

Dialogue on 'Sola Scriptura' with a Protestant

Quote: "The Bible is our only infallible rule for faith and practice. He shouldn't read it with ANY skepticism, but as a little child trusting his dad. Any other writings, no matter who wrote them, always bring the possibility of containing error."

Reply:

But don't you see that Christians only know what books comprise the Bible from the witness of the Fathers of the Church? Why do Protestants accept the Church Father's testimony when they tell us which Apostle wrote what book, and that that writing is inspired, and yet they do not accept the rest of what the Fathers witnessed to regarding the historic Christian faith?

We would not know of the New Testament Canon except through these Church Fathers. Just as we would not know of the historic Christian faith except through them. They are the ones by whom we know that St. Matthew wrote the "Gospel of St. Matthew" and that that writing is inspired by the Holy Spirit and truly the Word of God. Why aren't you Protestants as skeptical about such information as you are regarding the Church Fathers' witness to the other elements of the Apostolic Faith like the historic Christian teaching that our worship service, the Divine Liturgy, is a sacrificial act, that Baptism regenerates us to new life, that Christ established the Holy Orders of Bishops, Presbyters (where we get the word 'Priest'), and Deacons to administer and lead His Church, that Holy Communion is truly the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ?

These are just a few things that all the historic, ancient, apostolic Orthodox Churches believe because this was the faith delivered to them along with the Canon of Holy Scripture. We have kept the entire deposit of faith which was once for all delivered (Jude 1:3). Protestants have only preserved a portion of it. Why aren't Protestants as trusting with the entire message delivered to us in what is known as Holy Tradition as they are with the part of that Holy Tradition which regards Holy Writ?

This shows an arbitrary approach to the Christian Faith and it leads to factions because there is no historically grounded guiding principal in their interpretation of the Scriptures. This is why historically Protestants are divided into thousands of denominations, whereas Orthodox retain their respective Traditions. The point is, Christians must either trust the entire

deposit of faith passed on from the Fathers or reject it all. Picking and choosing results in newly invented faiths.

Quote: "Someone wrote, 'The Koran explicitly claims divine inspiration, but the New Testament books do not.' Oh, horsehockey! Hasn't this dude ever read 2 Tim. 3:16 or Rev. 1?"

Reply:

The point the writer was making is that the far majority of books in the New Testament don't make any claim to be divinely revealed. The historic Church passed onto us this faith. Even the very books you just mention don't claim for themselves to be divinely inspired! So why should one put their faith in them and believe the verses you quoted from them? In fact, the only books that even sound like they may be considered "Scripture" are those of St. Paul which are referred to in the third chapter of the Second Epistle of St. Peter (3:15-16). But, again, if we want to go by the "Bible Alone," we cannot say which letters of Paul are inspired because this is never defined in the Scriptures either. So, all we can do is speculate on which books of St. Paul, St. Peter is referring too. In other words, without a Church which has been given divine authority to bind and loose, among other things a Scriptural Canon, there is no way to settle the problem of which books make up the Canon of the Scripture. This seems to me to be a very clear and straightforward point (as staggering as it may be). Even if Protestants recognize this authority, then they fail to recognize that the same Church that canonized the New Testament Books also canonized the longer Old Testament Canon which Protestants have all abandoned.

Quote: "So what? The Holy Spirit bears witness to the Scripture's authenticity. Unless you want to be a liberal and believe some of them were not written by Paul."

Reply:

Could you explain how does He does this? Mormon's make the same claim about the Book of Mormon. I said, "The point he is making is that the far majority of books in the N.T. don't make any claim to be divinely revealed." You said, "True; but Paul quotes 'The laborer is worthy of his hire' (from Mt. 10) as Scripture, giving his apostolic imprimatur to Matthew's gospel." But to say that St. Paul quoted St. Matthew's Gospel "as

Scripture” based on that above quote is like saying St. Jude quoted the “Assumption of Moses” or the “Book of Enoch” as Scripture. Although St. Jude did quote these books in his Epistle, this does not prove he recognized them as inspired Scripture. Since you yourself would not consider these books inspired, your argument does not hold up. So, you are actually going beyond the Scriptures because the Scriptures NEVER tell us which epistles of St. Paul are authentic or inspired. Again, you get this from Holy Tradition and the authority of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. Many books claimed to be written by the Apostles. It was the Orthodox Church which validated the claims to Apostolic authorship and Canonized these as Scripture.

Quote: "Revelation expressly claims divine inspiration. You also have Jude 3 stating he was ‘constrained to write.’ You can interpret that to mean ‘constrained by the Holy Spirit.’ Then you have the apostolic authorship of John's Gospel and the three letters, as well as the two Peters and James. You can take that as prima facie evidence of divine inspiration.

Reply:

Even if it did claim divine inspiration there is nothing that differentiates that claim of this single book from that of the Koran, save the authority of the Church and its Holy Tradition of which the Scriptures are a part. A question comes to mind here. Where does the author of the above-mentioned Gospel ever identify himself as St. John the Apostle? I believe St. John wrote it because I accept Holy Tradition as authoritative. But with no biblical basis, why do you accept it?

Even if St. John did identify himself as the author, as St. Peter does in his 1st and 2nd epistles and as St. Paul and St. James do in their Epistles, you still have a problem. There were many other Epistles also claiming Apostolic authorship in the early Church. Some of these books were even considered divinely inspired by some in the Church. The Fathers and Church leaders had to come together in Councils, guided by the Holy Spirit, and decide which books were in and which were out of the Church’s Canon. If Protestants accept their decision on the New Testament Canon, why don’t they accept the entire faith which they witnessed to as well?

You are trying to “connect the dots” of the Scriptural Canon but are ignoring the fact that all the dots have already been connected. Study Church history and you will see the consistency and the Scriptural witness to

back it. Let the full faith of the Fathers teach you since you already implicitly accept their authoritative decision about the Holy Scriptures.

Quote: "But anyway, arguing on the basis of what foolish claims the Koran makes for itself is a side-issue."

Reply:

No, it rather effectively demonstrates how any book can claim for itself divine origin. The bottom-line question for us is, "Who guarantees that inspiration"? No doubt you will say, "The Holy Spirit." The Muslim will reply that Allah does the same for the Koran. Based on historically reliable evidence, I recognize that Jesus Christ established the Apostles as leaders of His Church. He promised that His Church would be guided to all truth (cf. St. Jn 14:26, 16:13, St. Mt 28:18-20). The Apostles appointed successors (e.g. in the case of Judas: Act 1:15-26) to preserve this deposit of truth and continue the office of shepherding Christ's Church. These chosen successors, bishops (cf. 1 Tim 3:1), were ordained by the Apostles (Acts 14:23) through the laying on of hands (cf. Acts 6:6, 1 Tim 4:14, 5:22, 2 Tim 1:6), and were entrusted with the entire "deposit of truth" (cf. 2 Tim 1:13-14; 2:2, Titus 1:7-9). This office has been maintained down to this day through the Holy Mystery or Sacrament of Holy Orders.

The Apostle's successors, the Bishops of the same historic Orthodox Church, came together in Councils and affirmed that the Scriptures are Apostolic and Divinely inspired. Therefore, I accept them, as well as the entire faith they handed on (which is what the word "tradition" literally means). Being obedient to the canonical leaders of the Church who are over me in the Lord (Hebrews 13:17), I accept the clear historical faith they also have accepted and received.

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