

Andrews University

Digital Commons @ Andrews University

Faculty Publications

5-10-1973

The R. S. V. Common Bible

Walter F. Specht
Andrews University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pubs>

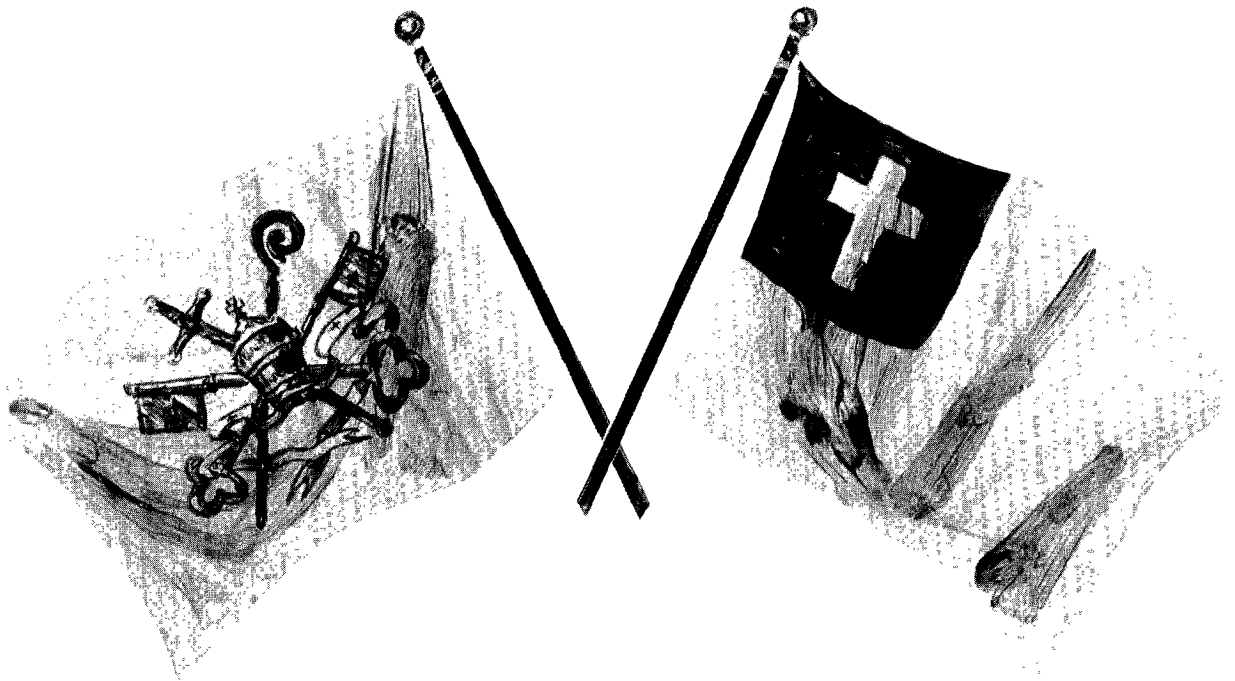


Part of the [Biblical Studies Commons](#), and the [Practical Theology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Specht, Walter F., "The R. S. V. Common Bible" (1973). *Faculty Publications*. 4127.
<https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pubs/4127>

This Popular Press is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Andrews University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Andrews University. For more information, please contact repository@andrews.edu.



For years Protestants and Catholics have used different Bibles. Now a Bible has been published acceptable to both.

(See also editorial "A Common Bible for Protestants and Catholics," p. 13.)

The R.S.V. Common

By WALTER F. SPECHT

THE PUBLICATION of an Ecumenical Edition of the Revised Standard Version of the Bible is indeed a significant religious event of our time. Called the *Common Bible*, this edition was published during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in England, and shortly afterward in America. The new Bible is copyrighted by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ, U.S.A., and has international Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant endorsement. This is the first time in the history of Christendom that these religious bodies have agreed on a mutually acceptable translation.

A number of recent developments have led up to this Ecumenical Edition. The first was the publication of the R.S.V. Apocrypha, October 30, 1957, the result of a request to the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches made

Walter F. Specht is chairman of the New Testament Department, Theological Seminary, Andrews University.

five years earlier by the General Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church.

Then in 1965 a Catholic edition of the R.S.V. New Testament was published, which had been prepared by the Catholic Biblical Association of Great Britain with the approval of the R.S.V. Bible Committee. This edition contains two appendices. Appendix 1 contains a series of "Explanatory Notes" as prescribed by Canon Law. These notes are interpretive, most of which a Protestant would find acceptable; indeed, many are helpful. Appendix 2 contains a list of the changes made in the Catholic Edition of the R.S.V. text. Some 50 changes in the text were made, which are of two kinds: (1) those that have to do with the underlying Greek text. Sixteen passages that were printed in R.S.V. footnotes are put into the text, including the "long ending" of Mark (Mark 16:9-20); the story of the woman taken in adultery (John 7:53-8:11); and the Lucan account of Peter running to the tomb (Luke 24:12). In each case there is a footnote stating,

"Other ancient authorities omit . . ." The second kind of change consists of differences in translation. These are minimal, 16 consisting in the designation of Jesus' brothers as "brethren" (see Matt. 12:48f.; Mark 3:31ff.; Luke 8:19ff.; John 7:34), since Catholics assert (as do Adventists) that these men were not His real brothers. In Matt. 1:19 "send her away" is substituted for "divorce her." In such passages as Romans 5:5 and 8:11 the relative pronoun "who" rather than "which" is used in reference to the Holy Spirit. These examples illustrate the kinds of changes made.

In 1966 the Catholic edition of the entire R.S.V. Bible was published. No changes whatever were made in the text of the Old Testament. There remains however, the important difference in canon, since Catholics accept all but three of the books Protestants designate as Apocryphal as sacred Scripture. Hence, with the exception of 1 and 2 Esdras and the Prayer of Manasseh, the apocryphal books are interspersed among the

Bible

Apocrypha and explanatory notes. This was the first English Bible to be approved by both Protestants and Catholics. In it the Apocrypha are printed as a separate group. It thus helped Catholics to become used to having these books separated from the Old Testament.

The R.S.V. Bible committee is a continuing committee with authority to recommend further revisions in the R.S.V. when in their judgment these are needed. It is also now an international and ecumenical committee, with members coming from Canada and Great Britain as well as the U.S.A., and with Catholic as well as Protestant members. In 1959-1960, in response to criticisms and suggestions, a few changes were made in the translation. Three are worthy of note here. In Job

Deutero-canonical and which they regard as authoritative scripture. Then the remaining apocryphal books, 1 and 2 Esdras and the Prayer of Manasseh, which are not regarded by Catholics as authoritative, are printed.

More than three pages of the Preface are devoted to a presentation of the position of various Christian bodies with reference to the Apocrypha. We have already mentioned the Roman Catholic position which was defined by the fourth session of the Council of Trent, April 8, 1546. The Council decreed that with the exception of 1 and 2 Esdras and the Prayer of Manasseh these books "entire with all their parts" are "sacred and canonical" and pronounced an anathema on anyone who "knowingly or deliberately" rejects them. While the Greek Orthodox Church has never made a universally accepted decision regarding the canon, that denomination uses as the authentic text of the Old Testament the Greek Septuagint, which included the Apocrypha.

The Church of England, the Lutheran, and Zurich Reformed churches hold that these books are useful but not canonical. Article VI of the famous thirty-nine articles of the Church of England states that these books are read "for example of life and instruction of manners," but the church does not use them "to establish any doctrine."

Finally the Calvinistic and Puritan and other Reformed churches reject them altogether (as do Adventists). The position is clearly defined in the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647). "The books commonly called Apocrypha, not being of divine inspiration, are no part of the Canon of the Scripture; and therefore are of no authority in the Church of God, nor to be any otherwise approved, or made use of, than other human writings."

Nevertheless, even the Protestants who have taken this strong stand against the canonical status of the Apocrypha, have come to realize that these documents have an immense historical value. They serve to bridge the 400-year gap between the Testaments, and aid the reader in understanding the social, political, and religious background of the New Testament.

The *Common Bible* marks the end of controversy for many denominations regarding an authoritative English translation of the Bible. It is indeed a new day when Catholics, Orthodox, and Protestants can all use the same English Bible. □

books of the Old Testament in harmony with Catholic practice. Explanatory notes of various passages are given at the end of the Old Testament. The Introduction contains this significant paragraph from the Catholic edition:

"With the improvement in interdenominational relations and the advance of Biblical knowledge, the possibility of producing a Bible common to all Christians was mooted as far back as 1953. It was felt that, if such a thing could be achieved, it would be of incalculable benefit in wiping away remaining misconceptions and prejudices and in fostering still further good relations between the churches. The Word of God would then not only be our common heritage and unifying link but be recognized as such, and those engaged in theological discussion could appeal to the same authoritative text."

Another significant development in 1965 was the *Imprimatur* which was given by Cardinal Cushing, Archbishop of Boston, to the *Oxford Annotated Bible* (R.S.V.) containing the

19:26 "without my flesh" was changed to "from my flesh." The Roman centurion's confession "Truly this was a son of God" became "Truly this was the Son of God" (Matt. 27:54; Mark 15:39). In the Pastoral Letters "married only once" was replaced by "the husband of one wife" (1 Tim. 3:2, 12; 5:9; Titus 1:6).

The second edition of the R.S.V. New Testament was copyrighted in 1971. On the basis of new research in manuscripts some changes in the underlying Greek text were made (see, for example, Luke 22:19b, 20; 24:51b). Improvements in some passages were also made by rephrasing and reordering the translation (see, for example, Matt. 5:42; Luke 22:29, 30; John 10:33; 1 Cor. 3:9; 2 Cor. 5:19; Heb. 13:13).

It is this second edition of the New Testament that is printed in the *Common Bible*, together with the Old Testament and the Apocrypha. The apocryphal books are printed between the Old and New Testaments, and arranged in two groups. First there are the books Roman Catholics call