The books of Solomon

Jerome (c. AD 347–420)

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[Translated by Kevin P. Edgecomb] BEGINNING OF THE PROLOGUE OF JEROME TO THE BOOKS OF SOLOMON Jerome to Bishops Cromatius and Heliodorus. May the letter join those joined in priesthood. Indeed, a sheet may not divide those who the love of Christ has connected. You request commentaries on Hosea, Amos, Zechariah, and Malachi. I wrote, even if it cost through ill-health. You have sent the solace of expenses, by our scribes and copyist having been sustained, so that our genius exerts itself most strongly for you. And behold, from every side a diverse crowd of those demanding, as though it is equal for me either to work for you with others hungering, or I might be subject to anyone besides you in matters of giving and receiving. And so, with a long sickness broken, I have not kept inwardly silent this year and been mute with you. I have dedicated to your names the work of three days, namely the translation of the three scrolls of Solomon: Masloth, which are Parables in Hebrew, called in the common edition Proverbs; Coeleth, which in Greek is Ecclesiastes, in Latin we could say Preacher; (and) Sirassirim, which is translated into our language Song of Songs.

Also included is the book of the model of virtue (παναρετος) Jesus son of Sirach, and another falsely ascribed work (ψευδεπιγραφος) which is titled Wisdom of Solomon. The former of these I have also found in Hebrew, titled not Ecclesiasticus as among the Latins, but Parables, to which were joined Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs, as though it made of equal worth the likeness not only of the number of the books of Solomon, but also the kind of subjects. The second was never among the Hebrews, the very style of which reeks of Greek eloquence. And some of the ancient scribes affirm this one is of Philo Judaeus. Therefore, just as the Church also reads the books of Judith, Tobias, and the Maccabees, but does not receive them among the the canonical Scriptures, so also one may read these two scrolls for the strengthening of the people, (but) not for confirming the authority of ecclesiastical dogmas.

If anyone is truly more pleased by the edition of the Seventy interpreters, he has it already corrected by us. For it is not as though we build the new so that we destroy the old. And yes, when one will have read most carefully, he will know our things to be more understood, which haven’t soured by having been poured into a third

vessel, but have rather preserved their flavor by having been entrusted to a new container immediately from the press. END OF THE PROLOGUE

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