

**RCIA**  
**Understanding & Using the Bible**  
**Week # 2**

***I urge all to read again and again these holy words. For here in the Sacred Scriptures, "the Father who is in heaven meets His Children with great love and speaks to them; the force and the power in the Word of God is so great that it stands as the strength of faith, the food of the soul, the pure and everlasting source of spiritual life." May all who read this be filled with the Holy Spirit. Through this access to the Father, may we all come to share in His Divine nature.***

Richard Cardinal Cushing



## ***UNDERSTANDING AND USING A BIBLE***

- I What is the Bible?
- II How did it come to be?
- III Why is it Holy?

### ***I What is the Bible?***

The bible is the most read book in the world. However, it is not a single book. The bible is actually a little library. Not unlike a library, it contains many different kinds of writing and various literary forms. Some examples: there is history (1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings, 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel), stories (Job), letters (Paul, Peter, James etc.) songs (Psalms), pronouncements (Proverbs), sayings. Most importantly for Christians, it is *Sacred Scripture*, ***The Word of God!***

The Bible mediates God's presence to us. In the bible we learn from the very beginning of time God's love and desire to enter into a relationship with us as human beings. It is a self-disclosure, a way of God letting us see Him. It is a way to help us understand Him and ourselves and how to live our lives. The bible gives us an eternal code to live by. It is a source of nourishment and strength.

### ***II How did it come to be?***

Did God cause certain individuals to go into a trance during which time their hands moved across a scroll so that they wrote God's own words?

#### **Did God send a recording?**

Did the complete book fall from the sky?

Did someone find it in an archeological dig, say WOW, I found the ultimate users manual for life?

Unfortunately there are those who think that is how it happened. The truth is, the bible we have today is the end product of a 5-step process.

1 *The Event: the happening.* God revealed Himself through events in human history. These events began about four thousand years ago and continued through the events of Jesus life and the apostles & disciples in the 1<sup>st</sup> century Church. Through the revelatory events, the creation, exodus from Egypt, the exile, Jesus life, the early Church, people (Hebrew people) came to understand that the one and eternal God was present with them in their history. These events and the insights that came from them occurred in the midst of the community. This leads to the next process.

2 *The Oral Tradition:* No story about a biblical event is contemporary with the event. Nobody was taking notes during the creation. All of the stories took shape over a period of time. Some times long periods of time. Accounts were passed on in the community by word of mouth, sometimes for many generations. Think of your own families. At a reunion sisters, brothers, aunts, cousins sit around and listen to stories of

your parents or family members as told by grandparents. Those who passed on the oral tradition were NOT trying to tell their audiences exactly what happened, but to tell the significance of the events for their own lives. Think again of your family. When grandpa is telling a story, how often does grandma interrupt to add her comments or how she experienced it differently.

**The accounts of early storytellers were molded to meet each community's needs so that the community would appreciate their importance. In the case of the bible, those who told the stories were passing on to the communities of believers about God's role in the events that had occurred.**

**3 As time went on, the oral tradition gave birth to the 3<sup>rd</sup> step in the process, a variety of kinds of writings including parables, miracle stories legends, creeds, laws and poetry. In each case, the motive of the writer was not to report all that had occurred. Their purpose was to pass on to *the generation contemporary with the writer how God had acted through events in the past and to help them see how God was still acting in their own lives.* For example, the earliest writings in our New Testament are Paul's letters. Paul used the oral tradition about Jesus to help various communities integrate the facts of Jesus resurrection and presence in their midst into their daily lives.**

4 In the 4<sup>th</sup> step of the process we see clarifications or editing occurring. At different times in history, inspired individuals went over the inherited oral and written documents about events and wrote ordered, edited accounts of all that occurred. We call this "*Edited Tradition.*" The first 5 books of the Old Testament (The Pentateuch) or Torah, were edited a number of times. During the time of King David and after the Babylonian Exile are examples of a couple of those times. Accounts of Jesus' life, death and resurrection were edited to produce the Gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke.

5 Not all accounts of revelatory events that passed through oral and written tradition are in the Bible. Some texts did not pass the test of time. The communities of faithful rejected any texts because they did not truthfully represent their faith experiences. Some writings did not nourishing them spiritually. (Think DaVinci Code here – the texts D. Brown cites as sources fall into these groups of writings. They were not included in the bible because they did not stand the test of time or the early Christian communities faith experiences.)

The texts that are in the bible are called "*canonical*". When we say that a text is canonical we are making two claims: that it contains

revelation and that those who passed it on to us were inspired to hand on to us what God intended to communicate through them.

### **III Why is the Bible Holy?**

We have mentioned the test of time throughout the ages believer understood the words in the Bible to reveal the Holy. Christians throughout the ages believe the bible directs their lives on the path of holiness. In the books of the Bible we recognize God, who comes lovingly to meet us and talk with us. We believe the bible is inspired by God. By this we mean that these writings by human authors faithfully contain what God wants to communicate.

God did not take possession of the imagination or thought of the author. God did not dictate to the author what to write down. God's inspiration is not controlling, nor is it limited to the few people to whom the books of the bible are attributed. The Church recognizes that inspiration was, first of all, a gift bestowed on the biblical communities who first recognized Gods working in their lives then testified to that. Later these same gifts compelled others to use that testimony in such a way that it could speak to a new time and a different community. Still later, it was the same gift for those who wrote down the oral testimony and memories of earlier believers so as to preserve the holy tradition. Thus, to say that the bible is inspired is to recognize the long process of diverse inspiration that affected the growth, development and interpretation of Sacred Scripture.

Because the Bible is inspired we also speak of its '*truth, fullness and authority*'. The truth of Scripture can seem confusing to those who look at it with only a literal eye. First of all there seem to be inconsistencies. Why are human beings created after the plants and animals in Genesis 1, yet in Genesis 2 human beings are created first? Catholic biblical scholars reminds and caution us that we should expect from Sacred Scripture only what it intends to offer to us. Scripture intends to share the truth of a people's faith in God. Because the Bible is not primarily concerned with historical or scientific truth we must meet seeming contradictions with the question "*What is the religious or theological truth to which scripture is testifying?*"

The Bible is a testimony of God's revealing Himself to us. But it is also the account of an ancient people who were transformed as they heard and embraced God's truth. We believe that today the Bible continues to offer the occasion to hear and embrace God's presence, allowing God to transform our lives. This continuing power of the Bible's religious message is a sure sign of the Bible's truthfulness and authority. The truth of the Bible is not a truth for days gone by but a living and active truth in our very midst.

## ***Origins of the Scriptures***

The Bible did not begin as a full-blown book, but as an experience of God lived by the Israelites and early Christians. These people came to understand God's presence in their midst in the events, persons, daily happenings, and miracles. They interpreted these saving acts of God and passed on their faith by word of mouth. These ancient peoples were not the paper and pen generation as are we; they relied on their sharp memories.

Gradually, at significant times, the Israelites committed to writing certain parts of their heritage, for example, the Ten Commandments and parts of the Torah were written first. When the nations formed and kings ruled, court histories and chronicles were kept. During the Exile, their heritage was preserved by completing the history and writing down the words of the prophets. The writing was done in Hebrew on scrolls and taken back to Palestine after the exile (537 B.C.E.)

Other Jews who had fled to Egypt translated the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek in a version called the **Septuagint** or the **Alexandrian Canon**. This copy included seven books that were not in the Hebrew or Palestinian Canon. (this is a significant detail in later biblical development.)

The New Testament, too, developed gradually. The early Christian communities, when they gathered for the Lord's supper, circulated the letters Paul sent to the various communities of faith. The groups found Paul's letters, written between A.D. 52-64 to be valuable and practical for their living out of Christ's teachings. These **epistles** are the earliest works of the New Testament.

As the Christian communities spread to other parts of the Empire, the apostles and disciples took with them their memories and the collections of sayings, episodes, miracles, and faith experiences of Jesus. These were proclaimed to the faithful. But time wore on and the first witnesses were dying. Collections of the Good News "**Gospels**," were written and circulated among the Christian communities. Finally, four Gospels were accepted by the community as most authentic because they were intimately connected with the apostles, and developed in four major areas: **Matthew (Jerusalem), Mark (Rome), Luke (Antioch), and John (Ephesus.)** Later, about A.D. 100, the **Book of Revelation** or the **Apocalypse** was added because people believed that the second coming of Christ was imminent. The Book of Revelation, always open to many interpretations, ultimately portrays the constant struggle between good and evil.

The twenty-seven books of the New Testament – four Gospels, Acts of the Apostles, epistles of Paul and other early Christian leaders, and the Apocalypse – are recognized and accepted by all Christians.



## Development of the Scriptures

These early Scriptures were written on scrolls. To be preserved, they were painstakingly copied. Later, this work was taken up by the monks. Although there are manuscripts which date back to the early days, we have no originals of the Scriptures.

When Latin became the common language, **Pope Damasus** commissioned **St. Jerome**, literary scholar and priest, around A.D. 383, to translate the Bible into Latin. This translation was based on the original Hebrew writings. This version became the official Christian Bible known as the **Vulgate**. It was the standard version of the Bible for over 1,000 years. For Roman Catholics, it still is.

When St. Jerome translated, he used the Greek text of the Scriptures. The Old Testament Canon in Greek contained the books of **Wisdom, Sirach (Ecclesiasticus), Baruch, Judith, Tobias**, and the two books of **Maccabees**, which *were not in the Hebrew Scriptures*. Consequently, *translations of later times that reverted to the Hebrew Canon were minus the seven books in the Greek Old Testament*. These seven books came to be known as the **Apocrypha**.

When Latin was no longer the universal language of Europe, common people could no longer read the Bible. After the conversion of England in 600 A.D. Anglo-Saxon translations for the people appeared (**700-1020: Caedman, Aldhelm, Bede**).

**1382 Wycliffe Bible**, Wycliffe was an Oxford Scholar, Vicar – translated the Vulgate to English. He was condemned as a heretic. Further unauthorized translations were forbidden under pain of excommunication. Because **Martin Luther** used the Hebrew version in translating the Bible into German during the Reformation, the Protestant Bible had seven less books than the Catholic Vulgate, which was based on the Greek. Today however, many Protestant Bibles include the Apocrypha.

**1525-31 Tyndale Bible**: Tyndale, an Oxford scholar, translated New Testament from Greek, part of Old Testament from Hebrew. It was printed in Germany because of England's opposition to the Text's "heretical" slant.

**1535 Coverdale Bible**: Coverdale was a priest and friar who published a Bible based on the Vulgate, Luther's Bible and Tyndale's bible. He dedicated it to the King. It became the official English version.

**1582-1609 Rheims-Douay Bible**: William Allen and Gregory Martin translated the Vulgate into English for use by Roman Catholic refugees from England – as a response to English Protestants. It was revised by **Challoner** several times between 1749-1772.

**1611 King James Bible**: King James ordered a new version done by 50 scholars working together, a Bible of great beauty that greatly influenced the English language.

**1902-Today**: 1902's Twentieth Century New Testament, with the discovery of *koine* Greek, departed from the traditional Elizabethan

English of the King James Bible. A whole new era began. In 1952 the Revised Standard Version came out. Many translations continue to be made in an effort to make the Bible more understandable. New ones are being published every year, each trying to make the Bible easier to read and understand. Some examples of English Language Translations to choose from:

**Protestant**

- \* New English Bible
- \* New American Standard Bible

**Roman Catholic**

- \* New Jerusalem Bible
- \* New American Bible

*Ecumenical*

- \* The Common Bible:  
RSV – accepted by Protestants, Catholics, and Orthodox Churches

*Contemporary*

- \* Living bible
- \* Today’s English version (Good News for Modern Man)

Practical Points in using most Bibles

*Reading Citations – list a book, a chapter, a verse*

- Exa: Lk 10:1-3      Luke is a book, 10 is a chapter, 1-3 are verses
- Exa: Ps 23            Psalms is a book, 23 is 23 of 150 psalms
- Exa: Lk 10, 1-3      is a different notation format
- Exa:2 Cor4:13–5:1   a number in front of the book indicates more than one biblical book has the same name – Second Corinthians is a book, 4 is a chapter, 13 is the beginning verse, 5 is a chapter, 1 is the ending verse.
- Various features      Often found at the front and back of a bible i.e. maps
- Translation            Compare texts, if you have more than one bible. It is interesting to see how the same message is said in different ways.
- Introduction           Background information found at the beginning of each biblical book.
- Tabs                      May be purchased with or added to a bible to aid in locating different biblical books.
- Text divisions        may find this varies by translation
  - Chapters              often agreement between translations – may see some variation.
  - Verses                  Again some agreement but may vary between translations.
  - Headings              These are arbitrary, one will find variations between Translations.

Text References	Refers to other biblical passages relating to the referenced verse. This varies by translation.
Text footnotes	Explains the verse and may offer other text references (passages) They vary by translation.

## WHAT IS THE "BIBLE"?

The word "bible" comes from the Greek "biblia" meaning "books". It is a collection of ancient writings about GOD (YAHWEH)

*The bible is in 2 parts*

### OLD TESTAMENT TESTAMENT

### NEW

*TESTAMENT means AGREEMENT*

SCRIPTURE means SACRED WRITINGS

OT are stories about an old agreement between God (Yahweh) and man (the Hebrews) when the Hebrews came out of Egypt .... And how it worked out. Jesus ...

relationship

Protestant bibles include 66 writings.

Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and Anglican

**accepted**

Contain 73 writings.

their sins

NT are stories and about a new agreement God and man based on teachings and life of who opened up

with God to all men who **believed in Him and**

God's forgiveness of

*WHO wrote the Bible?*

**It was written by many different authors these writings?**

written by INSPIRED MEN i.e. God chosen filled them with the Spirit to accurately understand and communicate His message of salvation for men of ALL TIMES: subsequent they wrote the words according to the canon customs and styles of their own times.

**Who CHOSE**

the Writings were not but acknowledged to be inspired. The Council of (393 A.D.) and councils drew up a list or of inspired books.

WHEN was it written?

over

At different times .. over 1,000 years were

From about 900 B.C. to 100 A.D. books

into

The Bible EVOLVED over the course TODAY.

of 44 generations.

**At different places : Palestine, Babylon, different purposes...**

Egypt, Rome, Corinth. God and

For different purposes: To teach live

Religion and patriotism, to describe The Messiah

THE BIBLE: the most famous book in history - a "book of 30 centuries"

"The All time Best Seller"

OLD TESTAMENT

(Jewish Scriptures) describes an describes a

early promise between God and God's and

people.

A collection of religious books in written in

Hebrew, written during a period years

Finally—after much controversy

whether certain books

sacred. The individual

Were gathered together

the Holy Book we know

WHY read the Bible?

**for many**

To help you understand

His works.

To help you know how to

and act.

To share stories of human experience in many literary forms:

songs & poetry

laws & history

prophecies, wise

sayings

short stories, letters.

NEW TESTAMENT

(Christian Scriptures)

"new" relationship between God

Humankind.

A collection of 27 books

colloquial Greek in less than 100

Over 900 years, including....

1 Histories of heroes and events

## HANDBOOK

2 Codes of Laws

and

3 Orations

Church.

4 Reflective Literature

5 Poetry

looking forward to a Mission for  
Israel on earth.

39 books

in Protestant Bibles

5 cover "the Law" *rules of conduct, worship*

*The beginnings of Israel as a nation.*

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy

21 cover "the Prophets" *uniting 12 tribes, prophecies*  
& Paul

Joshua, Judges, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings,  
Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah  
Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai  
Zechariah, Malachi  
Galatians,

13 cover "the Writings" *history poetry, and song*

Thessalonians,  
*wisdom for living and philosophy*

Titus,

psalms, Proverbs, Job, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah,  
1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Song of Songs, Ruth

Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther

7 cover "The Second Canon"

2 John,

Tobit, Judith, Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach, Baruch

1 Maccabees, 2 Maccabees, + Esther, Daniel additions

(51-105 A.D.) after Christ as a  
**MISSIONARY**

proclaims the birth, growth,

teachings of the Christian

27 books

First 4 called "The Gospels" *The story of*

*Christ: His teachings, foundation of NT.*

Matthew, Mark, Luke, John

the Acts of the Apostles Peter

Acts

13 Epistles (letters) from Paul  
to Churches & People

Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians,

Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1

2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy,

Philemon

8 other Letters

Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John,

3 John, Jude

a "Vision"

Revelation: John's vision of a great  
struggle between Christ's Church and  
Satan; the final victory of the Kingdom of  
God.

## Some Ideas on HOW TO READ the Bible

The world's best selling book

### ***Getting the MOST out of you Bible reading***

- 1 Set aside TIME for bible reading**  
Make Bible reading a habit-every day of the year.
- 2 Try to read a BOOK AT A TIME**  
many books of the Bible can be read in 20 minutes, some in an hour, others require more time.
- 3 Try to understand the WRITERS PURPOSES**  
Who was he? What was his 'world'? Why did he write?
- 4 WHO was the message for**  
Who was the audience for this message - what did it mean to them?  
What does it mean to you
- 5 Keep a NOTEBOOK as you read.**  
Jot down words to look up - and questions for which to find answers.
- 6 LOOK THINGS UP you don't understand.**  
Use a Bible concordance, dictionary, atlas, and commentary to help you.

### *Three focuses of reading the Bible*

Learning	Experiencing	Applying
<b>How to approach</b>	<b>firsthand the words</b>	<b>the wisdom and faith</b>
<b>Scriptures for</b>	<b>of great men of God</b>	<b>of the Bible in your fuller, deeper</b>
<b>understanding.</b>		<b>daily life.</b>

*Above all: APPLY the insights of the Bible to your daily life.  
"be doers of the word, and not hearers only" James 1:2*

### *Your Inner Life*

**A commitment to Christ is the basis of a fruitful life as a Christian. The Bible teaches how to practice self-discipline, prayer and meditation.**

### *Marriage and Family*

**The Bible explains the sacred nature of the family and gives standards of family conduct. For example 'Honor your father and mother... (Exodus 20;12)**

### *Community*

**The books of the New Testament teach us to deal fairly with other people: that we should carry Christ's message to others wherever we go, whatever we do.**

### *Church membership*

**Laws set out in the Old Testament, Jesus' teachings, and Paul's letters are still helpful for the members of any congregation.**

### *Crisis / Death*

**The people of the Bible experienced the same kinds of sorrow, trials of conscience and tragedies of life that we face today. We can feel comfort in knowing that they felt as we did; we can learn how they dealt with their problems, so that we can learn from them.**