



"Drowning in the Tiber (Part 8)"
Responding to Francis Beckwith's *Return to Rome:*
Confessions of an Evangelical Catholic

Sola Scriptura 2 | *tiber062809(8)* | Selected Scriptures



I. What is Sola Scriptura?

"The Holy Scripture is the only sufficient, certain, and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience . . ." [1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith]

II. Compare this to the Roman Catholic Position on the Bible and Authority

A Vatican I - SESSION 3: 24 April 1870 - Chapter 2 (on Revelation)

"...in matters of faith and morals . . . that meaning of holy scripture must be held to be the true one, which Holy Mother Church held and holds, since it is her right to judge of the true meaning and interpretation of holy scripture."

B. Same thing with Vatican II

"Thus it comes about that the Church does not draw her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone. Hence, both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal feelings of devotion and reverence."

IV. Sola Scriptural means that the canonical Scriptures are sufficient to serve as the *regula fidei*, or the infallible rule of faith for the believer and the church

A. Two issues: Authority and Sufficiency

1. The Scriptures are sufficient to lead us to salvation in _____ alone
2. The Scriptures are sufficient to guide us in _____

B. How did the doctrine of Sola Scriptura play into Beckwith's decision to revert to Rome? He writes:

"To be blunt, it didn't, primarily because over the years I could not find an understanding or definition of sola scriptura convincing enough that it did not have to be so qualified that it seemed to be more a slogan than a standard." [79]

1. Beckwith's encounter at Boston College (as a professed evangelical he was there to deliver a paper he had written a year earlier entitled, *Vatican Bible School: What John Paul II Can Teach Evangelicals*)

V. Beckwith, Sola Scriptura and The Council of Trent

A. Trent writes that no one has the right to a private interpretation of Scripture

B. Was The Council of Trent a Roman Catholic Reformation or Regression?

1. Clearly a regression (Luther and Staupitz)

2. Anathemas to the left of me, anathemas to the right of me!

- a. If you doubt that Trent was really condemning anyone you might note the creed that Trent formulated called "The Creed of the Council of Trent" (1564)

This is a vow that a faithful Catholic is to adhere unto. It reads in part:

" . . . I accept Sacred Scripture according to the meaning which has been held by holy Mother Church and which she now holds. . . . I embrace and accept each and every article on original sin and justification declared and defined in the most holy Council of Trent. I likewise profess that in the mass a true, proper, and propitiatory sacrifice is offered to God on behalf of the living and the dead, and that the body and blood together with the soul and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ is truly, really, and substantially contained in the most holy sacrament of the Eucharist, and that there is a change of the whole substance of the bread into the body, and of the whole substance of the wine into blood; and this change the Catholic Church calls transubstantiation. I firmly hold that there is a purgatory, and that the souls detained there are helped by the prayers of the faithful. I likewise hold that the saints reigning together with Christ should be honored and invoked, that they offer prayers to God on our behalf, and that their relics should be venerated. I firmly assert that images of Christ, of the Mother of God ever Virgin, and of the other saints should be given to that due honor and veneration should be given to them. I affirm the power of indulgences was left in the keeping of the Church by Christ, and that the use of indulgences is very beneficial to Christians. . . . I promise and swear true obedience to the Roman Pontiff, vicar of Christ and successor of Blessed Peter, Prince of the Apostles. I unhesitatingly accept and profess all the doctrines (especially those concerning the primacy of the Roman pontiff and his infallible teaching authority) handed down, defined, and explained by the sacred canons and ecumenical councils (and by the ecumenical Vatican Council). And at the same time I condemn, reject, and anathematize everything that is contrary to those propositions, and all heresies without exception that have been condemned, rejected, and anathematized by the Church. I, N., promise, vow, and swear that, with God's help, I shall most constantly hold and profess this true Catholic faith, outside which no one can be saved and which I now freely profess and truly hold." ** The part in parenthesis was later added by order of Pope Pius IX following Vatican I which made papal infallibility dogma – In 1877 Pius IX demanded that certain additions be made to a document written over 300 years earlier.

VI. Where Do We Go to Hear the *Vox Dei* - the Voice of God?

- A. Who (or what) do we trust? What is the standard by which we measure truth and judge error?
1. If we go back to the Jews in the O.T. we find that the written Law was the standard
 2. During his earthly ministry Jesus constantly held the Jews accountable to the written Word of God
 3. After the death and resurrection of Christ during the embryonic stage of the church we see the same thing (cf. Acts 17:11)

a. *The Catholic Encyclopedia* of 1917 under the topic "Religious Discussions"

"It is not, then, surprising that the question of disputations with heretics has been made the subject of ecclesiastical legislation. By a decree of Alexander IV (1254-1261) inserted in "Sextus Decretalium", (Lib. V, c. ii), and still in force, all laymen are forbidden, under threat of excommunication, to dispute publicly or privately with heretics on the Catholic Faith. The text reads: We furthermore forbid any lay person to engage in dispute, either private or public, concerning the Catholic Faith. Whosoever shall act contrary to this decree, let him be bound in the fetters of excommunication. This law, like all penal laws, must be very narrowly construed. The terms Catholic Faith and dispute have a technical signification. The former term refers to questions purely theological; the latter to disputations more or less formal, and engrossing the attention of the public. There are numerous questions, somewhat connected with theology, which many laymen who have received no scientific theological training can treat more intelligently than a priest. . . . But when there is a question of dogmatic or moral theology, every intelligent layman will concede the propriety of leaving the exposition and defence of it to the clergy."

VII. Did the Roman Catholic Church give us the Bible?

A. A fictitious conversation between Greg and Peter . . .

B. The canonicity issue

The word "canon" (Hebrew *kaneh* (a rod); Greek *kanon* (a reed) - referred to a measuring rod or stick - A Standard. As it relates to Scripture, canon/canonicity refers to the authenticity of the books themselves. The canon = 66 books of our English Bible, no more and no less.

". . . because a list of canonical books is itself not found in scripture—as one can find the Ten Commandments or the names of Christ's Apostles—any such list, whether Protestant or Catholic, would be an item of extra-biblical theological knowledge." [Francis Beckwith, 123]

1. The Old Testament

a Long before the Roman Church came upon the scene the Jews had a fixed canon (totalled 22 to 24 books which are the same as our 39)

- (1) The Law (Torah)
- (2) The Prophets (Neviim)
- (3) The Writings (Kethubim)

No where in the O.T. would a Jew find a list of what books were to be part of the O.T.!

a. What about the Apocrypha?

- The New Testament never cites any apocryphal books as inspired; Jesus' usage of Scripture suggests that only the books in the Hebrew Bible were thought to be authoritative (Matt. 23:34-35; Luke 11:50-51).
- None of the apocryphal books claim to be the word of the Lord as do many Old Testament books . . .
- The Old Testament canon is confirmed by many sources: 2 Esdras 4:45-48 (24 books); Josephus Contra Apion 1.7-8 §§37-42 (22 books); Melito (all Old Testament books except possibly Esther); Jerusalem List (all 39 books); Origen (22 books). Each of these sources list the same 39 Old Testament books as we have today (except possibly Melito, who omits Esther).
- There is little evidence to suggest that two different canons originated in Palestine and in Egypt. In fact, Philo, a Jew from Alexandria, never quotes from an apocryphal book as authoritative.
- There are significant historical inaccuracies in the Apocrypha. For example, the events in the Book of Tobit (1:3-5) are chronologically incompatible—Tobit is said to live in Nineveh about 722 B.C., and yet also saw the division of the united kingdom in 931 B.C.
- There are theological inconsistencies; for example 2 Maccabees 12:43-45 espouses praying for the dead, but canonical books maintain that decisions about one's eternal destiny can only be made before death (Heb. 9:27).
- Many early church fathers spoke against the canonicity of much or all of the Apocrypha (Melito, Origen, Cyril of Jerusalem, Athanasius, Jerome); no major church father accepted all of the apocryphal books until Augustine, the apocryphal books have never been universally accepted by the church.
- The earliest list of the Old Testament canon by Melito (c. 170) does not include the Apocrypha.
- Jerome, the most qualified Hebrew scholar in his time, argued against the canonicity of the Apocrypha.
- During the Council of Trent, Martin Luther argued against the canonicity of the Book of Maccabees, citing the New Testament, early church fathers, and Jewish teachers in support. The Roman Catholic Church responded by canonizing the Apocrypha." [Paul Wegner, *Journey from Texts to Translations*, 126]

(1) What about the Septuagint?

(a) Paul Wegner O.T. scholar and textual critic writes:

"Philo, an Alexandrian Jew, shows no evidence that apocryphal books were included in the Hebrew canon. Rather they were probably added later by Christians who were unfamiliar with the Hebrew canon." [Ibid]

(b) Wegner goes on to list 10 compelling reasons to reject the Apocrypha:

1. The New Testament never cites any apocryphal books as inspired; Jesus' usage of Scripture suggests that only the books in the Hebrew Bible were thought to be authoritative (Matt. 23:34-35; Luke 11:50-51).
2. None of the apocryphal books claim to be the word of the Lord as do many Old Testament books.
3. The Old Testament canon is confirmed by many sources: 2 Esdras 4:45-48 (24 books); Josephus Contra Apion 1.7-8 §§37-42 (22 books); Melito (all Old Testament books except possibly Esther); Jerusalem List (all 39 books); Origen (22 books). Each of these sources list the same 39 Old Testament books as we have today (except possibly Melito, who omits Esther).
4. There is little evidence to suggest that two different canons originated in Palestine and in Egypt. In fact, Philo, a Jew from Alexandria, never quotes from an apocryphal book as authoritative.

5. There are significant historical inaccuracies in the Apocrypha. For example, the events in the Book of Tobit (1:3-5) are chronologically incompatible—Tobit is said to live in Nineveh about 722 B.C., and yet also saw the division of the united kingdom in 931 B.C.
6. There are theological inconsistencies; for example 2 Maccabees 12:43-45 espouses praying for the dead, but canonical books maintain that decisions about one's eternal destiny can only be made before death (Heb. 9:27).
7. Many early church fathers spoke against the canonicity of much or all of the Apocrypha (Melito, Origen, Cyril of Jerusalem, Athanasius, Jerome); no major church father accepted all of the apocryphal books until Augustine, the apocryphal books have never been universally accepted by the church.
8. The earliest list of the Old Testament canon by Melito (c. 170) does not include the Apocrypha.
9. Jerome, the most qualified Hebrew scholar in his time, argued against the canonicity of the Apocrypha.
10. During the Council of Trent, Martin Luther argued against the canonicity of the Book of Maccabees, citing the New Testament, early church fathers, and Jewish teachers in support. The Roman Catholic Church responded by canonizing the Apocrypha."

The reason why the Roman Catholic canonized them was because they supported pagan teachings like praying for the dead and purgatory! The Reformers even cited Augustine against the Roman Catholic Church in this regard:

Augustine said of the books of Maccabees: "The Jews do not esteem this [writing] as the Law and the Prophets, to which the Lord bears witness." [Wegner, footnote on page 412]

2. The New Testament?

a. The earliest list we have comes from the Muratorian Canon (circa 150 AD)

Includes: The four Gospels; Acts; 13 letters of Paul; Two (or three?) letters of John; Jude; Revelation. Leaves out: James and Hebrews; 1 and 2 Peter (though we know that 1 Peter was widely accepted at this time, so it may have been an oversight by a later copyist). These books were "accepted by the universal church" according to the writer.

b. Irenaeus

Irenaeus quoted over a thousand passages of Scripture from all but four or five N.T. books, and called them "The Scriptures" given by the Holy Spirit—the exceptions being Philemon; 3 John; 2 Peter; and Hebrews; Jude and perhaps James (he seems to allude to James). It doesn't mean he didn't know them or uphold them, he simply didn't use them.

"In addition to the four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles and thirteen letters of Paul were all accepted without question from the earliest records known today. Apart from James, Jude, 2 and 3 John, 2 Peter, Hebrews and Revelation all other new Testament books had been universally accepted by AD 180. Only a few churches hesitated over these seven." [Brian Edwards, Why 66 Books? DVD]

c. AD 240 Origen of Alexandria - All 27 (exclusively referred to as Scripture)

d. Less than 100 years later

AD 325 Eusebius of Caesarea, Advisor to Constantine, considered the first church historian, did some research to find what the churches of his day accepted as N.T. Scripture. He listed 22 of the books as being accepted without hesitation and 5 books (James, Jude, 2 Peter, 2-3 John) were widely recognized.

e. AD 367 Athanasius has the first list identical to ours:

"These are the fountains of salvation, that whoever thirsts, may be satisfied by the eloquence which is in them. In them alone is set forth the doctrine of piety. Let no one add to them, nor take anything from them." [Athanasius]

f. As you go into the 4th c. one finds quotes such as that given by Basil of Caesarea (330-379) writing in response to dissenters who claimed their own authority and customs over those that Basil recognized:

"If custom is to be taken in proof of what is right, then it is certainly competent for me to put forward on my side the custom which obtains here. If they reject this, we are clearly not bound to follow them. Therefore, let God-inspired Scripture decide between us; and on whichever side be found doctrines in harmony with the word of God, in favor of that side will be cast the vote of truth." [Letter CLXXXIX]

g. Compare the words of Josephus in his *Contra Apion* (the Jews were guided by Four principles in their understanding of what was canonical):

- 1) The writings were consistent - they didn't contain contradictions and errors.
- 2) They had prophetic authority having been written by a prophet.
- 3) They were given by inspiration.
- 4) They were universally received by the people of Israel.

The canon came together under the providential working of God. He worked through history by showing that only His Word is $\tau\eta\epsilon\omicron\pi\nu\epsilon\upsilon\sigma\tau\omicron\varsigma$ as we see in 2 Timothy 3:16. Only His written word is "God-breathed."

E. The Self-Authenticating Nature of Scripture

1. The church does not create the canon—the church can only recognize what God has inspired

"The church of God has no power to establish any article of faith; nor has it ever established any; nor will it ever establish any.... The church of God has no power to confirm articles or precepts or the Holy Writings as by a higher sanction or judicial authority; nor has it ever done this; nor will it ever do it. Rather, the church of God is approved and confirmed by the Holy Writings as by a higher and judicial authority." [Martin Luther]

"Accordingly, the canon is not the product of the Christian church. The church has no authority to control, create, or define the Word of God. . . . When we understand this, we can see how erroneous it is to suppose that the corporate church, at some council of its leaders, voted on certain documents and constituted them the canon. The church cannot subsequently attribute authority to certain writings. It can simply receive them as God's revealed word which, as such, always has been the church's canon. Authority is inherent in those writings from the outset, and the church simply confesses this to be the case." [Greg Bahnsen, *The Concept and Importance of Canoncity*]