

The Canon of the Roman Catholic Bible

The canon of the Catholic Bible consists of 73 books, including the deuterocanonical texts, which are recognized as divinely inspired by the Roman Catholic Church.

The following four translations of the Bible are all approved for Roman Catholic use and are among the most used translations:

1. **New American Bible (NAB) Vatican Edition**, (Version used in the Catholic Liturgy)
2. **New American Bible Revised Edition (NAB-RE)**, (Most recent revision of the NAB, also available from the USCCB)
3. **Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition (RSV-CE)**, (Recommended by respected Catholic scholars as the best translation)
4. **New Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition (NRSV-CE)**, (A revision of the RSV-CE)

Overview of the Canon

The canon of Scripture refers to the official list of books that the Roman Catholic Church recognizes as sacred and inspired by God. This canon includes a total of 73 books: 46 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament. The Old Testament canon includes several books that are not found in the Protestant Bible, known as the deuterocanonical books including Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, Sirach, Baruch, and 1 and 2 Maccabees, Additions to Esther (Greek additions), Additions to Daniel (including the Prayer of Azariah and Susanna).

Historical Development

The process of determining the canon was gradual and involved several key events and figures throughout early Church history. Various councils, such as those at Hippo and Carthage, played crucial roles in recognizing and formalizing the canon of the New Testament, which includes the four Gospels and the letters of Paul. The Council of Trent (1546) was significant in affirming the Roman Catholic canon in response to the Protestant Reformation, which challenged the inclusion of the deuterocanonical books.

Criteria for Inclusion

The criteria for determining which books were included in the canon involved several factors:

1. **Apostolic Origin**: Books needed to be linked to the apostles or their close associates.
2. **Widespread Acceptance**: The texts had to be accepted and used by the early Christian communities.
3. **Consistency of Doctrine**: The teachings within the books had to align with the established Christian faith and morals.
4. **Spiritual Value**: The texts should reflect high moral and spiritual values indicative of divine inspiration.

The Role of Tradition in Canon Formation

Tradition played a vital role in deciding the canon, as no book of Scripture lists itself as inspired. Early Christians relied on the living tradition passed down from the apostles. This tradition included the liturgical use of certain texts in worship. Books read during the Eucharist were often seen as authoritative. Bishops and theologians, guided by this practice, evaluated writings for consistency with apostolic teaching. The Church did not depend on a single council at first but on a growing consensus.

Local churches shared their accepted texts, fostering agreement over time. Heresies, like those of Marcion, who rejected the Old Testament, forced clearer definitions. Tradition acted as a filter, ensuring only inspired works endured. This organic process reflects the Church's trust in divine guidance.

Differences with Other Canons

The Roman Catholic canon differs from the Protestant canon primarily due to the inclusion of the deuterocanonical books. While the Protestant Bible contains 39 books in the Old Testament, the Roman Catholic Bible includes these additional texts, leading to a total of 46. This distinction is rooted in the early Church's reliance on the Septuagint Hebrew Bible.

The Septuagint, often called the Translation of the Seventy, is the oldest known Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. It included the deuterocanonical texts and was widely used by early Christians. It was created by 72 Hellenistic Jewish scholars in Alexandria, Egypt, in the 3rd century BCE. The translation was commissioned for the Library of Alexandria by King Ptolemy II Philadelphus, the pharaoh of Ptolemaic Egypt from 284 to 246 BC. He was the son of Ptolemy I, the Macedonian general of Alexander the Great who founded the Ptolemaic Kingdom.

Conclusion

The canon of the Roman Catholic Bible is a foundational aspect of Roman Catholic faith, reflecting a long history of discernment and theological reflection. The inclusion of the deuterocanonical books highlights the Roman Catholic Church's commitment to preserving the fullness of God's revelation as understood through tradition and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The canon remains a vital element of Roman Catholic teaching and practice today.