

The Canon of Sacred Scripture

A Brief Introduction

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After the death of Christ on the cross, and in the centuries before 419 A.D., there were many, perhaps hundreds of writings, and some forgeries that had to be sorted out and decided upon as to if they were canonical (canon = rule or official list) or not. The early Catholic Church was scattered out in communities over a wide geographic area. Many people in these communities liked the Shepherd of Hermas and it was very popular and read as if it were scripture. On The Shepherd of Hermas; in the document The Muratorian Fragment, approx. 170-180 A. D., it is written: "was written quite recently in our own time by Hermas, while his brother, Pius, was filling the chair of the Church of the city of Rome". (Pope Saint Pious I apparently occupied the chair of Peter approx. 140 - 155 A. D.). Origen (185-232 A.D.) believed the author of The Shepherd of Hermas to be the same Hermas referred to by Saint Paul in Romans 16:14.

The Epistle of Barnabus was accepted as Scripture by Clement and Origen but not by Saint Jerome. While both of the books; the Shepherd of Hermas and the Epistle of Barnabus, were read and accepted by many Early Church communities they are not found in today's Bibles

Christian evangelists and apologists used the ***Alexandrian canon (Septuagint LXX)** preserved in Greek. (Not necessarily originally written in Greek.) Hellenists Jews from outside Palestine had their own synagogue where the Bible was read in Greek.

The Hebrews were native Palestinian Jews with their own synagogue. Their language was Aramaic and their Bible was read in Hebrew. There were complaints and disputations amongst these two Jewish groups (Hellenists and Hebrews), who used different languages, as is noted in (Acts 6:1-2).

The Gospel of Thomas was also in circulation and accepted by some followers of Mani (Manicheans). Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, in his Catechesis V (approx. 348 A.D.), states: "Let none read the gospel of Thomas, for it is the work, not of one of the twelve apostles, but one of Mani's three wicked disciples." Manichaeism is a heretical idea that has echoed down the centuries and has persisted even unto today. Likewise, Gnosticism (Gnostics were Docetists = Greek "to appear") teaches that salvation is liberation from the body because the material world is evil. These heretical teachings and writings were rejected as false by ****_ecclesiastical authority**. The important thing to remember about

heretical ideas is that they will continue to re-emerge, in more virulent form (variants), and under different name, throughout the centuries.

Some communities did not accept the Book of Revelation (Apocalypse) as Scripture, so it was not so popularly read and it was a disputed book. The Council of Laodicea about 360 A.D. did not include Revelation in the Canon of Scripture. Cyril, Bishop of Jerusalem, also rejected it and forbade its reading in public or private as well. Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, accepted it as Scripture as it is shown in his festal letter of 367 A.D. Disputes over the canonicity of the Book of Revelation contributed to divisions in the Eastern Church communities, and some Greek Churches of today do not accept it as Sacred Scripture. [1] [2]

The Bible did not come complete with an index, telling us which books, and how many, are inspired writings and canonical or not. It was the bishops of the Catholic Church **under the guidance of the Holy Spirit** that sorted out and decided the canon of Sacred Scripture. **The bishops were preserved from falling into error, as our Lord promised,** on this important matter concerning the entire Catholic Church. (Matt. 16:18; 28:18-20) (John 14, 15, and 16) (1 Tim. 3:14-15) (Acts 15:28) They included Tobit, Baruch, Judith, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus (Sirach), 1 Maccabees, and 2 Maccabees. Roman Catholics call these books deuterocanonical. [Protestants call them Apocrypha. There are some additional passages in Daniel and Esther not found in Protestant Bibles.]

Early Canonical Lists, Dates, and Reference.

The Bible is a Church based book. The Bible, the inspired word of God, came out of the Catholic Church around the end of the 4th century.

In Endnote (4) Of the Council of Trent, Fourth Session, Celebrated on the Eighth Day of April, 1546 on the ***Decree Concerning the Canonical Scriptures states this:***

“(4)For earlier lists, cf. Synod of Laodicea (end of IV cent.), c. 60, the genuineness of which canon however is contested (Hefele-Leclercq, Hist. des conciles, I, 1026); Synod of Rome (382) under Pope Damasus (Denzinger, Enchiridion, no. 84); Synod of Hippo (393), c. 36, which the III Synod of Carthage (397) made its own in c.47 (idem, no. 92); Innocent I in 405 to Exuperius, bishop of Toulouse (idem, no. 96); Eugene IV in the Council of Florence (Mansi, XXXI, 1736; Hardouin, IX, 1023f.). The Tridentine list or decree was the first infallible and effectually promulgated declaration on the Canon of the Holy Scriptures”

The decrees of the local or regional Church councils were submitted to the "transmarine Church" (Rome) and approved by the Popes and are considered official Church teachings by official Church councils. Although these councils were merely local, and they in themselves did not have universal binding authority, their decrees were submitted to various Popes and approved. **The Latin Vulgate (LV) version of the Bible by Saint Jerome was completed about 406 A.D. and included the deuterocanonical books. [3]**

The Ecumenical Council of Florence again affirmed the list of inspired books in 1442 A.D., about 100 years before the Council of Trent. The "Decretum pro Jacobitis" by Pope Eugenius IV lists the inspired books. Since there was no urgent challenge, or compelling reason why it should, the Ecumenical Council of Florence did not dogmatically pass on the canonicity of the inspired books. It did however teach that the books were inspired.

The canon of the Bible was solemnly defined and made dogmatic by the Fourth Session, of the Ecumenical Council of Trent, of the Catholic Church, (held in northern Italy 1545-1563 A.D.) by the Decree "De Canonicis Scripturis" on April 8th, 1546. Pope Pius IV formally confirmed all of its decrees in 1564 A.D. This put the canonicity of the whole Traditional Bible (LV) **beyond the permissibility of doubt** on the part of Catholics.

The Council of Trent lists 45 books of the Old Testament not 46, because like the Traditional Bible (LV) it considers Lamentations part of Jeremiah. It also lists 27 books of the New Testament. This canon is the same as the Traditional Bible (LV) as it was listed for over 1000 years before the Council of Trent. This canon was agreed upon (after much debate) by the earlier popes mentioned and both regional (provincial) and ecumenical official Church councils or synods.

Today's Catholic Bibles usually count a 73-book canon of Scripture, not 72. This is simply because they number the book of Lamentations separate from Jeremiah. However, once dogmatically defined, there can be no dispute as to the canonicity of the sacred books on the part of Catholics. Here are a few keywords and phrases to help in understanding what the Council of Trent did: reaffirmed, reiterated what had already been taught, dogmatically defined.

Relatively recent archeological findings and analysis of the Dead Sea scrolls (Qumran) of 1947 revealed that several deuterocanonical books were originally composed in Hebrew (Sirach, Judith, 1 Maccabees,) or Aramaic (Tobit). The Protestant reformers of the 16th century were not

aware of the Hebrew and Aramaic Versions of the deuterocanonical books in the Alexandrian canon.

Early Protestant reformers of the 16th century like Martin Luther, Martin Bucer, Ulrich Zwingli, and John Calvin promoted individual judgment and interpretation of the Bible. They rejected Church authority (John 17: 20 - 23) (Luke 10: 16) that is; the Holy Spirit sent upon the Church by Christ to teach and guide the Church as a universal body in matters of faith and morals. The Reformers accept the 27 books of the New Testament. (Martin Luther dishonored and nearly eliminated some of the New Testament books like James, Hebrews, Jude, and Revelation. The insistence of his friends stopped him from eliminating some of the New Testament canon. Luther was likely suffering from scrupulosity.)

The Historical and Spiritual Wrong way turn of Protestantism.

The archeological evidence available to the reformers of the 16th century led them to believe that the deuterocanonical books were later Greek language compositions and additions to the Holy Bible. They used this as one of the criteria for deciding their 66 book Bible canon. Thus the Protestant Bible is short seven books. I wonder now, if the reformers would have done this, had they known what we know today about the findings and analysis of the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran and the Hebrew and Aramaic versions of some of the deuterocanonical books?

The reformers (deformers) also invented unhistorical and novel doctrines like justification by faith alone (**sola fide**) and use of the Bible alone (**sola scriptura**) as the only source of divine revelation. They eliminated the deuterocanonical books of the Traditional Bible (LV) of the Catholic Church, which had been in use for over 1000 years, and which supported Catholic Doctrine like prayer for the dead and Purgatory found in 2 Maccabees. This is noteworthy [4] [5] [6] [7] [8]

The process of recognizing the written word of God involved a human process of discernment by the Magisterial (teaching authority) of the Catholic Church over many centuries of time. Quoting from one of the 16 documents of Vatican 11, **Dei Verbum (Word of God)** "...but the task of authentically interpreting the Word of God, whether written or handed down, has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office of the Church whose authority is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ. This teaching office is not above the word of God but serves it, teaching only what has been handed on... with the help of the Holy Spirit; it draws from this one deposit of faith everything it presents for belief as divinely revealed." [9]

Footnotes:

[1] **History of Eastern Christianity**, Page 248, By Aziz S. Atiya, University of Notre Dame Press, 1968, Notre Dame, Indiana

[2] **Eastern Christianity**, Page 191, By Nicholas Zernov, G.P. Putnam's sons, 1961, New York

[3] **Henry Denzinger's Enchiridion Symbolorum Et Definition**, No. 84, Page 35

[4] **The New Jerome Biblical Commentary**, Prentice Hall 1990, Raymond Edward Brown, Roland Edmund Murphy, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, Editors, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey

Page 1041, #38 states the following: "...(2) it was once thought that the extra (deuterocanonical) books in the Alexandrian canon had been composed in Greek and not Hebrew or Aramaic the sacred languages known in Palestine. Actually, a good number of the deuterocanonical books were originally composed in Hebrew (Sir, Jdt, 1 Macc) or Aramaic (Tob). The Qumran discoveries prove that some of these books were in circulation in Palestine and accepted by Jewish groups there. The fact that the codices of the LXX do not isolate the deuterocanonical books as a group but mix them in with the Prophets (Bar) and the Writings (Sir, Wis) shows that there was no awareness that these books had a unique origin, as there would have been if they were thought to be later and foreign additions to an already fixed collection translated from Hebrew. (3) The thesis that the Jews in Alexandria had a different theory of inspiration from the theory shared by the Jews in Jerusalem is gratuitous."

[5] "**Faith Facts**" from Catholics United for the Faith (CUF), 827 North Forth Street, Steubenville, Ohio 43952
http://www.cuf.org/Faithfacts/View_all.asp

[6] ***Why Catholic Bibles are Bigger***

The Untold Story of the Lost Books of the Protestant Bible

see especially pages 126 through 165

by Gary Michuta

Published by Grotto Press

Port Huron, Michigan

ISBN 13: 978-1-58188-010-6

ISBN 10: 1-58188-010-3

<http://www.handsonapologetics.com>

[7] **Not by Scripture Alone**: A Catholic Critique of the Protestant Doctrine of Sola Scriptura by Robert A. Sungenis

ISBN-10: 1579180558

ISBN-13: 978-1579180553

[8] **Not by Faith Alone**: A Biblical Study of the Catholic Doctrine of Justification by Robert A. Sungenis

ISBN-10: 1579180086

ISBN-13: 978-1579180089

[9] **The Sixteen Documents of Vatican II**, By Pauline Books and Media, Boston, Massachusetts.

ISBN-0819870188

ISBN-13:9780819870186

*Of the approximately 300 Old Testament quotes in the New Testament, approximately 2/3 of them came from the **Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament)** which included the deuterocanonical books that the Protestants later removed. This is additional evidence that Jesus and the apostles viewed the deuterocanonical books as part of canon of the Old Testament.

<http://www.scripturecatholic.com/septuagint.html>

By "ecclesiastical authority**:" I understand creedal definition, papal definition, or conciliar definition. See: Responses To 101 Questions on the Bible by Raymond E. Brown published by Paulist Press, New York, pages 11 - 16 and pages 73 - 74.

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