Helpful or Harmful? The "Apocrypha" and Evangelical Theology

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SUMMARY

The argument is that the issue of the OT Apocrypha is not an insignificant one. The author lists historical reasons for seeing the canon as fixed in Judaism by the time of Jesus, whatever the state of various and conflicting collections of Greek Old Testament writings. Theological reasons for acknowledging the Hebrew canon include the Church's need to acknowledge what Israel has passed on to her as canonical under God's providence. The content of much of the Apocrypha leaves much to be desired. For all there is continuity of God's providence between the times of the testaments there was also a pause in revelation. The New Testament comes as something new indeed, even if works such as the apocrypha illustrate the context into which God's word was spoken, and can be seen as witness to God's uninterrupted providence.

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ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Der Autor argumentiert, dass die Sache der alttestamentlichen Apokryphen keine unbedeutende ist. Er bringt historische Gründe für die Ansicht, der Kanon sei schon im Judentum zur Zeit Jesu festgelegt gewesen, wie auch immer die Situation um verschiedene und widersprüchliche Sammlungen griechischer alttestamentlicher Schriften gewesen sein mag. Theologische Gründe für die Anerkennung des hebräischen Kanons beinhalten das Bedürfnis der Kirche, das anzuerkennen, was Israel ihr als kanonisch unter Gottes Fürsorge hinterlassen hat. Der Inhalt großer Teile der Apokryphen lässt viel zu wünschen übrig. Bei aller Kontinuität der Fürsorge Gottes in der zwischentestamentlichen Zeit gab es doch auch eine Offenbarungspause. Das Neue Testament kommt als etwas wirklich neues, auch wenn Werke wie die Apokryphen den Kontext illustrieren, in den hinein Gottes Wort gesprochen wurde, und dienen als ununterbrechba Zeugen göttlichen Vorsehungs.

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RÉSUMÉ

Pour H. Blocher, la question du statut des écrits apocryphes de l'Ancien Testament n'est pas sans importance. Il donne une série de raisons historiques qui amènent à considérer qu'au temps de Jésus, le canon avait déjà été fixé dans le judaïsme, et ce, malgré l'existence de collections de textes divergentes et variées dans les traductions grecques de l'Ancien Testament. La reconnaissance de ce que le peuple d'Israël a transmis à l'Église comme canonique, sous le contrôle providentiel de Dieu, constitue l'une des raisons théologiques de s'en tenir au canon hébraïque. Le contenu de bien des apocryphes laisse beaucoup à désirer. Certes, Dieu n'a pas cessé d'exercer son activité providentielle durant la période intertestamentaire, mais une pause a été marquée en cette période pour ce qui concerne la révélation spéciale. Le Nouveau Testament apparaît comme quelque chose de vraiment nouveau, même si des ouvres comme les apocryphes apportent un éclairage utile quant au contexte dans lequel la parole divine a été prononcée et peuvent être considérées comme des témoins du caractère ininterrompu de la providence divine.

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St. John the Seer solemnly warns that God will attach apocalyptic plagues to any one who attaches any addition to the Book and will take away his/her share in the Tree of life from any one who takes away from its words (Rev 22:18f). He thus applies "Ptah hotep's principle," as it is called,[1] the use of curses to dissuade tampering with texts. In many a religious book of the ancient world, authors or

editors appealed to it to protect not so much intellectual property (as do our copyright statements) as sacred substance. St. John was referring to the book of Revelation, but since canonical order bears the stamp of some providential guidance (this can hardly be denied if one believes in Providence), the location of the warning, as a seal at the end of our Bibles, may be felt to be significant. We are *permitted* to extend the reference to the whole of Holy Scripture, as was done very early in the church.[2]

A question then arises from the pews, one of those naïve questions that penetrate deeply: do Catholic Bibles *add* to Scripture, to the Old Testament? Or do Protestant Bibles *subtract* from the same? Catholic Bibles are thicker than Protestant ones! They include additional material. Apart from expansions (of Daniel, Esther, Jeremiah), one can summarize: two wisdom books of ambitious proportions (Ecclesiasticus or "Sirach," Wisdom [of Solomon]); two historical ones (1 and 2 Maccabees); two "stories" with an edifying moral, or, at least, a comforting message for Jews (Tobit, Judith).

They have been a bone of contention for centuries. St. Jerome, the most learned scholar of his time, armed with his rare knowledge of Hebrew, had highlighted the non-canonical status of those books, which he called *apocrypha*.[3] His motto was: "Back to *hebraica veritas*!" At the time of the Reformation, his position was revived.[4] The first to write on the topic was the distinguished scholar Andreas Bodenstein (von) Karlstadt, who had presided (in 1512) over Luther's graduation ceremony and later become one of the Reformer's supporters: in 1520, he again called the books "apocrypha" and denied them a place within the Canon. His view was established as the Protestant and Anglican position. But a few decades earlier, the so-called *Council of Union* at Florence (1441), with delegates from the Eastern church gathered with the Latin churchmen (the attempt at reunion ultimately failed), had affirmed the canonicity of the said books. The *Council of Trent* voted the definitive decree (April 8, 1546). Twenty years later, Sixtus of Siena, a scholarly convert from Judaism, coined the word "deuterocanonical" (Bibliotheca sacra, Venice, 1566), now in current use among Catholics.

The situation remained frozen for 400 years. But ecumenical dialogues, and other factors, have brought significant changes during the last four or five decades. New attitudes, new policies: I have observed in the Bible Societies movement that often Protestants today speak of the "deuterocanonical" books. They may do so out of mere courtesy, but sometimes it sounds as if they were only half conscious of the move they are making. There has been comparatively little discussion, at least *theological* discussion, of the issue – though LXX studies are very much alive, and there has been recently some excitement about a Dead Sea Scroll fragment which, its editors claim, would prove an early date for the threefold division of the Hebrew canon (4 QMMT). The stakes are not negligible for Christians who are concerned for the full and *exclusive* authority of Holy Scripture. It is time that we revisit the disputed question of the Old Testament apocryphal/deuterocanonical books.

Ascertaining historical facts

The way has to be cleared first of a superstructure which was erected for apologetic purposes and always lacked factual foundations: the theory that a different, "Alexandrian," canon had been accepted among the Greek-speaking Jews of Egypt, of Alexandria. These, so the hypothesis ran, had decided on *other* canonical boundaries than their Palestinian, Hebrew or Aramaic-speaking, brothers: the Alexandrians' canon included Wisdom and Ecclesiasticus, Tobit and Judith, etc., which did not find their way into the Hebrew Bible. No scholar of repute, especially since A. C. Sundberg's refutation, upholds the Alexandrian canon conjecture any more[5] – though some, occasionally, slip back into using the phrase.[6] There is not a shred of evidence that Alexandrian Jews, who would regularly attend festivals in Jerusalem and maintained constant exchanges with Judean compatriots, ever dissented from the pronouncements of institutional Judaism on canonicity. Philo, their eminent philosopher, who quotes above a thousand times from the Pentateuch, *never* does so from the Apocrypha. Flavius Josephus, who used first-rate information, affirms the Hebrew canon – and not as something novel – and says nothing of a wider choice by some.

On what basis, or under what pretext, was the idea born? There is one fact: in the earliest complete manuscripts of the old Greek version called "the Septuagint" (LXX), the disputed books are found *together* with those of the Hebrew Bible (translated). Hence, many who dare no longer speak of an "Alexandrian canon" still refer to the "LXX canon" or "Septuagintal plus." But the whole fact must be told, and conclusions drawn carefully. One must first remember that the three manu-

scripts, the Sinaiticus (a) and Vaticanus (B) from the IVth century (AD), and Alexandrinus (A) a little less prestigious, a century later, are *Christian* documents; they are *codices*, which Christians only used while Jews clung to the older "format" of scrolls.[7] Then, not *two* of these codices offer the same books – as one would expect if a different canon had been defined: a does not include Baruch (apocryphal appendix to Jeremiah) but *adds* 4 Maccabees; B does not include any Maccabees, but adds a 3 Esdras; A, a century later, *adds* 3 Esdras, 3 and 4 Maccabees.[8] And a third consideration clinches the matter: when books are found in the great codices, it demonstrates widespread use and a degree of reverence, but not *necessarily* the same status as that of the canonical Scriptures. E. Earle Ellis finds wise words to say: "No two LXX codices contain the same apocrypha, and no uniform LXX 'Bible' was ever the subject of discussion in the patristic church. In view of these facts, the LXX codices appear to have been originally intended more as service books than as a defined and normative canon of Scripture."[9]

Advocates of a canonical recognition of the disputed books, however, have been able to frame a less precarious argument than the untenable Alexandrian hypothesis. It could be called "ecclesiocentric" and relies on historical data from church history. The early church and the ancient church, it is claimed, treasured these books and made a great religious use of them; they were revered as Scriptures; St. Augustine drew much inspiration from the Wisdom of Solomon, and, under his influence, the Council of Carthage (397) voted in favour of the larger canon list. This was also accepted later in the Greek church (Second Council in *Trullo*, 692: Council of Jerusalem, 1672). This choice – first collective and *de facto*, then formally validated by competent authorities in the church – should stand for at least two reasons: the absence of any other fixed canon when Christianity began; the authority that belongs to the church in such a matter. In the time of the apostles, they allege, the Jews had not yet agreed on the precise boundaries of the sacred collection: a process had started, but discussions continued into the second century. Pharisees disagreed with Sadducees and with Essenes on the extent of the canon; after the fall of Jerusalem and within the "Council" of Jamnia (Yavne), they prevailed – but there is no reason why Christians should feel bound by their preferences. In any case (second argument), canonicity is a church matter. A church defines its own identity by designating and setting apart its sacred writings; there is no higher criterion to restrict this prerogative. Voices today, in this our pluralistic age, deny that any choice "should be deemed superior or less valid than others"[19]; the Ethiopian church was free to define itself by the inclusion in its canon of a historical work of the 10th century AD (the work called *Pseudo-Josephus*)! More conservative writers stress the authority of the Great Church, the universal/catholic church, and its majestic continuity through millennia: to that church, the true Israel, the People of God under the care of its shepherds, belongs the authority of canon definition.

Postponing, for the moment, any scrutiny of the more theological elements of the case, the statement of historical fact calls for nuances and complements.

Is it perfectly accurate to paint in glowing colours the reception of the Apocrypha in the ancient church, as if a unanimous canonization had taken place? Witnesses suggest a more variegated picture. Undoubtedly, the Apocrypha were used, especially for moral instruction. Occasionally – but instances are few before Augustine's time – they were introduced with formulas used for Holy Scripture.[11] Roger T. Beckwith observes: "The Apocrypha were known from the start, but the further back one goes, the more rarely are they treated as inspired."[12] With the sole exception of Clement of Alexandria (who had recourse to Tobit, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus), the Fathers exercised a remarkable restraint in their use.[13] Silence may be eloquent: "In the whole Christian literature of the first four centuries, we do not find *any* commentary or homily on these books."[14] The *earliest* Greek commentary on the book of Wisdom was only written in the XIVth century![15] Before the Council of Carthage (which was a regional one, for North Africa only), the Council of Laodicea (c. 360) had excluded the Apocrypha and even forbidden reading from them in the church.[16] All canonical lists prior to Carthage leave out the Apocrypha: so does Melito of Sardis, the "luminary" of the church in Asia Minor, c. 160-170, may have been the first to draw one, unless the list in the document *Hierosolymitanus 54* (which C. C. Torrey would date c. 100 AD) preceded him.[17] Athanasius, in his famous *39th Festal Letter* (367), a weighty pronouncement, calls the Apocrypha "outside" (ἔξωθεν) books, "non canonised" (οὐ κανονιζόμενα).

Some leading figures, and usually the most competent in historical and literary matters, resisted the canonisation of the Apocrypha. After Melito,

Julius Africanus, the Director of the Imperial Library, wrote to Origen to denounce the counterfeit character of the Susanna story.[18] Epiphanius stood on the same side, and, of course, Jerome: what weight is one to attribute, on such an issue, to the opinion of a myriad of illiterate and often superstitious people, against that of one Jerome? Rufinus, a more middle-of-the-road bishop, who attacked Jerome, only called the books "ecclesiastical" and not "canonical." Still later, among those who tried to stem the dominant trend, one can name Gregory the Great (the Pope!) and John Damascene,[19] and in the IXth century, the Patriarch of Constantinople, Nicephoros.[20]

In the Easter Orthodox church no monolithic position has obtained. Apart from the short-lived attempt at Reformation in the XVIIth century, with Patriarch Cyril Lukaris,[21] the Apocrypha have usually been received in Greece and around Greece. However, the Russian church, in the XIXth century, took the opposite side, especially the Patriarch of Moscow in 1836 and 1839 (Plato), and that "filtered into the Greek church";[22] a Report drafted by the Interorthodox Commission in 1973 practically endorsed Luther's position: "[T]hese books are to be distinguished from the canonical and inspired books as regards the authority of their divine inspiration";[23] Hengel's comment may be an overstatement: "[T]hus was rescinded a decision of the Synod of Jerusalem [1672],"[24] but it is enough to show the distance from unanimity, even in *Catholic* christendom.

The stage which the canonical process had reached, within Judaism, in New Testament times, is still a matter of scholarly dispute. Many experts, including Martin Hengel, believe things were not settled before the second, or even third, century AD. In their opinion, canonicity remained fluid and elusive; the works, not a few in that period, that betray the itch to "rewrite" the Bible, to inflate it with imaginative additions, show that pious Jews were not aware of canonical boundaries. On the other hand, high profile specialists of Jewish literature and the LXX adopt a contrary position. They firmly conclude that, in all essentials, the Hebrew canon as we know it – *without* the Apocrypha – had been acknowledged before Christ. So do Roger T. Beckwith in his *magnum opus*[25] and, more recently, Robert Hanhart, whom Hengel greets as "the great Septuagint scholar," and who writes: "Hellenistic Judaism had a relatively well-defined canon of "Holy Scripture" already in the second century BC, which thus preceded the witnesses of the New Testament writings; in the definition of what was to be regarded as "canonical" the foundation is being laid for the later differentiation between "canonical" and 'apocryphal'."[26]

It is wiser not to rely, in support of the latter position, on the fragment 4Q *Miqsat ma'asê hatôrâh* (4Q MMT), which allegedly offers very early evidence of the threefold Hebrew canon (c. 150 BC), for it depends on a precarious reconstruction of the (damaged) text,[27] but Ulrich's minimising comments on the Prologue of Ecclesiasticus are not convincing: they smell of *Tendenz*.[27] On the contrary, Hanhart's interpretation happily espouses the Siracide's wording:[29] in 132 BC, the threefold canon emerges, and Ecclesiasticus puts itself in another category. Hanhart finds a confirmation in the Qumran "Damascus Document," CD 19:7-9, which cites Zechariah 13:7 as Scripture, "as it is written" (הדבר אשר כתוב ביד זכריהו).[30] One may add 4Q 174 with similar import for Daniel.[31] And then, of course, come the explicit statements of Josephus, *Contra Apionem* I.37-42, who affirms the Hebrew canon, and as a legacy of old. It is also known that soon after New Testament times a vigorous rejection of the "external" books (החיצונים) took place, with Rabbi Aqiba depriving of his/her share in the future world whoever would read from them.[32]

The existence of rival canons within Judaism falls short of proof. Experts on the Sadducees rather doubt their having another canon: only *in practice* did they concentrate on the Law and disregard the Prophets and the Writings.[33] Did the Essenes add their own books as components of an enlarged canon? More likely *not* in Beckwith's eyes.[34] A systematic theologian is not required to take sides!

Josephus also witnesses to a remarkable conviction, that seems to have been widely shared by contemporary Jews: the *cessation* of fully authoritative prophecy since the time of Artaxerxes, after Malachi. He writes: "From Artaxerxes until our own time everything has been written down, but the record has not been deemed worthy of the same faith (credit) as the previous [canonical] ones because there has not been an exact succession of the prophets."[35] This sentiment already surfaces in the First book of Maccabees (4:46; 9:17; 14:41), and was later expressed in Talmudic Judaism by the saying: since that time, "the Holy Spirit has deserted Israel."[36] This did not ruled out occasional, lower-rank, prophecy: Josephus himself saved his life through sudden inspiration when he had to surrender to the Romans – he claimed he

had received a prophecy for General Vespasian, which did come true (he became the Emperor). But such outbursts did not cancel a common, though dim, awareness, of a historical change that had occurred, and which may be interpreted in retrospect as a kind of "canonical closure."

Hence the excitement when John the Baptist arose, impersonating a new Elijah! A new age of prophecy was dawning!

Circumscribing Status and Use

The net result of the survey of historical data is the lack of proper evidence to warrant attributing canonical status to the books Jerome called the "Apocrypha": by the end of the first century AD, the authorities of Judaism (in Jerusalem or in the Diaspora) had not manifested any disposition to accept them as Scripture; in the first centuries of the ancient church, despite widespread use, they were not clearly granted equal footing with the Hebrew canon books, and opposition was vocal, coming from the most learned stratum of the Christian community. One argument only may counterpoise this factual consideration: the theological argument on ecclesial competence. *If* it belongs to the church to define the canon of its Bible, the decision the church made is binding: the Apocrypha have become (deutero)canonical, *Roma locuta, causa finita est*.

The argument, of course, begs the question of which institution or body may legitimately claim the title "the church." Are not the churches of the Reformation also the church (and so their daughter, churches, Baptist, Methodist, Pentecostal)? Not to speak of trends prevailing in Easter Orthodox churches... Even apart from this consideration, however, serious theological problems make the grounding of canonical status on church authority a questionable procedure. Deeply repugnant to Christian faith would be the submission of Scripture to the higher power of the church: either in the form of a relativistic downgrading of Revelation to the level of autonomous self-identification, for a given community (the life-giving Word that addresses and creates the church then becomes the word the church chooses to tell itself); or in the more respectable form of such an interpretation of magisterium that the church appears to be the main channel of Revelation, and the scriptural corpus only the first expression of the mind of the church. This would blunt the critical edge of the Sword of the Spirit (Eph 6:17). It would tame to powerlessness the lion-like prophetic Word (Am 3:8).

Whatever problems remain with the claims that are made for the magisterial office, it must be noted that such an interpretation that elevates the church above the Word is not official Roman Catholic doctrine. Yves (Cardinal) Congar stressed the precedence and pre-eminence of the Apostles *vis-à-vis* the church, as the foundation precedes the building.[37] Even the Pope's authority is understood in terms of custodianship, to serve and preserve the Word of God. Concerning the canon of Scripture, it means that the pronouncements of the church count as a *recognition* of a God-given fact: they solemnise the reception of uniquely inspired writings. Yet, within that frame, the claim is put forward and maintained that the church recognised with due competence the boundaries of the Old Testament canon, and the *causa* is *finita*.

The contrary Protestant conviction only requires a few words: the church, being the New Covenant people of God, was not competent in regard to Old Covenant Scriptures. The church (almost all the churches) did acknowledge the books of the New Covenant – not by decision of an ecumenical council but through a large, providentially-secured, consensus. But defining the canon of the Old Testament pertained to the prerogatives and mandates of *Israel's* authorities. These did exercise their prerogative and fulfil their mandate: they left *out* the Apocrypha. The principle is clearly stated in Romans 3:2: *They* were entrusted with the oracles of God, and Paul has in view Jews that reject Jesus as the Christ.

One need not be a dispensationalist to distinguish between economies, the Old and the New. The New is the fulfilment of the Old, the New was latent in the Old, the Old is patent in the New (to use Augustine's play on words), but one should not confuse the two. That the distinction is blurred is the flaw in the well-intentioned refusal of a closed Old Testament canon by M. Hengel (following Hartmut Gese):[38] he is intent to show that Jesus fulfilled the Scriptures, that there is continuity between the Old and the New. Amen! But he disregards the newness of the regime of fulfilment. The intertestamental revelatory "silence" which the Jews themselves sensed and confessed offers a providential sign of the distinction between the Old and the New economies. It is, as it were, a gigantic punctuation mark in God's unfolding plan. The Lord "held his Breath"... To enhance the newness of messianic times, and the excellence, beyond

measure, of Revelation-in-the-Son (Heb 1:2), God did not want canonical books to be written in the intervening centuries.

Nothing in the New Testament points any other way. Though it is clear that the Apocrypha were known and used, they are *never* quoted as Scripture. Jesus upholds the authority of the *scribes and Pharisees* as they occupy Moses' chair (Mat 23:2); defining which writings were Holy Scripture was an essential part of their mandate; a safe conclusion is that our Lord put his stamp of approval on their canon, which we know as the "Hebrew" canon.[39]

Calvin, in his critique of the Decrees of Trent, added the argument of the Apocrypha's manifest inferiority.[40] He quotes, in the same passage, the final comment by the author of 2 Maccabees, who explains that he mixed water with wine: this, Calvin considers, is not "congruent with the majesty of the Holy Spirit." Hengel similarly observes, referring to 2 Maccabees 15:39: "It is also clear that this author had not the most remote notion of publishing his book as a sacred text."[41]

Assessment of quality, above all spiritual quality, is a delicate matter. Who dares to be the arbiter? If I had to choose between chapter 2 of Wisdom and Esther 9, I confess I could vacillate... But, globally, I cannot help feeling Calvin is right, right indeed. There are difficulties we are not able to solve in canonical books, but nowhere in the Hebrew Bible do we find such a topsy-turvy chronology as the book of Judith offers us: in Philip Essley's words:

> We have a seventh century B.C. Assyria, under the rule of a sixth century Chaldean (Babylonian) king, invading a fifth century restored Judah, with an army led by a fourth century Persian general (Holofernes was the Persian general under Artaxerxes III in the successful campaign against Egypt in the fourth century B.C.). In truth, no major attacks were made on Jerusalem while under Persian rule in the fifth and fourth centuries (an unprecedented period of peace for war-weary Canaan).[42]

Tobit teaches, in all seriousness, that the way to put a demon to flight is to burn the liver of a fish – the demon cannot bear the smell (6:16f; 8:2f); and the demon that had killed all seven previous bridegrooms of Sara on the wedding night flew straight from Ecbatana to Upper Egypt (8:3). Sirach (Ecclesiasticus), who has a lot of sanctified commonsense to share, almost ends his book with an all too common expression of racism and ethnic prejudice: "By two nations my soul is angered, and a third is no nation: those who dwell on the Mount of Samaria, and the Philistines, and the foolish people who inhabit Shechem" (50:25f). The writer of Wisdom, who sometimes rises to heights of intelligence and of eloquence, exalts priestly power beyond measure: he ascribes to Aaron (in Numbers 16:41ff) the *subduing* of the God-sent Minister of punishment: the Agent of divine wrath was *frightened* by the majestic vestments and diadem (18:22,25). To say nothing of the prayer for the dead in 2 Maccabees 12:42,45... Maybe, we begin to understand how John Lightfoot, the renowned Hebrew and Talmudic scholar, could denounce, in 1643, "the wretched Apocrypha,"[43] and the Haldane brothers ardently and successfully campaign against the printing of the Apocrypha in Bibles produced by the British and Foreign Bible Society (1825).

Harmful, the Apocrypha? And, yet, the New Testament does know and use them! Hartmut Gese boldly asserts: "One simply cannot – to name only one example – understand John 1 without Sir [Ecclesiasticus] 24."[44] Actually, he somewhat overstates his case, and he could have chosen an even better example. Wisdom 7:22f and 9:1, building upon Proverbs 8:22ff, shed more helpful light on the Λόγος status (personified wisdom, e.g., is said to be μονογενές) and his role in creation, though this light should not overshadow contacts with Greek philosophy and, maybe, the influence of Philo's ideas. As to Ecclesiasticus 24, the most distinct echo I perceive is found later in the Fourth Gospel: Personified Wisdom (in Sir 24) invites "Come unto me" (v. 19a), compares herself with the vine (v. 17), and promises: "Those who eat of me will still be hungry, those who drink of me will still be thirsty" (v. 21, οἱ ἐσθίοντές με ἔτι πεινάσουσιν καὶ οἱ πίνοντές με ἔτι διψήσουσιν): one cannot doubt that Jesus had noticed and pondered these words. His declaration in John 6:35: "He who comes to me shall not (οὐ μὴ) be hungry, and he who believes in me shall not ever be thirsty" sounds as a reply to the apocryphal wisdom book. As he formally reverses the statement, he does not necessarily contradicts the intended meaning of Ecclesiasticus (would have he shown such freedom, however, with a canonical passage?), but he uses the reminiscence as foil and tool for his self-revelation: he has come as the final Mediator, as Wisdom incarnate, to bring about the fullness of God's purposes, and of human destiny. One can find dozens of such reminiscences, with various

degrees of certainty. Luther, therefore, added the Apocrypha to his Bible, not as a part of the canon, but as "good and profitable reading," as helpful rather than harmful. Ignoring the Apocrypha impoverishes our knowledge and interpretation of Scripture. Provided they do not usurp the normative role of canonical books, they offer us a treasure of information we may not despise.

Two main lines may be drawn. First, the Apocrypha provide us with background and contextual information on pre-Christian Judaism which we would gain from no other source. Without it, the sequence of events would often be obscure: without the books of Maccabees (from which also Josephus derived what he wrote), we would be at a loss when reading some chapters in Daniel. Edifying tales and sapiential works highlight how central the Law could be in the Jews' personal religion as well as in their public worship: how passionately they clung to it; how, also, the pride they put in its possession bred contempt for non-Jews and acute nationalistic feelings. We better realise which forces, social, cultural, spiritual, Jesus and his apostles had to engage. The Apocrypha, to be sure, have no exclusive monopoly as witnesses for that period. The Dead Sea finds have enriched our knowledge of intertestamental (or Second Temple) Judaism, especially of its apocalyptic wing, or fringe. But the Apocrypha represent a time-honoured selection; their average quality was deemed superior to that of other comparable literature. It would be unwise to do without them.

The second line may be more controversial. The Apocrypha, I suggest, belong to the *praeparatio evangelica*, the preparation of the Gospel, and, thus, to *Heilsgeschichte*, the history of salvation. They build a bridge, although sometimes a shaky one, between Old Testament revelation and the New Testament. One observes a gap between the contents of Israel's beliefs in Artaxerxes' time and what is assumed (presupposed and taken over) in the New Testament, between the latest writings of the Old canon and that part of Judaism owned by Christian faith. The Apocrypha provide a cross piece: not as continuing revelation would have done – canonical prophecy had ceased – but as a providentially guided and guarded development, as the blossoming and ripening of previous seeds.

An example could be the activity of demons and the role of Satan. They remain shrouded in mystery as far as Old Testament texts go, explicit information is scarce; obviously, the gospels presuppose a much fuller, though still mysterious, demonology; they thus approve of an intertestamental development, of which such a book as Tobit testifies. Another example relates to human constitution. Various hints, in the Old Testament, do suggest a duality, but the polysemy of the mains anthropological terms (נפש בשר) forbids its being very clear, whereas it is a major feature in the New Testament view. The Apocrypha, in between, elaborate the discernment of the duality of inner and outer ἄνθρωπος. (Duality, not dualism – although Wisdom, especially, does betray the influence of Platonic dualism.) Through clarification and expansion of revealed teachings, the Apocrypha are able to prepare New Testament affirmations of afterlife, of rewards beyond, of the intermediate state consisting in conscious bliss, between physical death and final resurrection.

Perhaps the most significant of such benefits is the one relating to Christology. As already appeared, the Prologue of John's Gospel is indebted to Wisdom; the other grand Christological passages, especially Colossians 1:15-20 and Hebrews 1:3, also make use of apocryphal literature: the way it describes divine Wisdom, with increasing personal traits and the major mediatorial role in creation and revelation, was appropriated by the New Testament to "explain" divine sonship. Again, it was no new revelation: it was the amplification, blossoming and ripening of Proverbs 8:22ff – but, as such, it was a providential preparation of the Gospel.

Conjoining Some Theological Reflections

The calling of systematic theology is to think a little farther (or to try to). After the facts have been ascertained and their import evaluated, it adopts a more "meditative" stance. In that mood, as a conclusion and without any technical elaboration, I offer a few thoughts in sketchy form.

A first reflection invites us to consider the risks and chances attending present influences. In this our ecumenical age, conformist pressures may tempt us to abandon our moorings and forget about the *hebraica veritas*. Or, simply, good manners and a worthy desire not to displease others may lead us to speak of "deuterocanonical" books without ever recalling the "obstinate" facts of the case. I hope we can be courteous and brotherly, loving, indeed, and yet resist the trend. The more popular an idea around us, the more vigilant we are called to be – if we are committed to truth, before acceptance and success.

This in no way requires a closed mind! Our

supreme aim should not be to avoid danger: life *is* danger! This life, at least... New trends also open new opportunities. Our present situation allows us to discern that our Protestant fathers may have overreacted against the Catholics' use of the Apocrypha. We rediscover how *helpful* these can be. Open vigilance combined with vigilant openness deserves to count as a general model.

The positive value of the Apocrypha lies first in their contextual function for New Testament writings. It triggers a second reflection on the close ties (the umbilical cord!) that bind word and context. Contextual determination is true of any utterance, though some general statements, e.g. proverbial sayings, only require a quasi universal context. *No word can resound in a pure vacuum.* A word, a speech-act, is a use of language, language as available in context. The Word of God makes use of human language. The Word of God resounds in the world of creation, and providence. The New Testament Word avails itself – the Divine Word avails himself – of the resources afforded by the Apocrypha. I am reluctant to speak here of "incarnation": for fear that the unique and concrete event of the Incarnation be transmuted into an abstract principle; yet, some analogy obtains between the rootedness of word in context and the Personal Word's having come in the flesh.

Balance is critical. If dreaming of a pure Word freed from the bonds of language, and therefore of context, denies the essence of speech and disregards the ways of God's wisdom in Scripture, it is equally ruinous to confuse word with language, speech-act with context. Word, aiming at truth, precedes and transcends language. On the contemporary scene, not a few examples are found of contextual claims oppressing the meaning of words, of language hailed as if it were revelation, of the Word forbidden to be more than the mere echo of surrounding talk. The "contextual fallacy" systematically tames the newness of the New Testament message where it differs from its environment; the Apocrypha become harmful if the freedom of their use by the Divine Word is not acknowledged.

Finally, the mediating role of the Apocrypha, bridging the gap between the Old and the New, raises the issue of time and truth: of time as governed by divine Providence, of truth as known by special revelation. Everlasting firmness and unchanging validity do belong to the connotations of "truth," especially the truth of the Word of God, throughout Scripture (e.g., Psalm 119:160). But this truth about truth never falls a prey to dualism, to the unbiblical dualistic antithesis of time and eternity (conceived of as the opposite of time).

Under the sovereignty of the God One and Trine, *truth* also has a history. 2 Peter 1:12 speaks, literally, of the "the present truth" (ἐν τῇ παρούσῃ ἀληθείᾳ). As the mercies of God are new every morning, his truth, as a living communication of his will, thought and love, has the power of renewing the face it shows. It progressively unfolds its riches through the various stages of God's plan (his kairoi,), and lends itself to apprehension in original ways by successive generations.

This unfolding is not restricted to the central events of special revelation, the infallible, unmixed, Word of God. It is also the more hidden work of Providence, which fulfils the divine purposes by the hands of fallible men – as were the authors of the Apocrypha. The all-embracing scope of the history of truth wards off the other dualism, of general history and culture on the one hand and special revelation, for faith, on the other. In their conjunction, the foundation is laid of the sure hope of ultimate unity. The service fallible Apocrypha, so typical of the surrounding culture, render to the canonical Word of God thus witnesses to the promise of final convergence in fulfilment: the recapitulation of history complete when the glory of divine truth shall fill the earth as the waters fill the sea.

Notes

1 Because it is already found at the end of an Egyptian document from c. 2200 BC, *The Instruction of the Sage Ptah hotep*.

2 In AD 192, by the anonymous orthodox theologian who wrote an anti-Montanist treatise and says, in his preface addressed to the Phrygian bishop Abercius Marcellinus, that he hesitated to undertake the task lest he "might seem to some to be adding to the writings or injunctions of the new covenant of the gospel, to which no one who has chosen to live according to the gospel itself can add and from which he cannot take away" (the allusion to Rev 22:18f is obvious, though the verb "to add", προσθεῖναί, is not the same): the text was preserved by Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, V.xvi.3, and is given in R. Kirsopp Lake's translation in the Loeb Classic Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 19261) p. 473. I was led to it by F.F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL; InterVarsity Press, 1988) p. 22.

3 The term means "hidden" but there was a note of disparagement, as shown by Irenaeus' use in *Adv. Haeres*.I.20,13.1, and Tertullian's in De Pudicitia 10.6.

4 Forerunners included Hugh of St. Victor in the XIIth century (F. F. Bruce, p.99) and John Wycliffe in 1382 (J. C. Turro, "Bible, III. History of the Old Testament Canon," *New Catholic Encyclopedia* [New York...: McGraw-Hill, 1967] vol.II, 391a).

5 Mogens Müller, *The First Bible of the Church. A Plea for the Septuagint* (Copenhagen International Seminar 1/JSOT Supplement series 206; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996) p. 39f; Martin Hengel, *The Septuagint as Christian Scripture. Its Prehistory and the Problem of its Canon*, transl. Mark E. Biddle (Edinburgh & New York: T.&T. Clark, 2002) p. 20 (the assumption "has proved to be a wrong turning"), though he uses the phrase without endorsing the obsolete theory, p. 79: "The 'Alexandrian Canon' – if one wishes to speak of one at all – concentrates on the Pentateuch."

6 Robert Hanhart, whose main thesis is not at all favourable to the theory, can write in his introductory chapter to Hengel's book, p. 3: "The Palestinian canon in the form preserved in the Masoretic tradition was seen as the authentic canon, the other writings transmitted *in the Alexandrian canon* – both those translated from Hebrew or Aramaic and those originally written in Greek – as 'apocryphal'" (italics added). More vaguely, many still talk of "the Greek Bible."

7 Hengel, p. 41; p. 59, he stresses that in all Greek manuscripts of the Psalms that we possess, from the Vth century, the *Magnificat*, *Benedictus* and *Nunc dimittis* are included. Roger T. Beckwith, "The Canon of the Old Testament," in *The Origin of the Bible*, ed. Philip Wesley Comfort (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1992) p. 62, writes: "In the Septuagint manuscripts, the Prophets and Hagiographa have been rearranged by Christian hands in a non-Jewish manner, and the intermingling of Apocrypha there is a Christian phenomenon, not a Jewish."

8 Hengel, p. 57, acknowledges : "But even there the data exhibit such significant differences that one can not yet speak of a truly fixed canon even in this period."

9 *The Old Testament in Early Christianity* (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament I/54; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1991) p. 34f, as quoted by Hengel, p. 57 n.2.

10 Peter W. Flint, "Noncanonical Writings in the Dead Sea Scrolls : Apocrypha, Other Previously Known Writings, Pseudepigrapha," in *The Bible at Qumran. Text, Shape, and Interpretation*, ed. Peter W. Flint (Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001) p.87.

11 Hans-Peter Rüger, however, in his article "Apokryphen des Alten Testaments," *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, ed. Gerhard Krause & Gerhard Müller (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1978) vol. III, 291, goes far beyond the evidence he adduces when he suggests that it was ordinary procedure: his quotations are mostly from parts which could be seen as extensions of canonical books (e.g. Daniel), not from distinct books among the Apocrypha.

12 "The Canon of the Old Testament," p. 62.

13 Hengel, p.60.

14 Eric Junod, in *Le Canon de l'Ancien Testament, sa formation et son histoire*, ed. J.-D. Kaestli & O. Wermelinger (Geneva: Labor & Fides, 1984), p. 118f, with Hengel's approval (apparently), p. 68.

15 Hengel, p. 69.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 65.

17 Junod, p. 111f, 136.

18 Hengel, p. 47f.

19 Turro, *New Cath. Enc.*, II, 390b.

20 Hengel, p. 65.

21 Zachary Gerganos, who had studied in Wittenberg, introduced the "Protestant" view in 1627, according to Turro, II, 390b.

22 Turro, II, 391a; Louis Gaussen, *Le Canon des Saintes Ecritures au double point de vue de la science et de la foi* (Lausanne: Georges Bridel, 1860) vol.II, p. 90-92.

23 Quoted by Hengel, p. 125.

24 *Ibid.*

25 Whose scholarship was praised by the editor of the journal, Abbé Jean Carmignac, "Recension de Roger T. Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church and Its Background in Early Judaism,*" *Revue de Qumran* 12 (1986) 449-453.

26 In his introduction to Hengel's book, p. 2. Hengel's own divergent choice implies the unlikely assumption that the inclusion in the canon of Ecclesiastes, Esther, Song of Songs, and Chronicles, was based on a historical error, p. 91.

27 The devastating force of Eugene Ulrich's critique cannot be denied, "The Non-Attestation of a Tripartite Canon in 4Q MMT," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 65 (2003) 202-214.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 212f.

29 Introduction to Hengel, p. 2.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 4.

31 P. W. Flint, "Non canonical Writings...," p. 116.

32 In the Mishna, *mSanh.* 10.1 (Danby translates: "heretical" books, but explains in his note: books "outside the canon").

33 So James Vanderkam, *From Revelation to Canon: Studies in the Hebrew Bible and Second Temple Literature* (Leiden;: Brill, 2000), as quoted by Eugene Ulrich, "The Bible in the Making: The Scriptures Found at Qumran," in *The Bible at Qumran*, ed. Peter W. Flint, p. 55 n.6, this being the understanding of Sundberg, Marcel Simon.

34 "The Canon," p. 62; *contra* E. Ulrich, "The Bible in the Making," p. 56f (57 n.17: CD 10: 8-10 cites Jubilees 23:11 as authoritative, and the title occurs at CD 16.3-4), and James E. Bowley, "Moses in the Dead Sea Scrolls: Living in the Shadow of God's Anointed," p. 175 (*Apocryphon of Moses C* quoted by 4Q 377 2 ii 5), in *The Bible at Qumran, op. cit.*

35 *Contra Apionem* I.41: Ἀπὸ δὲ Ἀρταξέρξου μέχρι τοῦ καθ' ἡμᾶς χρόνου γέγραπται μὲν ἕκαστά πίστεως δ' οὐχ ὁμοίας ἠξίωται τοῖς πρὸ αὐτῶν διὰ τὸ μὴ γενέσθαι τὴν τῶν προφητῶν ἀκριβῆ διαδοχήν

36 E.g. *bSoṭa* 13.2, cf. Rüger, 290.

37 His article "Inspiration des Ecritures canoniques et apostolicité de l'Eglise," *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques* 45 (1961) 32-42, was critical of Karl Rahner's proposed views.

38 Hengel, p. 126.

39 Traditionally Luke 24:44 is taken to reflect the threefold Hebrew canon (the "Psalms" standing for the third part of which they are the most important book); the Prologue of Ecclesiasticus (as expounded by Hanhart) and the testimony of Josephus render this reading quite likely. Matthew 23:35 ...ni-larly supposed to witness to the Hebrew ...ng of books: the murder of Zechariah, reco... ...in 2 Chronicles 24:20-22, is *last* in the ord... ...ne Hebrew canon, with Chronicles at the end.

40 "Les Actes du Concile de Trente," avec le ...de contre le poison, in *Recueil des Opuscules, c'e... ...re, Petits Traictez de M. Iean Calvin* (Geneva: ...te Pinereul, 1566) p. 916.

41 Hengel, p. 94 n.50.

42 Letter published by the *Bible Review* 18/... ...ne 2002) 6.

43 According to Turro, 391a.

44 *Alttestamentliche Studien* (Tübingen, 199... ...7, as quoted by Hengel, .p. 110.