

## WHEN IT COMES TO DISCUSSING RELIGION...

It is often difficult to keep balanced when Catholics and Protestants get around to discussing religion. It often becomes a question of one side attempting to “prove” to the other the incorrectness of their beliefs, or else the incompleteness of their church. This is not exactly what is meant by ‘fraternal dialogue’!

Questions from Protestants like “Where in the Bible does it say...?” frequently throw Catholics for a loop. This is in part because we don’t know where; in part it is also because the particular belief or practice being challenged cannot in fact be found (at least, not fully-formed) in the Bible. So what’s a Catholic to do in replying? I am indebted to Marcus Grodi from *The Journey Home* (as he was, in turn, indebted to Scott Hahn) for the following line of thinking.

One step might be to ask, “Where in the Bible does it say that beliefs must be found completely and only in the Bible?” The answer is that there is no place where this statement can be found. In part, of course, it’s because the Church and its Tradition (this is the meaning of the Greek word *paradosis* which St. Paul uses in I Corinthians 15:3 to describe central teaching) were in existence for many decades before all the books of what we now call the “New Testament” were written. And it was a couple of centuries beyond that before they were gathered (not without disagreements!) to form what we call the “New Testament.” So of course there must have been preaching and teaching of faith and practice separate from the Bible.

Another consideration is I Timothy 3:15. Here it is the Church as a whole which is referred to as “the pillar and foundation of truth,” and not just the Bible (scriptures). Again, this is to be expected since the “New Testament” as such didn’t exist when I Timothy was being written! When in the New Testament the word “scripture(s)” is used, it always refers to what was coming to be gathered together (again, not without disagreements) to form what we now call the “Old Testament.”

A final point (this time my own), is to realize that when Protestants challenge Catholics about certain beliefs or practices, it turns out that what they are asking about is portions of faith and practice that were rejected during the 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformation. The Reformation was caused by desire to rid the Church of abuses, and they unfortunately abounded. But the baby was, in many cases, thrown out with the bath water. So if asked, “Why do you Catholics believe/do...?” the answer sometimes might well be, “Why did you Protestants stop believing/doing? It was part of the faith-life of the Church for 1500 years.” The classic example of this is belief in the true Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

The bottom line is that no one ever needs to be afraid of authentic fraternal dialogue about the Faith. And no one needs to feel intimidated by attacks that pass for ‘dialogue,’ either.