

The Bible – a Battlefield

PART 1

Once ordinary people were prevented from reading the Bible because it was written in Latin. When translations came, they were forbidden by the Church. Still a fierce battle is fought against the Word of God, but in our days it happens in a way which might be difficult to discover...

Reformation and Counter-reformation

In the 16th century the Bible had become a central matter at issue. It was because of what was written in this book that John Wycliffe (1324-1384), John Huss (1369-1415), William Tyndale (1490-1536), Martin Luther (1483-1546) and other Reformers stood up as critics of the doctrines and practices of the Church. In those days most people had little knowledge about what was written in the Bible. Only the Latin edition known as the Vulgate was approved by the Church, and even the sermons were conducted in Latin. By limiting the knowledge to the clergy this way, the Church gained control and great influence on the spiritual life and devotion of the people.

Through translations, preaching and writings the Reformers gave ordinary people a possibility to learn about the teachings of the Bible. As the knowledge about the Word of God increased, so did also the opposition against the Roman Catholic Church. As a result the Church lost much of its power, and it has never again recovered fully.

The Council of Trent, which was held in three periods between 1545 and 1563, was an important part of the Catholic Counter-Reformation. The purpose of the Council was to confirm certain doctrines which had been attacked by the Reformers, and to resolve issues of internal abuse within the Church.

Among the doctrines that were confirmed by the Council was the teaching about Bible and Tradition as equal when it comes to theological authority. The Protestants had made the Bible the only foundation for their faith. Thus they rejected the Tradition of the Church (i.e. statements from the Church Fathers and Church Councils). The Council of Trent declared that only the Latin Vulgate contained the true scriptures and should be used for teaching, sermons, and discussions. Those who would not acknowledge the Vulgate, the seven books of the Apocrypha (which were included in the Vulgate edition), and the Tradition, were *anathema*. This meant that they were excommunicated (i.e. excluded from the Christian community), and consequently also from salvation, as this was believed to be found solely in the Catholic Church.

”But if any one receive not, as sacred and canonical, the said books entire with all their parts, as they have been used to be read in the Catholic Church, and as they are contained in the old Latin vulgate edition; and knowingly and deliberately contemn the traditions aforesaid; let him be anathema.”

(*Decree Concerning the Canonical Scriptures*, 8th of April 1546, Waterworth, 1848, p.19.

ONLINE (10.09.11): <http://history.hanover.edu/texts/trent/ct04.html>

Furthermore, the Council of Trent forbade interpretations of the Scriptures that differed from those of the Church or the Church Fathers, and they forbade to print and spread biblical writings or comments without permission from the clergy. Thus the Church tried to prevent ordinary people from getting access to the Bible and knowledge of its teachings. But they did not succeed. Now the big question is: Have they given up? Or have they *not* given up?

Unitatis Redintegratio

Until the 1960s the Catholic Church officially was reserved when it came to conversations and cooperation with other church societies. A change came with *the Second Vatican Council* (1962-65). This council published several documents which treated different church reforms, e.g. about ecumenical cooperation, the liturgy, and the Bible.

The Second Vatican Council encouraged both the clergy and ordinary church members to promote dialogue and cooperation with other Christians, which the council spoke of as “*our separated brethren*”. But even though the Catholic Church now referred to other Christian churches and congregations in a friendlier manner, the documents from the Vatican Council shows that both the attitude and the goal of the church are the same as they were during the Council of Trent in the 16th century.

The introduction of the document *Unitatis Redintegratio*, the decree on ecumenism, states:

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“The restoration of unity among all Christians is one of the principal concerns of the Second Vatican Council. Christ the Lord founded one Church and one Church only. However, many Christian communions present themselves to men as the true inheritors of Jesus Christ; all indeed profess to be followers of the Lord but differ in mind and go their different ways, as if Christ Himself were divided.(1) Such division openly contradicts the will of Christ, scandalizes the world, and damages the holy cause of preaching the Gospel to every creature.”
(from the introduction of UR, 1965)

“In order to establish this His holy Church everywhere in the world till the end of time, Christ entrusted to the College of the Twelve the task of teaching, ruling and sanctifying. Among their number He selected Peter, and after his confession of faith determined that on him He would build His Church. Also to Peter He promised the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and after His profession of love, entrusted all His sheep to him to be confirmed in faith and shepherded in perfect unity. Christ Jesus Himself was forever to remain the chief cornerstone and shepherd of our souls.

Jesus Christ, then, willed that the apostles and their successors -the bishops with Peter's successor at their head- should preach the Gospel faithfully, administer the sacraments, and rule the Church in love. It is thus, under the action of the Holy Spirit, that Christ wills His people to increase, and He perfects His people's fellowship in unity: in their confessing the one faith, celebrating divine worship in common, and keeping the fraternal harmony of the family of God.

The Church, then, is God's only flock; it is like a standard lifted high for the nations to see it: for it serves all mankind through the Gospel of peace as it makes its pilgrim way in hope toward the goal of the fatherland above.” (UR, chap.1:2)

http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19641121_unitatis-redintegratio_en.html

According to the Catholic Church there is only *one Church* – “*one Church and one Church only*” – and this is the Catholic Church (UR, introduction). The Church itself says that its goal is “*the restoration of unity among all Christians*”. The purpose of their ecumenical efforts is, then, not to create a new unity, but to RE-establish something that has been, i.e. *to reverse the Reformation*. In other words, the Catholic Church is still trying to regain its former power. To achieve this, they have taken a more conciliatory attitude. But even though they are willing to give some recognition other Christian groups, they still teach that salvation is *only* possible through the Catholic Church, and that it therefore is necessary for *all* other Christians to be “incorporated” in it:

“Nevertheless, our separated brethren ... are not blessed with that unity which Jesus Christ wished to bestow on all those who through Him were born again into one body, and with Him quickened to newness of life...” [And what kind of unity do they here speak of? The text continues to explain what they mean:] *“...that unity which the Holy Scriptures and the ancient Tradition of the Church proclaim.”* [So, it refers to *both* the Bible and the Tradition of the Church. The latter of these is the foundation of their teaching about salvation, which is:] *“...For it is only through Christ's Catholic Church, which is "the all-embracing means of salvation," that they can benefit fully from the means of salvation. We believe that Our Lord entrusted all the blessings of the New Covenant to the apostolic college [i.e. the bishops] alone, of which Peter [i.e. the pope] is the head, in order to establish the one Body of Christ on earth to which all should be fully incorporated who belong in any way to the people of God.”* (UR, chap.1:3)

- And this is the foundation of *all* the ecumenical work in which the Catholic Church takes part...

Dei Verbum

The Second Vatican Council confirmed the teaching from the Council of Trent that *“the word of God”* consists of both the Bible and the Tradition of the Church (*Dei Verbum*, 10). To adapt the liturgy to the modern world, to promote unity, and to make it easier for people to join the Church, the local churches were now allowed to use the mother tongues of the members for large parts of the sermons (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 1, 36, 54, 101). The Church now accepted that people read the Bible in their own language. In the document *Dei Verbum* it even recommended *“frequent reading of the divine Scriptures”* (DV, 25).

Nevertheless, the Church still maintains that only they are capable of interpreting the word of God. The Council claimed that only the clergy had been given *“the task of authentically interpreting the word of God, whether written or handed on [i.e. Tradition]”* (DV, 10).

“For all of what has been said about the way of interpreting Scripture is subject finally to the judgment of the Church, which carries out the divine commission and ministry of guarding and interpreting the word of God.” (DV, 12).

When it comes to controlling *what kind* of Bible editions the church members will get access to, the Council says:

“But since the word of God should be accessible at all times, the Church by her authority and with maternal concern sees to it that suitable and correct translations are made into different languages, especially from the original texts of the sacred books.” (DV, 22).

Even though it promoted use of the Bible in the mother tongue, the Catholic Church is still trying to control what its members shall think about what they read. Some of its means to do this, is to assign to the bishops the only correct authority of interpretation, to decide which Bible editions are to be used, and to provide them with comments – so that *“the children of the Church”* may *“safely”* use them (DV, 25).

We might ask *who* will actually be in danger when people study the Bible and try to understand what it teaches – the one reading, or the Church and its leaders? Maybe we have learned something from the story about the Reformers...

*“It devolves on sacred bishops "who have the apostolic teaching"(7) to give the faithful entrusted to them suitable instruction in the right use of the divine books, especially the New Testament and above all the Gospels. This can be done through translations of the sacred texts, which are to be provided with the necessary and really adequate explanations so that the children of the Church may **safely** and profitably become conversant with the*

Sacred Scriptures and be penetrated with their spirit. Furthermore, editions of the Sacred Scriptures, provided with suitable footnotes, should be prepared also for the use of non-Christians and adapted to their situation.”
(DV, 25)

Cooperation in Bible Translation

The Second Vatican Council also allowed cooperation with other denominations in translating the Bible:

“And should the opportunity arise and the Church authorities approve, if these translations are produced in cooperation with the separated brethren as well, all Christians will be able to use them.”
(DV, 22).

Here we find three “conditions” for such cooperation. First of all it should only take place “*should the opportunity arise*”. The cooperation should be linked with a purpose. Second, it should only happen with the approval of the Church authorities, i.e. under the control of the pope and the bishops.

The third condition is only shown indirectly. It says that “*all Christians*” will be able to use such an ecumenical Bible. As we have seen, the Catholic Church will *only* acknowledge those Bible editions which are in accordance with the teachings of the Church. We also saw that it is the responsibility of the bishops to make sure that *these* editions are used by the church members, and that they are understood the way the leaders of the Church interprets them. If an ecumenical Bible is to be used by “*all Christians*” – Catholics included – it necessarily will have to be in accordance with Catholic teachings. Hence we may know that *any* Bible translation that the Catholic Church has taken part in, and which is approved by the leaders of the Church, will promote Catholic doctrines and practices.

The question is then what effect *this* might have on the ecumenical work – if also other Christians use the same edition?

Guidelines for Translating the Bible

In 1968 *the United Bible Societies* (an international union of interconfessional Bible societies) and *the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity* (PCPCU) published a document called *Guidelines for Interconfessional Cooperation in Translating the Bible*. A revised edition of the Guidelines came in 1987. In his Presentation of the new guidelines, Cardinal Willebrands, then leader of the papal council, said:

“...as in the past, interconfessional translations will continue to be based on a Hebrew text of the Old Testament and a Greek text of the New Testament which have been agreed on by scholars from various church traditions. Drafting and reviewing of the translations will be carried out in close cooperation, with the aim that the new text will be acceptable to, and be used by all Christians and Christian communities who speak the language into which the translation is being made.

The clear goal of this interconfessional effort is to produce editions of the Holy Scriptures which provide all speakers of the language with a common text. This will in turn make possible, often for the first time, a common witness to the Word of God in the world of today.” (*Guidelines for Interconfessional Cooperation in Translating the Bible. The New Revised Edition, Presentation*).

It is not difficult to understand how an ecumenical Bible translation will promote Christian unity. If all Christians use the same translation, it will quite naturally promote “*a common witness to the Word of God*” as one will end up with the same teaching (unity) – at least in those questions where *the Bible translation itself* decides how the text is to be understood. And since the Catholic Church cannot

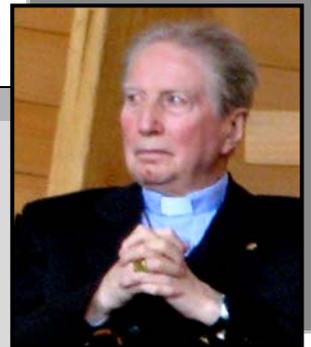
accept other editions than those which agree with its own teachings, it is quite obvious in what direction such an interconfessional Bible edition will lead the unity.

The New Greek New Testament

According to the Guidelines the Bible translators should use *the third critical edition of the Greek New Testament*, published by the United Bible Societies (UBS) in 1975. This edition was itself a result of the cooperation between representatives from the Catholic Church and other denominations. The committee consisted of five persons: Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, Bruce Metzger, Allen Wikren, and Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini. Cardinal Martini is a Jesuit priest, and a former bishop of Milan (comp. the responsibility of the bishops, DV, 25). He was one of the candidates for pope after John Paul II.

Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini (1927-)

- **1952:** ordained as a Jesuit priest
- **1962:** took the 4th solemn vow of the Jesuit order
- **1969:** became rector at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome
- **1979:** made archbishop of Milan by pope John Paul II
- **1983:** ordained as a cardinal
- **2000:** elected to "the European of the Year" by 15 European magazines



SOURCE: <http://www.katolsk.no/utenriks/personer/martini/>, <http://www.katolsk.no/nyheter/2001/01/05-0002.htm>

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The UBS Greek New Testament is a reconstruction of how this committee of five persons thinks that the Greek New Testament originally might have looked like, based on a critical study of different manuscripts. It is basically manuscripts from the Alexandrian text-type that have been used (see Part 2). The way of reading was decided by the committee by majority vote.

The USB New Testament is meant for translators. In addition to the Greek text it has a critical apparatus. In this we find information about the degree of certainty with which the chosen reading has been adopted, and which manuscripts that support different ways of readings that the committee considers relevant for the translators.

A new edition of the USB Greek New Testament was published in 1983. However, the Greek text remains the same as in the 1975 edition, but there has been made certain changes in the critical apparatus. Today this text is – at least by academics – acknowledged as a standard of the Greek New Testament. The text is used for new translations and revisions, and it “*marks a significant step with regard to interconfessional relationships*”, as it says in the Introduction of Nestle-Aland (27th ed., 2006, p. 45).