

replacing the historical approach with alternatives based on the literary and social sciences.

Robert Morgan has reflected on the problems involved in biblical theology, and especially NT theology, in numerous works, the most comprehensive of which is *Biblical Interpretation*. According to Morgan, 'acts of God cannot be spoken of, let alone established, by historical research' (p. 70). Since history is not capable of conveying theological judgments (cf. also p. 119), other approaches are needed (cf. also pp. 123, 197-198). According to Morgan's survey, recent developments in biblical interpretation suggest that the religious message of the text can be identified by interpreting the Bible within a literary framework (see e.g. pp. 143, 199). Sometimes the historical approach may even become 'subordinate' to the literary one (p. 287).

Morgan defines the literary approach as follows (p. 221): 'The literary frame of reference can be characterized as a shift in the focus of interest from past persons, events, traditions, literary forms, and conventions, to the now available texts and their impact upon present-day hearers and readers.'

However, there are good reasons for retaining a historical frame of reference for biblical theology. First, Morgan himself acknowledges that historical criticism has made 'positive contributions to constructive theological restatement' inasmuch as its 'negative theological role' forced theologians to 'restate the traditional faith' (p. 288). Secondly, historical study can control arbitrary interpretations. Consigning the historical approach to a secondary role and introducing non-historical approaches can undermine the accuracy of biblical interpretation. Morgan himself concedes that there may be occasions in the theological work where 'the historical framework of research co-ordinates all the methods used' (p. 287). He also acknowledges that literary methods were used alongside historical ones in the past (e.g. by Wellhausen, p. 82).

It follows that the historical and the literary approaches do not exclude one another. It is best to combine them in the way suggested by Morgan (cf. p. 215).

In *Biblical Interpretation* Morgan identifies significant differences between the disciplines of history and sociology: 1. 'history attends to the individual and particular, sociology to

what is general or typical' (p. 139); 2. history is diachronic, sociology is synchronic (pp. 139-140). For Morgan, these differences imply 'that the disciplines are complementary' (p. 140). Since in biblical theology we are more concerned with the 'unique' than with the 'typical', it follows 'that history rather than sociology should provide the framework for studying the biblical past'. A 'sociological theory', that is 'based on empirically grounded generalizations' such as might be discovered by 'observing many societies' may helpfully complement the insights of historical study. Morgan also argues that 'Since religion is a social phenomenon, the history of religion must be social history' (p. 140).

However, a distinction should be drawn between extending historical inquiry to include the societies of biblical times and using theories based on present-day sociological analysis. A historical framework for studying the Bible's theology may incorporate a social dimension without making use of modern sociological theories.

So it is possible to complement historical study with a sociological theory within the discipline of biblical theology, but this is only an option for the scholar. The validity of the historical approach to biblical theology is not dependent upon its being supplemented by sociology.

### Conclusion

The foregoing argument suggests the term 'theology' can reasonably be retained as a description of the Bible's content. It may be used to refer to the biblical authors' (and characters') thoughts about God. Biblical theology is essentially historical, and may be justified as such, though the biblical theologian may also adopt frames of reference drawn from literary theory or the social sciences.

Judgments on the validity of the enterprise depend upon the presuppositions of scholars, the interpretation of key biblical passages and the exegetical reconstruction of historical events related in the Bible. For example, even if we find that much early Christianity shared a basic theology (perhaps expressed in short credal statements), we may still acknowledge diversity in the details with which early Christians filled out that theology.

It is likely that Christians with different theological views formed different canons

from the 2nd century onwards. The orthodox group also formed a canon. The Christians of the 1st century may have written with a certain 'canonical awareness'. If as historians we find that the NT 'canon', in the form of a 'canonical process', is a historical fact of the first two Christian centuries (and not just the result of a decision made at a later date), and if we find that the NT claims authority for itself, perhaps even that of a 'canonical' text, then it is legitimate to look for the theology contained in the NT writings.

We do not have to move 'beyond' biblical theology. The discipline can be justified both in its focus on the canonical writings, and in its aim of describing the theology contained in the Bible.

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P. BALLA

## The Canon of Scripture

### Introduction: canonicity

Every book has a text, but not every book has a canon. Only a book like the Bible, which is also a collection of books, has a canon. The collection can be listed, and indeed needs to be listed for the avoidance of confusion and doubt, especially in a period like the biblical period, when the collection cannot yet be embodied in a single scroll or codex. 'Canon' is by origin a Greek word, denoting a straight rod or rule, and thus a criterion, and (together with its cognates 'canonical' and 'can-

onize') it began to be applied by Christian writers of the later 4th century AD to the correct collection and list of the Scriptures. This was a new usage; the common idea that this language had earlier been used by the Alexandrian grammarians for the select lists (*pinakeis*) of classical writers and artists which they drew up is a mistake. Such lists did exist, both among the Greeks and perhaps among the Babylonians, but calling them a 'canon' is a practice dating only from the 18th century, and was based upon the biblical canon, not the other way round.

It is interesting that this language first arose just at the time when it was at last becoming possible to put the Scriptures into a single volume. The great 4th-century codices, Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus, are the earliest known examples. Among the Jews, the Pentateuch seems not to have been embodied in a single scroll before the Christian era, and at Qumran each biblical book (or regular and manageable combination of books) had its own scroll. The scrolls of the Greek OT, being made of papyrus not leather, seem to have been even less capacious. So lists were of great importance. The earliest Christian lists of the OT and NT, those of Melito and the Muratorian Fragment respectively, both date from the 2nd century AD, and the earliest Jewish list of the Hebrew Scriptures, found in a primitive tradition or *baraita* quoted in the Babylonian Talmud (*Baba Bathra* 14b), is probably older still. Before the term 'canon' was invented, a variety of names were already used by Jews and Christians for the collection of their sacred books, some, such as 'the Holy Scriptures', going back to the 1st century (Rom. 1:2; 2 Tim. 3:15; Philo; Josephus), and others, such as 'the Holy Books' and 'the Law and the Prophets', being even more ancient (1 Macc. 12:9; 2 Macc. 15:9). The terms 'Old Testament' and 'New Testament' began to be applied by Christian writers to collections of Scriptures in the 2nd and early 3rd centuries. What the language of 'canonicity' added was the idea of correctness; this correctness could now be embodied, for the first time, not just in lists but also in one-volume copies.

The biblical canon is not, of course, primarily a collection or list of literary masterpieces, like the Alexandrian lists, but one of authoritative sacred texts. Their authority derived not from their early date, nor from their role as records of revelation (important though these characteristics were), but from the fact that they were believed to be inspired by God and thus to share the nature of revelation themselves. This belief, expressed at various points in the OT, had become a settled conviction among Jews of the intertestamental period, and is everywhere taken for granted in the NT treatment of the OT. That NT writings share this scriptural and inspired character is first stated in 1 Timothy 5:18 and 2 Peter 3:16. Pagan religion also could speak of 'holy scriptures' and attribute

them on occasion to a deity (see J. Leipoldt and S. Morenz, *Heilige Schriften* [Leipzig, 1953], pp. 21f., 28-30), but the Jewish and Christian claims were made credible by the different quality of biblical religion and biblical literature.

In a dictionary of biblical theology, the canon provides both boundaries and a basis. We are not engaged in producing a general survey of ancient Jewish and Christian religious ideas; if we were, all the surviving literature from the period would have an equal claim to our attention. Rather, we are engaged in interpreting the revelation of God, and for this the books which are believed to embody that revelation, and their text, are alone directly relevant. The accepted ways of arranging the canonical books are also significant, in so far as they highlight the historical progression of revelation and the literary forms in which it was given.

#### The history of the OT canon

The origin of the canon may be dated from the time that revelation first started being given in written form and being recognized for what it was. In both covenants, revelation was initially given through spoken words and outward signs, and in the new covenant through the person of the Lord Jesus Christ during his ministry on earth, but for the sake of permanence it soon started to be put into written form. The materials mainly used were books, *viz.* scrolls of papyrus or leather, and in NT times perhaps also small papyrus codices, but in OT times writing tablets might sometimes be used (Is. 30:8; Hab. 2:2), of which the tablets of the Ten Commandments, written by the finger of God and deposited in the ark of the covenant, are an illustrious example. Writing was used as a 'memorial' (Exod. 17:14) and as an abiding 'witness' (Deut. 31:26) which would last until 'the generation to come' (Ps. 102:18) and indeed 'for ever' (Is. 30:8). The finding of the law-book by Hilkiah in the temple showed vividly what happened when the written form of revelation was lost; the revelation itself was forgotten (2 Kgs. 22 — 23; 2 Chr. 34). In the NT one finds Luke writing a careful record of Jesus' life and work for the sake of his readers' 'certainty' (Luke 1:3-4.) and John correcting in writing a corrupt oral report (John 21:23).

On three great occasions in Israel's history, we see a smaller or greater part of the Penta-

teuch being recognized as having divine authority, and being accepted as a written rule of life for the nation: at the giving of the covenant at Sinai (Exod. 24:4, 7), at the reformation of Josiah (2 Kgs. 23:1-3; 2 Chr. 34:29-32) and at the re-establishment of the nation after the exile (Neh. 8:9, 14-18; 10:28-39; 13:1-3). Deuteronomy contains provisions for the book to be regularly read, so that its laws may be known and obeyed (Deut. 17:18-20; 31:9-13).

There are many other references in the OT to the written law of Moses as a God-given rule (Josh. 1:7-8; 8:31; 23:6-8; 1 Kgs. 2:3; 2 Kgs. 14:6; 17:37; Hos. 8:12, *etc.*) and also to the written form of oracles uttered by the prophets (Is. 30:8; Jer. 25:13; 29:1; 30:2; 36:1-32, *etc.*; Ezek. 43:11; Hab. 2:2; Dan. 7:1). In the later books of the OT, references start to be made to the earlier books with the expression 'as it is written', but without further explanation as to where 'it is written' (2 Chr. 30:5, 18; Ezra 3:4; Neh. 8:15; *cf.* Ps. 149:9), the meaning of the phrase being 'as it is written in the well-known and authoritative Scriptures'. This usage becomes common in the intertestamental literature, and also in the NT, especially as a way of introducing quotations. Every book of the Hebrew OT except perhaps the little Song of Songs is attested as authoritative in the intertestamental literature and the NT taken together, most of them several times over; there is no need to appeal to the rabbinical literature to demonstrate their authoritative status.

The fullest evidence is provided by the Jewish historian Josephus (late 1st century AD). He numbers the sacred books as twenty-two, a common variant on the standard Jewish number twenty-four (first attested about Josephus's time in 2 Esdras 14:44-48). The Jews reckoned Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah and the twelve Minor Prophets together as one book each, giving a total of twenty-four books (instead of the familiar thirty-nine). But this figure was often reduced to twenty-two, to assimilate it to the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet, by appending Ruth to Judges and Lamentations to Jeremiah. For the benefit of his Greek readers, Josephus provides a simple arrangement for the twenty-two books, putting all those with historical content into Moses and the Prophets (consisting of five and thirteen books respectively), and leaving just 'hymns to God

and precepts for human life' in the final section of four books (*Against Apion* 1:7f., or 1:37-43).

It has been widely believed that the Greek-speaking Jews of Alexandria had a larger canon, including the books (found in manuscripts of the Old Greek or Septuagint translation) which we call the Apocrypha. This theory arose from the assumption that the large 4th- and 5th-century Christian codices of the Greek Bible, in which the Apocrypha are found, went back to others, much older but equally capacious, produced by Jews. We now know that this assumption is mistaken. A contributory cause of the theory was the belief that the Apocrypha were mostly composed in Alexandria, and that their original language was Greek. These claims too are now widely doubted. Ecclesiasticus tells us that it was translated from Hebrew, and many believe that all the Apocrypha except Wisdom and 2 Maccabees were translated from a Semitic language and originated in Palestine. We can now explain the strange silence of Philo (early 1st century AD), the greatest of Alexandrian Jewish writers, in his voluminous works, where he quotes as divinely inspired many of the OT books but not one of the Apocrypha. The Jews of course read these books, and so did the early Christians, but the idea that they were Scripture is a purely Christian phenomenon, of slow and irregular development, and always opposed by the greatest scholars, such as Origen and Jerome. The NT never quotes the Apocrypha as Scripture, and the earliest Christian OT lists and biblical manuscripts contain few or none of them.

A better case could be made out for the canonicity of the so-called Pseudepigrapha (books under false names), such as *1 Enoch* and *Jubilees*, which were cherished by the Essenes at Qumran; two of which are mentioned in the NT epistle of Jude. The Dead Sea Scrolls, however, never actually treat these books as Scripture, and the Essenes seem to have regarded them as an interpretative appendix to the standard canon, not as part of it. Jude's use of such books is best regarded as an *argumentum ad hominem* for readers influenced by them, *i.e.* an argument designed to take advantage of the readers' ideas (whether right or wrong) for a good purpose.

In the rabbinical literature there are dis-

cussions of the canonicity of five OT books — Ezekiel, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Songs and Esther. Some rabbis propose that these books should be withdrawn from use or should even be regarded as uninspired. The grounds they offer, such as contradictions, are also offered in the rabbinical literature against many other canonical books, including the books of Moses, and are refuted, but the books listed evidently presented specially intractable problems. It follows that the matter under discussion was that of removing books from the canon, not that of adding them to it, and the objections to these five books were eventually answered or dismissed. The theory that a synod at Jamnia about AD 90 added them to the Jewish canon is pure imagination. The academy at Jamnia did once discuss two of the books, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs, and confirmed their canonicity, but that is all.

The closing of the OT canon can hardly be dated later than the time of Judas Maccabaeus, in the second quarter of the 2nd century BC. Some books were probably recognized as Scripture more slowly than others, and the evidence of Ecclesiasticus (c. 180 BC) may indicate that the last to be recognized were Daniel and Esther. Ecclesiasticus seems to reflect a knowledge of Daniel, but the fact that its great catalogue of the 'famous men' of Scripture (Ecclus. 44 — 49) does not include either Daniel and his companions or Esther and Mordecai may indicate that there was not yet agreement to include Daniel and Esther among the Scriptures. By the time Ecclesiasticus was translated into Greek (c. 130 BC), the

Scriptures had been organized in three sections and translated into Greek, as the prologue by the translator of the book shows, and the principles on which the threefold organization was made involved the arrangement of the books in order and a potential numbering of them (cf. The shape of the canon' below), so Daniel and Esther must by then have been included. These final steps may have been taken when Judas collected the scattered Scriptures after the Antiochene persecution (1 Macc. 1:56-57; 2 Macc. 2:13-15).

#### The history of the NT canon

Since the OT canon was closed more than two centuries before the NT canon was opened, it provided a model to which the NT canon

could be conformed. By the 1st century, it was customary to think of all the authors of the OT books as prophets, but prophecy (in the full sense of the word) had ceased in the inter-testamental period, as 1 Maccabees, Josephus and the rabbinical literature all bear witness. With the gospel, however, the long silence of prophecy was broken (Matt. 11:9; Acts 2:16-18; 11:27-28; 13:1; etc.), and written prophecy also was revived (Rev. 1:3; 10:11; 22:6-7, 9-10, 18-19). With the NT prophets were linked the apostles (Luke 11:49; 1 Cor. 12:28-29; Eph. 4:11), as joint recipients of the mystery of the gospel and joint foundation stones of the Christian church (Eph. 2:20; 3:5), and the greatest Christian prophet of all was Jesus himself, the expected prophet like Moses (Mark 6:4; Luke 13:33; 24:19; Acts 3:22-23; 7:37).

At first the sayings of Jesus and the writings of the apostles were often quoted alongside the OT Scripture as having a similar authority but not as themselves constituting Scripture. The idea of scriptures in any language except Hebrew was alien to the Semitic mind, but the high reputation of the Septuagint must have made Greek Scriptures less unthinkable, and Paul's command that his epistles should be publicly read in the congregation (1 Thess. 5:27; cf. Col. 4:16) suggests that in his view they have scriptural status; the author of Revelation makes the same claim, more clearly, for his work (Rev. 1:3; 22:18-19.). In 2 Peter 3:16 Paul's epistles are actually called 'Scriptures', and a gospel is identified as 'the Scripture' in 1 Timothy 5:18. The use of 'Scripture(s)' to denote NT writings became increasingly common through the 2nd century and by the end of it was normal. By that date there was widespread agreement to accept as Scripture the four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, the thirteen epistles of Paul, 1 Peter and 1 John. The remaining seven books (the so-called 'Antilegomena', books spoken against) were still the subject of disagreement, and general agreement to include them was not reached until the end of the 4th century. A few extra books (notably the *Apocalypse of Peter* and the *Shepherd of Hermas*) were under consideration for a short time, but by the early 4th century it was agreed to exclude them. The three general criteria which the Fathers are known to have applied were origin in the apostolic circle, continuous use and orthodoxy.

There was already strong support for Hebrews and Revelation in the 2nd century, or even the late 1st, and a fair degree of support for Jude and 2 John. 3 John seems to have been little known, however, and James and 2 Peter, though rather better known, were seldom regarded as canonical. An international body like the Christian church would be bound to take time in reaching agreement on the canon, but the reason why it took longer with these seven books than with the others is that they all presented particular problems. In five cases there was doubt about apostolic authorship. Hebrews was anonymous and stylistically different from the acknowledged Pauline epistles. 2 Peter was stylistically different from 1 Peter, and Revelation from the other writings of John. The author of 2 and 3 John called himself 'the elder'. There was a second problem with Revelation: the Montanists claimed its support. (They also claimed the support of the Gospel of John, which caused some opponents of the Montanists to attack it, but it was so well established that the church simply brushed these criticisms aside.) Jude quoted the book of *Enoch*. The problem with James is not clearly recorded, but it probably related to the teaching given on justification in chapter two.

The church did not in the long run find these problems insuperable; nor need we. Hebrews is probably by an associate of Paul (cf. Heb. 13:23), though not by Paul himself. The stylistic differences between 1 and 2 Peter could be due to Peter's use of different scribes, and those between Revelation and the other Johannine literature due to John having no help with his Greek when in exile on Patmos. The use of 'the elder' does not exclude the possibility that the author of the Johannine letters was an apostle (cf. 1 Pet. 5:1). Revelation does not really give support to Montanism; Jude does not really recognize *1 Enoch* as Scripture; and James does not really agree with the Pharisees or disagree with Paul on justification.

Probably all these books were accepted as Scripture from an early period in some quarter of the church, even those whose acceptance is not recorded. Otherwise we would have to suppose that, at the end of the 4th century, some of them sprang suddenly from being canonical nowhere to being canonical everywhere, an implausible supposition.

#### The shape of the canon

The Hebrew OT is differently arranged from the Christian OT with which the English Bible has made us familiar. It is in three sections: the Law, the Prophets and the Hagiographa or Scriptures (probably meaning 'the other Scriptures'). The division is at first sight perplexing, especially with respect to the books assigned to each section, and until recently it was widely held to be a mere historical accident, due to the books having been recognized as Scripture (so it was supposed) at three different periods. However, the ancient order of the books, found in the Talmudic *baraita*, corrects this view. The arrangement is subtle, but fully intelligible. It is as follows (the five books of the Law, Genesis to Deuteronomy, being taken for granted): 'Our rabbis taught: The order of the Prophets is Joshua and Judges, Samuel and Kings, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, Isaiah and the Twelve ... the order of the Hagiographa is Ruth and the Book of Psalms and Job and Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs and Lamentations, Daniel and the Scroll of Esther, Ezra and Chronicles' (*Baba Bathra* 14b).

An inspection of this list shows that each of the three sections contains narrative literature, covering three successive periods, and that each contains literature of another kind, differing from section to section. In the Law, the narrative runs from the creation to the death of Moses. The other kind of literature is law, but it is introduced into the context of the narrative, and the sequence is chronological throughout.

In the Prophets, the narrative books are distinct from the others; they are the first four, and they carry on the history, in chronological order, from where Deuteronomy leaves it, beginning from the death of Moses and ending with the end of the monarchy, at the start of the Babylonian Exile. The other four books in the Prophets are oracular literature, and they are arranged, not chronologically, but in descending order of size.

In the Hagiographa, there are four narrative books covering the period of the Exile and the return, and they are put after the others, probably so that the canon can begin with creation and end with the return, the beginning and end of biblical history. Chronicles, which recapitulates the whole of it,

starting with Adam and ending with the return, is for that reason put last, after and not before Ezra-Nehemiah. Daniel, because of its first six chapters, is reckoned to be a narrative book. Ruth, which is really a narrative book relating to a quite different period, is treated in the Hagiographa as a preface to the Psalter, ending as it does with the genealogy of the psalmist David. The other six books are books of lyrics and wisdom, and once again they are arranged not chronologically but in descending order of size, a slight liberty being taken with the Song of Songs (which is really shorter than Lamentations, not longer), so as to keep the books relating to Solomon together.

This is by no means the only order in which the books of the Hebrew Bible have been arranged, but it is the oldest and most illuminating. In a modern printed Hebrew Bible, the three sections, with the books assigned to them, are maintained, but one will often find the oracular Prophets rearranged chronologically and the Hagiographa rearranged liturgically (with the five little books now read at Jewish festivals put together), though still ending with Chronicles.

Whether the Alexandrian Jews who translated the Septuagint made any alteration to the Hebrew arrangement we do not know, since no list that they produced has survived, though the way that Josephus simplifies the arrangement for the benefit of Greek readers, in his list mentioned earlier, is interesting. But when Christian lists and manuscripts of the OT begin to appear, we again find the subtle Hebrew arrangement simplified, and the books rearranged, according to literary character and chronology, as law, histories, poetical and wisdom books, prophecies (though not always in that order, and with the histories sometimes subdivided). The main difference is that, whereas Josephus put all the narrative books into the Prophets, Christians took all the narrative books out of the Prophets, and created a fourth section. This is the sort of arrangement that is found in Greek and Latin Bibles, and from there it was transferred to the English Bible. When books of the Apocrypha are included in Greek and Latin Bibles, they are usually assigned to the various standard categories in the same way. Following the Reformation, they were taken out and printed as a separate section between the Testaments in the English Bible. Among

modern English Bibles it is only those of Roman Catholic origin that still intermingle them with the canonical books.

The way Christians arranged the books of the NT was similar to the way they rearranged those of the OT. In ancient lists and manuscripts, as in modern printed Bibles, they are normally arranged as follows: the four Gospels; the Acts of the Apostles; two groups of epistles (either the Pauline epistles or the catholic epistles coming first); and the Revelation of John. The most basic books come first, another narrative book follows, and a prophetic book comes last, much as in the OT. The epistles take the place of the poetical and wisdom books, and it is here that the correspondence between the lists is most approximate.

#### Divergent forms of the canon

1. *The Samaritan canon*, The Samaritans have, from antiquity, recognized as canonical only the Pentateuch. This was at one time thought to indicate that when the Samaritans separated from the Jews in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, the Jewish canon consisted simply of the Pentateuch. The Dead Sea Scrolls, however, have provided evidence that the Samaritans remained closely in touch with the Jews and conformed to most of their customs till the latter part of the 2nd century BC, when the Jews caused a permanent estrangement by destroying the Samaritan temple on Mount Gerizim. The Samaritans, it appears, reacted by rejecting the Prophets and Hagiographa, because of the recognition they give to the temple at Jerusalem.

2. *The Syrian canon*. When the standard Syriac translation of the Scriptures, the Peshitta, was made in the early 5th century, debate about the seven NT Antilegomena was still continuing in Syria, and only two of them, Hebrews and James, were included in the translation. The linguistic and political isolation of the Syrian churches was greatly accentuated by the Nestorian and Monophysite schisms of the 5th century, in which large parts of Syrian Christianity became separated for doctrinal reasons from the catholic communion of East and West. As a result, the status of the remaining five Antilegomena has continued to be doubtful in the Syrian churches.

The Ethiopian church, which was founded by missionaries from Syria, was further sepa-

rated even from the other Monophysite churches for about 600 years, between the 7th and the 13th centuries, because of the Moslem domination of Egypt and Arabia. As a result its canon is quite eccentric, and today includes all the books generally recognized in East and West, with one possible exception, but also many of the Apocrypha, *1 Enoch*, *Jubilees* and certain late works, mainly of Ethiopian origin, which have been mistakenly identified with ancient books not available in Ethiopia.

3. *The Roman Catholic canon*. The Council of Trent, at its fourth session (1546), reacted to the Reformation by endorsing the list of the Scriptures first found in the 6th-century pseudo-Gelasian decree, and obliterating Jerome's distinction between the Hebrew Bible and the Apocrypha. Though later Roman Catholic writers sometimes speak of the Apocrypha as 'deutero-canonical', this is contrary to the official teaching of Trent, often reaffirmed since, most recently in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (120, 138). The church which really regards the Apocrypha as deutero-canonical (authoritative, but less so) is the Eastern Orthodox.

Bodies which have a defective canon obviously lack something of the full biblical message, but bodies which recognize additional books are probably in greater danger of going astray. Some books of the Apocrypha countenance a weaker view of original sin and of the need for salvation (Tobit 12:9; Wisdom 8:19-20; Eccclus. 1:14; 3:3, 30; 35:3); one recommends prayer for the forgiveness of those who have died in their sins (2 Macc. 12:39-45).

#### Text and versions

The language of the OT is Hebrew (and to a small extent Aramaic) and that of the NT is Greek. These were the languages in which the inspired authors wrote, and what they wrote is our starting point for study, faith and obedience. Thus the original text of what they wrote, in so far as it can now be recovered, is our starting point. But although it is our starting point, it is not therefore all that we need.

Well before the NT was written, the OT was translated into Greek, and the Septuagint translation has deeply affected the NT, both in its OT references and in its general religious phraseology. This fact shows the feasibility and

legitimacy of translating the Scriptures into other languages, and the importance of the Septuagint translation in particular.

Then again, the use that the NT makes of the OT shows that a transmitted text can have authority, and not just the original text. The NT writers quote the OT as it was in their day, and in translation, but even so attribute to it final authority. This indicates that the transmission of the text is firmly controlled by the providence of God, and that, though we should study all indications of what the original text may have been, we can have confidence that it has not been changed out of all recognition, so as to frustrate God's purpose of guiding his people through Scripture. These considerations would not apply to every aberration of an individual scribe, but they do apply to standard forms of the transmitted text, such as the Massoretic text of the Hebrew OT and the 'traditional' text of the Greek NT, and probably also to standard translations of them. At the same time, they do not give the transmitted text exclusive authority, or imply that it is identical with the original text.

As regards the original text itself, our search for it, though proper and important, is circumscribed in various ways. Even the oldest and most carefully written manuscripts are separated from it by a period of decades or centuries, and the study of them has convinced textual critics that they do not at every point correspond to the original. To get back further, conjecture is necessary, and though certain agreed procedures are employed by textual critics, they are such as can yield only possible or probable results and leave plenty of scope for disagreement. What is more, there is scope for disagreement as to what is being sought. Many of the biblical books show signs of having been edited or supplemented, sometimes by the original author, sometimes by another. Even when another hand has been at work, we seldom have the right to say that the changes it made were unnecessary. The edited text is often the only text for which we have manuscript evidence. What, then, are we looking for? The work as it originally left the hand of the primary author, or as it left the hand of the editor, whether the author or another? These doubts about the original text should make us humble enough to treat the transmitted text with a proper respect.

Since both the canon and the text are the forms in which it has pleased God to clothe his revelation, we accept them as his precious gifts, given to make us wise unto salvation, and use them with the confidence of believers.

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R. T. BECKWITH

## Scripture

#### Introduction

#### Definitions

~~When Christians refer to the Bible as 'Scripture', they express their conviction that the Bible is the written word of God. The term 'holy Scripture(s)' was used by Jews to denote an established body of writings of divine origin, possessing authority for the people of God as well as for the individual (cf. *Epistle of Aristeeas*, 155, 168; Philo, *Quis Rerum Divinarum Heres Sit* 106, 159; *Mishnah Yadayim* 3, 5). The early Christians shared this view: the (OT) Scriptures are 'utterances of God' (Rom. 3:2; cf. 1:2), even when the speaker is not God himself (cf. the quotation of Is. 28:11-12 in 1 Cor. 14:21). Jewish and the early Christian tradition agree that 'what Scripture says, God says'. Jewish and Christian interpretations of various statements in the Hebrew Scriptures differed, but the divine origin and the normative nature of Scripture were acknowledged by both groups. The first Christians extended the notion of the 'word of God' to the apostolic account and explanation of the person and ministry of Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Thess. 2:13), just as specific words of~~

~~Jesus were regarded as authoritative (cf. 1 Cor. 7:10), and soon the term 'Scripture' was used for letters of the apostles (cf. 2 Pet. 3:16). The conviction that Scripture is the word of God was the undisputed tradition of the church until the 17th century.~~

#### Challenges

~~In the 17th century, philosophers and theologians began to challenge the truthfulness and authority of Scripture with reference to human reason (which was increasingly regarded as an independent source for truth about the world) and the nature of history (which was regarded as contingent, particularly in relation to the supposedly 'absolute' truths established by reason). Rene Descartes's method of establishing truth fundamentally changed the way 'progressive' theologians viewed Scripture, particularly its truthfulness and relevance. If on the one hand the insights of human reason are regarded as a priori correct and certain; if on the other hand the possibility of a contradiction between theology and philosophy is excluded; then Scripture must be open to criticism, unless such criticism is forbidden by clear dogmatic statements (K. Scholder). As such statements were soon re-~~

garded as inadmissible in an academic 'scientific' context, the appropriateness of the traditional concepts used to describe the nature of Scripture – word of God, revelation, inspiration, authority, canon – was challenged.

Today some critics abandon the traditional models for Scripture altogether, e.g. by attenuating the notion of an authoritative canon on the grounds that texts other than Scripture can mediate God's presence, and by suggesting a new view of how the Bible functions today (J. Barr). Others seek to redefine the traditional terms: revelation is seen as an 'occurrence' which happens within people and changes their self-understanding (R. Bultmann); the term 'word of God' is reserved for Jesus Christ (K. Barth); inspiration becomes the human experience of being inspired by someone to do something (W. J. Abraham), or a process whereby traditions are formulated, reshaped and transmitted within believing communities (P. J. Achtemeier), or an enhancement of one's understanding of God which is effected by the Bible (K. R. Trembath); biblical authority is limited to the saving purpose and effect of the Bible (D. K. McKim).

The problem with many of these approaches is that of establishing a clear and definite 'location' where humans may find truth, particularly truth about God. In the context of postmodern thinking, some scholars explicitly repudiate any appeal to normative 'readings' (of the Bible, or of any other text). More conservative scholars seek to preserve the notion that God speaks to humans; however, as some reject the traditional identification of Scripture as the word of God, and do not want to accord authority to an historical document, it is not clear which criteria might be used to establish where we may hear God's voice, unless one appeals to tradition, reason or experience. These alternatives all rely on the exercise of human reason in one form or another. As the history of humankind has made many people rather pessimistic concerning the competence of human reason to establish truth, the intrinsic subjectivity of these options does not give much ground for hope. As human reason is affected by the fall and thus by the malaise of sin, it cannot be the source of truth. If truth about God is not revealed to us, we have to remain agnostic. Without revelation we can-

not know God. This is the reason why our understanding of Scripture as the word of God has to be derived from Scripture itself.

#### Consequences for biblical theology

The refusal to regard the Bible as Scripture, i.e. as the word of God, reflects the belief that the biblical documents, being historical in nature and diverse in outlook, do not constitute a coherent and established canon. As a result, biblical theology is thought to be impossible. The programmatic essay of W. Wrede (1859-1906) on 'The tasks and methods of NT theology' (in R. Morgan [ed.], *The Nature of New Testament Theology* [London, 1973], pp. 68-116) illustrates this view with reference to the NT. Wrede asserted that since 'logical thinking' cannot arrive at the conclusion that Scripture is a collection of inspired writings which constitute the revealed word of God, the traditional 'biblical theology of the NT' should be replaced by a 'history of early Christian religion and theology' which deliberately ignores the canon or any consideration of the question of revelation; the scholar who wants to deal with the NT in a scientific way must be guided by 'a pure, disinterested concern for knowledge, a concern that accepts every result that emerges', as the task of theology is not to serve the church but to pursue truth.

Today many critical scholars dismiss the possibility of biblical theology because they regard the Bible as a collection of diverse historical texts; they contain information and represent theological positions which are mutually contradictory, and revelation cannot be identified with historical documents anyway (cf. P. Pokorny, in *HBT* 15, pp. 83-94). Biblical scholars must work with a complex diversity of texts, sources, traditions and positions. Some believe that only confessionally bound 'scholars of the church' can attempt to formulate a biblical theology in the sense of a synthesis of 'early Christian thought' or an outline of the theologies of the whole Bible (H. Raisanen, *Beyond New Testament Theology*, p. 121).

#### The task

Biblical theology seeks to present a synthesis of the message of Scripture. It presupposes therefore a coherent and established canon of biblical books. It is precisely for this reason that the nature of the Bible as Scripture is of