Introduction

Why should anyone invest himself or herself in reading, let alone studying in minute detail, the book we call 4 Maccabees? This is a question with which I have been long familiar, as I have had to answer it dozens of times over the course of the last twenty-five years after first answering the question, "What are you working on these days?"

The first part of my answer concerns what this particular text reveals about the quality and nature of the interaction of Judaism and Hellenism in the first century of the common era. Even though we are close to celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of Martin Hengel's landmark work on *Judaism and Hellenism*, many of my students (and even a number of scholars whose work I have critiqued or who have critiqued my own work) continue to look upon Judaism—and especially *pious* Jews—as standing apart from all things Greek as if from something unclean. Faithful Jews think "Hebraically" and not "Hellenistically." It still surprises many in the classroom and in the pews that the majority of faithful Jews throughout the Diaspora knew their Scriptures in Greek and *only* in Greek. In the author of 4 Maccabees, we find a man who has excelled in Greek composition and rhetoric, who has provided for himself a more-than-passing acquaintance with Greek philosophical ethics and Greek drama, speaking in the most Greek modes to promote the most Jewish way of life. Here is a man who has developed fully Greek rationales for remaining true to the Jewish way of life, who has thought about for himself and now proclaims to others the significance and value of his ancestral Law and the kind of life it shapes in terms that any non-Jew could understand (if not accept). Fourth Maccabees thus provides a witness to the possibility of being fully Hellenized in terms of knowledge, cultural literacy, and training in the arts of communication while remaining fully dedicated to promoting continued, unyielding commitment to the

Jewish way of life—the possibility of being fully acculturated while resisting assimilation in any and every sense.

The second part of my answer concerns what 4 Maccabees reveals about the way Paul's contemporaries or near-contemporaries—who did *not* have a life-changing encounter that distanced them significantly from the convictions and pursuits of the first part of their careers—thought about the Jewish Law. In light of popular Christian (and particularly Protestant Christian) tendencies to view the Law as impossible in its demands—a crushing burden that drives people either to hypocrisy or despair—it is most illuminating and even refreshing to encounter a book that portrays the Law of Moses as a divinely-given good without qualification. The author of 4 Maccabees preaches with an evangelistic fervor about the value and benefits of the Torah-driven life. It is not only *possible* to live in line with the Torah (2:6). It is also the way of life most suited to our created natures and to God's plan for how we will realize our best selves in the here and now (2:21–23; 5:25–26). It is the educative discipline by means of which we become well-formed and mature moral agents (1:15–17; 5:23–24) and the training program whereby we gain the moral muscle needed to escape the domination of our passions and desires (1:31–2:14). It strengthens human and humane feelings without allowing one to be *overcome* by feelings and turned away from the just and right course of action by them at any point (13:19–27; 14:13–20). A text like 4 Maccabees provides, in this way, an important corrective to theologically-rooted prejudices against a Torah-centered piety—not that 4 Maccabees is likely to make Christian theologians discard Galatians or Romans, but it is likely to make them read them (and their treatment of the Law of Moses) in a far more nuanced fashion.[1]

The third part of my answer (if my interlocutor has not yet walked away) concerns the impact of this book—one that seems so remote to modern readers—on Christian martyrology and ethics during the second through fifth centuries, to which it was seen to have immediate relevance. In the face of increasingly hostile persecution and, in particular, trials before governors and other representatives of the imperial power that typically ended in grisly forms of execution, Christian leaders turned for their own inspiration and that of their charges to the story of the Jewish martyrs who chose death for the sake of piety over release at the cost of apostasy as found in both 2 Maccabees and 4 Maccabees. After Constantine I and

1. I have considered elsewhere the possibility that 4 Maccabees is suggestive for the ways in which the rival Jewish Christian missionaries who came to Paul's converts in the province of Galatia might have presented Torah-observance in precisely the attractive manner that threatened to win Paul's converts over to their understanding of what trusting Jesus opened up for the Gentile convert (*Galatians*, 19–22).

Licinius issued the Edict of Milan declaring Christianity a tolerated religion, Christian leaders continued to draw inspiration from 4 Maccabees and its author's assurance that the piety-infused mind could successfully master the impulses, cravings, and emotions that threatened a consistent commitment to virtue. Neither the political situation of the global Church nor the ethical situation of humanity has advanced to such a state as to render either contribution of this ancient text superfluous in the modern world.

This volume contains ten essays written on 4 Maccabees over the course of what I hope is only the first half of my career (1995–2016). Each contributes in some way to the reader's appreciation of one of these three focal points concerning the abiding value of this text. In the first part ("Rhetorical Situation and Strategic Response"), I focus more fully on the question of the author's relationship to his Jewish identity and community, on the one hand, and his Hellenistic-Roman context on the other. The first chapter ("The Author of 4 Maccabees and Greek *Paideia*: Facets of the Formation of a Hellenistic Jewish Rhetor") represents an attempt to reconstruct the kind of educational background that would have produced a communicator like the author of 4 Maccabees. I look first for signs of elementary and secondary training in his work, exploring points of contact between the skills developed by the curriculum of exercises known as the "Progymnasmata" (elementary exercises in composition) and the skills exhibited in 4 Maccabees. I examine also the author's level of mastery of Greek language, philosophical ethics, and literature against scholarly reconstructions of secondary and tertiary curricula, on the one hand, and consider, on the other hand, how he was likely to have come by his significant facility in his own Jewish tradition and practice.

In the second and third chapters, I examine the use to which the author has put his education. In "Honor and Shame as Argumentative Topoi in 4 Maccabees," I consider the correspondences between 4 Maccabees and the kind of oratory and rhetorical aims addressed by epideictic and deliberative speeches (and, specifically, how considerations of the honorable and the shameful are used to position the author's audience vis-à-vis their commitment to their ancestral way of life. In "Fourth Maccabees as Acculturated Resistance Literature," I employ a "postcolonial optic" more forthrightly to examine 4 Maccabees as a specimen of resistance literature—specifically, as a work whose author has used his facility in the tools and knowledge of the dominant culture to carve out a space for his own subaltern culture and model strategies for sustaining a minority cultural identity in the midst of a dominant and majority culture that fairly aggressively promotes assimilation.

In the second part ("The Rhetorical Contributions of Intertexture"), I examine how the author has used both Greek and traditional Jewish resources to advance his goals for his audience. Chapter 4 ("The Strategic Retelling of Scripture in 4 Maccabees: David's Thirst [4 Macc 3:6–18]") examines four accounts of a particular episode in the life of David and the correspondences between the various authors' redaction or re-invention of that episode to better support each author's particular goals for the story—in the case of our author, the demonstration that, while intense sensations cannot but be felt, they need not lead one to intemperate or unjust actions. Chapter 5 ("Engagement with Greco-Roman Intertexture: Conversations about Maternal Affections") examines the correspondences between the presentation of the love that the mother of the seven brothers felt for her sons (and the pains she endured as they were tortured) and discussions about "affection for offspring" in Aristotle and Plutarch and, then, the correspondences between the laments of bereaved mothers in Euripidean tragedy and the lament that the author crafts for the mother—"had *she* been of cowardly disposition" (4 Macc 16:5). This provides a case study in the author's use of Greek cultural knowledge to advance his claims concerning the superiority of training in the Jewish way of life (the Torah-prescribed life) for the attainment of the ideals prized by the dominant Hellenized culture. A third essay (chapter 6, "'Father Knew Best': Intertextuality and Argumentation in 4 Macc 18:6–19") investigates the string of examples and brief quotations from the Jewish scriptures that the author incorporates into the mother's second speech as the "epitome" of the instruction her husband passed along to their sons before his own death with a view to laying bare the implicit argumentation advanced by the *sequence* of material, even in the general absence of explicit inferential conjunctions and particles.

In the third and final part ("The Legacy of 4 Maccabees"), I give attention to the ongoing contributions of 4 Maccabees to theological reflection in general and the early church's responses to pastoral needs in particular. Chapter 7 ("The Human Ideal, the Problem of Evil, and Moral Responsibility in 4 Maccabees") explores the responses that this text gives to the perennial questions of human existence: What does it mean to be fully human? What are the origins of the evils that invade human lives? How will good be restored—and justice done—where we see unjust suffering? In chapters 8 ("Fourth Maccabees and Early Christian Martyrdom: The Influence of 4 Maccabees on Origen's *Exhortatio ad Martyrium*") and 9 ("Ambrose's Use of 4 Maccabees in *De Jacob et Vita Beata*"), I trace out the impact of 4 Maccabees on two early Christian texts that exemplify the twin interests of the early church in this text noted above. Finally, in chapter 10 ("Beyond the Eclectic Text of 4 Maccabees: Reading 4 Maccabees in Codex Sinaiticus"),

I inquire into how readers of 4 Maccabees as represented in a particular, fourth-century Christian manuscript will experience the text differently than readers of the reconstructed, eclectic text (or translations based on the same). It is, incidentally, also a testimony to the importance of 4 Maccabees for the early Church that it should have been included in Codex Sinaiticus (as well as Codex Alexandrinus) in the first place.

I have been drawn again and again to 4 Maccabees because the author and his work demolish stereotypes—the stereotype of the Second Temple Period Jew who eschews rather than deeply engages Greek culture without yielding his or her own way of life for a moment; the stereotype of the Second Temple Period Jew laboring under "the curse of the Law"; the stereotype of the extrabiblical text that exercises little or no influence and is little or nothing valued by the Church in its formative centuries. As one who is primarily a scholar of the New Testament, I have found the study of 4 Maccabees to be indispensable for my primary work because it teaches me again and again to think about Christian origins and early Christian literature more clearly and honestly, because it teaches me to do so apart from these stereotypes.