

After recovering from the lack of sleep since the debate, including an extra long drive home to Michigan, I thought it would be good to post a few reflections on my participation in the *Great Debate IX* on the Deuterocanon.

First and foremost, I thought that Dr. James White was a gentleman and a scholar. This doesn't mean that there weren't times where we were both terse, but there were no personal attacks or slights of any sort. It was a debate that for the most part personalities were kept as much in the background, which was easy for me since I don't have a personality.

As for the debate proper, James did a sporting job defending his position. Unfortunately, the position he addressed in his opening comments and subsequent questioning was not that of the resolution of the debate (i.e. "the deuterocanon [apocrypha] is Scripture") but the infallibility of the Church with particular emphasis on supposed papal and councilor contradicts in the middle ages. Here, I think, James would have done a far better job had he relied on Rodger Beckwith's *Old Testament Canon In the New Testament Church* (which he did in his debate with Jerry Matatics on the same topic) rather than incorporating William Webster's material on the canon, which James apparently accepted uncritically.

This was made known in the cross-examination period when both speakers are free to ask any question they desired. James' questions were based largely upon Webster's book and even though they were not *ad rem* to the resolution of the debate, I nevertheless was obliged to respond. Such questions as Cardinal Ximenes' *Complutensian Polyglot* rejection of the 'apocrypha' or the councils of Hippo and Carthage acceptance of the Book of Esdras that was supposedly "rejected" by Trent or that there were fifty major scholars in the middle ages who rejected the deuterocanon. I couldn't help but think that, if the shoe were on the other foot and I used the same sources to *prove* the inspiration of the deuterocanon, I would have been laughed out of the room. Had I stood up in my opening statement and claimed that the deuterocanon is inspired Scripture because Cardinal Ximenes accepted them in his *Complutensian Polyglot* and fifty major scholars in the middle ages accepted them, people would laugh at me. So, I'm not sure why James saw it as fitting to use this line of questioning to demonstrate that the deuterocanon could *not* be inspired Scripture. I'll have to review the tape to see if I missed something.

A second difficulty I ran into during the debate was James inability to complete his arguments. Whether this phenomenon was intentional or that he didn't understand some of the dynamics of the current discussion on the canon in scholarly circles, I don't know. A good example can be seen in James' use of Romans 3:2 which states that the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God. His argument can be diagrammed as follows:

- P1. The Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God
- P2. The Jew accepted only the books of the Protestant Bible.
- ∴ God divinely entrusted the Protestant canon to the Jews.

The first premise is ambiguous, but understandable. While James rightly underscored the meaning of the word translated *entrusted*, I pointed out two other aspects of this passage that ought to be noted. First, the inspired Apostle didn't say that the Jews were entrusted with the "*writings* of God," but a more fuller or general word "the *oracles* of God." Second, I noted that Paul uses the aorist (passive) indicating that this entrustment was held sometime prior to the writing of Romans.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, any appeal to the Jews as divinely authorized custodians of the word of God ought to be made prior to the composition of Romans.

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<sup>1</sup> According to James' web blog, he was [is] apparently befuddled on my first point, which was a rather minor comment, namely that Paul uses the word "oracles" instead of "writings." My point was simple. There is more going on in this passage than Paul stating that the Jews had benefits over the gentiles because they had Scripture. The term *oracles* includes, not only God's divine revelation in writing, but also God's providential care for his people orally through the prophets and also through other prophetic gifts. The reason I pointed this fact out was to underscore the importance of Paul's use of the aorist. If one were to argue that this divine entrustment continues through into the Christian era, then such an idea would not only contradict the aorist used in this passage, but also contradict all those things included under the "oracles" of God, which the Jews themselves claim no longer to possess.

It was the second premise that needed to be demonstrated for James to win the debate. It was not enough for him to show that the Jews acknowledged *some* books as inspired and used with controversy (as would be the case when the canon is in formation). He needed to demonstrate the existence of a *closed* canon that is some sort of tangible acknowledgment that *only* the books of the Protestant OT are Scripture *to the exclusion* of all others.

To the best of my recollection, James put forward only three arguments in this regard. One argument was that the New Testament did not solemnly quote any of the deuterocanonical books. The second argument was that only the books of the Protestant OT were “laid up” in the Temple in Jerusalem. The third was that the Jews recognized that all prophecy ceased after the time of Ezra (or Artaxerxes) and therefore they restricted the canon to that of the Protestant Old Testament.

In regards to the first argument (regarding solemn quotations), I tried to point out to James (and the audience who may not be familiar with the material) that a good portion of the Protestant OT is not quoted with any solemn formula in the NT. Therefore, if the absence of this special introduction is an indication of a *repudiation* of a book, then the NT *repudiates* a good portion of the protocanonical books (which of course is impossible). Really, the only thing James could have proved from the absence of a solemn quotation was that the divinity of the deuterocanon is not explicitly affirmed in the NT, which is also true for several other books that are accepted by Protestants.<sup>2</sup> The flip side is also true. The mere allusion or reference to a book does not prove its Scriptural status either. If that were the case, as James notes in his blog, Enoch and the Assumption of Moses would be considered Scripture as well. This is why during the cross-examination period I mentioned A. C. Sundberg’s description of the New Testament evidence as a collection of sacred documents without any clearly defined limits. In other words, we do not see a *closed* canon (which James needed to demonstrate).

Yet, even within this less-than-clearly-defined usage in the New Testament, we are still able to glean some salient facts concerning the resolution of the canon debate: 1) the deuterocanonical books are used in a manner commensurate with sacred Scripture in the New Testament, 2) The New Testament nowhere calls these books apocrypha nor does it in anyway repudiate or disparage them.

The other two points James made requires a little explanation. Both his argument from the Temple Scrolls and the “cessation of prophecy” argument are based largely (and almost exclusively) on two sources – Josephus and rabbinical literature.

During the cross-examination, I targeted the reliability of both sources. The first source to be examined was Josephus. In order to establish the second premise that the Jews, to the exclusion of all others accepted *only* the books of the Protestant canon, James had to prove that all those books and only the books of Protestant canon were “laid up” in the Temple. With difficulty, I was able to show that the only person who had “first hand” knowledge of which books were “laid up” in the Temple and whose writings are extant is Josephus. Yet, Beckwith acknowledges that Josephus only explicitly identifies the first five books of the Old Testament (the Pentateuch) and Joshua as being “laid up” in the Temple. The claim that the rest of the Protestant canon was also “laid up” in the Temple comes from later rabbinical literature (e.g. the Mishna and the Talmudim).

My second line of questioning was directed at the reliability of these rabbinic sources. I made the case in my opening statement that a rabbi named Akiba was the first to explicitly close the OT canon and to repudiate the deuterocanon.<sup>3</sup> It was also made known that Akiba was instrumental in the formation of the Mishna and that two of Akiba’s disciples, Rabbis Meyer and Judah the Prince, were responsible for

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<sup>2</sup> Even this line of argument has problems since some Protestant scholars acknowledge the Letter of Jude’s citation of the Book of Enoch as a solemn formula or introduction. Does it then follow that Enoch is inspired?

<sup>3</sup> Akiba also was the one who officially repudiated (in the same statement) the Gospels and the book of the New Testament. He is also credited with rejecting the Septuagint and as a side note declared Bar Kokba to be the Messiah prophesied in Numbers 24:17.

bringing the Mishnah into its present form roughly 200 AD. The two Talmuds (Palestinian and Babylonian), which are partially based on the Mishnah, did not come into their final forms until roughly a hundred years after Jerome (sometime in the fifth or sixth Christian centuries). In addition to this late dating and their connection with Akiba, the historical recollection of these writings is more or less uniformly Pharisaic, which does not speak for their historical accuracy since, as James admitted in the debate, these were pluralistic within first century Judea.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, these late rabbinical sources cited by James (e.g. Bab. Baba Bathra 14a – 15a, et al.) are certainly impeachable witnesses of the past and they most likely represent a later view of the canon, which is projected back into history. More can be said on this matter, but we must move on.

One of the interesting aspects of the debate, for me at least, was James' appeal to "errors" in the Book of Judith. As James mentions in his blog, I did study his debates. I also over the past four years of research that I did for my book on the deuterocanon called *Why Catholic Bibles Are Bigger*, I also studied Protestant / Catholic debates since the sixteenth century. One thing that invariably takes place in these polemics is when all the major objections launched by Protestants against the deuterocanon are dispensed, the old "error in the deuterocanon" argument comes in.<sup>5</sup> This signaled to me that James was nearing the end of his arguments.

One who is familiar with the dynamics of biblical inerrancy immediately knows that this is an illegitimate line of inquiry because it ultimately commits the formal fallacy of begging the question. Biblical inerrancy is the result of inspiration. It is not the result of a critical investigation of the texts for the simple reason that it is impossible for us to determine with absolute certainty whether a difficulty (e.g. factual, historical, moral or theological problem) can or cannot be resolved. Inerrancy is the result of a prior determination that a given text is or is not inspired. Therefore, scholars in this field speak of "real" and "apparent" errors depending on whether the text that is being investigated is inspired Scripture or not. Protestant apologists beg the question when they assume at the outset that a given book (in this case Judith) is not inspired. Next they point to one or several difficulties within this book as "real" errors (concluding that it is impossible for these problems to ever be resolved since they are the product of fallible human beings). Finally, they conclude that since it has "real" errors, it must not be inspired Scripture. In addition to running roughshod over the basic tenants of biblical inerrancy, it is also, at root, an "anti-Protestant" approach since it violates the principle of *Sola Scriptura*. Since this paper is already long enough to be a mediation rather than a reflection, I'll post my thoughts on this issue on Steve Ray's website titled "Errors in Judith" (or some other title if I can think of something more clever to call it).

Perhaps my only regret of the debate was my inability to put together a cogent and compelling closing statement. There I was standing in front of the audience with my mind racing trying to recall any coherent argument that wasn't already put to rest during the rebuttal or the cross-examination. What do I talk about? Should I address the recycled Weber argument concerning the *Glossa Ordinaria*? But what does a medieval gloss have to do with whether or not the deuterocanon is inspired Scripture? But alas, I fumbled through a review of the high and low points of the evening. I did manage to get one important point across in my closing, although according to James' blog and his closing statement, it fell on deaf ears. My entire presentation that night was done as a "Protestant." Not once, in my opening statement or in any subsequent remarks, did I ever appeal to the authority of the Church, papal decrees or Church Councils. Whenever I mentioned a pope (e.g. Innocent I, Nicholas I) or a council (e.g. Hippo, Carthage) I used them only as historical witnesses of their time and not authoritative teachers.<sup>6</sup> All the scholars I cited were either Protestant or Jewish. Likewise, nearly every point that I made in the debate can be traced back either to Protestant or Jewish sources.<sup>7</sup> I knew that James has come to the conviction that all Catholics are somehow

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<sup>4</sup> The New Testament provides ample evidence that first century Judaism was not monolithic. There were various sects and groups (e.g. the Pharisees, Sadducees, Samaritans, Zealots et al.) all with their own idiosyncrasy and perspectives.

<sup>5</sup> A great example of this can be found in John Calvin's polemical treatise *Antidote to the Council of Trent*, Session Four, trans. Henry Beveridge, (Edinburgh, 1851), 69.

<sup>6</sup> My only mention of Trent in my opening statement was an off-handed comment – "In case anyone here believes that Council of Trent *added* books to the Bible..." That's it!

<sup>7</sup> Most notably A. C. Sundberg, F. F. Bruce, Lee McDonald, Frank More, H. E. Ryle, Edward Ruess, J.N.D. Kelly, H. H. Howorth, Daubney and others. If my memory serves me correctly, I may have made reference

straightjacketed by what he calls *sola ecclesia*. Sadly and strangely, both in his closing statement and in his blog, James refused to grant me this point. Maybe, if I ever debate this topic again, I'll have to have Lee McDonald or J. A. Sanders write my opening statement so as to avoid any secret adherence to *sola ecclesia*.

The reaction from both Protestants and Catholic who were at the debate has been, despite my poor effort, remarkably positive. Some have even remarked that it was one of the most substantive of the *Great Debate* series. Once the tapes are available, you'll have to let me know what you think.

In conclusion, I'd like to send my appreciation to Chris Arnzen for putting together an outstanding forum for these types of debates. I would also like to extend my thanks to Patrick Madrid for his help and support as well as Arnold Pilsner, John Dockwell, Susan Cumming, Jesses Romero, Joseph Waked, and a special thank you to Steve and Janet Ray and David Palm for flying out to the debate and all the support they had provided (and continue to provide). Also a special thank you to James White for allowing me to engage him on this issue. It will be a pleasure to meet him again.

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to the Catholic scholar Frank Cross. However, this is certainly forgivable since Cross is acknowledge by Catholic, Protestant and Jewish scholars as one of the premier authorities on the textual transmission of the Old Testament and the Dead Sea Scrolls.