

“Why did the men who sat in Council in this Hall in the 15th century succumb! To answer in a single sentence, *They succumbed because they were not indwelt with the spirit of Holy Scripture.* In the first fresh bloom of Christianity—in that whole period of which we speak as the Age of the Fathers—all theologians were Bible theologians; and in the first six centuries of the Church, and even longer, there was no other theology than Bible theology. Later in the Middle Ages, when the schools based their teaching on the philosophy of Aristotle, Biblical learning decayed. It consisted, such as it was, in a collection of opinions, often unintelligently made, of what the Fathers had thought concerning Holy Scripture. After the art of printing had been discovered, both the text and explanations of Scripture were printed, but in an anarchical fashion, good and bad, without method or order; the booksellers made a mere trade of it. In the beginning of the 16th century, there were in the German language alone some eighteen translations* (query, recensions) of the Holy Scriptures: and of Latin translations (query, recensions) the number was still greater. Then came the Council of Trent, which, under these circumstances, found it necessary to pronounce an opinion on the question of publishing and reading the Holy Scriptures.

“But before going further I must tell you that the subject on which I am going to address you is the *Prohibition of Bible Reading.* This prohibition is enforced with great stringency at the present time by the Romish Bishops, and the priests who depend upon them. I know of an Archbishop whom I could name, who not long ago told believing Catholics who spoke to him on the subject, that the Holy Scriptures with explanations might even yet be read with the sanction of the confessor, but that to read the Bible without such explanations *was a sin!* Is it, then, really a forbidden thing in the Roman Catholic Church to read the Scriptures in the vulgar tongue! This is my first question. Practically it is the case, as I have just said; but upon what is the prohibition based! The clergy often appeal to the Council of Trent, but not justly. [After showing that the decree of the Council did not prohibit the reading of the Bible, but aimed at other ends, he proceeds.] I have looked about to discover the real reasons which the Roman Curia might have for insisting so stringently just at present on the prohibition to read the Bible. I have hit upon the writings of a man fully initiated into the plans and intentions of the Roman See, who enjoyed a Romish training, and was devoted both body and soul to the furtherance of Romish views—the late Cardinal Wiseman. He published an essay on the reading of the Scriptures in the vulgar tongue. It was written primarily against the English Bible Societies, but throws also considerable light upon the matter I am now discussing. I pass over what he says about the methods pursued by these Bodies; my object is to discover what motive Rome can have for preventing the faithful from the free and unsophisticated reading of the Scriptures. Cardinal Wiseman says: ‘The Church (he means Rome) does not place the Word of God indiscriminately in the hands of the faithful, because God Himself has not done it! God has not given His Word indiscriminately to men.’ Such is the Cardinal’s position; but if he intends to maintain this, he certainly acts wisely in forbidding Christians to read the Bible, for it is just the reverse of what the Bible expressly teaches. I remind you how our Lord commissioned His disciples to proclaim God’s Word from the house-tops; to preach from the house-tops *all* that He had taught them in secret. I remind you further of His answer to those who were sent to question Him—‘To the poor the Gospel is preached.’ I remind you still further how He compares His gospel to a banquet, to which, when the invited guests refused to come—He meant the Jewish people—all were invited from the highways and hedges, and entered freely. What is all this, I ask, but giving the Word of God to all without distinction! In the face of God’s own Word, it is a daring assertion to maintain that it was not meant for all mankind.

The Bishop is wrong in speaking of so many translations.