
A PERSONAL STATEMENT REGARDING THE APOCRYPHA

Today most Jews and Protestants know little if anything about the books and writings of the Apocrypha, and if they are aware of them, they generally ignore them. And although the Biblical Apocrypha is found in modern Catholic Bibles, reference is seldom made to them in Catholic homilies, sermons, and Bible studies. So everyone is missing out on the wisdom, beauty and reverence of the Apocrypha.

For more than a dozen years I worked daily on *Wycliffe's Bible*, a modern-spelling version of the "Wycliffe Bible" (3 years for *Wycliffe's New Testament*, and 9 years for *Wycliffe's Old Testament*). During that time a familiarity with the words and rhythms, the cadences and character of the Bible developed. And so, when I recently worked through the books and writings of the Apocrypha found in the "Wycliffe Bible", I soon realized that I was hearing the same voice that I had heard so many times before in those twelve years, a voice of wisdom and holiness, a voice of authority and compassion and justice. The voice of the Holy Spirit. This voice was not a facsimile or an imitation, emanating from the writings of a faux Old Testament-lite, writings that merely copied the Bible, as one encounters with cultish writings, old and new age. Those writings try to sound holy, majestic, and uplifting, i.e. "Biblical", but in the end ring hollow, not hallowed. No. The voice we hear in the Prayer of Manasseh, the Prayer of Azariah, and the Song of the Three is the same voice we hear in the best of David's Psalms. The voice we hear in Ecclesiasticus and the Wisdom of Solomon is the same voice we hear in Solomon's Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. The voice we hear in Baruch and the Letter of Jeremiah is the same voice we hear in Jeremiah and Isaiah. The voice we hear in 1ST

Maccabees, 3RD Ezra, and the Additions to Esther is the same voice we hear in Judges, Samuel, Kings and Chronicles.

The verses from the Wisdom of Solomon quoted at the end of the Introduction, as well as the opening verses of Ecclesiasticus printed here below, are as beautiful and profound as any other passage of Scripture. Listen:

1:1 All wisdom is of (or from) the Lord God, and was (for)ever with him, and is before the world.

1:2 Who numbered the gravel (or the sand) of the sea, and the drops of rain, and the days of the world?

1:3 Who measured the highness [or the height] of heaven, and the breadth of (the) earth, and the depth of the sea? Who ensearched (or searched for, or into) the wisdom of God, that goeth before all things?

1:4 Wisdom was formed first of all things, and the understanding of prudence, from the world, *that is, from without beginning.*

As you read through this book, you will encounter many other exquisite passages of Holy Writ also found in the Apocrypha.

But, unfortunately, another voice is also sometimes heard in the Apocrypha, a discordant voice, a hurtful voice, a voice not of love, and I would be remiss if I did not address this failing. (A number of these verses are additions to the original text made by later unknown copyists, something which has occurred with other Biblical writings as well.)

As stated, my two favourite passages from the Apocrypha are found in the Wisdom of Solomon and Ecclesiasticus, the latter book

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being the crown jewel of the Apocrypha. I believe that the wisdom expressed in each of these books – the practical, daily advice and the profound understanding of life – is of inestimable value, exquisitely presented, and equal to what we find in their counterparts in the Old Testament. And it is because I hold these books in such high regard, the discovery of hurtful statements in both of them is that much more disappointing.

For on the same page where we read some profound, yea, inspired wisdom, just a few lines later we may encounter statements of misogyny or potential inducements to what can only be called child abuse (two of the top three charges of social injustice most often, and sometimes rightly, levelled against the Bible, the third, of course, being “the love that dare not speak its name”, which is all but absent from the Apocrypha, with only one reference in the KJV version, and none in the Wycliffe), and then, just a few lines later, more pearls to live by. While it can be stated that such sentiments also appear in other Biblical writings, that does not justify what we find in the Apocrypha. Simply put, in terms of women and children, there are some disturbing and distressing passages, and I apologize to those who read these words and are hurt by them. But while these words are distressing, they should not be disqualifying.

I ask that we be mature enough to discern, with the help of the Holy Spirit, what indeed comes from God, and what are human prejudices, short-sightedness and cultural standards of bygone eras, that have occasionally reared their ugly heads, and have stained that Holy transmission. I ask that we separate the wheat from the chaff, and so still be able to highly esteem that which is so obviously the Word of Truth, and differentiate it from the ignorant and uncaring pronouncements made by creatures formed out of the slime and the clay.

I liken this defect to a public person that we respect and even have affection for, and then learn some disturbing aspect of their character or their personal behaviour, by which we are both disappointed and disgusted. In such a situation, now more complex than in our ignorance before, we are faced with a decision of whether to maintain our allegiance or not. We now have to decide how to reconcile these disparate elements, if they can be reconciled, and if not, how to assess this complexity of character, this mixture of the divine and the profane, which inhabits that individual, and these writings, and frankly, the lives of each and every one of us as well. Some will shake their heads, and turn and walk away; for others it will not be of much concern; but for many of us there will be a shadow of disappointment cast over that individual, and over these writings, that we would prefer not to be there. But it is there. However I believe that when mature discernment is applied, the human filter of failings and foibles through which these writings were transmitted can be readily acknowledged, but that we can go beyond that, and so not lose the wisdom that is also so clearly before us.

So I hope that you will find much here that is worthwhile and valuable and, yes, God-breathed. The Apocrypha, like the Old and the New Testaments, has been filtered through imperfect human vessels. But taken as a whole, and with the compassion and wisdom that fulfills that well-known phrase, “There but by the grace of God go I”, I believe we can clearly see the faults that are present in these writings, and still be in awe of the beauty and profundity which also appear in these pages. Read *Wycliffe’s Apocrypha*, and decide for yourself.

Terence Noble
Vancouver Canada
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