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Question 10 - What are the positions of the Roman Catholic Church and the cults in regard to the Bible?

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101 MOST ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE BIBLE

10. What are the positions of the Roman Catholic Church and the cults in regard to the Bible?

A. The Roman Catholic Church

Rome believes that the church is the divinely appointed custodian of the Bible and has the final word on what is meant in any specific passage. It accepts the apocryphal books as a part of the inspired scriptures. Rome's position on the Bible could be diagrammed as a triangle, with the pope at the top, and the Bible and church tradition at the bottom.

Consider the following excerpts from James Cardinal Gibbons, Archbishop of Baltimore, who perhaps was the most widely read Catholic theologian since the Reformation:

"The Church, as we have just seen, is the only divinely constituted teacher of Revelation.

"Now, the Scripture is the great depository of the Word of God. Therefore, the Church is the divinely appointed Custodian and Interpreter of the Bible. For, her office of infallible Guide were superfluous if each individual could interpret the Bible for himself.

"That God never intended the Bible to be the Christian's rule of faith, independently of the living authority of the Church, will be the subject of this chapter.

"We often hear the shibboleth: 'The Bible, and the Bible only, must be your guide.' Why, then, do you go to the useless expense of building fine churches and Sabbath-schools? What is the use of your preaching sermons and catechizing the young, if the Bible at home is a sufficient guide for your people? The fact is, you reverend gentlemen contradict in practice what you so vehemently advance in theory. Do not tell me that the Bible is all-sufficient; or, if you believe it is self-sufficient, cease your instructions. Stand not between the people and the Scriptures.

"I will address myself now in a friendly spirit to a non-Catholic, and will proceed to show him that he cannot consistently accept the silent Book of Scripture as his sufficient guide.

"Indeed, when you accept the Bible as the Word of God, you are obliged to receive it on the authority of the Catholic Church, who was the sole Guardian of the Scriptures for fifteen hundred years.

“We must, therefore, conclude that the Scriptures *alone* cannot be a sufficient guide and rule of faith because they cannot, at any time, be within the reach of every inquirer; because they are not of themselves clear and intelligible even in matters of the highest importance, and because they do not contain all the truths necessary for salvation.” (*The Faith of Our Fathers*, P. J. Kennedy & Sons. New York. 1917, pp. 63, 67, 68, 73)

Rome however teaches that Bible reading, if properly supervised, can serve as an indulgence, which would shorten his or her punishment in Purgatory after death.

For example, on December 13, 1898 a decree of Leo XIII granted an indulgence of 300 days for reading the Gospels for at least 15 minutes, and, under the usual conditions, a plenary indulgence once a month for the daily reading of the Gospels. (The latest official list of indulgences [*Enchiridion Indulgentiarum*, 1950] has changed the indulgence granted for reading the Bible for fifteen minutes to three years; for reading some verses of the Gospels and reciting certain invocations while kissing the Gospel book, the indulgence is 500 days each time and a plenary indulgence once a month.)

Finally, ponder the warning once given by Pope Pius IX:

“These crafty Bible societies, which renew the ancient guile of heretics, cease not to thrust their Bibles upon all men, even the unlearned, -- their Bibles, which have been translated against the laws of the church, and often contain false explanations of the text. Thus, the divine traditions, the teaching of the Fathers, and the authority of the Catholic Church are rejected, and everyone in his own way interprets the Word of the Lord, and distorts their meaning thereby falling into miserable errors.” (*The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. II, “Bible Societies,” p. 545)

B. The Cults

In general it may be said the major cults and sects of Christianity give lip service to the Bible; they nevertheless look upon the writings of their various founders as equal if not superior to the Scriptures.

1. **Christian Science** – Founded by Mary Baker Eddy (1821–1910). George Channing, an international Christian Science lecturer and practitioner, writes the following:

“Each person, of any religion, can find what is satisfying to him as the spiritual meaning in the Bible. But Christian Scientists feel that Mrs. Mary Baker Eddy’s book, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, offers the complete spiritual meaning of the Bible. They believe that this full meaning would not have been available to them without Mrs. Eddy’s discovery.” (*The Reason for Our Hope*, p. 67)

Eddy herself once said:

“The manifest mistakes in the ancient versions; the thirty thousand different readings in the Old Testament, and the three hundred thousand in the New – these facts show how a mortal and material sense stole into the divine record, with its own hue darkening, to some extent, the inspired pages.” (*S & H*, 139).

2. **Jehovah’s Witnesses** – Founded by Charles Taze Russell (1851-1916). Mr. Russell calmly announces in the opening pages of his *Studies in the Scriptures* that it would be far better to leave the Bible unread but read his comments on it than to omit his writings and read the Bible.

In fact, cults expert Walter Martin provides us with Russell’s complete statement as taken from the *Watchtower*, Sept. 15, 1910 magazine:

“If the six volumes of *Scriptures Studies* are practically the Bible, topically arranged with Bible proof texts given, we might not improperly name the volumes The Bible in an Arranged Form. That is to say, they are not mere comments on the Bible, *but they are practically the Bible itself* . . .

“Furthermore, not only do we find that *people cannot see the divine plan in studying the Bible by itself*, but we see, also, that if anyone lays the *Scripture Studies* aside, even after he has used them, after he has become familiar with them after he has read them for ten years – if he then lays them aside and ignores them and goes to the Bible alone, though he has understood his Bible for ten years, our experience shows that within two years *he goes into darkness*. On the other hand, if he had merely read the *Scripture Studies* with their references, and had *not read a page of the Bible, as such*, he would be in the light at the end of two years, because he would have the light of the Scriptures.” (*The Kingdom of the Cults*, Bethany Publishers, p. 87).

3. **Mormonism** – Founded by Joseph Smith (1805-1844). This cult teaches that the *Book of Mormon*, first printed in 1830, must be regarded on an equal basis with the Bible.

In essence, Mormonism places Joseph Smith’s writings on a higher plane than the Bible. It says that wherever the Bible is at variance with Mormon doctrine, the Bible is incorrectly translated.