

WHERE
WE GOT
THE BIBLE

OUR DEBT TO THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

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By

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“All scripture, inspired of God, is profitable to teach, to reprove, to correct, to instruct in justice, that the man of God may be perfect, furnished to every good work.”
—2 Timothy 3:16-17

TAN Books
Charlotte, North Carolina

Nihil Obstat et Imprimatur
JOANNES RITCHIE, *Vic. Gen.*
Glasguae

Originally published by B. Herder Book Co., St. Louis, Missouri. Reprinted in 1977 by TAN Books. Retypeset and republished by TAN in 2004.

ISBN: 978-0-89555-796-4

Cover illustration: Stained glass window of St. Peter with Keys. Photo © Alan Brown 1999. Used by arrangement with Al Brown Photo, 3597 N. Roberts Rd., Bardstown, KY 40004.

History of the First 31 Printings

<i>1st Printing, 1911</i>	<i>18th Printing, 1979</i>
<i>2nd Printing (Revised), 1924</i>	<i>19th Printing, 1981</i>
<i>3rd Printing, 1927</i>	<i>20th Printing, 1985</i>
<i>4th Printing, 1931</i>	<i>21st Printing, 1986</i>
<i>5th Printing, 1932</i>	<i>22nd Printing, 1987</i>
<i>6th Printing, 1934</i>	<i>23rd Printing, 1989</i>
<i>7th Printing, 1935</i>	<i>24th Printing, 1992</i>
<i>8th Printing, 1936</i>	<i>25th Printing, 1994</i>
<i>9th Printing (Revised), 1939</i>	<i>26th Printing, 1997</i>
<i>10th Printing, 1940</i>	<i>27th Printing, 1997</i>
<i>11th Printing, 1948</i>	<i>28th Printing, 1999</i>
<i>12th Printing, 1950</i>	<i>29th Printing, 2001</i>
<i>13th Printing, 1952</i>	<i>30th Printing (Retypeset), 2004</i>
<i>14th Printing, 1955</i>	<i>31st Printing, 2007</i>
<i>15th Printing, 1957</i>	<i>32nd Printing, 2009</i>
<i>16th Printing, 1960</i>	<i>33rd Printing, 2010</i>
<i>17th Printing, 1977</i>	<i>34th Printing, 2013</i>

Printed and bound in the United States of America.

TAN Books
Charlotte, North Carolina
www.TANBooks.com

2010

Dedicated to
All Lovers of the Written Word of God,
“in which are certain things hard to be understood, which the unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, to their own destruction.”
—2 *Peter* 3:16

“I would not believe the Gospel unless moved thereto by the authority of the Church.”
—St. Augustine
(*Contra Epis. Manich.*,
Fund., n. 6)

Preface to the First Edition

THIS little book about the Bible grew out of lectures which the writer delivered on the subject to mixed audiences. The lectures were afterwards expanded, and appeared in a series of articles in the Catholic press 1908-9, and are now with slight alterations reprinted. Their origin will sufficiently account for the colloquial style employed throughout.

There is, therefore, no pretense either of profound scholarship or of eloquent language; all that is attempted is a popular and, as far as possible, accurate exposition along familiar lines of the Catholic claim historically in regard to the Bible. It is candidly controversial without, however, let us hope, being uncharitable or unfair.

Friends had more than once suggested the reissue of the articles; and it appeared to the writer that at last the proper moment for it had come when the Protestant world is jubilating over the Tercentenary of the Authorized Version. Amidst the flood of literature on the subject of the Bible, it seemed but right that some statement, however plain and simple, should be set forth from the Catholic side, with the object of bringing home to the average mind the debt that Britain, in common with the rest of Christendom, owes to the Catholic Church in this connection. Probably the

motive of the present publication will be best understood by a perusal of the following letter from the writer which appeared in the *Glasgow Herald*, 18th of March, 1911:

The Bible Centenary and the Catholic Church

Amid the general jubilation over the three hundredth anniversary of the appearance of King James's version of the Bible, I think it would be a pity if we did not make mention of that great Church to which, under God, we owe our possession of the sacred Scriptures—I mean of course, the Roman Catholic Church. Without striking one single jarring note, I hope, in the universal chorus, yet I feel it would be rather ungenerous, and indeed historically unjust, did we not turn our eyes at least in passing to that venerable figure standing in the background surveying our celebrations, and, as it were, saying, "Rejoice over it, but remember it was from me you got it." As a Scotsman, who cannot forget that it is the Bible that has made Scotland largely what she is today, I yield to no one in veneration of the inspired Scriptures and in admiration of the incomparably beautiful Authorized Version. Still, honor to whom honor. We shall only be awarding a just meed of praise and gratitude if we frankly and thankfully recognize that it is to a council (or councils) of the R.C. Church that we owe the collection of the separate books into our present

Canon of the New Testament, and that to the loving care and devoted labor of the monks and scholars of that Church all through the ages we are indebted, not only for the multiplication and distribution of the sacred volume among the faithful when as yet no printing press existed, but even for the preservation of the Book from corruption and destruction. It is, then, undoubtedly true to say that, in the present order of Providence, it is owing to the Roman Catholic Church that we have a Bible at all. And no one will be a bit the worse Christian and Bible-lover if he remembers, this notable year, that it is to the Mother Church of Christendom he must look if he would behold the real preserver, defender, and transmitter of the "Word that endureth for ever."

HENRY GREY GRAHAM

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❧ Introduction ❧

Rome Hates the Bible?

IF all were true that is alleged against the Catholic Church in her treatment of Holy Scripture, then the proper title of these papers should be not “How we got”, but “How we have not got the Bible”. The common and received opinion about the matter among non-Catholics in Britain, for the most part, has been that Rome hates the Bible—that she has done all she could to destroy it—that in all countries where she has held power and sway she has kept the Bible from the hands of the people—has taken it and burned it whenever she found anyone reading it. Or if she cannot altogether prevent its publication or its perusal, at least she renders it as nearly useless as possible by sealing it up in a dead language which the majority of people can neither read nor understand. And all this she does, so we are told, because she knows that her doctrines are absolutely opposed to and contradicted by the letter of God’s written Word. She holds and propagates dogmas and traditions which could not stand one moment’s examination if exposed to the searching light of Holy Scripture. As a matter of fact, is it not known to everybody that, when the Bible was for the first time brought to the light

and printed and put into the people's hands in the sixteenth century, suddenly there was a great revolt against the Roman Church—there was a glorious Reformation? The people eagerly gazing upon the open Bible, saw they had been befooled and hoodwinked and been taught to hold “for doctrines the commandments of men,” and forthwith throwing off the fetters and emancipating themselves from the bondage of Romanism, they embraced the pure truth of the Word of God as set forth in Protestantism and Protestant Bibles.

Is not this the tale that history tells about Rome? Has she not always waged a cruel and relentless war against the Holy Book—issued prohibitions and framed decrees against reading it or having it in the house—sometimes even in her deadly hatred going to the length of making bonfires of heaps of Old and New Testaments, as Tunstall, Bishop of London, did to William Tyndale's? Has she not burned at the stake, or at least banished from their home and country, servants of the Lord like John Wycliffe and William Tyndale for no other crime than that of translating and printing and putting into layfolk's hands the sacred text of the Gospel of Jesus Christ? Who does not know instances, even in our own days, of pious old women (especially in Ireland) chancing to light upon a Bible (which they have never seen before) and reading it (especially St. John's Gospel 3:16) and going to the priest about the new light they had received through the blessed words, and then the priest snatching it out of

their hands and throwing it into the fire? This is not at all uncommon (it is said) in Catholic lands, where the poor people sometimes chance to get a copy of God's Word through the devoted labors of Bible-women and tract distributors. A Scotch lady in Rome, now happily a Catholic but then a member of a Protestant congregation there which supports a Bible distributor, once informed me of the account that this gentleman gravely related to a meeting of the congregation as to how an old woman in a small Italian town, accepting one of his Testaments and being illuminated by the Gospel of St. John (which she never saw before, of course, though part of it is read every day at Holy Mass), straightway went and confuted her priest and silenced him, so that he had no word to say in reply. This, I repeat, is the commonly accepted idea about Rome and her attitude toward Holy Scripture among the masses of non-Catholic people.

I have said advisedly "among the masses," for happily there are now a goodly number of enlightened and impartial persons and of scholars who have studied the matter fairly for themselves—men, for example, of the stamp of the late Dr. S. R. Maitland, among whom the idea is quite exploded. And one may not blame the masses too severely for entertaining the notion above alluded to: how indeed, we may ask, could they possibly think otherwise in face of the tradition handed down to them from their forefathers since the "Reformation" by minister, teacher and parents,

through sermon, catechism, newspaper, books of travel, fiction and history? They have believed the tradition as naturally as they believed that the sun rose in the east and set in the west; or that monasteries and convents were sinks of iniquity and dens of corruption; or that there was once a female Pope called Joan; or that Catholics pay money to get their sins forgiven. You cannot blame them altogether, for they had, humanly speaking, no opportunity of knowing anything else.

The Protestant account of pre-Reformation Catholicism has been largely a falsification of history. All the faults and sins that could possibly be raked up or invented against Rome or against particular bishops or priests were presented to the people of this unhappy land, and all her best acts misconstrued, misjudged, misrepresented, and nothing of good told in her favor. She has been painted as all black and hideous, and no beauty could be seen in her. Consequently people came to believe the tradition as a matter of course, and accepted it as history, and no more dreamed of inquiring whether it was true or not than they dreamed of questioning whether Mary wrote the Casket Letters or blew up Darnley at Kirk o' Field. Add to this the further fact that, Catholicism being almost totally wiped out in Scotland, the people had no means of making themselves personally acquainted with either its doctrines or its practices, and being very imperfectly educated till the beginning of the nine-

teenth century, were as incapable of arriving at a true knowledge of the interior life of the Catholic Church as of the internal organism of an antediluvian tadpole. Hence one can easily understand how it came about that, among the mass of the people in Bible-loving Scotland, the Pope was recognized as the Anti-Christ foretold by St. John, and Rome herself, that sitteth upon the seven hills, identified as "Babylon, the Great, the mother of harlots, and abominations of the earth," and the "woman drunken with the blood of the saints."

The story goes that one day the Merry Monarch, Charles the Second, propounded to the learned and scientific men about the Court the following profound problem: How is it that a dead fish weighs less than a living one? The learned and scientific men discussed the grave difficulty and wrote elaborate treatises on it to please the Royal inquirer, but came to no satisfactory conclusion. Finally it occurred to one of them to test whether it really was as the King had said; and of course he discovered that the thing was a joke: the fish weighed exactly the same dead or living, and all the time the Merry Monarch had been "having them on." People have been acting much in the same way in regard to the assertion so glibly made that Rome hates the Bible, and persecutes it, and tries to blot it out of existence. But nowadays many are inquiring: Is it really so? Are we sure of our facts? Are we not building up mountains of abuse and calumny on a false sup-

position? Just as all have come to know that the sun, as a matter of fact, does not rise or set but stands still, that there never was a Pope Joan but his name was John, that monasteries and convents are homes of learning and sanctity and charity, and that no Catholic ever pays or ever could pay a single farthing to get his sins remitted—and all this through the spread of knowledge and education and enlightenment and study—so also I venture to think that people will now be rightly considered ignorant and blameworthy, and at the least behind the times, if they do not learn that the notion I have alluded to above about the Catholic Church and the Bible is false and nonsensical—historically false and inherently nonsensical. By a calm consideration of the facts of history and a mind open to conviction on genuine evidence, they will be driven by sheer force of honesty to the conclusion that the Catholic Church, so far from being the monster of iniquity that she is painted, has in very truth been the parent, the author and maker, under God, of the Bible; that she has guarded it and defended it all through the ages, and preserved it from error or destruction; that she has ever held it in highest veneration and esteem, and has grounded her doctrines upon it; that she alone has the right to call it her book; that she alone possesses the true Bible and the whole Bible, and that copies of the Scriptures existing outside of her pale are partly incorrect and partly defective, and that whatever in them is true, is true because

derived from her who alone possesses the Book in its fullness and its truth. If they were Catholics, they would love God's Holy Word more and more; they would understand it better; they would adore the Divine Providence that took such a wise and sure means of preserving and perpetuating it; and they would profoundly admire the Catholic Church for her ceaseless vigilance, untiring zeal and unswerving fidelity to the commission entrusted to her by Almighty God.