

communion when "The Way" was young, vulnerable — and working without a codified canon of sacred texts.

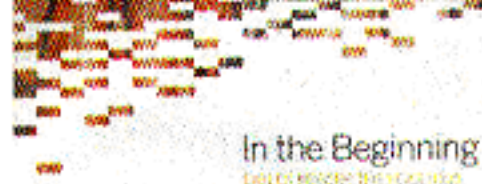
Many of us also sense that the price of all the divisions among Christians today is high. Too high. The non-Christian world often can't hear Christians' evangelizing voice because, to many unchurched ears, there isn't a voice to hear. There's a cacophony. Untold swarms of self-assured ambassadors contradict and compete with one another even on such basic doctrines as what a person has to do to be saved. All cite Scripture.

Christendom could use a reminder about the true nature of apostolic authority as Christ established it. And Catholics could use a little help explaining the particulars on the matter, as we see it, to our separated brothers and sisters who seek to follow Jesus by the light of the Bible alone. The ideal resource would be non-sectarian so as to invite all comers. It would be scholarly in scope yet popular in presentation.

Ask and ye shall receive.

In the Beginning: Bibles Before the Year 1000 is a 5-pound flagstone of a coffee-table topper that wasn't published to do the Catholic Church any favors. But its utility as an apologetics aid will be unmistakable to the Catholic with eyes to see Christian archaeology as a boon. Hard ancient evidence can help show not just *that* the Church has withstood the gates of hell but also *how*.

And of course the "how" behind the Bibles we hold in our hands



In the Beginning
BIBLES BEFORE THE YEAR 1000

IN THE BEGINNING

Bibles Before the Year 1000

edited by **Michelle P. Brown**

Smithsonian, 2006

368 pages, \$45

Available in online bookstores

parchment scraps, bound codices and such — is reproduced on these pages in sharp color photos. The transition works, with one minor hitch: Museum display plates don't work as photo captions, which is how they're employed here. But flipping back through pages you've already read to find the section referring to the image you're now inspecting pays off, as the rich text surely goes into far greater detail than any tour guide could have.

Another consolation for those who missed the Washington exhibit: The tales of how the ancient artifacts were found and collected are just as interesting as the primer on the development and dissemination of the canon. Think Indiana Jones meets Scott Hahn. Also: Some of the later items — an embossed and illuminated Gospels cover from the late 11th century, for example — are as gorgeously rendered as the earliest ones are crudely fashioned. What once had to be hidden was now to be held high. The telling detail is that both packages present the same content.