



DD.1104

Nihil Obstat: FR. COLMAN, O.S.F.C.  
Imprimatur: FR. KEVIN, O.S.F.C.,  
Minister Provincial.  
Nihil Obstat: RECCABHDUS FLEMING,  
Censor Theol. Deput.  
Imprimi Potest: ✠ EDUARDUS,  
Archiep. Dublinen.,  
Hiberniæ Primas.  
Dublini, die 5 Dec., anno, 1930.



1114  
1/6

PRINTED IN IRELAND 1946

# THE CANON OF THE SCRIPTURES

By FATHER FELIX, O.F.M.Cap., L.S.S.

For centuries before Our Divine Lord came on earth there was a firm and unquestioned tradition among the Jews that certain books which they possessed were written under divine inspiration and had divine authority for their contents. The study of these sacred books was regarded as a duty by every true Israelite—they were read in the Temple and in the Synagogue during divine worship; the text was frequently and carefully copied out by scribes (there was no printing in those days); the manuscripts were preserved and kept with the greatest reverence; and thus the tradition and the books were handed down from age to age. These books, taken collectively or as a whole, were called by various names in various epochs of Jewish history. In Josue 24, 26 we have mention of "*the volume of the law of the Lord*"; Daniel the prophet speaks of them as "*the books*" (Dan. 9, 2—the article is not found in the English translation but it is in the original Hebrew text); the author of the prologue of Ecclesiasticus calls them "*the law and the prophets and the other books.*" and in 1 Machabees 12, 9 we have them entitled "*the holy books.*" In no instance is there any explanation given of the title so that we can conclude that these writers had in mind a well-known collection of sacred writings.

## THE REDEEMER AND THE SACRED BOOKS.

THEN, at a definite point in the world's history, Christ Our Lord became man and lived and preached on earth. Conceived by the Holy Ghost, He was born miraculously of a Jewish Virgin, and he grew up to manhood in Palestine among the Jewish people. Moreover His personal mission was primarily to the people of the Jews—"I was not sent but to buy the sheep that are lost of the house of Israel" (Matt. 15, 24). This is a matter of history, and all these facts have been recorded for us by the contemporaries and

intimate companions of the God-man. It is of supreme importance therefore for us to know the attitude of Christ towards these sacred books of the Jews and towards the tradition which held them to be the very word of God. There can be no doubt of His attitude; that He accepted the books as the word of God is clear from many incidents in His life. When He was tempted in the wilderness at the beginning of His public ministry, He refused to follow out the suggestions made to Him by Satan. Three times this occurred, and on each occasion He gave us as His sole reason a quotation from the sacred books of the Jews to justify His conduct. The third refusal to obey the tempter is particularly emphatic—“*Begone, Satan! For it is written: The Lord thy God shalt thou adore, and him only shalt thou serve*” (Matt. 4, 10). In the ‘Sermon on the Mount’ He gives us clearly to understand that these sacred books are authoritative and unchangeable—“*Do not think I am come to destroy the law or the prophets. I am not come to destroy but to fulfil. For amen I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall not pass of the law . . .*” (Matt. 5, 17-18). On another occasion when vindicating His divine mission, He appealed to the authority of the sacred books again—“*Search the Scriptures: for you think in them to have life everlasting. And the same are they that give testimony of me*” (John 5, 39). Here He uses the word ‘Scriptures’ to denote the sacred writings we have been speaking of. It was a word much in vogue at that epoch, it occurs frequently in the writings of the apostles, and has been used ever since in the Christian Church.

#### THE APOSTLES AND DISCIPLES AND THE SACRED BOOKS.

THE attitude of the companions and first followers of Christ to the sacred books of the Jews is precisely the same as the attitude of their Master. St. Matthew takes great pains to show that Christ fulfilled in His life and passion and death the prophecies in the Jewish scriptures. At the very beginning of the second gospel St. Mark quotes

the scriptures under the usual formula which was then used—“*as it is written.*” St. Luke was a Gentile, and he too accepted the books of the scriptures, and acknowledged their divine authority. The same is true of all the apostles—their sermons and exhortations, as given in the Acts of the Apostles, abound in quotations from the sacred books, and their writings are full of evidences of their acceptance of the tradition of their divine origin. St. Paul says clearly: “*All scripture, inspired of God, is profitable to teach, to reprove, to correct, to instruct in justice*” (2 Tim. 3, 16). And this attitude is consistently maintained in the writings of the Fathers of the early Church.

#### THE CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURES.

To these books which the Church received from the synagogue were added others; and these latter were accepted as being equally the word of God with the Jewish scriptures. There is a marked contrast between both collections of the Scriptures,—in the one there is always question of a future redeemer, and their message and hope is always directed to one nation, the Jews; whereas in those inspired books written after the coming of Christ the one great theme is the Redeemer Who has come and died, the way of holiness He has pointed out; and their message is for all men, Jews and Gentiles. For this reason the scriptures are divided into the Old and the New Testaments,—the Old Testament containing those books written before the Redemption, the New those written after the Redemption. These books have come down to us; the Church has preserved and handed on both Testaments; and they are accepted by Her with equal authority and reverence, and are both the word of God. Nowadays all the Scriptures are to be found printed in one volume, and this volume we call the *Bible*. The word ‘bible’ comes from the Latin of the Middle Ages—*biblia*, and *biblia* is not so much a Latin, as a *latinised* word, for it is derived from the Greek, and in Greek the word means simply ‘books.’ ‘The Scriptures’ and ‘the Bible’ are therefore only two names for one and the same thing, viz.—those

sacred books, which, 'having been written under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, have God for their author' (Council of the Vatican, chapter 2); and under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost means that "by supernatural power, God so moved and impelled the human authors to write—He was so present to them—that the things which He ordered and those only, they, first, rightly understood, then willed faithfully to write down, and finally expressed in apt words and with infallible truth" (Pope Leo XIII—Encyclical Letter—*Providentissimus Deus*—1893).

#### THE WHOLE BIBLE AND NOTHING BUT THE BIBLE.

At this point the question will naturally suggest itself: How are we to know that our Bible contains all the inspired books and none that are not inspired? The books themselves do not state in all cases that they are the word of God. Our Lord quoted the Scriptures of the Old Testament, but after all only a very small part of the whole; we have no written record of His having drawn up a list of the inspired books, and in any event the New Testament was all written after His ascension into heaven. Neither do the Apostles furnish us in their writings with such a list. This question is all the more important since the Jews at the time of Our Lord were not all of one opinion regarding the inspiration of certain books; and again certain books were circulated in the early centuries of Christianity which purported to be Scripture but which were rejected after a short time. And finally, to come down to present day affairs, if you open a Protestant edition of the Bible and compare it with our Catholic (Douay) version you may be surprised when you find that seven of the books of the Old Testament as given in the Douay Bible are omitted in the Protestant version. And this brings us now to the question of "the Canon of the Scriptures," the meaning of "Canon," the history of the Canon, and the authority for our catalogue or list of the books of Sacred Scripture.

## THE CANON OF THE SCRIPTURES

THE language of the early Church was not Latin but Greek. Latin superseded it after a time. In consequence of this many words commonly employed in theology and Christian doctrine are derived from Greek and come to us through Latin. This is true of the word 'Canon' amongst others. In Greek it means a rule or measure, a rule such as carpenters use to test the accuracy of their work or to guide them when working. From this meaning the word came in time to signify a rule of faith or a rule of conduct. The Greek word indeed is employed by St. Paul in both of these significations, a rule of faith in Galatians, 6, 16, and a rule of conduct in Philippians 3, 16.

Nowadays the word *Canon* is used frequently in theology in various technical meanings. Thus we speak of Canons of the General Councils, e.g., the fourth Canon of the second chapter of the Vatican Council reads: "If anyone refuses to accept all the books of sacred scripture with all their parts, as the Holy Council of Trent enumerates them, for sacred and canonical, or denies that they are inspired by God—let him be anathema." A canon in this sense is obviously a rule or test of orthodoxy in matters of faith. Again we speak of Canon Law which means those laws laid down by the legitimate authority in the Church as distinct from civil law—the laws laid down by the legitimate authority in the State. The name arose from the fact that the laws of the Church were from very ancient times called canons. The word canon in this particular matter means of course a rule of conduct. In the same way, too, we speak of canons of propriety. Certain priests have the title and dignity of Canon because they are members of a cathedral or diocesan chapter. The Canon of the Mass is that portion of the liturgy of the holy sacrifice which never varies.

#### THE CANON OF THE SCRIPTURES.

FINALLY we have the term "Canon of the Scriptures." It means the list or catalogue drawn up and promulgated by the Church of the books which are divinely inspired,

and so possess infallible authority and contain truths revealed by God. The term came into use in the fourth century and is found in the writings of St. Chrysostom and St. Augustine. *Canonical* books (for the adjective also is found in the writings of the early Fathers of the Church) are those books which the Church accepted and declared to be divinely inspired. There were books in the early centuries of our era which professed to be Scripture, were written in the style of the books we have in the Bible and bore biblical titles, but the Church rejected them and declared them *not* inspired by God. We call these *apocryphal* books. St. Athanasius speaks too of the *canonised* books, to denote the genuine Scriptures. In point of fact the adjectives *canonical* and *canonised*, as applied to the books of the Bible to distinguish them from the *apocryphal* or pretended Scriptures, were in use prior to the use of the noun *canon*. The word *canonical* would seem to imply that the term canon came to be employed because the Scriptures appertain to the canon or rule of faith. On the other hand, the word *canonised* would seem to point to a canon or list or authentic catalogue, just as a canonised saint is one whose name is formally placed on the list of the saints of the Church. This, of course, concerns only the derivation of the word. The collection of sacred books which we now call the Canon of Scripture, and which has been called by that name since the fourth century, and the Catholic doctrine which holds that the Church alone is the competent and the only competent and infallible judge of the question of the inspiration of these books—both of these realities existed long before the use of the terms *canon* and *canonical*. It was only a matter of finding a suitable theological term to embody the idea.

#### CANONICITY.

FOR us, Catholics, then the criterion of canonicity is the teaching of the Church on the point. The Church has decided the question of the Canon of the Scriptures. The Latin vulgate bible is the official Bible of the Church; and it contains the books which the Church has pronounced to

be Scripture. And our Douay Bible is a faithful translation of the vulgate, reproducing the canon and the sense of the vulgate, and it has the approval and authorization of the competent ecclesiastical authorities. The writings, therefore, which we read in our Bible are the written word of God, and contain revealed truths. These writings were inspired by the Holy Ghost, and we know they are inspired because the Church has pronounced them to be inspired. For us, this pronouncement of the Church makes them canonical. They were inspired of course at the actual time when they were being written in the original versions; they became canonical when the Church acknowledged and made known the fact that they were inspired. It would avail us nothing that God had revealed His will to mankind in certain books unless He had also provided us with a means of knowing with certainty what books these were. The Church is that means, for the Church has authority to teach doctrines of faith and morals. The fact that the Holy Ghost "spoke through the prophets" is a doctrine of faith, it is contained in the Nicene Creed; and therefore it is to the Church we look for the criterion of canonicity. It is a safe and a certain criterion; not alone that, but an infallible criterion. Further, it is the one and only safe and certain test or criterion.

#### THE CHURCH.

THIS is a fundamental doctrine of our Catholic faith, and it is a doctrine which non-Catholics deny; consequently we must explain it at some length, and prove its truth. The Bible contains revealed truths—things we must believe and things we must do in order to attain to eternal life. But the Bible is not the only source from which we know the truths which God has revealed or made known to man. We have tradition as well, i.e., truths handed down from the days of Our Lord and the apostles, which are not contained in the Scriptures, but were given orally by Our Lord or the apostles and conserved in the Church. And again, we have the teaching Church which tells us first of all what is Scripture and what is not, and then interprets

both the Scriptures and tradition for us. Non-Catholics will not admit tradition as a source of revelation, nor will they admit the infallible authority of the teaching Church. But the existence of this tradition is proved conclusively from the following considerations. The gospels are the only historical records we possess of Our Divine Lord's life on earth, save a passing mention of Josephus the Jewish, and Tacitus the Roman historian. Now in the gospels you will nowhere find that Christ commanded the apostles to write—still less that He ever said that what they would write would be Scripture. He commanded them to go into the whole world and *preach* the Gospel to every creature (cfr. Mark 16, 15). Again, St. John at the conclusion of the fourth Gospel says that it would be utterly impossible to record in writing all that Christ did on earth—“*There are also many other things which Jesus did; which, if they were written every one, the world itself, I think, would not be able to contain the books that should be written*” (John 21, 25). Then in the Acts of the Apostles we read that St. Peter preached to a multitude in Jerusalem immediately after the first Pentecost. Three thousand people were baptized in one day, and we are told that “*they were persevering in the doctrine of the apostles*” (A.A. 2, 42). Now at this point in history not one word of the New Testament was yet penned. “*The doctrine of the apostles*” referred to was therefore oral, not written. The books which form the New Testament were written later, not to supplant this oral teaching but to strengthen and supplement it.

#### THE AUTHORITY TO TEACH INFALLIBLY.

THAT the Church has power to interpret the meaning of Scripture and traditions concerning faith and morals can be proved in a similar manner also. In the first of the four gospels it is clearly evidenced that Christ Our Lord founded a Church under the leadership of St. Peter. To Peter as Head of the Church He entrusted “*the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven,*” i.e., Peter was to be the administrator or vicar of Christ, to have supreme authority

in the Christian society. To Peter also He gave the power to bind and to loose, i.e., to make laws. He promised also that the gates of hell should not prevail against the Church, and by the gates of hell He meant the powers of evil and especially Satan, who is the father of lies and error and deceit. This promise of Our Lord was made to St. Peter at Caesarea Philippi in the presence of all the Apostles. St. Matthew was one of the Apostles and therefore he witnessed the whole scene. And it is to him that we are indebted for the account of it given in the Gospel. And for the words of the Saviour: “*And I say to thee: Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church. And the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give to thee the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. And whatsoever thou shalt bind upon earth, it shall be bound also in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, it shall be loosed also in heaven*” (Matt. 16, 18-19). This power given to St. Peter was to endure until the end of time. We should have expected this in any event, for no one would think of limiting the existence of the Christian society and its constitution to one generation. But we have explicit testimony besides in the first Gospel where Our Lord is reported as saying: “*Behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world*” (Matt. 28, 20), and this after He had promised that the Paraclete would teach them all truth and abide with them for ever (John 14, 16 and 26).

These are the words of Our Divine Lord; they were spoken in very solemn circumstances, and the language is very emphatic. They admit of only one interpretation: there is clearly question of a visible society, its end to save souls and provide means of sanctification, consisting of pastors and flock united under one central authority; it will endure until the end of time, and, built upon a sure foundation and endowed with power and authority from God, it will be an infallible teacher of God's revelation. How St. Paul understood these texts can be gathered from his first epistle to St. Timothy (3, 15), where he says that the Church is “*the pillar and ground of the truth.*” In this way too these words of the Saviour were understood

and interpreted by the Fathers of the early Church. Nowadays, in theological controversy, the teaching of the early centuries of Christianity is much quoted, and non-Catholics as a rule will recognise its force as an argument. Consequently it may be well to give here just a few of many testimonials which bear on this question of the Church as the judge of the Canon of the Scriptures. Origen **lived in the third century**; he was a learned man, he travelled extensively, wrote many books (thousands according to Eusebius) and was above all a scripture scholar. Treating of this very question of the books which are to be accepted as canonical he says in his third homily on the gospel according to St. Luke: "In all these we approve of nothing excepting what the Church approves of, that is, that only four gospels are to be received." St. Cyril of Jerusalem lived in the fourth century and wrote a work called *Catacheses*, which is a complete course of Christian Doctrine. In it he says with regard to the scriptures: "Meditate upon and study only those books which we need in the Church with complete confidence." St. Augustine flourished at the end of the fourth century. His testimony is very strong for he is regarded as the greatest doctor of the western Church, and he says: "I indeed would not believe in the Gospels if the authority of the Catholic Church did not compel me" (*Contra Ep. Manichaei* 5, 6). This is clear and emphatic and to the point.

#### THE BIBLE OF THE CATHOLIC.

WE have seen then that the Bible is a holy book, containing revealed truths, and that it is only one source of revelation—apostolic tradition is another. And the Church interprets both of these and makes them clear for us. The Bible does not give a list of the books that are inspired, yet this appertains to faith and so we must go to tradition to find this list—the Canon of the Scriptures. All the truths necessary for salvation were revealed to the Apostles, for the Paraclete would teach them "*all truth*" on the word of Christ Himself. Public revelation in the Church ceased therefore at the death of the last of the apostles. Now,

the Church can interpret and define the truths given by tradition, and so She can lay down the Canon of the Scriptures and She has done so. This does not mean a new revelation, it is simply determining what was already revealed. The ordinary Catholic is not compelled to study the whole history of early Christianity, therefore, so as to find out the Canon of the Scriptures. The canon is defined by the Church, and that Canon is contained in the Bible as approved by the Catholic Church. It is forbidden to Catholics to edit or print the Bible in any language without the approval or imprimatur of the bishop of the place where it is edited or printed. And this approval is a guarantee in every case that the edition in question contains the Catholic Canon, no more, and no less.

#### THE CONTENTS OF THE CATHOLIC BIBLE.

If you open any Douay Bible, therefore, you will find the Canon of the Scriptures. The canon as given in the Douay version is an exact reproduction of the canon of the Latin vulgate. The Latin vulgate was edited and published as the official Bible of the Church in 1592 A.D. by Pope Clement VIII, and it contained the canon as defined in the Council of Trent, session 4. The canon as defined in Trent is exactly the same as the canon defined in the Council of Florence, in 1441 A.D. These definitions of the Councils of Florence and Trent were called forth by reason of the fact that heretics had arisen who denied the traditional teaching. The Latin vulgate which Pope Clement edited and its canon had heretofore been accepted everywhere in the middle ages without question. The same Canon of the Scriptures which we have in the Council of Trent is found again in a pronouncement of Pope Innocent I, Exuperius, Bishop of Toulouse, wrote to the Pope in 405 A.D. asking instructions on certain matters, among others on the Canon of the Scriptures. In the Pope's reply we have the canon. And it is worthy of note that although the books are not given in the same order as in Trent, still we have the same number of books and the same books precisely. Going back further still into the history of the Councils we find the same canon drawn up in the third Council of

Carthage, 397 A.D., and a note added to the effect that the Church of Rome be consulted for the confirmation of this canon. Earlier still, in 382 A.D. we find the canon again in the Acts of the Synod of Rome held under Pope St. Damasus I. This is probably the earliest authoritative pronouncement we have on the question. The number of the books of Scripture and their titles as given in those Councils are exactly those which the ordinary Catholic layman has in his Douay Bible.

The Books of Holy Scripture are: *The Old Testament*: Genesis; Exodus; Leviticus; Numbers; Deuteronomy; Josue; Judges; Ruth; the four Books of Kings; the two Books of Paralipomenon; the two Books of Esdras; Tobias; Judith; Esther; Job; Psalms; Proverbs; Ecclesiastes; Canticle of Canticles; Wisdom; Ecclesiasticus; Isaias; Jeremias; Lamentations; Baruch; Ezechiel; Daniel; Osee; Joel; Amos; Abdias; Jonas; Micheas; Nahum; Habacuc; Sophonias; Aggeus; Zacharias; Malachias; the two Books of Machabees.

*The New Testament*: The Four Gospels (according to Saints Matthew, Mark, Luke, John); Acts of the Apostles; Epistle to the Romans; two Epistles to the Corinthians; Epistle to the Galatians; Epistle to the Ephesians; Epistle to the Philippians; Epistle to the Colossians; two Epistles to the Thessalonians; two Epistles to Timothy; Epistle to Titus; Epistle to Philemon; Epistle to the Hebrews; Epistle of Saint James; two Epistles of Saint Peter; three Epistles of Saint John; Epistle of Saint Jude; Apocalypse.

#### THE NUMBER OF THE BOOKS OF SCRIPTURE.

THERE are first of all twenty-seven books in the New Testament. In the Old Testament if you consider Lamentations and Baruch as forming one book with the prophecy of Jeremias you have a total of forty-four. In order to help the memory, however, this mnemonic plan has been devised. By including Lamentations with Jeremias and regarding Baruch as a separate book we have forty-five books in the Old Testament. Forty-five and twenty-seven make a

total of seventy-two, and seventy-two is easily remembered, for it is the number of the disciples sent to preach by Our Lord (in Luke 10, 1). It is an additional aid in this system that in Arabic numerals 72 is 27 reversed. It is worth noting that St. Luke, the author of the third gospel and Acts of the Apostles, is the only gentile among the human authors of the books of Scripture.

#### THE TOTALITY OF INSPIRED BOOKS.

AN interesting point arises just here. The Church guarantees that the books in Her Canon are each and all inspired. We are bound to accept them as inspired and canonical; to refuse to do so is heresy. But does the Church claim that this canon is so complete as to include every book that was ever inspired? In other words, is it possible that some inspired books have been lost, and are no longer available? The declarations of the Church are concerned with the books which we have, and therefore She has nothing to say with regard to other books not in Her canon which may have been inspired but are lost. This is, therefore, an open question. At first sight it would seem impossible that an inspired book should be lost; we would expect that God's providence would prevent it. But many Catholic writers hold that if it were question of a book inspired for a particular purpose, and not committed to the custody of the Church such a book could have been lost in time. Father Cornely, S.J., is of this opinion (*Compendium Introductionis* p. 56) and he quotes St. Thomas Aquinas in support of it. To come to facts—many books are mentioned in the Old Testament, e.g., the book of Samuel the seer and the book of Nathan the prophet (1 Paralip, 29, 29), and it is quite possible that they were inspired books. A still better example, however, is an epistle which St. Paul mentions as written by him to the Laodiceans (Col. 4, 16). He commands the Colossians to send their epistle (our canonical Colossians) to the Laodiceans and to get his epistle to the Laodiceans and have it read in the Church at Colossae. He makes no distinction between the two epistles as regards their authority; Colossians is certainly inspired and canonical, hence it is implied that the other was inspired also.



The epistle to the Laodiceans is lost (we have a short letter of one chapter with this title among the apocrypha of the New Testament, but it does not go back beyond the third century and is only a repetition of portion of Ephesians), hence it seems probable that an inspired book may be lost. This question does not effect the Catholic position in the least—the Bible is only one of two sources of revelation for us, but it is a very annoying possibility for those who appeal to “the Bible and the Bible alone” for their rule of faith, that such books as those we mentioned may have been inspired and yet are lost.

#### OLD CALUMNIES NEVER DIE.

THIS, therefore, is the Canon of the Scriptures as laid down and defined by the Church. Before leaving the question of the Church and her authority to define the nature and content of inspiration, however, it may be well to mention and meet an old calumny which is often used against the particular Catholic doctrine which concerns us here. The objection is this: Catholics prove from the New Testament Scriptures that the Church is infallible. And they prove the authority of the scriptures from the Church. Hence, there is what is called a vicious circle in argument. The reply to this is quite simple: Catholics take the New Testament, and regarding the books thereof as merely historical records, abstracting for the moment from the fact of their inspiration, they prove from the human testimony of those who saw and heard Him that Christ was God and that He founded an infallible society, His Church, and left in it power to rule and teach and sanctify, to preserve and expound God’s revelation. Then from that Church they accept the Canon of the Scriptures. No one will have the hardihood to deny to the man Levi who afterwards became St. Matthew, or to St. Luke the physician of Antioch, or to Mark of Jerusalem the same authority we give to the pagan Thucydides. Very well then. Leaving aside for a moment the sacred character of the books written by SS. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and looking on them as simple history we can prove—we cannot but prove—the

divine mission and the divine nature of Christ, and this proved, the doctrine of the Church follows, and there is no vicious circle whatever in the argument.

“ . . . A REASON OF THE HOPE THAT IS IN YOU.”

THIS very point is basic and fundamental in Catholic apologetics, and yet it is continually being either deliberately ignored or at least misunderstood by non-Catholic writers when they come to controversy. This booklet will be read chiefly by intelligent lay Catholics. Now, by getting these few points clear and in order—the method by which the divinity of Christ is established from history, the proofs of the infallible authority of the Church in Her teaching on matters of faith and morals, Her authority in this matter of the Scriptures to point out that these books which treat of Christ and His life on earth are not only history but something more—the very word of God; and then Her power to discern what is and what is not the word of God—by this means you will be able, as an intelligent lay Catholic, to defend the Church of Christ from the calumnies of enemies, to assist honest-minded persons who are outside the true fold but genuinely eager to know the truth and thus “to satisfy everyone that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3, 15). And should this booklet come into the hands of a non-Catholic, I submit that this—a plain statement of the Catholic teaching on the question of the canon—is a strong doctrinal position and a clear line of argument.

#### THE TRADITION OF THE CANON OF THE SCRIPTURES.

WE have seen that an official pronouncement of the third Council of Carthage on the Canon of the Scriptures was confirmed by the Pope at the beginning of the fifth century. It was at this time, too, that St. Jerome produced his famous translation of the Scriptures in Latin. This Latin Bible was accepted and used throughout the Church and already in the seventh century had come to be known as

the "*Vulgate*" or commonly accepted Bible. It contains the canon as defined in Trent. It now remains for us to consider briefly the history of the canon before the end of the fourth century.

#### PROTO-CANONICAL AND DEUTERO-CANONICAL BOOKS.

HERE we meet a new division of the books of the Bible. It is a division which belongs, and could belong, only to the period when canonicity was a matter of pure tradition, and before the Church had pronounced judgement on that tradition. The *proto-canonical* books are those books which were accepted unanimously from the first as canonical, that is to say there was never any doubt of their inspiration. The *deutero-canonical* books are those books of the Bible concerning the canonicity of which there was doubt in certain places for a certain time. It is important to remember that this distinction is between the books which were accepted unanimously from the first and those which were accepted, but not without a certain amount of doubt and hesitation in certain places. A tradition, to be certain and infallible, must be a tradition of the whole Church Catholic, i.e., held by the majority of the members of the whole Church. This can be true in any single instance and yet the tradition may not be known to an individual, or to several individual members; or it may be unknown to or even rejected by all the members of a particular place. The distinction, therefore, into proto-canonical and deutero-canonical by no means affects the nature or the authority of the books—they are all equally inspired and equally canonical. It is a distinction which has a historical meaning and value and nothing more. There are proto- and deutero-canonical books of both the Old and the New Testaments, and it will be more convenient to treat of each Testament separately. Taking the Old Testament first, the deutero-canonical books are: Tobias, Judith, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, 1 and 2 Machabees, and parts of Esther and Daniel, viz., Esther 10, 4 to the end, and Daniel 3, 24-3, 90, and chapters 13 and 14 (the last two chapters).

These deutero-canonical portions of the Old Testament are not printed in the Hebrew Bible nor in the Protestant Bibles, so we must now consider their history so as to trace the spread of the tradition regarding their inspiration.

#### THE OLD TESTAMENT BEFORE THE CHRISTIAN ERA.

FROM the Old Testament itself we have evidence in plenty to show that there was a well-known collection of sacred books among the Jews, but when it comes to determining what books exactly these were we find very little direct evidence in the Bible. From Josue 24, 26 we know that the "*law*," i.e., the five books of Moses and Josue itself were received as Scripture from the first. I Kings 10, 25 would point to the same conclusion with regard to the writings of Samuel. We know that collections of the Psalms and of the Proverbs were made. Daniel 9, 2 speaks of Jeremias the Prophet and of "*the holy books*" in one breath; the Prologue of Ecclesiasticus dating from about 200 B.C., gives "*the law the prophets and the other books.*" But nowhere in the Bible do we find a list of the Scriptural books. We must depend, therefore, on Jewish tradition.

#### THE TWO JEWISH CANONS OF THE SCRIPTURES

WE find this tradition most easily in the Scriptures as they have come down to us from pre-Christian times, and here we have clear evidence of two canons. We have first of all the Old Testament in the Hebrew language, from which St. Jerome translated. He marks the places where the Hebrew text finishes, and tells us he had recourse to other sources for the books and parts of books we called deutero-canonical above. And if we get a copy of the Bible in Hebrew to-day we find, sure enough, that it contains only the proto-canonical Old Testament. This is often spoken of as the Palestinian canon, though a better title would be the canon according to the Pharisees. The Scribes and Pharisees would consider no book to be canonical un-

less it was written in the sacred language—Hebrew. And yet even among the Rabbis in Palestine itself there was not unanimity on the point, for traces of the deuterocanonical books have been noted in the Talmuds; and Josephus Flavius, who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees, mentions facts in his “Antiquities” that are recorded only in the deuterocanonical books. This would not be surprising of course if he had not given us to understand in the proëmium of this work that he would quote only the *sacred* books of the Jews. It is certain, however, that one school of thought among the Jews considered the canon to have been completed at the death of Esdras.

On the other hand, we have what is called the Alexandrian or Septuagint canon, containing the full catalogue of the books of the Old Testament. The Scriptures were translated into Greek between 300-130 B.C. for the benefit of the Jews outside of Palestine, and especially of those in Egypt. This version is known as the Septuagint and it contains all the books of the Old Testament as given in the Canon of Trent. At the time of Our Lord, therefore, there were two canons of the Old Testament among the Jews. How this division of opinion on such a vital matter came about cannot be answered with certainty. One explanation offered, and a plausible one, is that in the old law the prophets were the judges of the canon. The prophets ended with Malachias, and hence there was no one to judge of the inspiration of those books written after his time. Certain it is that in the reign of Josias, when “*the book of the law*” was found in the temple by Helcias (*the high priest*), Helcias and Saphan the Scribe and others went to consult Holda the *prophetess* (4 Kings 22, 8-16). And again in several places these later books lament the lack of a prophet in Israel (cfr. 1 Mach. 8, 27 and 14, 41).

“THE FULNESS OF THE TIME” (Gal. 4, 4).

THE great issue here of course is the choice of Our Lord and the Apostles in the matter of these two rival canons. There is no *direct* evidence in the New Testament. No catalogue of the books of the Old Testament is given; Our Lord merely speaks of: “*the law and the prophets*” (Matt.

5, 17) and of “*the law of Moses, the prophets and the psalms*” (Luke 24, 44). We have, however, indirect evidence in abundance to show that the canon He accepted was the Alexandrine. The deuterocanonical books are never quoted in the New Testament, but then neither are all the proto-canonical. That the deuterocanonical were accepted by Our Lord and the Apostles and given to the Christian Church is proved first of all by the quotations from the Old Testament which we have in the New. Of these there are about three hundred and fifty, and not more than fifty of the total number are quoted from the Hebrew—the remainder are taken from the Septuagint version. Scholars can easily determine for us whether a given quotation is from the Hebrew or the Septuagint because the Septuagint is scarcely ever a literal translation, and even where it is, a characteristic word or phrase will betray the source. Now, the acceptance of the Alexandrine version must mean the acceptance of the Alexandrine canon also otherwise we should have some trace of a warning to this effect. Not alone is there no trace of such a warning anywhere, but on the contrary the deuterocanonical books were read as Scripture in the early Church and were quoted as Scripture from the first in the writings of the Fathers of the Church. Thus, Pope St. Clement of Rome, writing to the Corinthians about 100 A.D., proposes Judith as an example for the faithful. He speaks of her as “Blessed Judith,” says she was “strengthened by divine grace,” and tells of her exploits against Holofernes (1 Clem. to the Cor. 55, 3-4). Obviously, therefore, he accepted the deuterocanonical book of Judith. Incidents from the deuterocanonical books are depicted in the paintings discovered in the catacombs, and finally the Alexandrine version and canon have come to us at all, only because they were accepted and used and handed down by the Christian Church.

#### THE CANON OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

THE same distinction into proto-canonical and deuterocanonical books obtains in the New Testament also. Here the deuterocanonical are: Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 and

3 John, Jude, Apocalypse. The four gospels, the Acts, and St. Paul's epistles (except Hebrews) were accepted as Scripture from the first. In 1 Timothy 5, 18, we have a quotation from the gospel under the formula "*the Scripture saith,*" and in 1 Peter 3, 16, St. Peter speaks of the epistles of St. Paul and the *other Scriptures*. Traces of all the proto-canonical books can be seen in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers. Even the early heretics in their writings bear witness indirectly to the firm and clear tradition of the Church that the New Testament was inspired, for they try to interpret certain passages in a manner favourable to their own heretical tenets.

No little difficulty in the formation of the canon of the New Testament was caused in the second and third centuries by the great number of works circulated and called by Scriptural names, which were in reality apocryphal. Some of these were plainly heretical and had brief vogue, but many were hard to be distinguished from genuine Scripture. The mere titles of all these would occupy several pages. It argues for a very clear tradition regarding the canon that these books were definitely set aside as apocryphal before the end of the fourth century, and that the doubts regarding the deuterocanonical were finally settled at the third Council of Carthage in 397 A.D.

#### THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS.

THE style of this epistle is in contrast to the style of the other epistles of St. Paul. Nowhere is the Apostle's name mentioned, and the Greek is smooth and polished. For this reason doubts arose regarding the authorship, especially in the west, and this led to further misgivings as to whether it was canonical. The explanation of the cause of these doubts seems to be that St. Paul did not wish to make the authorship known to the Jews. They regarded him as a renegade and persecuted him mercilessly. The language can be explained on the hypothesis that he employed an amanuensis.

#### JAMES, JUDE, 2 PETER, 2 AND 3 JOHN.

THE difficulty in establishing the canonicity of these books was that they were circulated very slowly. St. James as Bishop of the Church of Jerusalem and afterwards Pella, was to a great extent cut off from the rest of Christendom; 2 and 3 John were written in the first instance to private individuals; but Jude and 2 Peter are of general or catholic import, so that it is hard to account for their tardy acceptance unless their brevity may have been a factor.

#### THE APOCALYPSE.

THE last book of the New Testament was received generally both in the east and the west until the third century. Then in Chiliast or Millenarists misused it to prove their heretical tenet of a millenium. To refute these Dionysius of Alexandria and others attacked the authenticity of the Apocalypse so that it came under suspicion in the east for a time. These doubts were not more than local and always shortlived. From the fifth century, they are known in history.

#### THE CANON IN THE MIDDLE AGES.

THE canon was accepted everywhere in the Church during the Middle Ages, and the strength of the tradition of which the Councils of Rome and Carthage are the expression is clearly seen from the following considerations. The Syriac translation of the Bible was short five of the deuterocanonical books of the New Testament, viz., Jude, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, and the Apocalypse. These were added to the then existing Syriac Bible by Philoxenus early in the sixth century. This same Philoxenus was not noted for orthodoxy in such matters, so his action cannot be dismissed by adversaries as due to a desire to follow the Roman canon. He must have been forced by the general practice and tradition of the whole Church. Again, the Greeks accepted the canon in the third Council of Constantinople (680 A.D.), and retained it both for the Old

and New Testaments even after the schism of Photius in the ninth century. The Greeks, too, were always hostile to the Western Church and suspicious of Roman usages and traditions, and yet they held to the Canon of the Scriptures used in the Latin Church and authorised by the Popes. It is significant too that St. Jerome, to whom we owe the vulgate translation of the Bible, did not himself believe in the inspiration of all the deuterocanonical books. He was doubtful of the inspiration of the epistle of St. James in the New Testament; and of Wisdom, 1 and 2 Machabees, and perhaps others of the Old. Yet he translated the whole Bible, and where the Hebrew text of the Old Testament was short (and the Hebrew was his guide in the matter of the canon) he took pains to supply the missing portions from Greek sources. Thus, St. Jerome—the greatest authority in his day on matters Scriptural—waived his own opinion in favour of the general tradition.

#### THE TRADITION OPPOSED.

THE Canon of the Scriptures was accepted without question until the rise of Protestantism in the sixteenth century. In place of the age-long and unanimous tradition of the Catholic Church, Luther interposed his own authority as the criterion of canonicity. Thus in his translation of the Bible into German he omitted such proto-canonical books as Paralipomena and Ecclesiastes, retaining the deuterocanonical 1 Machabees; in the New Testament he omitted Hebrews, James, Jude and Apocalypse. Later on under the influence of Karlstadt's treatise on the canon in 1520 Luther changed his views on the question. Now the essence of a rule or criterion or canon is that it be fixed and unvarying. Zwingli held that the Holy Ghost made known the inspiration of the books to the reader in each individual case. This would be a multiplication of miracles surely, and anyhow its failure as a criterion is clearly proved from the historical fact that the various Protestant leaders had each his own canon of the books.

For English Protestants article six of "the thirty-nine articles" of faith accepts as Scriptural only those books the authority of which was never called in question. Consistently with this the modern (Revised Version) Protestant Bible omits the deuterocanonical books of the Old Testament; but in obvious contradiction to this same article, and to the early Protestant leaders generally, it prints the New Testament in full—the twenty-seven books, as in the Douay and Vulgate. This complete lack of consistency shows clearly that the Protestant doctrine furnished no authoritative criterion whatever by which the Canon of the Scriptures may be known.

#### CONCLUSION.

1. The Canon of the Scriptures, therefore, is the list of the books which were inspired by the Holy Ghost, have God for primary author and are in consequence the written word of God. The question of the Canon appertains to the deposit of faith, and so it must be decided either in Scripture itself or in tradition, as interpreted by the Church. The list of books is not given in Scripture itself; the books of the Bible do not testify that they are each inspired; we cannot determine the question by reading them, and hence tradition supplies the Canon. That tradition was clearly outlined from the first; but in certain places doubts obtained in regard to certain books, while in others apocryphal books were circulated and read as Scripture. To put an end to these difficulties the Church drew up an authentic list of the books of the Scriptures. This was a clear and authoritative interpretation of the tradition. It was intended to remove all doubt, and it did remove all doubt. That list has been accepted in the Catholic Church ever since; those who questioned it did so because they had broken with the Church.

2. The Church with the Pope as Her head made that Canon in the sense that the Synods of Rome and Carthage gave expression to the tradition commonly and generally held with regard to the number and names of the inspired books, and the decisions of these Councils were approved

and confirmed by the successor of St. Peter. That approval was renewed by St. Innocent I, and again in the General Councils of Florence, Trent and the Vatican. It is a rule of faith for all Catholics, and not to accept it is heresy and a denial of the Christian faith.

3. The authority in the Church to lay down this Canon and enforce its acceptance comes from Christ, Our Divine Lord—God and Man—Who, while on earth, as we know from the history of His life, founded His Church on the rock of St. Peter and St. Peter's successors in the Papacy, giving him and them authority and power to feed His lambs and His sheep. The remaining apostles and their successors in the episcopacy under the headship of St. Peter and the Popes are the foundation of that mystical edifice, and under the jurisdiction of the bishop of Rome, the Pastor of Pastors, they have authority to teach and rule and sanctify.

4. The authority of the Church to teach doctrines of faith and morals is an infallible authority. The same Holy Spirit, Who spoke through the prophets and apostles was sent from God the Father at the prayer of Christ to teach the Church all truth and abide with it forever. And Christ, "*the author and finisher of faith*" (Hebrews 12, 2), promised that the gates of hell and sin and error would never prevail against that Church and that He Himself would be with those whom He placed in authority over it "*even to the consummation of the world*" (Matt. 28 20).

## NOTABLE BOOK ON SOCIAL SCIENCE

# THE PLAN OF SOCIETY

REV. PETER McKEVITT, D.Ph.

*Price 8s. 6d. net.*

"This book should be made compulsory reading in Government circles here and everywhere."

—*Irish Independent.*

"... An excellent handbook for the social worker, the politician, or for the reader who desires a brief survey of the religious, political and economic constitutions of society."

—*Irish Rosary.*

"An admirable text book for a study circle."

—*Assisi.*

"Though the book assumes the assistance of a teacher who will expand the points, it by no means gives the impression of being a mere guide book. Dr. McKeivitt has in high degree the art of saying much in little space."

—*Irish Monthly.*

VERITAS COMPANY, LIMITED.

7 & 8, LOWER ABBEY STREET, DUBLIN.

OR ANY BOOKSELLER.