

The Apocrypha—Part Two

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(from *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, Baker Book House, 1999)

Answers to the Catholic Arguments.

The New Testament and the Apocrypha. There may be New Testament allusions to the *Apocrypha*, but not once is there a definite quotation from any *Apocrypha* book accepted by the Roman Catholic church. There are allusions to Pseudepigraphical books (false writings) that are rejected by Roman Catholics as well as Protestants, such as the *Bodily Assumption of Moses* (Jude 9) and the *Book of Enoch* (Jude 14-15). There are also citations from Pagan poets and philosophers (Acts 17:28; 1 Cor. 15:33; Titus 1:12). None of these sources are cited as Scripture, nor with authority.

The New Testament simply refers to a truth contained in these books which otherwise may (and do) have errors. Roman Catholic scholars agree with this assessment. The New Testament never refers to any document outside the canon as authoritative.

The Septuagint and the Apocrypha. The fact that the New Testament often quotes from other books in the Greek Old Testament in no way proves that the deuterocanonical books it contains are inspired. It is not even certain that the *Septuagint* of the first century contained the *Apocrypha*. The earliest Greek manuscripts that include them date from the fourth century A.D.

Even if these writings were in the *Septuagint* in apostolic times, Jesus and the apostles never once quoted from them, although they are supposed to have been included in the very version of the Old Testament (the *Septuagint*) that the Lord and apostles usually cited. Even notes in the currently used Roman Catholic New American Bible (NAB) make the revealing admission that the *Apocrypha* are “Religious books used by both Jews and Christians which were not included in the collection of inspired writings.” Instead, they “...were introduced rather late into the collection of the Bible. Catholics call them ‘deuterocanonical’ (second canon) books” (NAB, 413).

Use by the Church Fathers; Citations of church fathers in support of the canonicity of the *Apocrypha* is selective and misleading. Some fathers did seem to accept their inspiration; other fathers used them for devotional or homiletic (preaching) purposes but did not accept them as canonical. An authority on the *Apocrypha*, Roger Beckwith, observes,

When one examines the passages in the early Fathers which are supposed to establish the canonicity of the *Apocrypha*, one finds that some of them are taken from the alternative Greek text of Ezra (1 Esdras) or from additions or appendices to Daniel, Jeremiah or some other canonical book, which... are not really relevant; that others of them are not quotations from the *Apocrypha* at all; and that, of those which are, many do not give any indication that the book is regarded as Scripture.

[Beckwith, 387]

***Epistle of Barnabas* 6.7 and Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 3.22.5, are not quoting Wisd. 2.12 but Isa. 3:10 LXX, and Tertullian, *On the Soul* 15, is not quoting Wisd. 1.6 but Ps. 139.23, as a comparison of the passages shows. Similarly, Justin Martyr,**

***Dialogue with Trypho* 129, is quite clearly not quoting Wisdom but Prov. 8.21-5 LXX. The fact that he calls Proverbs “Wisdom” is in accordance with the common nomenclature of the earlier Fathers. [Beckwith, 427]**

Frequently in references, the fathers were not claiming divine authority for any of the eleven books infallibly canonized by the Council of Trent. Rather, they were citing a well-known piece of Hebrew literature or an informative devotional writing to which they gave no presumption of inspiration by the Holy Spirit.

The Fathers and the Apocrypha. Some individuals in the early church held the *Apocrypha* in high esteem; others were vehemently opposed to them. J. D. N. Kelly’s comment that “for the great majority [of early fathers]... the deuterocanonical writings ranked as scripture in the fullest sense is out of sync with the facts. Athanasius, Cyril of Jerusalem, Origen, and the great Roman Catholic biblical scholar and translator of the Latin Vulgate, Jerome, all opposed inclusion of the *Apocrypha*. In the second century A.D. the Syrian Bible (Peshitta) did not contain the *Apocrypha* (Geisler, *General Introduction*, chs. 27, 28).

Catacomb Art Apocrypha Themes. As many Catholic scholars admit, scenes from the catacombs do not prove the canonicity of the books whose events they depict. Such scenes indicate little more than the religious significance the portrayed events had for early Christians. At best, they show a respect for the books containing these events, not a recognition that they are inspired.

Books in the Greek Manuscripts. None of the great Greek manuscripts (*Aleph*, *A*, and *B*) contain all of the apocryphal books. Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, and Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) are found in all of them, and the oldest manuscripts (*B* or *Vaticanus*) totally exclude the Books of Maccabees. Yet Catholics appeal to this manuscript in support of their view. What is more, no Greek manuscript has the same list of apocryphal books accepted by the Council of Trent (1545-63; Beckwith, 194, 382-83).

Acceptance by Early Councils. These were only local councils and were not binding on the whole church. Local councils often erred in their decisions and were later overruled by the universal church. Some Catholic apologists argue that, even though a council was not ecumenical, its results can be binding if they were confirmed by a Pope. However, they acknowledge that there is no infallible way to know which statements by Popes are infallible. Indeed, they admit that other statements by Popes were even heretical, such as the monothelite heresy of Pope Honorius I (d. 638).

It is also important to remember that these books were not part of the Christian (New Testament period) writings. Hence, they were not under the province of the Christian church to decide. They were the province of the Jewish community which wrote them and which had, centuries before, rejected them as part of the canon.

The books accepted by these Christian Councils may not have been the same ones in each case. Hence, they cannot be used as proof of the exact canon later infallibly proclaimed by the Roman Catholic church in 1546.

Local Councils of Hippo and Carthage in North Africa were influenced by Augustine, the

most significant voice of antiquity who accepted the same apocryphal books later canonized by the Council of Trent. However, Augustine's position is ill-founded: (1) Augustine himself recognized that the Jews did not accept these books as part of their canon (Augustine, 19.36-38). (2) Of Maccabees, Augustine said, "These are held to be canonical, not by the Jews but by the Church, on account of the extreme and wonderful sufferings of certain martyrs" (Augustine, 18.36). On that ground *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* should be in the canon. (3) Augustine was inconsistent, since he rejected books not written by prophets, yet he accepted a book that appears to deny being prophetic (1 Macc. 9:27). (4) Augustine's mistaken acceptance of the *Apocrypha* seems to be connected with his belief in the inspiration of the *Septuagint*, whose later Greek manuscripts contained them. Augustine later acknowledged the superiority of Jerome's Hebrew text over the Septuagint's Greek text. That should have led him to accept the superiority of Jerome's Hebrew canon as well. Jerome utterly rejected the *Apocrypha*.

The later Council of Rome (382) which accepted *Apocryphal* books did not list the same books accepted by Hippo and Carthage. It does not list Baruch, thus listing only six, not seven, of the *Apocrypha* books later pronounced canonical. Even Trent lists it as a separate book (Denzinger, no. 84).

Acceptance by the Orthodox Church. The Greek church has not always accepted the *Apocrypha*, nor is its present position unequivocal. At the synods of Constantinople (1638), Jaffa (1642), and Jerusalem (1672) these books were declared canonical. But even as late as 1839 their Larger Catechism expressly omitted the *Apocrypha* on the grounds that they did not exist in the Hebrew Bible.

Acceptance at the Councils of Florence and Trent. At the Council of Trent (1546) the infallible proclamation was made accepting the *Apocrypha* as part of the inspired Word of God. Some Catholic scholars claim that the earlier Council of Florence (1442) made the same pronouncement. However, this council claimed no infallibility and neither council's decision has any real basis in Jewish history, the New Testament, or early Christian history. Unfortunately, the decision at Trent came a millennium and a half after the books were written and was an obvious polemic against Protestantism. The Council of Florence had proclaimed the *Apocrypha* inspired to bolster the doctrine of Purgatory that had blossomed. However, the manifestations of this belief in the sale of indulgences came to full bloom in Martin Luther's day, and Trent's infallible proclamation of the *Apocrypha* was a clear polemical against Luther's teaching. The official infallible addition of books that support prayers for the dead is highly suspect, coming only a few years after Luther protested this doctrine. It has all the appearance of an attempt to provide infallible support for doctrines that lack a real biblical basis.

Apocryphal Books in Protestant Bibles. *Apocryphal* books appeared in Protestant Bibles prior to the Council of Trent, and were generally placed in a separate section because they were not considered of equal authority. While Anglicans and some other non-Roman Catholic groups have always held a high regard for the inspirational and historical value of the *Apocrypha*, they never consider it inspired and of equal authority with Scripture. Even Roman Catholic scholars through the Reformation period distinguished between

deuterocanon and canon. Cardinal Ximenes made this distinction in his *Complutensian Polyglot* (1514-17) on the very eve of the Reformation. Cardinal Cajetan, who later opposed Luther at Augsburg in 1518, published a *Commentary on All the Authentic Historical Books of the Old Testament* (1532) after the Reformation began which did not contain the *Apocrypha*. Luther spoke against the *Apocrypha* in 1543, including its books at the back of his Bible (Metzger 181f.).

Apocryphal Writings at Qumran. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran included not only the community's Bible (the Old Testament) but their library, with fragments of hundreds of books. Among these were some Old Testament *Apocryphal* books. The fact that no commentaries were found for an *Apocryphal* book, and only canonical books were found in the special parchment and script indicates that the *Apocryphal* books were not viewed as canonical by the Qumran community. Menahem Mansoor lists the following fragments of the *Apocrypha* and *Pseudepigrapha*: Tobit, in Hebrew and Aramaic; *Enoch* in Aramaic; *Jubilees* in Hebrew; *Testament of Levi and Naphtali*, in Aramaic; *Apocryphal Daniel literature*, in Hebrew and Aramaic, and *Psalms of Joshua* (Mansoor, 203). The noted scholar on the Dead Sea Scrolls, Millar Burroughs, concluded: "There is no reason to think that any of these works were venerated as Sacred Scripture" (Burroughs, 178).

The Catholic Arguments in Summary. At best, all that the arguments urged in favor of the canonicity of the apocryphal books prove is that various apocryphal books were given varied degrees of esteem by various persons within the Christian church, usually falling short of claims for the books' canonicity. Only after Augustine and the local councils he dominated pronounced them inspired did they gain wider usage and eventual infallible acceptance by the Roman Catholic church at Trent. This falls far short of the kind of initial, continual, and full recognition among Christian churches of the canonical books of the Protestant Old Testament and Jewish Torah (which exclude the *Apocrypha*). True canonical books were received *immediately* by the people of God into the growing canon of Scripture (see Geisler, *General Introduction*, chap. 13). Any subsequent debate was by those who were not in a position, as was the immediate audience, to know whether they were from an accredited apostle or prophet. Hence, this subsequent debate over the antilegomena was over their *authenticity*, not canonicity. They were already in the canon; some in subsequent generations questioned whether they belonged there. Eventually, all of the antilegomena (books later questioned by some) were retained in the canon. This is not true of the *Apocrypha*, for Protestants reject all of them and even Roman Catholics reject 3 Esdras, 4 Esdras and The Prayer of Manasseh.