

# The Roman Catholic Bible

by James G. McCarthy

## Old Testament [120-123, 138] <sup>i</sup>

The Roman Catholic Old Testament is about 20% larger than that of non-Catholic Bibles. The additions, over 4,000 verses, come from a group of fifteen writings known since antiquity as the *Apocrypha*, meaning *hidden* or *hard to understand*.

The Apocrypha contains valuable historical information of the 400 years between the Old and New Testaments. Early Christian writers quote the Apocrypha; and some, such as Augustine, considered portions of it to be inspired Scripture. Fourth century A.D. manuscripts of the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Old Testament made in the third century before Christ, also include the Apocrypha. When the Apocrypha was appended to this translation is unknown.

In 1546, the Roman Catholic Church officially declared that God had inspired twelve of the fifteen writings of the Apocrypha, specifically, seven books:

- Tobit
- Judith
- 1 Maccabees
- 2 Maccabees
- Wisdom of Solomon
- Sirach (Ecclesiasticus)
- Baruch

and five passages:

- The Letter of Jeremiah, which became Baruch, chapter 6
- A 107 verse expansion of the Book of Esther
- The Prayer of Azariah, which became Daniel 3:24-90
- Susanna, which became Daniel 13
- Bel and the Dragon, which became Daniel 14

The Roman Catholic Church's claim that these writings of the Apocrypha are inspired must be rejected for the following reasons:

- The Apocrypha does not present itself as inspired. The author of 2 Maccabees says that his book is the abridgement of another man's work (2 Maccabees 2:23). He concludes the book, saying, "If it is well written and to the point, that is what I wanted; if it is poorly done and mediocre, that is the best I could do" (2 Maccabees 15:38). Mediocre is a good description of the Apocrypha. Despite its historical value, it promotes questionable ethics, fanciful legends, and doctrine that contradicts Scripture.
- The Jews of Palestine never accepted the Apocrypha as part of sacred Scripture. Neither was there a Jewish prophet living during the time in which the Apocrypha was written (300-30 B.C.).
- Jesus and the New Testament writers did not treat the Apocrypha as inspired. Though the New Testament quotes virtually every book of the Old Testament, there is not a single quotation from the Apocrypha.
- The early church as a whole never accepted the Apocrypha as inspired. Moreover, many Christian leaders spoke against the Apocrypha, including: Jerome, Origen, Athanasius, and Cyril of Jerusalem.

- Even the Roman Catholic Church did not dogmatically declare the Apocrypha to be inspired until the Council of Trent in the sixteenth century. Roman Catholic priest Father. H. J. Schroeder, a translator of the decrees of the Council of Trent writes, “The Tridentine list or decree was the first infallible and effectually promulgated declaration on the Canon of the Holy Scriptures.”<sup>ii</sup> The purpose of the Council of Trent was to counteract the Protestant Reformation. Protestants had rejected the Apocrypha. Rome reacted by dogmatically declaring most of the Apocrypha to be inspired. The Apocrypha also included teachings that could help Rome defend its doctrine against growing Protestant criticism. For instance, Martin Luther had forcefully argued against Rome’s practice of selling pardons from purgatory. Tobit 12:9 supports the practice, stating, “...almsgiving saves one from death and expiates every sin.” Even some Catholic writers acknowledge that Trent’s decision to accept the Apocrypha as inspired is problematic.<sup>iii</sup>

### **New Testament [120, 124-127, 138-139]**

The books of the Roman Catholic New Testament are the same as those of the Protestant Bible and the translations are generally reliable. However, some verses are translated with a noticeably Catholic slant. For example, the Catholic *New American Bible* translates a warning of Jesus to the Jews as saying: “But I tell you, you will all come to the same end unless you reform” (Luke 13:5, NAB). Here the Greek word *metanoeo*, meaning *to change one’s mind or to repent*, is translated to “reform,” meaning *to change into a new and improved form*. Making matters worse, the chapter title to Luke 13 added by the editors of the Catholic *New American Bible* reads: “Providential Calls to Penance.”

Adapted from *The Gospel According to Rome* by James G. McCarthy, Harvest House Publishers, © 1995.

### **Notes:**

- This article is indexed to the numbered paragraphs of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. The paragraph numbers are in brackets.
- H. J. Schroeder, translator, *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent* (Rockford, IL: Tan Books and Publishers, 178) p. 17, footnote 4.
- For a candid discussion of the Apocrypha by Roman Catholic Scholars, see Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., Roland E. Murphy, O. Carm., editors, *The Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs NJ: Prentice Hall, 1968), vol. 2, pp. 523-524.