

CREATION TO NEW CREATION:
JOURNEY THROUGH SCRIPTURE FROM GENESIS TO REVELATION

CC 100: *THE WHOLE IN ONE*
(THE WHOLE BIBLE IN ONE QUARTER)

Session 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE BIBLE:
WHAT IT IS, HOW WE GOT IT, HOW TO READ IT, WHAT IT SAYS,
HOW TO PRAY WITH IT

0. Introduction: Dare to Dream and The Task Before Us

- 0.1. “Can Catholics Be *Bible* Christians?: Debunking Some Popular Myths”–two-part article at www.emmausinstitute.net

- 0.2. Let’s think of the Bible as a *Catholic* book (because it *is*) and dream of the day when Catholic Christians are known as much by their devotion and attentiveness to consuming the *words* of our Lord as they are by their devotion and attentiveness to consuming the *Word*, the Body and Blood, of our Lord (see *Dei Verbum* 21).

- 0.3. The task before us in Session 1

1. What Is the Bible?: The Question of Definition

- 1.1. The Bible is a *written text*–pages with words written on them which someone wrote.
 - a. Three essential elements of every written text:
 - a written *medium* (*how* it says) . . .
 - that conveys a *message* (*what* it says) . . .
 - for a particular *mission* someone wanted to accomplish (*why* it says).
 - b. Illustration: A STOP sign
 - c. When we go about reading or studying the Bible, these are the questions before us:
 - *How* does this text say what it is saying? (the *medium/material*)
 - *What* does this text say? (the *meaning/message*)
 - *Why* does this text say what it is saying? (the *mission/motive*)

- 1.2. The Bible is a *divine revelation*—inspired words through which God wants to talk to us.
- a. This is the orthodox confession of Synagogue and Church, Jews and Christians. We affirm that the Scriptures are “inspired” (God-breathed, *theopneustos*, 2 Tim 3:16), that what Scripture says God says—*God’s speaking breath*.
 - b. The CCC 106 (citing DV 11) defines ‘inspiration’ this way: “To compose the sacred books, God chose certain men who, all the while he employed them in this task, made full use of their own faculties and powers so that, though he acted in them and by them, it was as true authors that they consigned to writing whatever he wanted written, and no more.”
 - c. By “breathing” his own words through the words of human authors in this way, the Bible is like Jesus—fully human and fully divine.
 - d. An important clarification: The Bible is not a mere source of historical information about persons, peoples, places, and events of the past, from which we draw lessons and morals and models for life. In fact, the Bible is not principally a history book any more than it is a math book or science book or cook book. Neither is the Bible a mere manual filled with guidelines and guardrails, just so God’s people have an authoritative reference volume for those who want to look things up and be sure they’ve got it right about what they are supposed to believe and how they are supposed to behave. *The Bible is the fresh and ever-living voice of God, communicating himself to humans. To read Scripture properly is to hear God speak. To know the Bible is to know God.*
- 1.3. The Bible is a *sacred canon*—an ordered collection which the Church recognizes as holy and authoritative.
- a. The Bible is not just a random assortment of otherwise isolated and free-standing books, like unrelated volumes on a library shelf, but two Testaments of 46 and 27 books, respectively, forming one Holy Bible and telling a unified grand story about the person, plans, and purposes of the Triune God. Moreover, all the biblical books are carefully shaped and masterfully fitted together in such a way that each uniquely depends upon and contributes to that larger whole.
 - b. If the canon of Scripture owes its existence to the instrumentality of the (Catholic) Church, which it does, then its most appropriate and qualified readers should be those who stand confessionally within that context—i.e., children and disciples of the Church.
 - c. Sometimes we refer to the various writings/texts/books as ‘the scriptures’, and to the collection/canon as ‘Scripture’ or ‘Sacred Scripture’ or ‘Holy Bible’. *Scripture* is comprised of the *scriptures*.

2. How Did We Get the Bible?: The Question of History/Formation

If the Bible did not suddenly fall from heaven, with all the books complete and intact, including chapter and verse divisions and marginal references and notations, in English words and bound in a soft, hard, or genuine cowhide cover, with a set of maps and a concordance at the end, all

wrapped up in a well-labeled box available on the shelf at Gloria Deo or online at Amazon.com for \$39.95, then how did it arrive in our hands?

2.1. Language and Literacy: Prerequisites in Their Place

- a. For the Bible to come into existence and for God to speak in this medium, there must be written language, someone who can write it, and presumably those who can read it.
- b. The languages in which the Bible first comes to us are Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek.

2.2. Authors and Compositors: Books and Their Producers

If words did not float randomly from heaven like raindrops or snowflakes, landing on receptive pages which somehow congealed into books all on their own; if God did not simply whisper into the ears of writers, dictating what they were to write down, or take pen in hand and write it himself (except for the Ten Commandments on tablets of stone); and if Jesus did not write the books that quote and speak of him, how then did what God wants to say make its way into authored texts?

- a. Two key texts:

“All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

“First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.” (2 Peter 1:20-21)

- b. Original authors and later editors and compositors

2.3. Canon and Consolidation: The Selection of Books and the Shape of Scripture

- a. Books that were originally authored and finally composed are not yet *biblical Scripture*—not yet part of a sacred collection or canon, not yet the *Bible*. As we have noted, the Bible does not consist in 73 free-standing or disconnected books, but a collection of books carefully shaped and masterfully fitted together in such a way that each uniquely depends upon and contributes to the larger whole.
- b. Adding some key words to our vocabulary:
 - ‘consolidation’—the process of fitting individual books together into a larger volume, the canon
 - ‘canon’—the collection of books recognized by the Church as the sacred and authoritative writings of God’s people
- c. A fascinating and complex process

- d. The end result: The shape of the canon

JEWISH CANON	CHRISTIAN CANON
Torah (Law/Instruction) Nebi'im (Prophets) Former Latter Ketubim (Writings)	Pentateuch History Psalms & Wisdom Prophets New Testament Gospels Acts Letters Apocalypse (Revelation)

2.4. Transmission and Translation: From There and Then to Here and Now

- a. So it was that through the invention of writing and reading, the production of sacred written compositions, and the collection of these holy books into a canon, the Bible came into being—sometime in the late centuries B.C. through the early centuries A.D.
- b. But that was 2,000 years ago, when the Bible “spoke” only Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. We live in the 21st century, and our language is English. What happened between then and now, or, in other words, how did the Bible arrive in our hands, printed in English? Or is it the case, as many people worry, that in the process of getting from there and then to here and now—before the invention of the printing press or *Canon* (!) copiers—the Bible passed through imperfect human hands which accidentally, or perhaps even intentionally, altered its content, so that the Bible we now read is no longer reliable? And how trusting should we be of translators and the translations (versions) they produce?
- c. Two more words in our growing glossary:
- ‘transmission’—the process of preserving and passing along original-language manuscripts so that we have access to Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek Bibles today
 - ‘translation’—the process of transferring as faithfully as possible what is said in one language (in the case of the Bible, what is said in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek) into Latin, English, German, French, Spanish, and other languages, and the product that results from such a process
- d. Illustration of transmission: The Incredible Masoretes

2.5. Why Catholic Bibles Are Bigger than Most Protestant Bibles (Refer to the Appendix)

3. How Should We Read the Bible?: The Question of Interpretation and Criteria

- 3.1. With the fitting virtues and disposition of heart for hearing the voice of the Lord

- 3.2. With the proper goal in view—to know, love, and worship the Triune God whose revelation it is
- 3.3. With the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* in one hand (especially CCC 109-119) . . .
- 3.4. And a procedure appropriate to what the Bible is and how we got it (parts 1 and 2 above) in the other.

4. **What Does the Bible Say, and Why Does It Matter?: The Question of Meaning and Relevance**

4.1. What It Says, in One Long Sentence!

The biblical story is the story of God’s universal blessing-plan in CREATION, which, having suffered CORRUPTION in the Fall, will be restored through God’s COVENANT program with specially called persons (notably, Abraham, Moses, David) and people (Israel), a program ultimately embodied and fulfilled in the redemptive mission of CHRIST JESUS, Israel’s Messiah, who, by the Holy Spirit, continues his mission in the world through the CHURCH, and who, by his own glorious return, brings the cosmic spiritual drama played out on the stage of heaven and earth to a just and final CONSUMMATION, culminating in a renewed CREATION in an everlasting kingdom—“on earth as it is in heaven.”

4.2. Why It Matters, or Why That Message Is Important for Us to Know

- a. Because of the testimony of Scripture itself—e.g., Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Psalms 1, 19, 119; Luke 1:46-55 (*Mary’s Magnificat*); 2 Timothy 3:15–4:5
- b. Because all Scripture, Old Testament and New, points to, centers in, and takes the form of Christ. Therefore, all Scripture is necessary to know Christ fully.
- c. Because Scripture shows us the way of salvation, sanctification, and service (2 Tim 3:14-17).
- d. Because Scripture *scripts* the real world into which we are invited to live. We need God’s *word* in order to understand the *world*—reality from God’s perspective.
- e. Because if *Scripture* says what *God* says, then nothing is more important in all the world, or more respectful or worshipful, than learning to *listen* to what those Scriptures are saying. “If God said or is saying something by way of this text, it is presumably important for some or all of us to find out what that was or is; it’s hard to imagine God engaging in small-talk” (N. Wolterstorff).
- f. Because the Bible is the Lord’s kiss in the form of words (P. Griffiths) and “a letter from Almighty God” (Pope St. Gregory the Great)
- g. Because reading and hearing and praying Scripture is the surest way to know God in a personal way.

5. How Should We Pray with the Bible?: The Question of Communion with the Author

Lectio Divina: “Divine Reading” (definitions taken from *A Ladder of Monks and Twelve Meditations* by Guigo the Carthusian d. 1193)

- 5.1. *Lectio* (Reading): “Reading is the careful study of the Scriptures, concentrating all one’s powers on it.”

- 5.2. *Meditatio* (Meditation): “Meditation is the busy application of the mind to seek with the help of one’s own reason for knowledge of hidden truth.”

- 5.3. *Oratio* (Prayer): “Prayer is the heart’s devoted turning to God to drive away evil and obtain what is good.”

- 5.4. *Contemplatio* (Contemplation): “Contemplation is when the mind is in some sort lifted up to God and held above itself, so that it tastes the joys of everlasting sweetness.”

WHY CATHOLIC BIBLES ARE BIGGER THAN PROTESTANT BIBLES
(OR PROTESTANT BIBLES SMALLER THAN CATHOLIC BIBLES):

A SHORT SUMMARY

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1. The issue under discussion concerns the Old Testament exclusively—whether it contains 46 books (Catholic view) or 39 books (Protestant view). Almost all Christians are agreed on the 27 books of the New Testament. The seven Old Testament books in question are: Tobit, Judith, 1-2 Maccabees, Wisdom, Sirach, and Baruch, plus some “additions” to Jeremiah, Esther, and Daniel which do not appear in the Hebrew versions of these books.
2. Having been “entrusted with the oracles of God” (Rom 3:2), the Jews bequeathed a large body of sacred writings to Jesus and the apostles, some of which they cited as Scripture and the Church eventually regarded as the Old (or First) Testament. Most of these Jewish books existed originally in Hebrew or Aramaic, a few in Greek; but from about 250 B.C., all had been translated into Greek, especially for Greek-speaking Jews dispersed throughout the world who no longer read Hebrew. These Greek Jewish Scriptures (the Septuagint or LXX) included the “seven,” and this larger collection served as Scripture for the New Testament writers, who often quoted it verbatim when citing Old Testament passages and who used and alluded to the “seven,” without reservation or warning.
3. It is sometimes claimed that the Church was born with a Bible in its hands, that the Bible which Jesus and the apostles revered was the Hebrew Old Testament, and that our Lord and his apostles differed from the religious leaders of Israel only in the interpretation of the Scriptures, not in the contents of the Scriptures. These claims exceed the historical evidence. At the time of Jesus and the apostles, the various sects of Judaism did not have a stabilized, definitive, or closed canon of Scripture. The Samaritans and Sadducees, for example, considered only the Books of Moses (the Pentateuch) as divinely inspired, whereas the Pharisees and Essenes accepted a larger number. There were collections of Sacred *Scriptures* in the time of Jesus, but there was no *Bible* per se. That came later, between the 1st and 5th centuries A.D. Prior to this, as many as four or five canonical traditions existed in Judaism.
4. The “seven,” as noted, were among the books included in the larger collection. Composed between 200 B.C. and A.D. 100, these books of Jewish origin appeared in the Greek translation of the Old Testament; but they were not included in the Hebrew Bible eventually adopted by Pharisaic Judaism in the early centuries of the Christian era. In other words, the narrowing and defining of the Jewish canon, excluding the “seven,” happened later, *after* Christ. Because the “seven” did not “make the cut” at that time, they are often referred to as the “deuterocanonical” (second canon) books. This term is relevant only in distinguishing these books from the so-called “protocanonical” books—those eventually selected by the Jewish leaders who had risen to prominence in the early centuries of the Christian era. Neither term implies anything at all about a secondary or primary level of inspiration or canonical status.
5. The reason these seven books were finally excluded from the Jewish canon relates to the perceived threat posed by the growing Christian movement, which not only used the Greek Jewish Scriptures, but produced and added its own Greek *Christian* Scriptures (i.e., the New Testament). In other words, the decision of the Jewish leaders was motivated at least in part as a reactionary measure against this new Messianic community—an effort to purify Judaism by ridding it of all things Greek, including the Church’s use of the Greek Scriptures. This means that the narrower canon represents the decision of rabbinic and Pharisaic Judaism in repudiation of the Church, *not* an original or pristine collection of Jewish books. Once again, the “deuterocanonical” books were just as Jewish in origin as the “protocanonical” books, which explains why they were included in the Jewish Scriptures known to Jesus and the apostles in the first place.
6. To be sure, mere inclusion of the “seven” in the Greek Jewish Scriptures did not automatically mean that all Jews at the time regarded them as inspired, nor would their inclusion in the Christian canon indicate that the Church blindly adopted them without further ado or selectivity. In clear evidence of this fact, the Church accepted these seven but rejected one or two other books in the Greek Jewish Scriptures (4 Maccabees rejected by both East and West, and 3 Maccabees rejected by the West). But inclusion of the “seven” in bound copies (codices) of the Septuagint alongside all the other Old Testament books, as well as their being read with apostolic approval in public worship (liturgical use being a primary criterion of canonicity), suggests that the early Church viewed these books as having full status as Sacred Scripture.
7. The Church’s recognition of the canonical status of all 46 Jewish books and 27 Christian books represents an advancement beyond where mainstream Judaism eventually ended up, suggesting that for Christians the

definitive word on what counts as inspired, as Sacred Scripture, depends on more than a certain linguistic criterion (Hebrew versus Greek) and on a different final authority from one recognized by the Jews. In other words, the Church, in submission to her Lord and led by the Holy Spirit in the era of the New Covenant, reached its own decisions on which books belong in the sacred canon. After all, if the Jews of Jesus' day got the Messiah wrong, on what basis should they be trusted to have gotten the Bible right? That was a decision our Lord entrusted to his apostles, whom he authorized to preach and teach in his name and whose recognition of Scripture, we can safely assume, was passed on to their successors and preserved by the Holy Spirit through the Church.

8. Obviously the Bible's table of contents was not bestowed from on high. It involved a decision, but by whom? The issue comes down to what sort of status we should award the decisions of anti-Christian Jewish religious leaders for the *Church*, or whether the Church, in submission to her Lord and guided by the Spirit, is able to make decisions about such matters based on other criteria. In other words, even if the rabbis of the 2nd century and beyond played a crucial role in defining the limits of the canon *for Judaism*, that does not *ipso facto* give them the authority to make such decisions *for the Church*. Otherwise, there would be no New Testament at all!
9. And so, in a number of ecclesiastical councils (Rome in 382, Hippo in 393, Carthage in 397 and 419), as well as a 405 letter *Consulenti tibi* of Pope Innocent I in response to Bishop Exuperius' inquiry about the canon, we have our earliest formal witnesses to the Church's recognition of the canonical books of Sacred Scripture. All are exactly the same as the canon used today by the Catholic Church, including the "seven." It is worth noting that all of these were more or less local councils, not ecumenical councils per se. Indeed, none of the great ecumenical councils of the early Church ever conferred about the contents and limits of the canon. That was not a contested matter except among some of the heretical groups (notably Marcion and his followers). Significantly, the seven books were never excluded from the canon in any official Church teaching from the beginning, meaning that the majority of Christians viewed them as authoritative for the first 1500 years of the Church's life. Those with reservations and who favored the narrower (Hebrew) canon (notably, St. Jerome), willingly submitted their personal views to the voice of the Church. The Protestant Reformation marks the first widespread departure from this view.
10. This early view of the Church was later affirmed at the Council of Florence (1442). Then so as to remove all doubt, it was universally and dogmatically validated at the Council of Trent (1546), in the aftermath of the Reformation. At that time, the Church was forced to render an official declaration on the contents of the canon, especially in response to Martin Luther, who challenged not just some of the seven deuterocanonical books (referring to them pejoratively as "apocryphal" [hidden] works that were "useful and good for reading" but not part of the scriptural canon), but four of the New Testament books as well. Of course, the urge to tinker with the canon and to decanonize certain books did not begin with Luther. The heretic Marcion had done so on a grand scale as early as the 2nd century, rejecting the Old Testament *in toto* and much of the New Testament as well.
11. It is telling that a formal declaration on the Church's canon had not been necessary before the 16th century. Ironically, Trent's acceptance of the fuller canon reflects an attempt to get back to the primitive Church as it was in the days of Jesus and the apostles, preserving an authentic memory of the days of Christian origins, whereas Luther and the other Reformers, although professing their commitment to primitive Christianity, actually settled for a narrower Jewish canon that was in fact the creation of a later period and the product of rabbinic and Pharisaic reaction against the Church.
12. Whether Catholics have *added* books *to* the Bible or Protestants have *deleted* books *from* the Bible depends then on how one reads the historical record and with what theological presuppositions. The best alternate construal of the historical data proposes that the Church's recognition of the canonical status of the "seven" was a later development—the unfortunate result of the binding together (for use in Christian worship and devotion) of canonical books with books never intended as canonical (a *corpus mixtum* or "mixed body" of writings), and the eventual confusion of this differentiation in the popular mind (but not among those in the know, like Jerome) sometime after the mid-2nd century. In other words, it was a case of custom triumphing over judgment. Although I once defended this view, I now regard its underlying assumptions as highly unlikely (the Church's leaders, like St. Augustine, simply caved to popular use and demand, really?), not to mention a number of historical difficulties which it leaves unanswered (e.g., evidence from Qumran [Dead Sea Scrolls], the many allusions to these books in the New Testament, the internal quality of the books in question, and the consistent testimony of the early Church).