

Christ the Lord Episcopal Church
Bible Study The Apocrypha
Session 2

Protestant Objection to the Apocrypha

During the time of the reformation the principle of “*sola Scriptura*” meaning Scripture alone and not church tradition was to be the source for all doctrine motivated a new look at the Apocrypha’s canonical status.

Questionable practices per the reformation leading to the controversy are:

Tobit 4:7-11 offers the practices that state charitable acts can contribute to a treasury of merits which one could use in the future - in the future particularly before the judgment seat of God.

Maccabees 12: 43- 45 offers practices of praying and offering Masses to secure forgiveness and salvation for those who died with sins on their consciences. Although not technically supported it can seem to support the doctrine of purgatory.

Andreas Bodenstein (Karlstadt) and Wycliffe in a prologue to the English translation of the Vulgate make a distinction between books to use as a basis for doctrine and books for moral instruction.

Karlstadt promoted “censoring with a knife” Baruch 1 and Esdras 1 and 2 along with the additions to Daniel.

Martin Luther was more positive and notably translated the Apocrypha in his German Bible. It was his innovation to move the disputed books to a section between the Testaments. Luther states “These are books that, though not esteemed like the holy Scriptures, are still both useful and good to read.”

The Swiss Reformers were less enthusiastic. Ulrich Zwingli in the preface to the 1531 Zurich Bible, John Calvin in the preface to the 1546 Geneva Bible and the framers of the Zurich Confession in 1545 affirmed the Apocrypha to be useful and fruitful for Christians to read *as long as the contents were interpreted in line with the already canonical Scriptures*.

For the English Reformers the sixth article of the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion, or the fifth article in Thomas Cranmer’s original draft of the Forty-Two Articles of Religion lists the books of the Old and New Testaments, then commends the qualified use of the

Apocrypha feeling *their use to be read for an example of life and instruction of manners, but need not apply them for any doctrine.*

In response to the Reformers, at the Catholic Church Council of Trent in 1546 they reaffirmed the Council of Florence in 1442 ruling the Apocrypha as canonical. They began using the reference of “*deuterocanonical books*” putting an end to the Roman Catholic Church debate.

After the Catholic church moved to acceptance of these books the Protestants and especially Calvin became more negative. At the Westminster Confession in 1646 it was decided that the Apocrypha does not contain any “Divine inspiration.”

Interestingly enough, it was not an issue to contain the Apocrypha in the King James Version, however the problem came down to printing costs and in the proper use of funds for evangelism. The Foreign Missionary Society of Britain pushed for the use of their funds to be used for scripture and scripture alone. This began the omission of the Apocrypha in many printed versions of the Bible except in the Anglican and Lutheran traditions which still use the books for lectionaries and special services. The lack of use turned the texts toward greater suspicion and polarization.

For Eastern Orthodox churches at the Trullan Council in 692 showed an unwillingness to impose a decision about the status of the Apocrypha. They accepted them to be read and some considered them to be canonical while others did not and either decision was considered acceptable. Modern Greek Orthodox churches view the books as canonical.

For the Anglican Communion, readings from Baruch, Ben Sira and Wisdom of Solomon still appear in the Sunday and daily lectionaries as well as in the lists of readings for funeral and weddings. Some of the works appear in Morning Prayer.

The Apocrypha is not represented in the Revised Common Lectionary used by United Methodists, Presbyterians and Lutherans at this time although the Oxford Movement pushed for the renewal of the appreciation for the Catholic church’s heritage. For evangelicals who focus on scripture alone for salvation there are no traces left of the Apocrypha in their Bibles or Scriptural preaching.

As appreciated by those traditions accepting of the Apocrypha, they feel “Many of the ethical ideals taken up by Jesus and his disciples and promoted in the New Testament find their roots here and so are reinforced and strengthened by the reading of them.”

* * *Introducing the Apocrypha: Message, Context and Significance*, David A. deSilva, Baker Academic, 2nd edition 2018.