

## STRUCTURE OF THE BIBLE

- The Bible is actually a small library of books. It is divided into two parts, the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament relates the whole history of God's saving interaction with mankind until the coming of Jesus of Nazareth.
- The New Testament records God's personal encounter with humanity in the person of Jesus Christ, who lived, was crucified, died, and rose again for our salvation. These accounts are contained in what are called the Gospels, which form the very heart of the Bible. They are deeply revered by the Church because they are the principal source for her life and teaching about our Saviour Jesus Christ.
- The New Testament also includes other books and letters that give an account of the Church in her infancy.
- Because of the existence of other writings that were not inspired by God, the Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit determined which writings were authentic and inspired, drawing up a complete list called the **canon of Scripture**.
- There are 46 books in the canon of the Old Testament. There is a tradition that Moses was the author of the first five books of the Old Testament; these five books are called, collectively, the Pentateuch (derived from Greek word that means "five cases," perhaps referring to the boxes in which the scrolls were kept). By 100 BC, this list was complete.
- There are 27 books in the New Testament canon. The letters of St. Paul were the first ones written, beginning between 50 and 55 AD and ending with his death about 67 AD.
- The four Gospels followed soon after, beginning with either the Gospel of Matthew or the Gospel of Mark and concluding with the Gospel of John. All the Gospels were written by the end of the 1st century.
- By tradition, St. Matthew is the Matthew identified as one of Jesus' apostles. St. Mark is named in the Acts of the Apostles and his Gospel is regarded as the substance of St. Peter's preaching. St. Luke is also named in the Acts of the Apostles and acted as St. Paul's travelling companion for a while. By his own description, he carefully researched his Gospel from eyewitnesses.
- The Acts of the Apostles, also written by St. Luke, was probably written before St. Paul's death and is at least in part history that St. Luke himself witnessed. The Gospel of St. John, by tradition, is written by the John identified as another of Jesus' apostles and also, by tradition, as the apostle "whom Jesus loved" (Jn. 13:23; 19:25).

- The remainder of the New Testament consists of letters written by St. Peter, St. James, St. Jude, and St. John, all apostles; the Letter to the Hebrews, whose authorship is not certain although it had traditionally been attributed to St. Paul; and the final book, Revelation, attributed as well to St. John the Evangelist.
- We must understand that, although the Bible consists of 73 books written over a period of more than a millennium, by perhaps 40 human authors, its principal author is the Holy Spirit who inspired each human author to write only what God wanted written for the sake of our salvation.
- In essence, therefore, Sacred Scripture is one book, and the one book is Jesus Christ, the Word of God, about whom all of Sacred Scripture writes and in whom all Scripture is fulfilled.