

**The New American Bible** is the translation of the scriptures that we read at Mass on Sundays. The NAB was the first Catholic translation to render the ancient texts from Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek directly into English.

Before the NAB the Douay Bible was in use. This was a translation of St. Jerome's Latin translation of the bible, often called the "Vulgate." In effect the Douay Bible was a translation of a translation. Similarly, the Jerusalem Bible was based on a French translation of the ancient languages. Since the editors wanted to use the same footnotes, they had to "keep an eye on the French" when they were writing their English, so the JB was also in effect a "translation of a translation."

The NAB has gone through several editions. The first edition came out in 1970. It was done rather quickly, and needed revision. The 1986 version was a great improvement. Then, in 1991 the book of Psalms was revised—the rest of the bible being unchanged. Last year, 2011, a completely revised Old Testament was published, with completely revised study notes. The 2011 edition is so updated that it no longer goes by NAB, but by NABRE, New American Bible Revised Edition. The NABRE can be purchased at bookstores. It will probably be some time before our liturgical books are updated.

**The RSV**, Revised Standard Version is the 1952 revision of the King James Version. It is available in three formats. The OT of the simple RSV has only books accepted by Jews and Protestants. The "RSV with Apocrypha" has additional books accepted by Catholics and Greek Orthodox (whose OT is longer than ours). It places these books in an appendix after the NT. The "RSV Catholic Edition" contains all the books recognized by the Church, and places them in our "Catholic order," i.e., in the midst of the other OT books.

The RSV is a fairly "literal" translation; it often renders the Hebrew and the Greek word-for-word into English. It is a bit old fashioned in that it uses "thee" and "thou" when addressing God, but it does not use these words when addressing a human being. Another weakness, by contemporary standards, is that the language is not "inclusive." E.g., it uses the word "man" to mean both "males" and "females." It translates the Greek word *adelphoi* by "brothers" rather than by "brothers and sisters."

If I were condemned to live on a desert island with only one English translation of the Bible it would be the "RSV with Apocrypha." The RSV was the translation used by **every** single professor I had during my seminary studies.

**The NRSV**, the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, is the "successor" to the RSV, about which I wrote last week. The NRSV is an ecumenical work, the fruit of the labors of Protestant and Catholic scholars. One of my professors at Catholic University was a member of the team that produced the NRSV.

The simple NRSV, like the RSV, does not contain all of the books in the Catholic Bible. However, the NRSV is available in a "Catholic Edition," which has an *imprimatur* from Cardinal Keeler of Baltimore. In addition, the "NRSV with Apocrypha" contains additional books considered inspired by the Orthodox.

One of the strong points of the NRSV is its use of "**inclusive language**." That is, it recognizes that many biblical readers are women. So, instead of simply translating the Greek word *adelphoi* as "**brothers**" it translates it as "**brothers and sisters**." Instead of saying, "Blessed is **the man** who follows not the way of the wicked," the NRSV reads, "Blessed are **they** who . . ."

I first became aware of the importance of inclusive language when attending a wedding in Germany. The service was being translated into English for the benefit of my friend, the bridegroom. It began, "Brothers and sisters . . . we are here today . . . to join **two men** in marriage . . ." It occurred to me that if it sounded "funny" to speak of joining two "men" in marriage, then the word "man" no longer equally refers to men and women, as it once did. Inclusive language is important!

**The Jerusalem Bible** is the 1966 English version of the 1956 French translation made from the ancient languages by the Dominican scholars at the *Ecole Biblique* in Jerusalem. The translation was made from the ancient languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek), but because the translators wanted to use the excellent footnotes of the French edition, they "kept an eye on the French" as they made their English translation.

This was the first Catholic Bible that did not use "thee," "thou," and other antiquated forms. As a sophomore in college I read it from cover to cover. I found it much more "readable" than the old Douay-Rheims version, which I also read that same year. (Every morning I got up at 5:00, went to the study hall, and read the bible for an hour. To keep from falling asleep I walked up and down the aisles between the desks!)

The JB renders the divine name as "Yahweh." This is how it would have been pronounced by ancient Israelites. By the time of Jesus, however, the divine name was considered too sacred to pronounce. Wherever it was written, the lector said *Adonai* (Lord) rather than Yahweh. Most other modern bibles render the divine name as "the LORD." It is placed in all capitals to remind the reader that the Hebrew does not **really** say "the LORD" (*Adonai*) but rather "Yahweh." The difference between *Yahweh* and *Adonai* is the same as the difference between "Father" and "Pat;" "Doctor" and "Jones;" "Professor" and "Smith." One is a **name**, the other is a **title**.

**The New Jerusalem Bible** is the 1985 update of the Jerusalem Bible produced by the Catholic Dominican scholars at the *Ecole Biblique* in Jerusalem.

One of the peculiarities of the old JB was in the choices made of **what** to translate. Before bibles were printed, each one was written by hand -- the Latin word *manu-scriptum* literally means "by hand - written," and is the source of the English word "manuscript." Since all bibles were originally written by hand, **no two of them were alike**. So, the first problem a translator faces is: **which** ancient manuscript am I going to put into English?

Père Benoit, director of the *Ecole*, had made some choices that many scholars consider "odd." For instance, even though every Greek manuscript in the world might say something, if there was one in Coptic that said something different, Père Benoit would insist on translating it, arguing that every Greek manuscript in the world was "corrupt" at that point. (Coptic was the language of Egypt before Arabic--it is used by Egyptian Christians to this day).

Many of these "odd" manuscript choices have been corrected in the revised New Jerusalem Bible, while maintaining the excellent points of the old JB. I highly recommend the NJB to Catholics who are looking for a "second Bible" for study purposes.

**NET** is short for New English Translation. It is also called the "NET Bible" because it is available for free on the internet. Go to <http://bible.org/netbible/>

The NET has the best notes of any Bible in the world, over 60,000 of them. There are 3 types of notes. 1) Notes marked **tn** are translators notes, and explain difficulties in rendering a passage into English. 2) Notes marked **tc** are text critical notes, and let the reader know when ancient manuscripts do not agree -- see last week's article on the New Jerusalem Bible. 3) Notes marked **sn** are study notes of interest to general readers of the Bible.

One of the drawbacks of the NET is that it does not contain all of the books that our Church considers to be sacred and canonical. While the NT is exactly the same as ours, the OT is lacking seven complete books, as well as several chapters in other books, from our Catholic perspective. The NET bible is currently working on translating these books.

A word of caution! While I highly recommend the NET version, some of the articles on their website have an anti-Catholic bias. This, of course, I cannot recommend!

**NETS** stands for New English Translation of the Septuagint. About two hundred years before Jesus there were many Jews living in Alexandria, Egypt. Like Jews in America today, most of them no longer spoke Hebrew. They needed a translation of the bible in their own language. In their case this meant Greek. Since Alexander the Great had conquered the world, Greek was the international language.

According to legend the translation was done by 70 scholars. The Latin word for 70 is *septuaginta*; hence our English word "Septuagint" to designate the work of the seventy. It is often abbreviated by the Roman numeral LXX (50 + 10 + 10 = 70).

Why are we interested in the Septuagint? Well, for one thing, it contains the seven books in the Catholic OT that are not found in the Hebrew Bible, and hence not in Protestant Bibles. Also, at times the Greek is significantly different than the Hebrew.

With rare exceptions, whenever a NT author quotes the OT, the quotation is almost always closer to the Greek than to the Hebrew. Would you like to read the OT used by first century Christians? Almost all bibles today are translations of the **Hebrew** OT. If you want to read what Paul and the Gospel writers read – but do not read Greek – the NETS is for you! NETS is available for free online at <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/nets/edition/>. Hard copy may be purchased at bookstores.

**GNT** stands for Good News Translation of the Bible. Sometimes this translation is called TEV, Today's English Version. It was first published by the American Bible Society in 1976. The GNT lacks 7 books in the OT that we Catholics consider sacred and canonical. However, in 1992 the ABS published the **GNTCE**, Good News Translation Catholic Edition, which contains all the books of our Bible.

The strength of the GNT is that it is easy to understand! It was written so that anyone who can read at a 4<sup>th</sup>-grade level can read this Bible. For comparison, to read the King James or the old Douay version of the Bible one must be able to read at 12<sup>th</sup>-grade level. To put this in perspective, there are many college graduates, even many people with masters degrees and doctorates who are unable to read at 12<sup>th</sup>-grade level.

The primary audience for the GNT are the billions of people for whom English is a second language, including many non-Christians in China and India. The GNT is also an easy Bible for children to read. But do not let its simplicity fool you! Many times after pondering the difficulties of the ancient languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, Latin, Syriac) my friend Rabbi Kline and I

have been amazed at how wonderfully and accurately the GNT renders a passage! It is obvious that the translators have examined the work of ancient translators and biblical commentators, both Christian and Jewish.

Consider adding the GNTCE as a second (or third!) Bible to your bookshelf.

### **Jewish Annotated New Testament (JANT)**

**The Catholic Biblical Association** of America met at the University of Notre Dame several weeks ago. I participated in the seminar on “Biblical Issues affecting Christian-Jewish Relations.” A major part of this year’s discussion was devoted to *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*.

The *JANT* came out in 2011. The biblical text is the NRSV translation. The New Revised Standard Version is the work of Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish scholars. It received an *imprimatur* from William Cardinal Keeler of Baltimore.

What makes the *JANT* special is that all of the study notes, including the introduction to each book, is the work of a Jewish scholar. While written from a Jewish point of view, the tone is one of respectful inter-religious dialogue. I recommend this edition of the NT as a worthwhile edition to your library. The ISBN is 978-0-19-529770-6.

**A Study Bible** is a bible is a special tool to help the reader who wants to study the scriptures, as opposed to using them only for prayer. (Theology is “faith seeking understanding!”) Typically study bibles include footnotes to help you understand the text, as well as a general introduction to each biblical book. Below is a brief description of my **favorite study bibles**.

- ***The Catholic Study Bible: NABRE*** (2011) includes the newly revised edition of the New American Bible, the version we read at Mass.
- ***The Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha: RSV*** (Oxford, 1965) got me through my theological studies as a seminarian, as well as my degree in Liturgy after my seminary training. I still refer to it.
- ***The HarperCollins Study Bible: NRSV with the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books*** (1993) is a worthy successor to this. The New Revised Standard Version is an update of the RSV. The version “revised” by both the RSV and the NRSV is the King James Version.
- ***The NET Bible, First Edition*** ([www.bible.org](http://www.bible.org)) is available for free online. One may also purchase “hard copy” via the website. It contains 60,932 helpful notes.
- Two works help us understand the perspective of our Jewish friends. The first is ***The Jewish Study Bible: Tanakh*** (Oxford, 1999). The Second is ***The Jewish Annotated New Testament: NRSV*** (Oxford, 2011).