

# INTRODUCTION

In the Constitution on Divine Revelation the Second Vatican Council refers to the importance of Sacred Scripture for the Church and to the veneration it deserves: “The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord, since, especially in the sacred liturgy, she unceasingly receives and offers to the faithful the bread of life from the table both of God's Word and of Christ's Body” (*De Divina Revelatione*, 21). In the Constitution on Sacred Liturgy the Council decreed: “The treasures of the bible are to be opened up more lavishly, so that richer fare may be provided for the faithful at the table of God's Word” (*De Sancta Liturgia*, 51). With the publication of the Irish Lectionary in 1970 priests were enabled to implement this recommendation of the Council. With the publication of this version of the Bible, a version which might well have been named The Maynooth Bible, the complete word of God is available in Irish to all. The explanatory introductions to the various sections will be of great help to the private reader.

This work has been overdue. Its history is briefly outlined by the editor. It is the desire of the Hierarchy of Ireland to have the spiritual riches of God's Word available to Irish speakers in their own language. Scholars of scripture and of the Irish language laboured together on this project. The former ensured that use would be made of the most accurate and up-to-date knowledge available on the Bible, and that the meaning of the books would be explained clearly in a scholarly and traditional way. The latter laboured to translate the basic texts into Irish that was both rich and natural, and which was accurate, standardised and understandable to Irish speakers throughout Ireland, and beyond.

As Cardinal William Conway wrote in the 1970 Lectionary:

The Bible has always been a source of spirituality for our race. It moulded the thoughts and vocabulary of Saint Patrick as illustrated on every page of his writings. The Bible was studied above all other books in Irish monasteries and long passages were memorised. It is in manuscripts of the Scriptures that the oldest samples of written Irish are to be found – explanatory words and sentences were inserted between the lines of the Latin text. It was in copying the Bible that our forefathers excelled in ornate scriptwriting.

The Church of Ireland's achievement in publishing a version of the Bible during the seventeenth century was noteworthy. It appears that Roman Catholic authorities and scholars of that time, and throughout the period that the old tradition of learning in Irish continued, did not see the need for such an undertaking. The one who was literate in Irish was generally also literate in Latin, and Latin was to long continue as an official language. Now, however, some amends are being made in an area of neglect; not before time. As the editor explains below, it was many a person, over a period of thirty five years, who exerted himself, one way or another, in this work. We note that his own name is hidden in a long list of contributors. Therefore it is right and proper to state publicly that the Maynooth Bible would not be available this century without the irrepressible dedication and enormous capacity for work of Father Pádraig Ó Fiannachta. Just as the 17<sup>th</sup> century translation was known as The Bedel Bible, I consider that it would not be inappropriate to call the 20<sup>th</sup> century version The Ó Fiannachta Bible. May God reward him for his labours.

We wish the happiness of Heaven and the Beatific Vision of the Trinity, in the company of Mary and the Saints, to all those contributors who have died. To the others we wish long life and health. We acknowledge them, along with the printers, binders, helpers and supporters of the work. May God reward them for all their generous labour.

We hope that a copy of this Bible will be in every household, school and Irish institution. We recommend it as an authentic and authoritative version to all our people. We hope also that our fellow Christians in other Churches will benefit from it and, of course, that this new translation will be a bridge between all Irish Christians. We realise that that was not how the Irish Bible was looked upon in the last century. In this age of ecumenism, however, may our fellowship in Christ be the greater for the use we will all make of the Word of God in the language of Ireland.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Tomás Ó Fiaich". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Cardinal Tomás Ó Fiaich  
Archbishop of Armagh  
Primate of All Ireland

Saint Patrick's Day, 1981

# A WORD FROM THE EDITOR

I can remember my professor, Father Donnchadh Ó Floinn, telling us, after an Irish lecture in 1945, that the hierarchy of Ireland had established a commission to make available a version of the New Testament in Irish, a version based on the Greek. He asked us to gather for him references to the New Testament in various books. The commission was comprised of Father Donnchadh himself, Father Seán Ó Floinn, L.S.S., and the President, Monsignor Éamann Ó Cíosáin, L.S.S. Workload, ill health and then death itself delayed the work. No portion of the commission's work was published until 1964, when *Luke* was published. Fathers Tomás Ó Fiaich and Pádraig Ó Fiannachta guided that lovely book into print. The Introduction and Notes were those of Father Seán Ó Floinn; the translation was Father Donnchadh's. Mgr. Ó Cíosáin was five years dead by that time. In 1966 *Matthew* was published in similar fashion. Father Donnchadh died before *Mark* was published in 1972; his were chapters 1-8 of the translation; the remainder were Father Ó Fiannachta's; again the Introduction and Notes were Father Seán Ó Floinn's.

Meanwhile there was an ongoing demand that a complete Irish version of the Bible be made available. In 1966 the Hierarchy set up a steering committee to bring this about. Along with Fathers Donnchadh and Seán Ó Floinn, Father Ó Fiaich, Father Colmán Ó hUallacháin, O.F.M., and Father Ó Fiannachta were appointed to the committee. It was decided that assistance would be sought nationwide from priests who had expertise in Irish and in the Bible. A Biblical scholar and a Greek scholar were employed. It was directed that the translation would be from the original text with an eye to other versions, which are highly regarded. Father Ó Fiannachta was appointed as secretary to the committee and given responsibility for publishing. The books were to be published as they were completed. By 1977 almost all the books of the Bible had been published in this way. The method of publication was varied, e.g., *The Minor Prophets* in editions of the magazine "An Sagart", *Isaiah* as a title by Veritas/An Sagart.

During the years of preparation Irish developed as a literary language. This present work follows today's standardisation in terms of spelling, grammar and vocabulary, something which was not always true of the earliest publications. This meant that the editor had many changes to make to the texts which were sent to him. That work had the benefit of many suggestions from scholars, particularly Muiris Ó Droighneáin, M.A., (+1979). Scholars were invited to make recommendations on improving the text. Recommendations were received from Father Seán Mac Riabhaigh, D.D., Peru, Father Pádraig Ó Nualláin, O. Cist., L.S.S., Father Liam Leader, Father Morgan Ó Curráin, M.S.C., Father Maolmhuire L. Ó Fiaich, C.S.Sp. Our thanks to them. The efforts of many, therefore, have gone into this version; readability and ease of understanding for the average reader, even in the case of proper names, was a consideration. Square brackets signify textual amendment or the insertion of extra words in the interest of clarity; round brackets signify words beyond what are in the original text.

It is only proper to give details of the various authors of the Irish version of particular books and accompanying notes. Father Ó Fiannachta translated: *Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Samuel, 1-2 Kings, 1-2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job, Wisdom, Sirach, Daniel, Obadiah, 1-2 Maccabees, Mark (chapters 9-*

16), *John, James, 1-2 Peter, Jude, Revelation*. He is responsible also for the General Introduction and the preambles, *The Psalms* excepted. Father Caoimhín Cundún, C.M., L.S.S., was his adviser on the books of *The Pentateuch, John, and Revelation*. He also provided the information for the General Introduction and the preambles to those books. Father Dónall Ó Conchúir, D.D., L.S.S., was his adviser in the case of all the Historical Books, and it was he who provided the information in the preambles to these; Father Dónal was his adviser in the case of the Wisdom Books, which he translated; and it was he who provided the information in the preambles accompanying all the Wisdom Books – apart from *The Psalms*.

Father P. Ó Nualláin, O.Cist., L.S.S., translated *Tobit, Ecclesiastes, the Minor Prophets* (except *Obadiah*), and *Hebrews*. *The Psalms* are a particular version of Father Colmcille, O.Cist. Father Máirtín Mac Conmara, M.S.C., D.S.S., wrote the accomplished preamble for him. Our version of *The Song of Songs* is Father Seán de hÍde's, S.J. Father Gearóid Ó Meachair, L.S.S., provided the preamble to *The Prophets*. Father Breandán Ó Doibhlin, D.D., L.S.S., provided *Isaiah* with the advice of Father Seán Ó Caoinleáin, D.D., L.S.S. Father Seán also advised Father Ó Fiannachta *The Catholic Epistles*, which he translated.

Father Seosamh Ó Dufaigh, M.A., with advice from Father Seán Ó Coinnealláin, S.M.A., L.S.S., provided *Ezekiel*. Father Aibhistín Valkenburg, O.P., provided *Jeremiah* in consultation with Father Wilfrid Ó hUrdail, O.P., a man who advised Father Ó Fiannachta also in the case of *Daniel*.

Father Ó hUrdail provided the original version of all the preambles in the case of the New Testament in this edition. Regarding the books of the New Testament not yet mentioned: Father P. Ó Nualláin provided *Hebrews*. Father Seán Mac Cárthaigh, D.C.L., translated *The Acts of the Apostles* and *The Pauline Corpus*, except *Hebrews*. Father Seán Ó Gríochá, D.D., L.S.S., was his adviser in the case of *Acts* and Father P. Ó Nualláin cast an eye over the rest of Father Mac Cárthaigh's work. Father Tomás Mac Aoidh, S.T.L., translated *1-3 John*, in conjunction with Father Seán Ó Floinn.

It was the editor's great privilege to have been associated with such a fine team. They were gracious and patient. Our genuine thanks to them. The happiness of heaven to those who have passed away. Our thanks to the typists, particularly to Mrs Gearóidín Uí Choinn and to Mrs Gearóidín Uí Ruadháin, for their accurate work. Our thanks to the staff at Leinster Leader, who printed this large work so quickly and professionally; to the manager, W. D. Britton, who undertook the task enthusiastically, and who bore the cost of the illustration pages; to the Board of Trinity College, who gave permission to publish copies of pages from the Book of Kells; to Mícheál Ó Catháin who directed the work, to Stan Hickey, who typeset every letter, and to Breandán Ellis, who laid out every page. Our thanks to John F. Newman and Son who did a lovely job on binding the book. Thanks to Thomas Nelson & Sons Ltd. for permission to publish four maps.

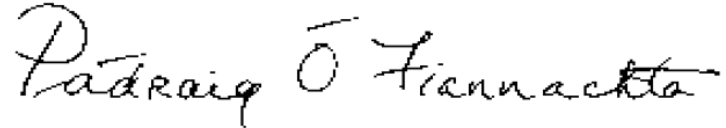
We would not have had the courage to undertake the work of the edition at this point had it not been for the generous support we received from the Irish-American Institute under the direction of Dr. Eoin Mac Thiarnáin. The Boston Irish were generous also, as were many people both in Ireland and abroad. May God reward their generosity.

A special thanks is due to the Hierarchy of Ireland under the leadership of his Eminence Cardinal Tomás Ó Fiaich. It was they who motivated the beginnings of the work and who gave ongoing encouragement; they were generous also with financial support. Cardinal Ó Fiaich was involved in the first volume to be published of The Maynooth Bible. He took

responsibility in 1978 for ensuring that the complete Bible would be made available in a short space of time. Thank God there was no great delay.

Forgive me for the faults you will find in this work. Send your recommendations to the editor in the expectation that they will be of assistance for the next edition of the Maynooth Bible.

*Patricius peccator rusticissimus.*

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pádraig Ó Fiannachta". The script is cursive and fluid, with a prominent initial 'P' and a long horizontal stroke at the end of the name.

Pádraig Ó Fiannachta  
Saint Patrick's College  
Maynooth

Saint Patrick's Day 1981

# A NOTE ABOUT THE ELECTRONIC TEXT

An Sagart first published An Bíobla Naofa [The Holy Bible] in 1981, and in 1992 they published the revised second edition. The following year they published an Irish language version of The Letters of Saint Patrick, which was translated by Father Pádraig Ó Fiannachta. It is these that are available on this CD. The complete text of the Bible is contained in this electronic version, including scripture, the Introduction and the preliminaries just as they were printed in the second edition. All acknowledgements in the preliminaries are included in this electronic version, even if they are not directly related to it.

The task of preparing an electronic version from the printed one was huge. In particular, the proofs had to be read and amended again – this was done by Vincent Ó Coileáin and Father Pádraig Ó Fiannachta. Máirtín Mac Oiste and Maitias Mac Cárthaigh did the typesetting. A special word of thanks to Nóirín Ní Riain, who very kindly allowed the use of six songs from her CD, “Gregorian Chant Experience”, published by O’Brien Press. Gratitude is also expressed to Bord na Gaeilge, who generously sponsored this project.

# GENERAL PREFACE

The Bible is a special unit of literature. No faith outside of Christianity has anything like it. The *Koran* is the closest thing to it, and that was influenced by the Bible. We call the Bible “the word of God”. It must be said however, that it came as “the word of God”; and when it is proclaimed it becomes again “the word of God”. In this respect also, Judaism and Christianity are both special faiths; basically, it is *kerygma*; this faith is proclaimed, it is a *word*.

There are two principal divisions in the Bible, the Old and the New Testaments. The *Testament* or *Contract* is the solemn promise of the salvation of God established in the Old Law under Moses and in the New Law under Christ. The Old Law is still honoured and respected by the Jews; only Christians accept the New Law.

## DIVISIONS

The Bible may be divided as follows:

### *The Old Testament*

- (a) The *Torah* or the Law: The five books of the Pentateuch namely: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. These names are based on Greek titles. The Hebrews called a book after the first words in it.
- (b) *The Prophets*: Four Major Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel) and Twelve Minor Prophets.
- (c) *History*: Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah and (in the Catholic Bible) 1 and 2 Maccabees.
- (d) *Wisdom*: Proverbs, Job, (Qohelet) and, in the Catholic Bible, the Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach.
- (e) *Prayers*: Book of the Psalms.
- (f) The Five Minor Scrolls for liturgical occasions: Ruth, Lamentations, The Song of Songs, Esther, Qohelet (also under Wisdom above). Judith, Tobit – and Baruch – which is in the Catholic Bible, may be included with these (see below).

### *The New Testament*

- (a) *The Gospels*: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John.
- (b) *History*: Acts of the Apostles.
- (c) *Epistles*: Thirteen letters attributed to Paul: Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon. Also: Hebrews, James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1-3 John, Jude.
- (d) Apocalypse of John.

If you open a Catholic Bible you'll usually find approximately a thousand pages of the Old Testament, and approximately two hundred and fifty of the New Testament. The New Testament is by far the most important for our era, for theological reasons. But there is something special about the Old Testament, which is not found in the New Testament on its own – it is comprehensive literature. The Old Testament is like a complete library with a great wealth of literary tradition behind it. The New Testament covers a hundred year period; but there is at least a thousand year range in the Old Testament. Which means it concerns a period

stretching back in our own tradition from The Islandman to Cín Droma Sneachta or to the first written version of the Táin.

## The Canon

The question of the canon and its verification is very important. Many books of the Bible were a long time in existence before they were accepted as “scripture” or “divine scripture”. Before the Exile the Hebrews had no official Holy Book, or Bible. They had, of course, books, documents, legal tracts, liturgical texts and so forth. But the Jewish people didn’t decide to preserve what was left of their ancient heritage until after the Exile (587-537 B.C.). The gathering and arranging continued for hundreds of year. Over a period as this work continued, certain sections were proclaimed officially to be “scripture”, that is, to be documents that would serve as a rule of faith and would be used in the Synagogue; in other words, they were accepted into the “Canon”; the word “Canon” means a rule. There was an official authorised list of canonical books just as there is an official list of “canonised” saints in today’s Catholic Church. Canonisation didn’t afford the book inspiration but it declared it to be inspirational.

In the New Testament we often meet with the expression “the Law and the Prophets”. These words mean virtually “the Bible”; but the expression should really be “the Law, the Prophets and the Writings”; these words reveal three stages in the formation of the books of Judaism. “The Law” was the first section of the Hebrew Canon to be published, about 444 B.C. Despite its name, that section contains more than law. The second section was named “the Prophets”, even though there are more than prophets there. The early historical books were concerned mostly with these: Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, three of the Major Prophets and also all of the Minor Prophets; Daniel hadn’t yet been included and so he is the third section, “the Writings”. We are not sure when exactly the second section was published, but according to the preface to Sirach, it must have happened about 200 B.C.

The third part, “the Writings” were still being arranged during Our Lord’s time, at least in the Greek-Hebrew world around Alexandria. By that time there were *two* Canons, Hebrew and Greek. There was more in the Greek Canon than in the Hebrew Canon (i.e. 1 and 2 Maccabees, Tobit, Judith, Sirach, Wisdom, Baruch, and appendices to Daniel and Esther). The Catholic Church adopted the Greek Canon, and so, there are more books in its Bible than in the Protestant Bible, which follows the Hebrew Canon.

## Inspiration

It’s difficult to say what principle the Rabbis used to decide on which book to accept into the Canon. They wished to preserve the relics of their heritage since their old life had been crushed by destruction and exile. They welcomed, therefore, random fragments or even whole books (*e.g.* Qohelet, The Song of Songs, the Hebrew version of Esther), a practice which most of today’s readers might think as unreliable with regard to faith. The Rabbis themselves were in doubt about certain books. It would be a mistake to think that the outlook on inspiration that is to the fore in today’s Church, an outlook rooted in Greek rather than in Hebrew tradition, was a guide to the Rabbis when determining the Canon. However, they had an ancient expression as a guide, when something like that was being discussed (remember, by the way, that they didn’t include every faith writing in the Canon). That expression was “the word of God”. This phrase is often found in Scripture (in both Old and New Testaments). In its proper context, the “word of God” is the oracle that comes from the prophet’s mouth when the *ru’ah*, or the Spirit of the

Lord, descends on him. Accordingly, prophecies or prophetic passages would have been welcome in the Canon from the beginning; but remember, we know that they were not all accepted. The word of God would have been more acceptable as it was revealed in the *Torah*; that would have been more important to the Jews than any prophecy. Liturgical texts would have been readily accepted, the Psalms for example, which had been in use for long ages. What about History? What about Wisdom? The books of Samuel and Kings are like royal chronicles or annals. Wisdom is simply human wisdom in the form of proverbs. How are these books the “word of God”?

Most probably, by the time the last books were being collected, the old expression *the word of God* was being explained under the influence of Greek philosophy, Stoicism in particular. It was accepted that the *word of God* existed, a word really spoken, something concrete; but that divine *Logos*, God’s truth, *Sophia* or Wisdom existed as well. It was understood that in a way, the *Torah* and *Sophia*, were identical, a colleague of God, present during the creation itself (*cf.* Prov. 8:30). God himself is the fount of all human knowledge and of all wisdom. Therefore, in a collection of *the word of God*, or *the words of God*, history was welcome, and wisdom, and poetry, and other works of the human spirit.

It must also be remembered that the books in question were to be used, eventually at least, in the liturgy. It’s difficult at times to attribute inspiration to some of the books as to origin and source, but there’s no doubt about the inspiration in their aim as Scripture. *God’s Word* is *God’s redemptive word*. It’s not the same as omniscience, or secret revelation. It is the hand of God, unceasingly active in the affairs of man. Therefore, the Scripture is not a single inspiration. Every time Scripture is used in the liturgy, another inspiration like the first one is involved. The word of God is “living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (Heb. 4:12).

## Diversity

Examples of almost every aspect of literature are to be found in the Bible, especially in the Old Testament; there are laws there and sermons, liturgies, prayers, divine and human poems (songs and lays of work and love; songs of wake and war; laments and praise *etc.*), prophecies, biographies, history, poetry, letters, reflections, conundrums and proverbs, visions and dreams, and others. The “gospels” in the New Testament could be called a particular aspect of literature. When this diverse material is being assessed, a distinction must be made between the traditional elements and the elements that spring from the author personally; perhaps, in certain cases, the traditional elements survived for ages as folklore and they were written down at some point and found a definite settled print; from the author and the editors themselves came the personal elements. The Hebrew folklore was wide-spread and comprehensive like our own oral learning. There are many examples of it to be found in Genesis, in the history books, in the Psalms, in the Proverbs, and, in the New Testament, in the gospels themselves. Regarding the personal elements, the authors tell a different story *e.g.* in the case of Jeremiah (from his biographer, Baruch), or Ezekiel, or Saint Paul. At other times, the author’s work stands out clearly here and there along with much lore and folklore and traditional material (*e.g.* Isaiah, whose book covers a two hundred year period). When traditional material is involved it is the business of the scholar to recognise this material, to classify it according to form, and to fit it into its proper

place and date. When this kind of examination of the gospels is being done, it is called “form critique” or “history of tradition”.

It must also be remembered that there was material that was *collected* and *compiled* involved in the Old Testament – and that this is there also in the New Testament in the case of the synoptic gospels. There was no modern protocol about the old world editors. They seldom give a clue about where a fragment or chapter or series begins. At times they insert one collection inside another, *e.g.* the Book of Emmanuel of Isaiah (cc. 6-9) was inserted in the middle of another division that begins c. 5 and continues until c. 10.

Today’s readers of the Bible must understand that much of what they are reading is translated from ancient languages and obscure texts. Hebrew is the language of the Old Testament, except for passages in Daniel and Ezra that are in Aramaic, and the other books of the Greek Bible adopted by the Catholic Church; we know that even some of these were first written in Hebrew. The New Testament was written in Greek. The reader wishing to verify the genuineness of a translation would do well to compare different versions.

It’s difficult for the ordinary reader to judge an original text. Many people don’t realise how uncertain manuscript texts are, especially in certain books that were very often in use – *e.g.* the Psalms. It’s an important matter, and work for qualified scholars, to classify and weigh the alternative versions and base a reliable critical text on them.

## Subject and Date

Almost all the Pentateuch was attributed to Moses for generations during the history of the Church; most of the Psalms were attributed, as the titles suggest, to David; it was accepted that Isaiah wrote most of his book. These opinions were upset to a great extent as a result of critical study of the Bible. It can’t be said, however, that that lessened its importance or its authority. What happened was that it was understood that the question was much more complicated than had been supposed. Take the case of Isaiah; if it can be shown that his book covers a period of two hundred years (around 700-500 R.C.), it appears, perhaps that Isaiah himself has lost some importance; however, in view of the fact that after the exile the Jews attributed the work to him, obviously they saw him as a very important person.

Dates will be given below in the preamble to the books. It may be said now about the Old Testament books, even the oldest of them, that they are not, *in the literary form in which they appear now*, as ancient as they were once believed to be. It is doubtful, say, that any one psalm, in its present form, goes back to the time of David as author. But there are psalms whose roots go back to the time of David, and that even contain remnants of the old Canannite worship (*e.g.* Psalm 29). In the same way, the Code of Holiness in Leviticus (cc. 11-26) may be placed after the date of the exile; but there are laws in it that are some of the oldest in the Bible. This all illustrates that the establishing of a literary form for a book must be distinguished from its prehistory in tradition; this might go back perhaps, hundreds of years. If Moses is not the author of the Pentateuch as we know it now, he was certainly the author of the tradition from which it sprung.

## Closure

The Bible is a major, very ancient, very diverse literary work and the interest of many people in it is not surprising. It is the source of the tradition of the Church. It has always been a well of inspiration and thought for preachers. It is help and comfort for ordinary people. People usually

read it with respect and devotion, hoping for sustenance in their spiritual life and encouragement towards righteousness. People read it from curiosity and to learn more about the people and the civilisation shown therein. Of great help to such people is an up to date commentary; the commentary must be up to date because there is no let up in the amount of information being discovered with the passage of years. A number of commentaries may be mentioned: *The Jerome Biblical Commentary* (published by Geoffrey Chapman in Ireland) and *A Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture* (Nelson), and, for the Protestant Bible, *Peate's Commentary on the Bible* (Nelson). With the publication of this Maynooth Bible, it is hoped that a school of Bible studies will be established in Irish, that will produce eventually, with God's help, a New Irish Commentary on the Bible.