself as the instrument of the Paraclete-Spirit promised by Christ which would take what he had given and guide

Christians along the way of truth in subsequent times (John 16:13).

2. The Bible teaches us that we are saved through faith in Jesus Christ, our sole mediator. Why do Catholics contradict this by teaching that people can be saved through good works or by praying to the saints?

The Catholic Church proclaims to its people that, just as the Bible indicates, justification and redemption come through the grace given by God because of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Human beings cannot earn redemption or salvation. Neither is it won through good works. Good works are done through God's grace in response to God's redemptive work in Christ. Accordingly, Christ is the unique mediator between God and human beings.

Roman Catholicism has recognized the intercession of the saints. That is part of its understanding of the biblical injunction that we must pray for one another. The "we" includes not only believers on earth, but those who have gone before us as saints in God's presence in heaven. Such intercession is useful and salutary but in no way necessary in the sense in which the mediation of Jesus Christ is necessary. Any intercession on the part of the saints must be accepted by God and joined to the supreme intercession of the one high priest Jesus Christ. There is no other name by which we may be saved, as Acts 4:12 affirms.

3. Why don't Catholics recognize we are saved through a personal relationship to Jesus Christ, not through membership in a Church?

While the Catholic Church proclaims the all-sufficiency of the redemptive death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, it acknowledges that Christians must respond in faith and commitment to Christ so that God's redemptive grace may transform them as children of God. Therefore, encountering Christ and believing in him in a personal way is very much a part of Roman Catholic thought.

Jesus Christ redeemed a people—that is why we belong to a Church—and one becomes part of that people by adhesion to Christ.

Baptism of infants, which makes them part of the Christian family of God, in no way is meant to substitute for the later personal decision that is intrinsically a Christian demand. In the wholeness of Christian faith, Baptism and personal commitment must accompany each other.

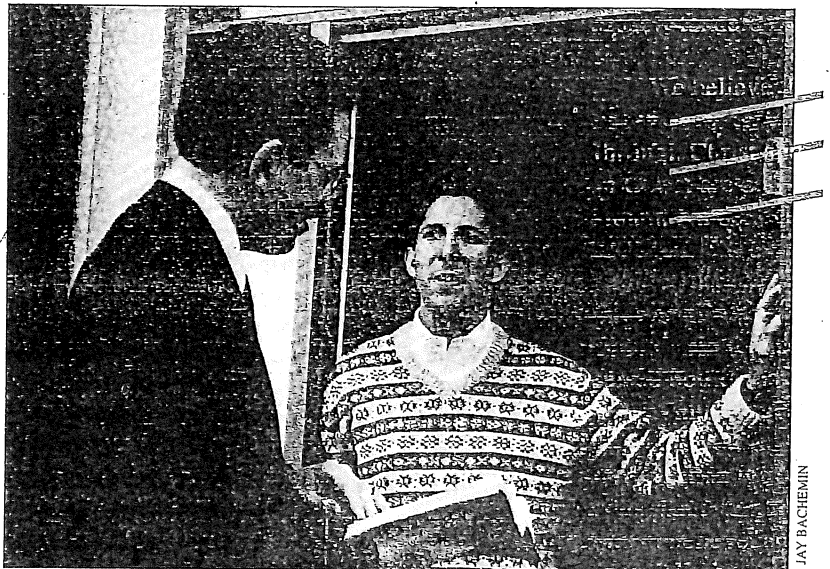
4. Why do Catholic priests repeat what you call "the Sacrifice of the Mass" instead of recognizing that Christ died once and for all and that his death can be the only Christian sacrifice?

Following the New Testament injunction of Jesus, "Do this in memory of me," the Catholic Church in its liturgy regularly breaks the bread which is the Body of Christ and offers the cup which is the communion in his

Blood. It accepts fully the teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross is once and for all. There is no need for other sacrifices.

The liturgy of the Last Supper, which we call the Mass, is a sacrifice in the sense that it makes present again for Christians of different times and places the possibility of participating in the Body and Blood of Christ in commemoration of him, proclaiming the death of the Lord until he comes. The Mass is in no way a separate sacrifice from the sacrifice of the cross. It is not a new sacrifice replacing the sacrifice of the cross or adding to it as if the sacrifice were insufficient. Jesus, the Catholic Church holds, is the one high priest of the new covenant.

Catholics refer to our clergy as priests. That terminology recognizes that when a Christian, designated by ordination, presides at the Eucharist, which recalls the death of the Lord until he comes, that person represents Jesus the high priest and not merely the community. Our doctrine of the Mass as representing the one priestly sacrifice of Jesus is, in our judgment, fully biblical.



5. Why do Catholics go to the Church and its sacraments as the source of grace rather than to the Savior himself?

Christ saves Christians in and through the Church. The Church, which is the Body of Christ for which he gave himself (Ephesians 5:23, 25), has great dignity and importance; but the Church itself does not save people. We believe that Christ is operative in the sacraments of the Church and that it is Christ who gives the grace that touches lives. The Catholic teaching that the sacraments work *ex opere operato* (that is, through the sacramental action grace is conferred) never should be understood to mean that the sacrament of itself, independently of Christ, is effective. That formula is meant to say that the efficacy of the sacraments is not dependent on the clergyperson or administrator of the sacrament. Rather, for those who are disposed to receive his grace, Christ is operative in the sacrament.

6. Why do Catholics say that the pope is the head of the Church when Scripture says that Christ is the head?

Catholics believe that Jesus Christ is the head of the body which is the Church. No human can take his place, dispensing with his headship. The pope has no authority independent of Christ or in rivalry with him. Even as the New Testament speaks of overseers or bishops guiding individual churches, the pope is an overseer through whom Christ supplies guidance to the whole Church, keeping it in the truth of the gospel.

7. Why do Catholics look on Mary as divine or more-than-human instead of recognizing that she needed salvation?

In Catholic faith Mary, like all other descendants of Adam, had to be redeemed through Christ. We honor her especially for two biblical reasons: (a) She is the mother of Jesus who is Lord and God. (b) According to Luke 1:26-38 she is the first one to hear the good news of Jesus' identity and to say, "Be it done to me according to your word"—thus becoming the first disciple to meet Jesus' standard of hearing the word of God and doing it (see Luke 8:21).

We believe that God gave her special privileges, but these are related to the graces of discipleship given through Christ and in no way divinize her. All believers in Christ are delivered by his grace from the sin of Adam: All believers in Christ will be raised bodily from the dead. Catholics believe that Mary, the first one to profess belief in Christ as revealed by an angel, was through Christ's grace the first to be totally freed from Adam's sin (conceived without sin) and the first to be raised bodily (assumed into heaven).

While we acknowledge that these doctrines of the Immaculate Conception and Assumption of Mary are not found in the New Testament, we hold them as consonant with the picture in Luke of Mary as the first one to believe, and with the picture in John where she is especially honored as Jesus hangs on the cross.

8. Why do Catholics neglect the biblical teaching that Christ is coming back again?

We Catholics believe in the second coming of Christ. For us that means that God has yet to establish fully his Kingdom and to judge the world. All this will be accomplished through Christ and is not attainable by human endeavor. As for when, through the coming of Christ, God will establish his Kingdom, we believe in the teaching of Jesus recorded in Acts 1:7: "It is not for you to know the times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority." All human guesses as to the time of the second coming must yield to that biblical teaching.

9. Why does the Catholic Church discourage private interpretation of Scripture and make its members submit to official teaching?

We Catholics do not exaggerate the principle that the Church is the interpreter of Scripture. The Roman Catholic Church has rarely, if ever, defined what a text meant to the person who wrote it. The Church encourages interpreters of Scripture to discover with all the means available to them what individual passages meant when they were written and encourages all of its members to read the Bible for spiritual nourishment.

Church interpretation for Catholics deals primarily, not with what the biblical text meant when it was written, but with what it means for the life of the Christian community in subsequent eras. On essential issues it maintains that the Spirit who inspired the Scriptures will not allow the whole community of believers to be misled about faith and moral behavior.

Individuals from their Bible reading may come to radical conclusions. This has indeed happened in the course of history. Some have even denied the divinity of Christ, the Resurrection, Creation and the Ten Commandments. The Catholic Church will take its guidance on such biblical matters from the long tradition of Christian teaching stemming from reflecting on the Bible.

10. Why don't Catholics defend God's word in the Bible against all possibility of error, scientific matters included?

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that the Bible communicates without error that truth which God intended for the sake of our salvation. Affirming biblical inerrancy (freedom from error) in that sense, it also resists modern attempts to make the Bible answer problems that the biblical authors never thought of. It resists attempts to take biblical texts that envisioned other situations and apply them without qualification to situations of our times. Some of the conflicts between Roman Catholic practices and "literal" interpretations of the Bible rest precisely on this point.

The Roman Catholic Church believes that none of its positions are in conflict with the literal interpretation of the Scriptures, when "literal" means *what the author intended in his times as a communication of the truth that God wanted for the sake of our salvation*. It resists the use of biblical interpretation to support scientific or historical statements that lay beyond the competency of the biblical authors in their times. ■

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