

Siegfried Meurer (ed), *The Apocrypha in Ecumenical Perspective* (United Bible Societies; Reading/New York 1991) XIII. 224 pp.

The present reviewer does not recall having come across an adequate appreciation of this monograph, the sixth in a series published by the United Bible Societies. And yet with this volume UBS offers the Churches, professors in theological institutes and faculties, as well as to experts of the history of the canon sterling service. The book originated as a German publication addressed mainly to general secretaries and board members of the several "deutschen Bibelgesellschaften". It was meant to furnish this select readership with "factual information and a presentation of current views" on "the question of the Apocrypha" (Meurer's Forward on p. viii). "The issues addressed in this book are of such importance to the Bible Societies and Christians that it was felt important to translate the articles into English so that the book could be read by a wider audience than was possible with the German edition" (Forward to the English Edition by Philip C. Stine, editor of the UBS Monograph Series, p. xiii). The translation was carried out by Dr. Paul Ellingworth of Aberdeen University.

This volume is an anthology of essays, the greater part reviewing the position of the Apocrypha (Deuterocanonicals for the Catholic

tradition) within the various traditions. This is one of the main strengths of this publication: that in merely 230 pages you have a serene, factual, informed and respectful account of how each Christian tradition values, reveres, employs and publishes a handful of 'writings' which Jewish tradition had judged as being 'extracanonical'. One would probably do best to start the perusal of this collection of studies with the penultimate by the late Hans Peter Rieger, "The Extent of the Old Testament Canon", (pp. 151-169) which was originally meant to close the set with a resumé. Rieger's contribution is essential for understanding not merely the variety of biblical canons (for both Old and New Testaments) but also the differing nuances in the concepts 'deuterocanonical writings' and 'apocrypha' (cfr p. 152).

Once Rieger's article is read, one may follow the order chosen by the editors. After Meurer's forward, explanatory of the volume *raison d'être*, and Stine's preface to this English edition explaining the adaptations of the first German version to an English context (p. xiii), comes the first contribution by the Tübingen New Testament Professor Peter Stuhlmacher who examines "the significance of the Old Testament Apocrypha and pseudepigrapha for the understanding of Jesus and Christology" (pp. 1-15). His study fits the framework of contemporary historical research on the

formation and closure of the Old Testament canon, which holds that "the early Church received the Holy Scriptures from early Judaism at a time when both the relative status of the Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek bible text, and the third part of the Old Testament canon, were still open questions" (p. 12). In his discussion on the significance of extracanonical literature for the reconstruction of the Church's Christology, Stuhlmacher focuses on the Son of Man tradition and on that of wisdom.

Stuhlmacher's essay is followed by a series of studies on the fate of the Apocrypha/Deuterocanonicals within the various traditions. (Not all traditions are discussed separately). Each study merits to be read on its own. Elias Oikonomos, Professor of Old Testament at the (Greek Orthodox) Theological Faculty in Athens, examines the significance of the Deuterocanonicals within Orthodoxy (pp. 16-32) [It's a pity that for texts from Church Fathers, so central to his contribution, are quoted only the *Bibliothèque Ellenion Pateron kai Ekklesistikon Syggrafeon* (Athens) and not the more commonly cited *Patrologia Graeca* (PG) and *Patrologia Latina* (PL)] Josef Stendebach, Honorary Professor of Old Testament at another German University, the University of Frankfurt am Main, develops the Catholic Theology that the Deuterocanonicals form part of the Church's Old Testament; he focuses

rather on the relevance of the Old Testament for the Church (pp. 33-45). Klaus Dietrich Fricke's long article (pp. 46-87) on the Apocrypha in the Luther Bible offers useful historical information on Martin Luther's decision both to distinguish the "apocrypha" from the canonical writings, and to constantly include them as a separate collection in his editions of the Bible, "because (they are) useful and good to read".

Identical treatment of the Apocrypha (on the one hand they are separated from the canonicals, on the other included as a distinguished set within the editions of Scripture) is given by the Reform Churches as can be seen from Wilhelm H. Neuser's contribution on pp. 88-115. It was within the Anglican Communion that the Bibles without the Apocrypha began to appear; this development occurred under the influence of Puritanism. We owe this information in the volume to Professor Owen Chadwick of Cambridge University as he discusses how the Anglican Church considered the Apocrypha (pp. 116-128). Hans-Harold Mallau's short essay reviews the attitude of Baptists to these books, concentrating mainly on German Baptists; in his survey Mallau confirms "the historical observation that for German Baptists the problem of the Apocrypha has not become controversial." The unified Baptist understanding of the canon allows free use of these writings, even

though for them “Holy Scripture alone is the binding norm, and that the deuterocanonical writings as Apocrypha do not belong to normative Holy Scripture” (pp. 132.130).

Wilhelm Gundert’s analysis (pp. 134-150) of the contribution of Bible Societies to the distribution of Scriptures without the Deuterocanonicals is extremely telling how dogmatics at times imposes itself upon very ancient traditions through pragmatic strategies (such as, distribution policies). Following Hans Peter Rüger’s essay, already reviewed, we find a rather long contribution by Jack P. Lewis. Lewis was originally asked to contribute a chapter to his second edition of the book in order to cover the attitudes towards the Apocrypha nurtured by the American Bible Society (see Stine’s forward on p. xiii). But to the survey entitled “The Apocrypha in America (pp. 161-166) Lewis adds a detailed though global review of the *status quaestionis* within academia. Readers should peruse this account without hurry.

Taking the leadership of Bible Societies as the nucleus of the targeted readership of the monograph, the editors thought fit to reproduce the 1987 revised edition of the “Guidelines for Interconfessional Cooperation in Translating the Bible”, originally published in 1968 by the United Bible Societies in collaboration with the Catholic Church’s “Secretariat for

Promoting Christian Unity” (pp. 208-220). These Guidelines formed the framework for many joint projects between the UBS and Catholic organisations since then. The text of the Guidelines is followed by the Glossary of Abbreviations (pp. 221-223) and a succinct presentation of the contributors (What about Paul Ellingworth?)

One cannot review this monograph without expressing approval for the decision to publish it, for the spirit in which all essays were written, and for the solidity of its contents. In view of an eventual re-edition one may point out the occasional slips of proof readers (‘Semitic’ not ‘Semantic’ on p. 168; ‘in America’ written twice on p. 163), the difficulty experienced by readers in having to run to and fro in the book because the notes are made to follow the text of each essay, and the quandary of professors and researchers in finding some of the citations taken not from international standard reference works. But the book does offer a good service not only to the ‘Bible Cause’ but also to the Churches’ understanding of themselves and of sister Churches in their relationship to the Written Word of God.

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