

PROTESTANT ASSERTION OF 'APOCRYPHA'

The following charge, set out in question and answer format, appears in a book defending and promoting Protestantism published in 2003—

DID THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH ADD BOOKS TO THE JEWISH OLD TESTAMENT?

Yes. These books, known as the Apocrypha, were written between 250 BC and 150 AD. They were written by Jews about Jewish history and beliefs in the intertestamental (sic) times, but they did not claim to be inspired, nor did Judaism ever accept them as inspired. Nevertheless, Roman Catholic officials added eleven of these apocryphal books to the Bible by an alleged infallible proclamation of the Council of Trent (AD 1546).

This adding of apocryphal books is rejected by Protestants because—

- * these books do not claim to be inspired.
- * they were not written by prophets.
- * they were not confirmed by miracles.
- * they contain no new supernatural prophecies.
- * they contain false teachings and errors.
- * they were never accepted by Judaism as inspired.
- * they are never quoted as Scripture in the New Testament.
- * Jesus accepted and confirmed the Jewish canon, which was called the Law and the Prophets (Matthew 5: 17-18; Luke 24: 27).
- * they were rejected by most major church fathers in the early church, including the great Roman Catholic biblical scholar Jerome.
- * the grounds on which Roman Catholics accepted them was faulty—claiming Christian usage rather than their being written by a prophet or apostle as the reason (see John 14: 26; 16: 13; Ephesians 2: 20; Hebrews 1: 1; 2: 3-4).

Source: *Who Made God? And answers to over 100 other tough questions of faith*, eds. Ravi Zacharias, Norman Geisler, (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2003), p. 142

Catholics should realise the truth of the Catholic Church's position on the issue and understand the folly of the Protestant imposition. In what follows we have drawn extensively on *The Authenticity of the Sacred Scriptures* by Cornelius Hagerty CSC (Houston, Lumen Christi Press, 1969)

Preliminary

The term 'apocrypha' (meaning 'of doubtful authenticity') is erroneously applied to certain books in the Jewish canon of sacred scripture. The argument presupposes, in each of its elements, the Protestant principle that the authority of the Bible is to be found in the Bible itself.

The argument presupposes another principle, namely, that the Catholic Church is no different to other religious bodies in being human and fallible. It presupposes a third principle, a philosophical one, which owes its provenance to Luther's rejection of God's authority in favour of his own, the intellectual vice of subjectivism which holds that truth is determined by human opinion.

The Bible's Divine Inspiration

The Bible's authority as divinely inspired comes from God. He pronounced it so via the entity He had established on earth, His Church, constituted of His Apostles and disciples. Of these He said,

"He who hears you hears me; he who despises you despises me and despises Him who sent me". [Luke 10: 16]

Of this entity Christ appointed Simon Peter the earthly head, calling him the rock on which He would build His Church and spelling out the ambit of his authority:

"I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven... Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth, it shall be bound also in heaven..." [Matthew 16: 18, 19]

It was Peter, in the person of his successor Pope Damasus, who first determined that the books listed in the Bible were divinely inspired. Pope Damasus's determination was confirmed by the popes who followed him endorsing views expressed by Church councils.

The Protestant argument that the books of the Bible are divinely inspired derives from reports in them of miraculous events confuses content with authorisation.¹ In his *Jewish Antiquities* Flavius Josephus, the Jewish historian who wrote for the Romans, reports that after he was crucified Jesus appeared to those who loved him "alive again on the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things", but no Protestant would argue that the historian's writings should be regarded as divinely inspired. Flawed likewise is the argument that in order for them to be so, the books must contain a claim to be divinely inspired. Their authors, or the subjects who are speaking in them, rarely made such a claim.

If *per impossibile* the Bible was sufficient in itself to justify the claim it is divinely inspired, one would expect it to contain a list of the inspired books. Nowhere among them is there found such a list.

At root the refusal to acknowledge God's indication of their inspiration through the Church He founded for man's salvation arises from the refusal to acknowledge His Church and the authority Christ gave to Peter. At any price, *even to embracing the folly of rejecting Christ's clearest possible words*, Protestants must support the rebellion of Martin Luther and Henry Tudor (King Henry VIII).

¹ While it is true that the books of the Bible, of both the Old and the New Testaments, contain accounts of miracles, and (true also) that a visible action which can only be divine evidences an invisibly inspired teacher of truth (*Summa Contra Gentiles* I, ch. 6, 4), this is not proof that the accounts of them are divinely inspired.

The claim the Roman Catholic Church added books to the Jewish Old Testament

The assertion reveals a shallow understanding of Jewish history. The Jewish canon comprised not only the books of the Law and the Prophets but books of Writings, the Kethubim, the last of which, the two Books of the *Machabees*, told of the struggles of the Jews against the edict of the Seleucid king Antiochus IV Epiphanes (215 - 164 BC) forbidding the practice of the Jewish religion. Many of these books were read in Jewish ceremonies during the 200 years before Christ came on earth. Josephus asserts that the Jews had a collection of sacred books which he numbered at twenty two. The apparent discrepancy between the twenty four the Jews acknowledged and his numbering is explained by the inclusion of the Book of Ruth with Josue and Lamentations as one with Jeremiah.

Two influences operated among the Jews following the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 AD and the dispersion of their race. These occurred at about the time of the Jewish Council of Jamnia in 90 AD.

The first arose out of their concern for the loss of oral tradition. The Hebrew texts were written with consonants only, vowels omitted, punctuation or spaces between words or sentences likewise omitted. (There was no printed text: each was written by hand on an appropriate material, parchment, i.e., skins of sheep or calves, or papyrus.) Each generation of Jewish rabbis, priests and scribes had to learn to read the handwritten text by listening to their elders; in other words, by oral tradition. The Jews feared that the traditional pronunciation of Hebrew words was in danger of being lost. They decided that a fence, or *massora*, should be built around the texts of the Jewish scriptures to preserve them. The *Massoretes*, those charged with the task of preserving them, invented vowel points and other indicators in the written texts to show how the words should be pronounced.

The second was the result of the action of a section of the Jewish priesthood comprised of Scribes and Pharisees whose members decided unilaterally at that Council that no book written outside of the Holy Land or after the time of Esdras (480 – 440 BC) belonged among the scriptures inspired by God. Max Margolis in his *Hebrew Scriptures in the Making* (Philadelphia, 1922 – Jewish Publication Society) reports:

“That body of near scriptural writings... was resolutely pushed aside... at the memorable session at Jabneh... where Gamaliel was deposed and Eleazor ben Azariah made head of the school... The closing of the canon by the excluding [of those books] was the work of Pharisaism triumphant.” (pp. 87-91)²

And we know what Christ’s attitude was to the scribes and Pharisees who “shut the kingdom of heaven against men” and “prevent those who would enter the kingdom of heaven from entering” (*Matthew 23: 13 et seq.*)!

Whatever authority the Jews had from God as His chosen people expired with their rejection of His Son, Jesus Christ, the Messiah so long promised when they engineered His death at the hands of the Romans. With that event the covenant God had with the Jews came to an end

² Quoted in Hagerty, *The Authenticity of the Sacred Scriptures*, op. cit., p. 113

signified dramatically with the rending of the veil of the Temple from top to bottom on His death (*Matthew 27: 51*). The testimony of St Paul at the very opening of his *Letter to the Hebrews* exposes the reality:

“In many and various ways in times past God spoke to our fathers through the prophets but now He has spoken to us through His Son whom He has appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the world...”

Hence the Jews at Jamnia in 90 AD no longer spoke with Divine inspiration. They had long since lost the authority to speak on God’s behalf.

When was the canon of Sacred Scripture established?

The Protestant position is grounded in a tacit assertion that this occurred at the time of the Death, Resurrection and Ascension into heaven of Christ. *It did not*. No formal listing of the books that constitute the Old or the New Testaments took place until some 360 years later.

Until then Christians relied on the preaching and practice of the Apostles and the bishops and priests ordained by them as their successors. That is, they did not follow a written text, or a collection of written texts, save as these were held to be consonant with the sacred tradition conveyed to them by Christ Himself under the guidance and inspiration of the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity, the Holy Spirit [*John 14: 15; Luke 24: 49*]. Insofar as they had recourse to the books of the Jewish canon the rendition used universally was that labelled the *Septuagint*.

In the third century BC, according to legend based on a letter of Aristeas, Ptolemy Philadelphus (285-247 BC), son of Ptolemy I, the Macedonian Greek General of Alexander the Great who founded the Ptolemaic kingdom after Alexander’s death, desired a Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures for his library. He sent an embassy to Jerusalem. Not only was a copy of the Hebrew scriptures given him by Eleazer, the Jewish high priest, but seventy scholars versed in Hebrew and Greek were sent to translate them, whence the eponymous title of the text they produced.

In the *Septuagint* there were seven books which later, at their Council of Jamnia, the Jews moved to exclude: Tobias, Judith, Baruch (including Jeremias), Wisdom, Sirach (Ecclesiasticus), Machabees I and II, parts of the book of Esther and of that of Daniel. There was nothing in these books that the Jews had considered heretical.

First Appearance of the Canon of Sacred Scripture

The canon of Sacred Scripture was not determined in the year 1546 as is asserted by Geisler. It was decreed in the year 382 AD by Pope Damasus at the *Council of Rome*, as anyone may discover who searches the Catholic Church’s historical records. [Cf. Denzinger, *Sources of Catholic Dogma*, at paragraph 84, Dz. 84]. Here are its terms:

The order of the Old Testament begins here:

Genesis one book

Exodus one book

Deuteronomy one book
Josue Nave one book
Judges one book
Ruth one book
Kings four books
Paralipomenon two books
Psalms one book
Solomon three books
Proverbs one book
Ecclesiastes one book
Canticle of Canticles one book
Wisdom one book
Ecclesiasticus one book.

Likewise the order of the Prophets.

Isaias one book
Jeremias one book with Ginoth (that is, with his Lamentations)
Ezechiel one book
Daniel one book
Osee one book
Micheas one book
Joel one book
Abdias one book
Jonas one book
Nahum one book
Habacuc one book
Sophonias one book
Aggeus one book
Zacharias one book
Malachias one book.

Likewise the order of the histories.

Job one book
Tobias one book
Esdras two books
Esther one book
Judith one book
Machabees two books.

Likewise the order of the writings of the New and eternal testament which the holy and Catholic Church supports...

[Mention of the later is omitted as not germane to the present argument save to say that the list included the epistle of James the Apostle, yet another book Luther thought it appropriate to exclude from the canon of Sacred Scripture.]

Eleven years later, under the influence of St Augustine of Hippo, the *Council of Carthage* (393 AD) canonised this list. [Dz. 92] In 405 AD in a letter to Bishop Exuperius Pope Innocent I endorsed it. [Dz. 96] In 692 AD the Eastern Church at the *Council of Trullo* adopted the ruling canon of the Council of Carthage.

And so things remained throughout the Christian world for the best part of 700 years.

At the *Council of Florence* [1431-1447] in his decree for the Jacobites Pope Eugenius IV repeated the scriptural canon. After the revolt of Martin Luther, in 1546 the Catholic Church in the ecumenical *Council of Trent*, confirmed what it had taught for 1,100 years when the bishops attending endorsed the canon first uttered by Pope Damasus and declared all the books of the Latin Vulgate edition of the Bible to be inspired by God and canonical. [Dz. 784, 785] The *Council of Trent* did more: it confirmed the sacred tradition promised before through the prophets and first promulgated by Jesus Christ the Son of God which He commanded to be preached by His apostles to every creature as the source of every saving truth and of instruction in morals [*Matthew* 28: 19; *Mark* 16: 15], and held anew that this truth and instruction are contained in the written books and in the unwritten traditions received by the apostles from the mouth of Christ Himself. [Dz. 783]

In 1870 the declaration of the *Council of Trent* as to the sources of God's revelation and the enumeration of the books of the Old and New Testaments with all their parts set out in the Latin Vulgate are to be held as sacred and canonical was confirmed by the (first) *Vatican Council*. [Dz. 1787]

The Catholic Church & Protestantism

Every earthly religion save one derives from men and has a man as its head. One only derives from God, has God as its head *and claims God as its head*, the Catholic Church. That head is Jesus Christ, Second Person of the Blessed Trinity become man. The Pope is NOT the head of the Catholic Church but Christ's Vicar, the one who stands in His place on earth.

The claim that it is of God is reflected in the history of its continuance over twenty centuries against the greatest vicissitudes, not the least of them precipitated by the failures of its own members, among which the revolt of the original Protestants is one of the more notable. These were renegade Catholics, Catholics who forsook the baptismal vows each had taken to serve God as He had ordained in the Church He had established, and to offer, or join in offering daily, in its sacramental representation the eternal sacrifice which Jesus Christ offered on Calvary for the living and the dead, the holy sacrifice of the Mass.

Accordingly, each of the ten propositions in the article quoted above is erroneous:

The books did not claim to be inspired. There was no need for them to be.

The books were not written by prophets. They did not need to be.

What they contain was not confirmed by miracles. They did not need to be.

They contain no new supernatural (sic) prophecies. They did not need to.

They contain false teachings and errors. They do not.
They were never accepted by Judaism as inspired. They were.
They are never quoted as Scripture in the New Testament. It was not essential they should be.
Jesus accepted and confirmed the Jewish canon, called the Law and the Prophets. He referred to part of it relevant to His argument. He did not cite it all.
They were rejected by most major Church Fathers, including St Jerome. They were rejected by some of the Fathers, not by all. The majority adopted them. Neither St Jerome nor the Fathers who rejected them were infallible on this point.
The grounds for Catholics accepting them was (sic) faulty. They were not.

It is remarkable that Protestants, so antagonistic to assertions that the Catholic Church and the Pope possess the charism of infallibility when teaching in faith and morals should claim infallibility on the part of the Jewish Council of Jamnia as to what constituted the inspired content of the Jewish scriptures; that they should claim infallibility for St Jerome when he seemed to agree with its determinations.

The Protestant argument involves the utterly irrational, and blasphemous, claim that the true ambit of God's revelation to mankind did not appear until fifteen centuries after Christ had died; and that, until Luther's rebellion, God His Church had systematically misled mankind, a claim that mocks God to his face and condemns His salvific will.

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January 29th, 2024 — *St Francis de Sales*

Postscript

It is enlightening to see how Protestant principle is reflected in the attitudes of modern science. Protestant principle prevents its adherents looking outside its subject, the Bible, to discover its authority. It can only look within. Modern science refuses to look outside its subject—the atom, light, gravity, etc.—to discover its authority. *It can only look within.* At the heart of each is a refusal to consider any extrinsic cause – and there are two, final cause and efficient cause – which ultimately reduce to God. Thus has theological error generated philosophical error.
