

days, even to the consummation of the world, he will be with them in all their lawful successors.

Gospel of Saint Mark

Now when we turn to the Gospel of Saint Mark, we find a splendid confirmation of all this. Here we read that” He [Jesus} said to them: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation” (16:15).

A Command to Preach

Again we are told of Christ’s commission to the Apostles. No slightest suggestion here that the Apostles should sit down and write. Only this most explicit command: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation.” Obviously this too is meant not only for the Apostles but for their legitimate successors as well. For the Apostles could not have in their lifetime penetrate every part of the world and preach the Gospel to every creature.

A Command to Accept

The following verse is evidence that just as Christ had commanded the Apostles and their successors to preach the Gospel to every creature, so he commanded every creature to accept their preaching, and that under penalty of being condemned: “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:16).

And So it Was

Surely these words give no evidence that Christ ever granted men permission to

determine their own religious belief through private interpretation of a particular book. It was by authoritative teaching and preaching that Christ intended his Gospel to be made known. This too is very clear in the same sixteenth chapter of Saint Mark, verse twenty, where the Evangelist sums up all the work of the Apostles with these words: “And they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that attended it.” Amen.

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Pamphlet 547

Must the Bible Alone Be Our Guide?

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O fall the questions asked about the Bible, one of the most important and all-embracing is: Must the Bible alone be our guide? To answer this question satisfactorily, it is well to consider why it is asked. Is it asked with a view to determining the amount of respect that is due the Bible? No—at least not by Catholics; for Catholics believe that they can never accord to the Bible too high a place of esteem. Catholics respect the Bible more than do their staunchest Protestant friends. In fact, they sincerely regret that the Church is the only church that really does respect it. Why then is this question asked? Although different persons may have different reasons for asking such a question, we believe that in most cases the reason is that the questioners are anxious to know what should determine their religious belief. Like all good Christians, they know that when Christ lived on earth almost two thousand years ago, he taught many truths; and since he intended that these truths should be accepted by all future generations as well as by the people of his own time, they rightly conclude that he must have made some provision for the preservation and propagation of those truths throughout the ages. Consequently when they ask: “Must the Bible alone be our guide?” they want to know whether or not Christ intended that we should learn his doctrine solely through the Bible.

A work of History

Now in proceeding to answer this question directly, we can do no better than consider the words and actions of Christ himself, as well as those of his Apostles and his first disciples. This we can do by consulting the most accurate and trustworthy of all historical documents, no other than the Bible itself. No matter what some may think of the higher prerogatives of this sacred book, all must admit that as a historical record of what Jesus said and did nothing else could be more reliable.

Searching the Bible then, as we would any other work of history, what do we find? Simply this: that a perusal of the New Testament from beginning to end will not reveal a single text to prove that Christ ever intended that a book should be the sole, or even the chief, means of preserving and propagating his doctrine. There is not even the slightest indication that Christ himself ever wrote a single line or that he directed his Apostles or disciples to write. But the passages in which Christ speaks of a Church and tells to go forth and teach are so clear that we are safe in saying that if the Bible does not prove that Christ intended his religion to be preserved and propagated through a Church with divinely authorized teachers, and not through a book alone, it does not prove anything at all.

An Imperishable Church

Let us consider just one or two of these texts. In the Gospel of Saint Matthew, chapter sixteen, verse eighteen, we find that Christ intended to establish an imperishable Church with Peter (the name signifies a

rock) as its foundation. Christ's own words are: "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it." In chapter eighteen, verse seventeen, we find that Christ intended that all men should obey the Church, for he says: "If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector."

Listening to Christ's Commission to his Apostles

Gospel of Saint Matthew

Most to our purpose in this study are the words at the end of Saint Matthew's Gospel: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (28:18-20).

A Plain Declaration

From the context it is clear that our Lord spoke these words shortly before his ascension and that they constitute his commission to the Apostles. That text is a plain expression of how Christ wished his Gospel to be made known. An in that text we find no mention whatsoever of a book, but Christ does speak of an authorized body of teachers whom he directs to communicate his whole doctrinal to all nations.

A Promise of Help

But how were these teachers to do all that? By their own unaided efforts? Certainly not. That is why Christ added those final words: "I am with you always, to the close of the age." To the Jew the expression I am with you had a very definite meaning. It recurs about ninety times in the Old Testament; and when it is used by Almighty God, it means his promise of special divine assistance to bring to a happy issue the work enjoined. This was the case when God appeared to Moses and bade him lead the chosen people out of Egypt. And when Moses declared that he was unable to do this, God simply said: "I will be with you" (Exodus 3:12); and so it came about that what Moses could not of himself have done he was able to do with the assistance of God.

Protection from Error

So when Christ said to his Apostles, "And lo, I am with you," it was clear to them that their work of teaching would always have his divine assistance. They were certain that as long as Christ was with them when they taught, their teaching would be free from error.

To the End of Time

Finally we note that the assistance was promised not only to the Apostles themselves but to their legitimate successors as well—to the very end of the age. Christ said, not "I am with you as long as you live," but "I am with you always, to the close of the age." Hence, it follows that if Christ promised to be with his Apostles all

