

philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University • Loyola Heights, Quezon City • 1108 Philippines

Towards a Common Bible

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Philippine Studies vol. 7, no. 4 (1959): 483–484

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Fri June 30 13:30:20 2008

Towards a Common Bible

Christian unity has become a preoccupying subject of thought for both Catholics and Protestants in recent times. The Roman Pontiffs have always been agonizingly aware of the gaping rents left in the body of Christendom by the severance from Rome of the Orthodox and Protestant churches. Repeated efforts to effect a reunion have had little success. But the efforts will continue. The present Holy Father has already announced that the problem of unity will rank high on the agenda of the Ecumenical Council which he intends to convoke in 1961 or 1962.

Protestants too have become self-consciously uneasy about the many-splintered thing their form of Christianity has become. The World Council of Churches has convened inter-denominational congresses to discuss ways and means of restoring some semblance of visible oneness to what according to their own tenets should be the Body of Christ. Consciences are bothered by the seeming inefficacy of our Lord's prayer at the last supper that His followers might be one, as He and the Father are One.

It has been suggested that an initial, practical step towards mutual understanding and closer communion between Catholics and Protestants might be the publication by a board of competent scholars of an edition of the Bible which would be acceptable to both religious groups. At present, each group has its own authorized versions, and Catholics are not permitted to read editions of the Bible published by Protestants. This restriction at times causes surprise, and an annoyed questioner may ask: Why not? Is there any difference between a Catholic and a Protestant Bible?

The most substantial as well as the most obvious difference is that Protestants omit from the Old Testament a total of seven books which are included in Catholic Bibles. The seven controverted books, Tobias, Judith, Ecclesiasticus, Wisdom, Baruch, I and II Maccabees, are called *apocrypha* by Protestants, and deuterocanonical books by Catholics.

Protestant scholars in recent years have shown a renewed interest in these so-called *apocrypha* and there has been a not unopposed trend to incorporate them once again into editions of the Bible prepared and published under Protestant auspices. The *Revised Standard Version* which since 1952 has enjoyed a phenomenal, multi-million-copy sale, was first published in an edition which excluded the seven books. Now however, another edition of the same work is available which includes them: the *Revised Standard Version and Apocrypha*.

This trend had started even before the last war. Some forty years ago the University of Chicago Press published a translation of

the Scriptures made by a group of Protestant scholars headed by J. M. Powis Smith and Edgar J. Goodspeed. It was entitled *The Bible, An American Translation*, and did not contain the *apocrypha*. However, in 1939, another edition appeared bearing the significant title *The Complete Bible, An American Translation*, which did contain them. In his preface to the section containing the *apocrypha*, Goodspeed points out that these books had always formed part of the traditional Christian Bible, and that it is only since 1827 that British and American Bible Societies have been omitting them.

The trend to put the deuterocanonical books back into their printed editions of the Scriptures does not mean however, that Protestants are beginning to accept them as part of the Bible in the same sense as Catholics do. For Catholics the seven books are inspired and canonical. Protestants resolutely deny both their inspiration and canonicity, and continue to regard them as *apocrypha*.

Nevertheless, the signs are encouraging.

The restoration of the so-called *apocrypha* to the Christian Bible may facilitate the publication of an edition which would be acceptable to both Protestants and Catholics alike; and that in turn might prove to be an initial, practical step towards the realization of the much-discussed and ardently desired Christian unity.

J. J. KAVANAGH, S.J.

The Margin Act

These comments will be confined to the immediate effects which can be expected to follow upon the law authorizing the Central Bank to establish a margin of not more than 40 per cent on sales of gold and foreign exchange for the purpose — as stated in the act — of curtailing “excessive demand upon the international reserve.”

The problem underlined by this act is our chronic shortage of foreign exchange. The problem might conceivably be solved in two ways. First, we might attempt to get more foreign exchange: earn it, borrow it or attract it in the form of foreign investment. Second, we might try to use fewer dollars. This act follows the second line of endeavor rather than the first.

The law gives producers for export no new incentive to earn more foreign exchange. It still requires them to sell whatever dollars they earn at the sacrificial rate of 2 to 1.

Nor does the law strengthen our chances of getting large international loans. Under the imaginative direction of the Swedish banker, Per Jacobsson, the International Monetary Fund stands ready to re-