



Theology Corner

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Theological Reflections by Paul Chutikorn - Director of Faith Formation

“Where Did the Bible Come From?”

I think that knowing the origins of the bible is very helpful both from an apologetics standpoint and from an exegetical standpoint. With regard to apologetics, it is often brought up that Catholics added books to the bible. It is also safe to say that Christians who are not Catholic also reject the authority of the Church, which leads to rejecting the teaching authority over the scriptures. This week's Theology Corner is meant to flesh this debate out a bit. Let's address the first part about why the Catholic bible has more books than a Protestant bible. The Protestant bible with less books in it is based on the Hebrew canon (meaning standard or measure), while the Catholic bible is based on the Greek canon. What is most important here, I think, is to know when the included books in the Catholic bible (known as the deuterocanonical books) were removed from the Hebrew canon. Originally, the Jews did in fact contain all of the books in their canon, but later removed them in the third century which was of course *after* Jesus came and the Catholic Church has already been established. The reasoning for the rabbinic Jews removing the books was because they only accepted books that were written in Hebrew, but at this time, they could not find any manuscripts other than those written in Greek. Remember, the Greek Septuagint was the translation used by Jesus and the writers of the New Testament. So the question then becomes, “Do we want to accept the canon that the Jews before Christ and the canon that Jesus Christ and his followers used, or the version that was later changed by the Jews *after* Christ?”

Now turning to the issue of authority of the Church, it is helpful to know the roots of the complete canon of both the Old and New Testament. We know that the bible did not just fall down from heaven pre-compiled into a volume of books that we now have, so who compiled it and determined its canonicity? This process was done over the span of a few Catholic councils including: the Council of Rome (AD 382), Council of Hippo (AD 393), and the Council of Carthage (AD 397). This process, as you can imagine, was difficult. The Church, was guided by the Holy Spirit in determining which books, particularly of the New Testament, were truly inspired. The Council of Hippo approved the current 73 books, and this was reaffirmed in the Council of Carthage, and the matter was officially closed by Pope Innocent I in AD 405. This remained unquestioned until it was debated during the Protestant reformation 1100 years later when Martin Luther wanted to remove the book of James to support his doctrine of *Sola Fide* (faith alone). The difference between the Protestant bible and the Catholic bible is only in the Old Testament, so the biggest question then remains, “Isn't it contradictory to accept the authority of the Church over the canon of the New Testament, yet reject that same authority in all other matters?”