

# **RELIABILITY OF THE SPOKEN WORD AGAINST THE WRITTEN WORD**

Dr. Kersey Antia, Mar 20, 2020

In “Whose Bible Is It?” Pelikan reminds us in the beginning was the spoken word. The biblical God who speaks to man does not “write anything until 80 chapters into the Old Testament. Similarly, Christ did not write anything (except on sand), nor did he tell his disciples to do so. When picking up a Bible, we should recall that its words were heard long before they could ever have been read.” Faith, as St. Paul reminds us, comes from hearing.

Both the Old and New Testaments came out of a strong oral tradition. The books of the Old Testament appeared gradually over a long period of time. The first five – the Pentateuch, or five Books of Moses – were probably put in final form after the Babylonian Exile in the sixth century B.C. and have a privileged status in Jewish revelation.

The entire Jewish canon came together only around A.D. 100, after the destruction of Jerusalem, when some highly orthodox rabbis met in Palestine and decreed which of the multifarious documents of Jewish tradition would henceforth constitute Scripture.

It took the church almost four centuries to sort out various documents and prescribe an official canon. Some Gospels such as the Gospel of Thomas, were finally rejected. A number of books, such as the Letter to Hebrews and the Book of Revelation, were hotly debated before their inclusion. Finally the church had to make up its mind about the Old Testament. Intellectuals like Marcion, a second-century Roman heretic, even argued that Christians could dispense with it.

Then the Enlightenment turned its sharp critical tools on the sacred texts, questioning such items as the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. The so-called historical-critical method was a great solvent of religious belief. The 17th-century philosopher Baruch Spinoza regarded Scripture as a mere collection of legends for childish minds.