

most consider it uninspired.

The Apostolic Canons, again, indicates considerable confusion. It contains the normal canon of the New Testament; however, it also adds several books which are now universally rejected as apocryphal. These include I and II Clement and the eight books of the Constitutions. This canon does not include the Apocalypse, which everyone now accepts as truly inspired.

Rufinus lists a normal canon of the New Testament, including the Apocalypse. However, he also cites a whole body of work which could be considered a New Testament apocrypha, including Hermas, the Two Ways, and the Judgment of Peter. Even as late as St. John Damascene, at the beginning of the eighth century, additional works were occasionally included in the canon of the New Testament in this way.

For the most part, however, our New Testament is supported by the *use* of the writers, even if not always in their lists. Like that of the Old Testament, this history does indicate a marked tendency to the Catholic canon; however, like that of the Old Testament, it's far from unambiguous. The Christian must, having perused this history even briefly as we have, proceed to the original questions again if he is to support his love of Scripture with reason and knowledge.

Solving the Confusion

The question remains: how does a Christian determine which books are inspired and which are not? The Protestant here should be quite perplexed; because his faith rests entirely on this volume, and this volume's proper contents cannot clearly be determined, his very faith is in jeopardy. He has no way to sort of the question out. There was clearly no direct revelation of the canon of Scripture to show him the way; the Bible itself does not list its own contents; and even tradition, should the Protestant turn to it, gives an at best ambiguous answer. The Protestant has no guidance; he really has no way of knowing that the Scripture he so loves (and rightly loves, of course) is truly inspired by God, and not merely composed by men.

For the early Church, however, the solution was easy: authority. Christ had left for His Church an authoritative interpreter of the traditions which had been passed down regarding the contents of Sacred Scripture. Nor did this authority first speak on the subject at the Council of Trent in the sixteenth century, as some Protestants assert. In reality, it echoes a much longer tradition, in line with, as noted above, the use of the great majority of the Fathers.

From the Council of Rome in 382 (Denz. 84), to the Council of Carthage in 397 (Denz. 92), to Pope St. Innocent I in the first two decades of the fifth century (Denz. 96), to the Council of Florence of 1438–1445 (Denz. 706), the Council of Trent is only the most recent of a long line of authoritative tradition.

The Catholic, then, has an easy and sure answer to what must forever plague the Protestant: we know that they are inspired because the Church has, always and everywhere, taught that they are so. God did not leave us without guidance on this issue; He provided us with precisely what we needed: an authority to cut through the confusion and dispute and give the true answer under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. And that it did; it gave us the Catholic, meaning “universal,” canon of the Scriptures.

The Protestant must look very carefully at his religion and consider how he knows that its one and only authority, the Scriptures, is worth anything more than the paper it's printed on. To maintain respect for the Bible and its inerrancy, only one answer is possible: the answer which the Catholic Church provides.

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What Books are Inspired?

Protestants often seem to believe that God Himself handed the King James version of the Bible down to English Protestants, and that therefore its contents and translation are totally unquestionable. Many, of course, are more thoughtful, and recognize that the Hebrew and Greek are the original texts, but think no further about its origins. More than a few know that Catholics include in the Bible several books which Protestants do not; these books, called “apocrypha” by Protestants and “deutero-canonical” by Catholics, are considered further proof of Catholicism's descent away from true Christianity.

But how does anyone know what books are really inspired—part of the Bible—and what books are not? Is there any merit to the claim that the deutero-canonical books are not really parts of Scripture?

Scripture before the New Testament

Protestants often claim that the early Christians were like Protestants, relying solely on Scripture for revelation. This is not the place to disprove that notion thoroughly; it suffices for our purposes to note that it's plainly false historically, because the early Christians didn't have Scripture at all.

That is, they had the Hebrew Old Testament, usually used in the Greek translation known as the Septuagint. But they did not have a New Testament for the simple reason that it was still being written. *All* the knowledge of the early Christians regarding Christ and His teaching was oral and traditional—being passed down from person to person—by necessity.

Over the course of the first century, what we know of as Scripture was being composed by the great apostles and evangelists of that holiest of

times. While God was inspiring these holy documents, however, other documents were being written, sometimes by the same men. There was a great deal of confusion and difference on which books were to be included in Scripture and which

This confusion extended across the Old and New Testaments. The Hebrew Scriptures, of course, did not include several of the books which Catholics accept as canonical, specifically Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, Sirach (or Ecclesiasticus), Baruch, and the two books of the Maccabees, plus parts of Esther and Daniel. This fact is sometimes cited by Protestants as proof that these books are not inspired.

However, by the time of Christ, most Jews outside of Palestine were using the Septuagint as their Scriptures. The Septuagint included, in addition to the Hebrew Scriptures, those books and chapters which Protestants call the apocrypha. This is a fact well-known among all Scripture scholars.¹ So at the time of Christ, the “apocrypha” were quite widely regarded by the Jews, especially those within the Greek-speaking tradition, as inspired Scripture. The fact that they were not originally Hebrew seems irrelevant in light of this fact.

So, at the time of Christ and the writing of the New Testament, the accepted canon of Scripture usually included the deuterocanonical books. How did the new Christians, however, treat this received Scripture, and how did they come to have the New Testament included?

Determining the Canon

The early Christians were nothing if not dedicated readers of the Scriptures. However, they were faced with two problems regarding what they would consider to be included within their Scriptures. First, they needed to determine which books of the received Jewish Scriptures, usually the Septuagint including the “Apocrypha,” should be considered part of the Christian canon. Second, they needed

¹Indeed, it’s noted very matter-of-factly in one of the English-speaking world’s most authoritative editions of the Septuagint, that of Sir Lancelot Brenton.

to decide which books currently being written, if any, should be given the same weight as the Scriptures received from the Jews.

The answer to both questions was difficult, and neither received a definitive answer quickly; that is, there was no imparting of the completed, unquestioned canon of Scripture directly to man by Christ, as some Protestants seem to believe.

It is now necessary to delve somewhat into the writings of the Fathers of the Church to continue our inquiry. All citations to Church Fathers in this pamphlet, unless otherwise noted, are from the excellent three-volume compendium of William A. Jurgens, *The Faith of the Early Fathers*.

The Old Testament

Regarding the Old Testament, there were great disputes over whether the deuterocanonical books should be considered of equal weight as the Hebrew Scriptures; as inspired, but of secondary weight; or as merely human writings. St. Gregory of Nazianz, for example, writing in the fourth century in Asia Minor, did not include the deuterocanonical books. St. Amphiloichius of Iconium, around the same time, did not include the deuterocanonical books, but also noted that many people did not include Esther, which Protestants all accept.

The Apostolic Canons, written around the beginning of the fifth century, includes some of the deuterocanonical works. It also includes several other books that Catholics and Protestants together reject, such as the third book of Maccabees (Catholics only accept the first two of the four). On the other hand, it also rejects several which Catholics accept, such as Baruch, Tobit, and Judith.

Rufinus, on the other hand, writing around the same time (the early fifth century), included the entirety of the Catholic canon of the Old Testament, though listing the deuterocanonical books separately and calling them “ecclesiastical” rather than “canonical.” And St. Jerome lists a standard Protestant Old Testament. St. John Damascene included the deuterocanonical books in the Old Testament, but stated that they were somehow dif-

ferent from the others.

St. Augustine, however, lists a standard Catholic Old Testament with the exception of Maccabees. St. Innocent did, as well. St. Irenaeus confirmed the “apocrypha” parts of Daniel and held that Baruch was equal in authority to Jeremiah.² This acceptance of the “Apocrypha” was so common, in fact, that Sir Lancelot Brenton was able to say that “[t]he writers of the early Church . . . quote the books of the ‘Apocrypha’ as of equal authority with the Old Testament.” This fact is concealed by the fact that few authors compiled explicit lists of what they considered to be Sacred Scripture; however, as Brenton notes in his edition of the Septuagint, it is clear from the *use* of such books that most authors accepted them as inspired.

The above, however, while evidence of a decisive trend toward including the deuterocanonical works as being equally inspired as the Hebrew Scriptures, is hardly a clear-cut statement on the subject. What it *does* unambiguously show is a great deal of confusion about the matter—a confusion which, from a Protestant perspective, should be very perplexing.

The New Testament

Regarding the New Testament, there is still more confusion. St. Gregory of Nazianz, who adhered to the more restricted canon of the Old Testament, did not accept the Apocalypse of St. John (often called “Revelation”) as inspired, which should give Christians pause in citing him for support for a shorter canon.

St. Amphiloichius displays further confusion. He gives some detail of the disputes surrounding the New Testament canon in his time and place, pointing out that some people argue only three epistles are canonical (namely, James, I Peter, and I John), while others hold that there should be seven (the Catholic Epistles we know: James, I-II Peter, I-III John, and Jude). He further notes that, while some will acknowledge the Apocalypse as genuine,

²“Canon of the Old Testament,” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, <http://www.newadvent.com>.