

## Thinking about Canon\*

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The questions of canon, inspiration, and authority deserve rethinking in our day. I come at things from the angle of early Jewish and early Christian tradition. The traditions are intertwined. Attention to both is necessary if the history of either is to be understood.

Jew or Gentile, believer or atheist, it doesn't matter: this essay is meant to be intelligible to all. On the other hand, the discussion is not dumbed down to the level of unsupported generalizations, nor is my intent apologetic. Links to information and discussion are provided; for more bibliography, see the "Suggestions for Further Study" at essay's conclusion.

### Definitions

The terms of the discussion are controversial and must be defined. I will use the term "canon" in a *functional* sense. A writing is canonical if and only if passages from it can be appealed to in order to bolster an argument or establish a direction of thought or action. A more pointed definition is also helpful: a writing is canonical if it must be shown that its contents cohere with teaching developed on independent grounds. So defined, the term describes a usage that is not specific to a single epoch or religious group.

For starters, I will concentrate attention on matters Jewish. It must be emphasized that rabbinic Judaism came to possess not one but several sets of authoritative writings. The [Tanakh](#), a heterogeneous corpus of narrative, law, prophecy, hymnody, lament, wisdom, love lyrics, and comedy, often referred to today as the Hebrew Bible, is the primal Jewish canon.<sup>1</sup> Next to attain canonical status was the [Mishnah](#) (c. 200 CE), a collection of tractates meant to preserve tradition and aid in the regulation of Jewish life. Supplementation and commentary thereto collected in the [Talmudim](#) (Talmud Yerushalmi [c. 400 CE]; Talmud Bavli [c. 500 CE]) also became canonical. In a looser sense, the same applies to commentary on the Tanakh collected in the various [Midrashim](#) (redacted collections from c. 200 – 800 CE).

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\* A [comment](#) by Doug Chaplin on his excellent [blog](#) provided the impetus for this piece. I thank Doug for noting my [proposal](#) that the Hebrew Ben Sira tradition be fully presented in study Bibles of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and [Peter Kirk](#) for his [comments](#). The essay reflects their input. I expect it will reflect the input of others as time goes by.

<sup>1</sup> TaNaKh is an acronym referring to three parts: the Torah (Law), the Neviim (Prophets), and the Ketuvim (Writings).

Another strand of tradition is called *piyyut*, a genre of liturgical poetry which originated in 5th cent. Palestine. *Piyyutim* inserted into statutory prayer (the *Amidah*) were composed for every Sabbath, and served to link the Amidah to specific Torah and festival readings by means of allusions large and small. Included to varying degrees in transmitted liturgical corpora, they engendered a corpus of exegesis in Ashkenazi Judaism.

Rival chains of tradition developed. *Karaite* Judaism (c. 850 - the present) came to possess a body of *halacha* distinct from that contained in the Talmuds. In its floruit, Karaism transmitted stimuli to Rabbanite Judaism, which nonetheless saw it as a threat. The achievement of *Aharon ben Asher* (fl. first half of 10th cent.), the Karaite behind the production of model codices of the Hebrew Bible, and of *Yefet ben Ali* (fl. second half of 10th cent.), whose exegetical writings are cited by *Avraham ibn Ezra* (1089-1164), exemplify the legacy of Karaism. *Saadiyah* Gaon (882-942), who inveighed against Karaism, left an immense legacy of his own. His translation of the Torah and other biblical books into Arabic, his biblical commentaries, and his *Articles of Faith and Dogma* (*Emunot veDeot* in translation), the first Jewish philosophical classic since *Philo* of Alexandria (c. 20 BCE – 50 CE) wrote works like *On the Eternity of the World* and *On Providence*, all had a lasting impact on subsequent tradition.

In line with sporadic earlier custom, rabbinic authorities wrote binding *responsa* (*teshuvot*) to questions (*she'elot*) of observance from the 6th cent. forward. A famous answer is that of *Amram bar Sheshna* (9th cent.), head of the Babylonian academy of Sura, to a query about correct liturgy from a scholar in Barcelona. The answer contained a complete prayerbook replete with liturgical texts and halachic instruction. Repeatedly revised, it became known as the *Seder Rav Amram*, and was used across medieval Europe.

The work of biblical exegetes like *Rashi* (R. Shelomo Izhaqi, 1045-1105) and *Avraham ibn Ezra* (1089-1164) came to be regarded as authoritative. *Rashi* is also the talmudic exegete par excellence. Commentaries on their commentaries are numerous. Additional bodies of thought and tradition, sometimes after heated controversy, came to rule life and practice, and were commented upon profusely. Examples include *Maimonides'* (1135-1204) *Mishneh Torah*, his Arabic *Guide for the Perplexed* (*Moreh Nevukhim* in translation) and *Yosef Karo's* (1488-1575) *Shulchan Arukh*. Another stream of tradition, the *Kabbalah*, reached canonical expression in the *Zohar* of *Moses de Leon* (c. 1240-1305). All of these traditions contribute to what Judaism is today.

Historically speaking, Judaism is a canon-making machine. Time and again, disparate texts were strung together, loosely integrated, or juxtaposed to form corpora worthy of study, transmission, and comment. Time and again, one canon-in-formation imposed order, opened up, and relativized canons already in existence in a never-ending stream of interpretation.

From the first century of the current era forward, the practice of reading excerpts from Moses and the Prophets on the Sabbath in synagogue is well-attested ([Acts 13:15](#); Josephus, *Against Apion* 2:175; Philo, *Hypoth.* 7.10-14; [Theodotus inscription](#), Mt. Ophel). In addition, ancient homilies on Torah passages often cite and expound a verse from Psalms or Proverbs in conjunction with the Torah passage (*Bereshit Rabbah*, etc.). But the contents of Judaism's most ancient set of canonical writings were not *necessarily* read and expounded on in public assembly. Beyond the Torah, vast stretches of the rest of what became the Tanakh had no fixed place in the reading tradition. Of the books later known as the [Five Scrolls](#), up until the end of the Talmudic period, only Esther was read publicly. Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, and Qohelet obtained a fixed place in the liturgy in *post*-Talmudic times, Qohelet last of all. A *baraita* states that on the Ninth of Av the Bible may not be read nor tradition studied, "but one may recite Job, Lamentations, and the sections of Jeremiah which deal with calamity," (הרעים שבירמיה וקורא בקינות באיוב ובדברים הרעים שבירמיה) b. Ta'an. 30a). Components of the Tanakh which *never* obtained a fixed place in the Sabbath and holiday reading tradition are (counting the Twelve as a single component): Job, Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Daniel. A text's inclusion in the Tanakh and the reading of it in assembly stand in *partial* correlation.

The study of Judaism's other canons is commanded, though some canons, e.g., the Zohar, are not accepted by all. The primary setting for the study of Talmud and other tradition was the *beit midrash*, where rabbis and students learned together, to be distinguished from the *beit sefer*, where boys under thirteen were introduced, beginning with Leviticus, to components of the Tanakh. The *beit sefer*, *beit midrash*, and *beit ha-keneset* (synagogue) are correlative institutions in which canon upon canon are commented upon.

Oral and written literature which made it into the prayerbook tradition was understood as consonant with sound doctrine, but insufficient as a basis for establishing said doctrine. The fact that something is repeated in worship does not imply that it could be appealed to as foundational to the teaching in the course of a homily. Prayers, hymns, and narrative that play or played a role in a liturgical setting but are not treated as a teaching instrument in the

sense explained include the [Megillat Antiochus](#) which was read on Hanukkah Sabbath in some times and places; the [piyyuṭim](#), in some times and places read in a fixed cycle alongside readings from the Torah and the Prophets; and statutory prayer like the *Amidah*. Hellenistic Jewish statutory prayer analogous to it, it might be noted, became a vehicle of worship among early Christians. Redacted versions are found in Books Seven and Eight of the [Apostolic Constitutions](#).

The reading of Mishnah excerpts on the Sabbath according to a fixed pattern was traditional in some times and places. The ban on the reading of *deuterosis* in the 6<sup>th</sup> cent. [Justinian code](#) appears to target this practice. The beloved [Pirquei Avot](#) has a place in the liturgy of many communities today. It is often found in editions of the [siddur](#).

Textual function is the most reliable index of canonicity. The canonical component of synagogue oratory is the text or texts treated as foundational to the teaching imparted. Said component can have more than one layer. A canonical interpretation of a canonical text may be the true foundation to the teaching imparted (an authorized translation, a transmitted midrash, or the authoritative comment of a Rashi or ibn Ezra). Nonetheless, authoritative interpretation derives its authority from the text it interprets. Layer upon layer of interpretation may serve as a foundation in the oratorical moment. In most times and places, nonetheless, the presupposed point of departure has been a passage of Torah read out beforehand.

“Inspiration” and “authority” must also be defined. The functional loci of both range from the texts themselves, the authors reputed to be behind them, authoritative interpreters of said texts, past and present, and the community to which text and interpretation are vouchsafed. The charter of the Qumran community (1st cent BCE) elaborates on the intersection of these loci (1QS 8:1-16). See Appendix A for a presentation. Viewed in isolation, the various lines of authority are subject to misunderstanding.

In Jewish tradition, a canonical book came to be defined as “composed under divine inspiration” (ברוח הקודש נאמרה; said of the scroll of Esther in b. Meg. [7a](#)). Tradition also ascribed inspiration to the translators of the Torah into Greek ([Philo](#), *Life of Moses* 2.25-44; b. Meg. [9a](#)) and the translator of the Prophets into Aramaic (b. Meg. [3a](#)). The last case is interesting. The [Targum](#) in question, attributed in the cited text to [Jonathan ben Uzziel](#) reputed to be [Hillel](#)’s foremost pupil, but there described as a contemporary of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, is paraphrastic at points and includes a number of aggadic expansions. As Philip Alexander points out, quotations

from it are sometimes prefaced with the following words: “Were it not for the [Targum](#) of this verse, we should not know what it means” (b. Meg. [3a](#)).<sup>2</sup> Christians no less than Greek-speaking Jews before them often thought of the [Septuagint](#), a term which came to refer to the received translation of the entire Old Testament, in similar terms.

It must not be assumed that the canonical reach of the five books of Moses, arguably the holy of holies of Jewish tradition, extended in all directions without encountering alternative media of self-understanding. Alongside the Torah and the Prophets on the one hand and the Mishnah on the other, partially or completely unassimilated masses of religious expression ruled the faith and practice of synagogue-attending Jews in late antiquity. The evidence is undeniable. Those who worshipped in a late antique Palestinian [synagogue](#), before, during, and after the service, which presumably included a [Torah reading](#), a [Haftarah](#), a [homily](#), and [statutory prayer](#), gazed with absorbing eyes on a wealth of iconic representation. On the one hand, a [Torah shrine](#) and a facade recalling the Jerusalem Temple, of which the synagogue was a reflection, were represented, along with a [menorah](#), a [shofar](#), a [lulav](#), an [etrog](#), and an [incense](#) shovel, accoutrements thereof. The objects’ significance depends on *post*-biblical developments. On the other, scenes and figures from the Bible were depicted, the *Aqedah*, Noah, Aaron and the Tabernacle altar, David with his lyre, and Daniel. Often, a representation of the zodiac and the sun god [Helios](#), with halo, sun rays, globe, and scepter, stood in the center of the synagogue floor. Torah-centric worship contextualized these representations and subordinated the worlds of meaning they evoke to its own world of meaning. But the reverse is also true.<sup>3</sup>

Biblical, post-biblical, and extra-biblical motifs were juxtaposed in late antique Judaism. Competing vectors of contextualization were no less typical of late antique Christianity. Post-biblical and extra-biblical practices include the commemoration and [veneration of Mary](#) and other biblical figures; commemoration and [veneration](#) of post-biblical [martyrs](#), founders of churches, benefactors, and bishops of the past, the names of which were

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<sup>2</sup> Philip S. Alexander, “Jewish Aramaic Translations of Hebrew Scriptures,” in *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* (eds. Martin Jan Mulder and Harry Sysling; CRINT 2/1; Assen/Maastricht: Van Gorcum; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990) 217-253; 223.

<sup>3</sup> For further discussion, see Lee I. Levine, “Art, Architecture, and Archaeology,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Studies* (ed. Martin Goodman, Jeremy Cohen, and David Sorkin; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) 824-851; 829-39.

often read out in the context of the eucharistic *synaxis* (gathering); celebration of [masses for the dead](#) three days out and annually thereafter; and annual observance of the *parentalia*, in which the family mourned its dead with ten days of fasting and gathered around its dead on the eleventh day, in church (with a mass) and out (with a banquet), gave substance to the faith and practice of late antique Christians.

In thinking about canon, we mislead ourselves if we do so without integrating whatever knowledge we have of the larger context in which it functioned. It is one thing to say that canon is about a set of texts the contents of which are selectively deployed in a never ending stream of tradition, interpretation and reappropriation. It is another to say that said canon, which is supposed to rule faith and practice, actually does so. Reality belies the accuracy of prescriptive injunction. It doesn't take a particularly acute observer of religious life to note that a canon, no matter how consolidated, codetermines rather than dictates actual practice, today no less than in late antique Judaism and Christianity.

Do I need to evoke contemporary realities to pound the point home? Probably so. I draw from experiences in the American Midwest. In attending a reformed or conservative synagogue, I note that the liturgy is rich with ancient, medieval, and modern components, juxtaposed rather than homogenized. The preaching cannot assume a shared halachic framework, because the congregation does not possess one. In attending an evangelical church, I note that the explication of scripture is governed by a baroque and post-biblical eschatological system, and that the preaching mixes motifs drawn from the Bible with elements drawn from the Horatio Alger myth and a Captain America plotline. Especially if it is a large church, or of any size if, like my own, it is a *mainline* evangelical church, the behavior and aspirations of the majority of those attending are codetermined by cultural factors in creative tension, to put it mildly, with everything that is said and done in the church on the basis of scripture and tradition.

Key aspects of a canon's function include the following. The truth which a canon contains is held to be such apart from its conformity to reality as socially constructed beyond the bounds of the community which cherishes it. The excellency of its truth is all the merrier if it clashes with the touted claims of a competing locus of authority. Contemporary examples may illustrate. Consider the creation vs. evolution debate, a false polarity which admirably serves powerful interests on both sides. Or consider the pushback against the *fait accompli*, de jure, of an egalitarian status for women. The

complementarian appeal to scripture serves to ground its protest in a paradigm of timeless value.

The cited examples may lead some readers to jump to the conclusion that canon, after all, is a bad thing. Nothing could be sillier. The truth which the Tanakh contains, the judgment and salvation it foresees for Jews and Gentiles, contradicts reality on multiple levels. Its truth lies therein. On the basis of such truth, the Jews have survived and flourished against all odds.

The truth vouchsafed through the Old and New Testaments is no less counterfactual. It is understood after all to have been nailed to a cross.

It is the prophetic experience that truth stands in opposition to fact. Unless that is seen, the content of the canon is read as a registry of fact, not a fountainhead of truth. The truth it contains, more often than not, is simply ignored, but it is also understood that said truth cannot be evaded forever. An example may illustrate. The *Wirkungsgeschichte* (history of effects) of the message of Isaiah as the eponymous book understands it is described by Martin Buber in the following terms: “The message will be misunderstood, misinterpreted, misused, it will even confirm and harden the people in their faithlessness. But its sting will rankle within them for all time.”<sup>4</sup>

A canon is supposed to be a plumbline, a witness to truth *extra nos*. If not, it is not canon at all. If, as Buber suggests, the prophetic word is effective “for all time,” then prophecy and canon go hand in hand. Since the effect of prophecy on those who hear it is inherently unpredictable, the effect of a canon which contains it is beyond the control of the powers that establish it.

The authority a canon has, therefore, is affirmed quite apart from the extent to which it effectively carries said authority at a given point in time. Paradoxes of this kind are not limited to religious discourse. In the *Declaration of Independence of the Thirteen Colonies* (July 4, 1776), it is said: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” It does not matter that it is obvious that human beings are *not* created equal. Some people are born poor, others are born rich; some people are blessed with two parents, others, with no parents at all. It isn’t true that human beings are created equal. *But it ought to be true*. Because we choose to believe what ought to be true, and not what is true, we allow ourselves to be transformed

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<sup>4</sup> Martin Buber, “Plato and Isaiah” (1938), in *Israel and the World: Essays in Time of Crisis* (New York: Schocken, 1963 [1948]) 103-112; 112.

by what ought to be true. Truth, and more specifically, acting on the truth, derives its world-transforming power from its counterfactual content.

The transforming power of a canon is in direct proportion to the amount of counterfactual truth it contains. In the final analysis, furthermore, said power is not at the disposition of a locus of authority external to it.

### Canonical Topography: Center and Periphery

As previously noted, the history of reception of the books that came to form Judaism's most ancient canon is not exhausted by a description of the selective deployment of their contents in the textual streams of tradition and interpretation which achieved authoritative status in the life and practice of successive eras. As soon as the function of the canon is placed in the multi-dimensional context of a "real-life" synagogue, ancient or modern, it is seen that the authority it is supposed to carry must compete with other loci of authority. That is the case quite apart from the well-known non-coincidence of text, authorized interpreter, and responding "reader." Interpreter and "reader" willy-nilly constitute loci of authority as well.

The canon comparable to that of Judaism in Christianity is more complex, with an "Old" and a "New" Testament. But the Jewish and Christian canons both have a canon within the canon. That of Christianity, like that of Judaism, is a mix of narrative, promissory vision, and precept – the four Gospels. The model and equivalent in Judaism: the five books of Moses.

The fundamental things apply in both traditions. The hierarchy of a canon's parts, the traditional way the canon impacts reality outside itself, is subject to change without notice. The primacy of a core canon gives way, historically speaking, more often than might seem upon first consideration, to the authority of another component of the canon, or to a system of thought or ideology beyond the canon altogether.

An example or two may illustrate. A Jewish general and poet, [Shmuel haNagid](#) (993-1056), known in Arabic as Ismail ibn Naghrela (a loan from Latin *niger*=‘dark’), held two portfolios simultaneously: that of prime minister of the Muslim state of Granada in wider [Al-Andalus](#), and that of *nagid*, or governor, of [Granada's Jewish community](#). He led the king of Granada's forces into battle in one annual campaign after another. Three books comprise the *diwan* (collection) of his poems assembled by his sons after him. The poetry of *Ben Tehillim* (on the model of the Psalms) is imbued with the "martial-lyric spirit," to use [Peter Cole's](#) phrase, of 2 Samuel and the Davidic psalms. *Ben Tehillim* also contains lyric as sensual as Song of Songs, satire as biting as that of the prophets, elegy as moving as that of

David for Saul and Jonathan. *Ben Mishle* (on the model of Proverbs) collects a body of witty aphorisms. *Ben Qohelet* (on the model of Qohelet) contains, in Cole's words, "piercing epigrams, stunning descriptions of natural phenomena, and powerful mortality poems of various lengths."<sup>5</sup> Shmuel drew from the periphery of the canon rather than its center in staking out a full-blooded form of Judaism of extraordinary originality.

As [Gerhard Ebeling](#) famously stated in his inaugural lecture at the University of Tübingen in 1947, church history is the history of the exposition of Holy Scripture.<sup>6</sup> In the course of history, the entire contents of the canon have been utilized. [Waldensian](#) history may illustrate. When the movement [begins](#) in France in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, it is firmly rooted in the synoptic gospel tradition, with an emphasis on itinerant preaching, a life of poverty, and obedience to the *lex Christi* as reported in the Sermon on the Mount. The movement was [censured](#) and [persecuted](#) for its refusal to submit to the authority of local bishops who for political reasons did not always wish to authorize the anti-heretical preaching the Waldensians excelled in. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Waldensians were introduced to the Pauline principle of justification by faith by the Swiss Reformer [Guillaume Farel](#). An internal crisis ensued, with the majority of the movement adhering to the Reformation. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, in the wake of attempts by Catholic powers to exterminate and eradicate them from their [ancestral valleys](#) along what is now a stretch of the Italian side of the Alps and Piedmont on the border with France, a band of expelled men, led by [Josué Janavel](#) and buoyed by apocalyptic fervor derived from an actualizing interpretation of biblical prophecy, stage a return to the valleys from their exile in Switzerland. They retake the valleys with tactics and a reliance on God's help drawn from the book of Joshua. Never dislodged from their valleys thereafter, they reconstituted themselves as a polity. The two principal foci of the New Testament, the Gospels and the letters of Paul, became the mainstay of Waldensian life and practice. At more than one juncture in their history, however, they would not have survived without relying on elements on the canon's periphery like the books of Joshua, Daniel, and Revelation.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Peter Cole, *The Dream of the Poem: Hebrew Poetry from Muslim and Christian Spain 950-1492* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007) 37-38.

<sup>6</sup> Gerhard Ebeling, *Kirchengeschichte als Geschichte der Auslegung der Heiligen Schrift* (Sammlung gemeinverständlicher Vorträge und Schriften aus dem Gebiet der Theologie und Religionsgeschichte 189; Tübingen: Mohr, 1947).

<sup>7</sup> For a readable overview of Waldensian history, see Issue 22 (1989) of *Christian History & Biography*.

### A Dual Dynamic

Rabbinic Judaism and various branches of early Christianity eventually achieved a high degree of uniformity within their respective spheres of influence with respect to the books and the content of the books with a canonical function as defined above. But there is no advantage gained by downplaying the extent to which Jews among themselves and Christians among themselves prior to those achievements did not agree about which books were suitable to appeal to and comment upon in teaching and preaching. To one degree or another, the situation was fluid for a long time. In certain respects it remained fluid despite all efforts at uniformization.

On the one hand, the existence of an agreed upon nucleus of authoritative literature in various times and places is undeniable; on the other, the supplementation of existing authoritative writings via interpolations and independent compositions with authoritative pretensions is equally well-attested. The dual dynamic describes a fundamental dimension of the history of Jewish, Jewish-Christian, and Christian literature throughout antiquity. It gave us the Tanakh + the Talmud according to two rival configurations in rabbinic Judaism, and the Old Testament in a variety of configurations + the New Testament in Christianity. Penultimately, *subsets* and *additions* to what eventually became the Tanakh and the New Testament carried the day.

What literature was accepted as authoritative, and in what translation (if any), varied according to time and place. For example, in the Yerushalmi (Meg. 10b), [Aquila](#)'s translation of the Pentateuch into Greek is described as supervised and approved by rabbis [Eliezer](#) (ben Hurqanos) and [Yehoshua](#) (ben Hananyah) (תירגם עקילס הגר התורה לפני רבי אליעזר ולפני רבי יהושע); in the Bavli (Meg. 3a), the [Aramaic translation](#) of the Pentateuch by the same person and supervised by the same people is mentioned (תרגום של תורה (אונקלוס הגר אמרו מפי ר' אליעזר ור' יהושע). Tradition garbled the historical details, but that is beside the point.<sup>8</sup> The [Yerushalmi and the Bavli](#) attest to the felt need for an authorized translation of the Torah in the vernacular.

### A Pluriform [Tradition](#)

The facts are clear. Among manuscripts of traditional literature found at [Qumran](#) and in the manuscript tradition of transmitted translations of the

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<sup>8</sup> The Greek translation of the Pentateuch and other books that came to be included in the Tanakh associated with the name of Aquila is of a wholly different nature than the Aramaic translation of the Pentateuch associated with the same name (Onqelos). That both translations go back to the same person is quite improbable.

same literature, variety abounds. Across the Hebrew, [Greek](#), and Aramaic witnesses, the following phenomena are apparent: a plurality of transmitted text forms of [Genesis](#), [Exodus](#), Numbers, [Deuteronomy](#), Joshua, 1-2 [Samuel](#), and [1-2 Kings](#); the accordion-like shape of the corpus attributed to [Jeremiah](#) (a [shorter](#) and a longer version of the primary text; supplementation in the form of [Baruch](#) and [Letter of Jeremiah](#); attribution of Lamentations to Jeremiah); a shorter and a longer version of Ezekiel; a [plurality](#) of text forms and supplements ([Susannah](#), [Bel and the Dragon](#), [Song of the Three Youth](#)) to Daniel and [Esther](#); a plurality of transmitted [arrangements](#) and [contents](#) of the [Psalter](#); a plurality of text forms of Job and [Proverbs](#); a plurality of shapes and editions of the Chronicles-Ezra-Nehemiah materials, with rival editions appearing [side by side](#) in Greek tradition; a plurality of text forms of [Tobit](#) (one Hebrew and multiple Aramaic copies are attested at Qumran; Tobit in Greek is attested in three text forms), alongside a decision in rabbinic tradition not to transmit it; a plurality of [text](#) forms of [Ben Sira](#), and a plurality of points of view regarding its role; a plurality of text forms of [Enoch](#) and the attestation of an apocalypse known as [Jubilees](#), alongside a decision in rabbinic and many Christian traditions to suppress or sideline Enoch literature and Jubilees.<sup>9</sup>

In particular, a variety of text forms of a swath of traditional literature are attested among the [Dead Sea Scrolls](#) on the one hand and in Old Greek translations of said literature on the other. The latter are based on parent texts in Hebrew and Aramaic [as old](#) or older than the DSS. Like the latter, they are inassimilable in a host of instances to the text-type reflected in later MT.

Textual variety is typical of the period in question (3<sup>rd</sup> cent. BCE -1<sup>st</sup> cent. CE). Even if proto-MT mss. outnumber other attested types at Qumran, and affine manuscripts found at Qumran are few, the text types reflected in the Old Greek translations cannot be dismissed for that reason. As Emanuel Tov puts it, “Both the Hebrew parent text of G and certain of the Qumran texts reflect excellent texts, often *better* than that of M” (my italics).<sup>10</sup>

The larger point is another. An example: proto-MT, proto-[Samaritan](#), and non-aligned text types in the case of the Pentateuch are known from Qumran, to which one must add the Vorlage of the [LXX](#) as an additional text

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<sup>9</sup> Introductions to the pluriformity of the textual tradition are provided by Martin Abegg, Jr., Peter Flint, and Eugene Ulrich in *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible* (New York: HarperCollins, 1999). The essays of Natalio Fernández Marcos, Adrian Schenker, Dieter Böhler, Pierre-Maurice Bogaert, Johan Lust, Olivier Munnich, and Emanuel Tov in *The Earliest Text of the Hebrew Bible* (ed. Adrian Schenker; SBLSCS 52; Atlanta: SBL, 2003) are also instructive.

<sup>10</sup> *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, <sup>2</sup>2001 [1992]) 24.

type. Highly significant differences large and small distinguish one text-type from another. To the extent that the differences exhibit patterns by intent, it is proper to speak of recensional differences. The question then is, which recension is to be preferred over the others? The obvious answer has always been: the text-type transmitted in *my* religious tradition.

The traditional goal of [text criticism](#), on the other hand, involves the rejection of *all* extant witnesses in favor of the reconstructed *archetype* of said witnesses. Said archetype was no doubt traditional in its own right at a certain time and a certain place.

When all is said and done, a plurality of traditional texts is attested or reconstructible. In the case of the Pentateuch, one text-type was adopted and adapted by a specific religious formation (the [Samaritans](#)), another became the parent text of an authorized translation (the LXX), and a third came to be preferred in the transmission of the text in Hebrew as time passed (proto-MT). The archetype of the three is, in a large number of details, reconstructible. *All four* text-types must be understood as *final* and *canonical* for a particular swath of time, space, and socioreligious context.

A strong tendency to supplement and [resignify](#) a base text in a [variety](#) of ways is generally in evidence. The translation technique and expansions characteristic of the Targumim are parade examples. A concurrent and countervailing tendency is also in evidence, both in Greek and Aramaic, whereby translations were purged of elements without an equivalent in the original, however “original” was defined at the time. Examples include the translations of [proto-Theodotion](#), [Symmachus](#), and [Aquila](#).

As part of a larger project known as the [Hexapla](#), [Origen](#) (185-c.284 CE) one-upped all previous efforts by creating a text that comprised the original Greek translations of the Old Testament in the form he received them, with lines in the Hebrew, but not in the Greek, added in *via* insertion of [Theodotion](#)’s translation of said lines. Origen marked the added lines with an asterisk (✕). At the same time, he marked passages in the received Greek but not in the Hebrew with an obelus (÷) at the beginning and a metobelus (:) at the end. In the subsequent transmission of the Old Testament, the practical and unintended effect of Origen’s efforts can only be described as chaos.

If the situation sounds irreducibly plural, that’s because it was. One might summarize as follows. Jews of ancient times, even when they agreed that a particular book was binding in matters of faith and practice, read the book in textual forms at considerable odds with one another. The proto-MT in the original or calqued in translation ([Aquila](#)) was read by some, the received

Greek translation (often referred to as the Septuagint) of a text sometimes quite different from proto-MT, by others. Others read the Bible in a revised version of the original Greek translation ([Theodotion](#)) or a new version ([Symmachus](#)). Still others, though they heard the text recited in Hebrew, assimilated it in an Aramaic translation designed to resignify the whole in terms of a metanarrative at some remove from that implied in the original.

A variety of text forms of “the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms” (Luke 24:44) circulated among early Christians, as quotations in the New Testament prove. Variety in terms of content and arrangement of individual books and in terms of what books were treated as part of the Old Testament is evident throughout antiquity among the Christian churches. Anyone with knowledge of the manuscript tradition of the Septuagint and its daughter translations is aware of a wealth of variation those who make use of Rahlfs’ *Septuaginta* might never guess at.

Evidence for different sets of New Testament texts among the various churches is also extensive. The diversity that existed leading up to the achievement of uniformity over a considerable area is attested in the writings of [Eusebius](#) (c.260-c.340) (*Eccles. Hist.* [3.25.1-7](#) and [3.3.5-7](#)). According to him, some churches deemed the following writings canonical in the sense explained above, and some did not: the [Gospel of the Hebrews](#), the [Epistle to the Hebrews](#), [James](#), [2 Peter](#), [2-3 John](#), [Jude](#), and the [Apocalypse of John](#). [Acts of Paul](#), [Shepherd of Hermas](#), the [Apocalypse of Peter](#), the [Epistle of Barnabas](#), and the [Didache](#) he lists as spurious, but the appearance of all but the last in the list found in [Codex Claromontanus](#) suggests that Eusebius so labels them in order to counter the practice of churches in which they were treated as genuine. The unsettled nature of the situation up into the third century is also reflected in the views of [Origen](#) (c.184-c.254). He questioned James, 2 Peter, and 2-3 John. On the other hand, he regarded Shepherd of Hermas, a very popular piece of early Christian literature, to be “very useful, and, as I believe, divinely inspired” (*Comm. in Rom.* 10.31).

The situation among Syriac-speaking eastern churches was different again. For centuries, the standard gospel text was a gospel harmony [Tatian](#) produced around 170 CE. Referred to as the [Diatessaron](#) (Eusebius, *Eccles. Hist.* 4.29.6), its author nonetheless employed *more than* the gospels Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John as known to him in the construction of a single gospel narrative. Readings attributable to gospel tradition beyond the four were included by Tatian.<sup>11</sup> The church fathers [Ephrem](#) and [Aphrahat](#)

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<sup>11</sup> William L. Peterson, “Diatessaron,” *ABD* (1992) 2:189-190.

quote from Tatian's gospel and Ephrem wrote a commentary on it. On the other hand, the canon of Ephrem and Aphrahat did not include 2 Peter, 2-3 John, Jude, and Revelation. Nor do said books appear in the New Testament of the [Peshitta](#), the authorized Syriac translation of the Bible from the 5th century forward. The Peshitta also lacks Matt 27:35b (also missing from the best Greek mss.); Luke 22:17-18 (six divergent forms of Luke 22:17-20 are attested in ancient witnesses; there is no agreement among scholars as to which form is the more original); John 7:53-8:11 (a pericope non-original to its context); and Acts 8:37, 15:34, and 28:29 (each of which is also missing from the best Greek mss.).

The situation remained unsettled long after the process of uniformization began in earnest. As [Sozomen](#) (d. c. 450) informs us (*Hist. Eccl.* 7.9), the [Apocalypse of Peter](#) was read on Holy Friday in Palestine as late as the 5th cent. CE. The liturgy of the church of Jerusalem (5th–8th cent.) preserved in [Georgian](#) tradition for the eve of [Theophany](#) starts off with a reading from [4 Ezra](#) ([2 Esdras] 5:22-30). One might argue that neither the Apocalypse of Peter nor 4 Ezra was ever canonical anywhere in the full sense. Commentaries on them appear never to have been written. But they were obviously thought to contain passages more suitable for a liturgical purpose than comparable passages from more widely accepted traditional literature. The de facto authority attributed to them is of a high order.

Uniformity across the spectrum of historic Christian churches was never achieved vis-à-vis the contents of either the Old or New Testaments. In the same quarter-century in which an African [synod met in Hippo](#) (393) and defined the Old Testament to include Tobit, Judith, Wisdom of Solomon, Ben Sira, [Baruch](#), [Letter of Jeremiah](#), and 1-2 Maccabees, and the New Testament to include 2 Peter and Apocalypse of John, [Gregory of Nazianzus](#) in Asia Minor (d. 389) composed a poem on the books of the Bible in which *none* of the deuterocanonicals are listed, *nor* Esther, *nor* Revelation (*Carm.* 1.12.5; 2.2.8), and [Didymus the Blind](#) (313-398) in Alexandria noted that 2 Peter is a forgery, and criticized its eschatology. While acknowledging that it might be read in church, he explicitly excluded it from the canon (*Non igitur ignorandum, praesentum Epistolam esse falsatum, quae licet publicetur, non tamen in canone est*).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Didymus the Blind, *In Epistolam S. Petri Secundum Enarratio*, PG 39, cc 1771-1774; 1774. Cited by H. J. de Jonge, "[Introduction: The New Testament Canon](#)," in *The Biblical Canons* (ed. J. W. Auwers and H. J. de Jonge; BETL 163; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2003) 309-320; 317, n. 30.

In rabbinic tradition, a high degree of uniformity with respect to the contents of what came to be called the Tanakh was achieved over the course of a millennium. Paradoxically, the fine details of its text were fixed by a [Karaite](#), [Aharon ben Asher](#). Practically speaking, the achieved uniformity was nevertheless ineffective, given the variety of Aramaic translations through which the Pentateuch in particular was understood, as evidenced by the following traditions: [Targums Onkelos](#), [Neofiti](#), and [Pseudo-Jonathan](#); the [Cairo Geniza](#) fragments, the Fragmentary Targum, and the targumic toseftot. In pre- and extra-rabbinic Judaism, differences among traditional texts, not identity, were no less widespread.

### A Multiform Witness to the Word and Work of God

Sooner or later the pluriformity of tradition must be evaluated on the theological plane. The attested variety is problematic if and only if one is troubled by the fact that the God whom believers invoke in worship “at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets” (Heb 1:1). To this day, one might observe, God speaks by the prophets in diverse fashion. God speaks to Jews through the scriptures vouchsafed to them, to the [Ethiopian Orthodox](#) through those inherited by them, to Roman Catholics through those held in honor by them, and so on.

To suggest otherwise involves a failure to come to grips with the persistence of divine election “to the thousandth generation of those of who love him and keep his commandments” (Deut 7:9). Paul’s language is no less unequivocal: “the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable” (Rom 11:29). He affirmed this with respect to himself and all other Jews whether or not they believed on the name of Jesus the Messiah. Either way according to Paul, God’s calling remains in force.

*A fortiori*, the same applies to Christians of all persuasions. No matter how far they stray from the gospel, Paul keeps at them (exhibit A: Galatians). Paul assumes that God continues to speak to Jews and Christians of whatever persuasion through the scriptures he appeals to in teaching and diatribe.

On the basis of scripture, Paul is convinced that God will not abandon the heirs of the promises. This leads him to an *open-ended* view of God’s work among his fellow Jews. The tensions in Paul’s discussion (Rom 9-11) are patent, but not of his own making. The one who wanted to be “all things to all people” embraced a set of crisscrossing particularisms and universalisms with roots in the scriptures and his encounter with the resurrected Christ.

It might be appropriate for Jews and Christians today to have a similarly open-ended view of God's work among Jews and among Christians of persuasions other than their own.

Paul's open-ended view is determined by apocalyptic hope no less than was the outlook of Jesus before him, and [Bar Kokhba and Akiva](#)'s after him. Openness and enormous truth claims go hand in hand in Paul. In this too, Paul might be an enduring model. What Paul kept together is torn asunder today. Those with openness sidestep the issue of truth. Those who make truth claims lack openness. To be sure, the refusal to make truth claims, for Jew and Christian, must be seen as a form of betrayal. A scholar who gets this is [Jon Levenson](#). In the absence of an *open-ended* view of the other and the future, claiming the truth nevertheless becomes a self-serving exercise.

A Jewish thinker who like Paul and more than Paul embraced multiple particularisms and universalisms was [Franz Rosenzweig](#). According to R, a star of redemption casts its light across history. Judaism is the fire in the heart of the star; Christianity, the rays that emanate from the star. Judaism is the light; Christianity, that which is lighted. On the other hand, R takes it for granted that tensions and antipathies will always characterize the ordained relationship that binds Judaism and Christianity together. Arnold Betz provides a first [introduction](#) to Rosenzweig's life and thought.

The history of the canon reflects this relationship. For Christians, the scriptures of the Old Testament, irrespective of how the outer boundaries of the collection are defined, are inherited gifts. The text forms in which they read it, in Hebrew or in translation, are products of a traditioning process that arcs across two millennia. The [Masoretic Text](#) is a gift from the very end of that process, the [Septuagint](#), a gift from its beginning; "the Hebrew truth" of the [Vulgate](#), a gift in mid-trajectory. The bearers of the gifts in every case were Jews, or depended on Jews. The [Jewishness of the New Testament](#) is also undeniable, its components written, perhaps without exception, by Jewish Christians. Yet resignifications of the old by the new in rabbinic Judaism on the one hand and Christianity on the other are clearly and purposely at loggerheads with one another.

The literature of the Old and New Testaments – irrespective of how the outer boundaries are defined – reflects in its every part Jewish roots and Jewish origins. The history of interpretation of biblical literature has been shaped repeatedly on the anvil of Jewish-Christian interaction, in antiquity; in the high Middle Ages; all the way to modern times. Today no less than

yesterday, the interpretation of scripture is best conceived of as a joint venture and a terrain of battle at the same time.

For further discussion of some of themes just treated, see Appendix C: “Soft and Hard Supersessionism.”

### Scripture and Metascripture

Irreducibly diverse metanarratives divide Jews and Christians, Jews and Jews, and Christians and Christians. The differences pull them in opposite directions even as they pore over the scriptures they hold in common. It is hard for those who define themselves in terms of differences with others to affirm God’s calling of said others, even if they read part or all of the same scriptures they do. In my view, the counter-example of the earliest Christians is of enduring significance.

“Those who belong to the Way” (Acts 9:2) had no doubt that the gifts and calling of God remained with the Jews. So much is implied by the fact that they worshipped with them in the Temple and synagogue (Acts 2:46; 13:5, 13-43; etc.).

The status of those Peter addresses as “brothers” (Acts 2:29) - irrespective of their position vis-à-vis the gospel he proclaimed - was not a controversial matter. The status of “Gentiles turning to God” through the preaching of the gospel was the issue (Acts 15:19).

The reported position of James is of great interest (15:13-21). He recognized what was happening as a fulfillment of scripture (Amos 9:11-12 + Isa 45:21, a significant conflation). But he insisted that Gentiles follow the halacha in Moses traditionally understood to apply to Gentiles and Jews alike. After all, he pointed out, “For generations now Moses has had those who proclaim him in every town, and he is read aloud in the synagogues on every Sabbath” (15:21).

According to James, the reading of Moses in the synagogue is of ongoing importance in the divine economy. The torah proclaimed binds Jews and Gentiles alike, albeit to different degrees. James affirms twin universalisms: the universality of the mission of Moses, and the universality of the mission of Simon, Barnabas, and Paul (15:14, 26). The proclamation of Moses in one context and of Jesus in another are understood to bear consequences for all.

The position of James no less than Paul proves that a non-supersessionist stance vis-à-vis Judaism is an option for Christians. A return to a position like that of James would have revolutionary consequences today.

It might be admitted that God speaks to Jews and Christians of whatever persuasion through Genesis, Deuteronomy, and Jeremiah. The divergent frameworks within which scripture is read are, to be sure, limiting factors. That is an argument for reading scripture within more than one discrete and irreducible framework. It follows, for example, that a Jewish reading of the New Testament will be of interest to Christians. We can, perhaps we must, learn from each other. If we were honest, we might admit we always have.

### Retention and Supplementation of Authoritative Tradition

The history of the canon goes like this. All of the texts in the first two divisions of what is now the Tanakh, and the majority of the texts in its third division, were accepted by Jews in general for the threefold purpose of hearing God speak, knowing how to walk with God, and knowing how to speak back to God, from the mid-second century BCE forward. As the evidence of Old Greek translations and the Dead Sea Scrolls makes clear, the situation was nevertheless fluid in terms of content and arrangement of said texts, and the degree to which other texts such as [Enoch](#), [Jubilees](#), and the [Temple Scroll](#) were held to be binding and revelatory alongside of texts now in the Tanakh. Specific strands of Judaism treasured specific sets of traditional literature.

A “twenty-four” book canon identical to the one attested in rabbinic tradition is not attested outside of it before the fourth cent. CE, most clearly in Jerome, [Prologue to the Book of Kings](#) (Vulg.). The so-called *kaige* recension of the Old Greek translations, tentatively dated to the mid-first cent. BCE, embraced [Baruch](#) and the additions to Daniel, *plusses* over against the finalized rabbinic canon. The “twenty-two” books of Josephus (38-99 CE) lacked either Song of Songs or Ecclesiastes, a *minus* over against the finalized canon. The text forms of the books Josephus relied on, furthermore, were generally *not*, any more than those reflected in the New Testament, proto-masoretic in type. Since Josephus was a Pharisee, the strand of Judaism from which later rabbinic Judaism derives, non-attestation of proto-MT in his writings precludes the notion that proto-MT enjoyed a privileged status in rabbinic Judaism of the mid-first century of this era.

[Melito](#) of Sardis (fl. 170 CE), the first author of Christian tradition known to Eusebius (c.260-c.340) to list the books of the Old Testament (*Eccl. Hist.* 4.26.14), lacked Esther. Tannaitic controversies reported in rabbinic tradition dovetail with this information. Esther and Ecclesiastes, it transpires, were not universally accepted in early rabbinic Judaism. Despite or perhaps because of its popularity in some rabbinic circles, Song of Songs was also “spoken

against,” to use Eusebian terminology. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that the reception/non-reception of Ecclesiastes and Esther among Christians echoes differences among Jews.

The received authoritative tradition which, in the course of the 2nd – 4th cent. CE, came to coincide with the Tanakh as known from later Masoretic codices down to the minutest details, was, over the same centuries, supplemented by later tradition. It might be shown that the legal portions of the Pentateuch were compatible with the developing oral law, but oral tradition came to be understood as canonical in its own right, with or *without* a demonstrated basis in the materials of the Tanakh thought to have legal implications. [Megillat Taanit](#), the canonical Midrashim, and the Mishnah and Talmudim fall into the category of supplementation to a pre-existing canonical base. The writings in the Tanakh remained the means by which Jews heard God speak, but, as already noted, they did so more directly through Targumim which resignified the whole. The Psalms continued to be used in personal devotion and public worship, but statutory prayers in non-biblical style gave Jews a new way to pray.<sup>13</sup>

Early Christians retained the authoritative traditions Jews of their number brought with them. As already noted, a few books found in all Christian Bibles today, most obviously Esther, were not accepted by all Christians for teaching and preaching. Then again, Esther was not universally accepted as canonical among Jews either. “Rav Judah [fl. 250-290 CE] said in the name of Samuel [d. 254 CE]: ‘The Scroll of Esther does not defile the hands’” (אמר רב יהודה אמר שמואל אסתר אינה מטמאה את הידים (b. Meg. 7a). There is no reason to think that Rav Judah and Rav Samuel’s view was theirs alone.

On the other hand, texts which did not come to be included in the Tanakh, such as [Enoch](#), [Jubilees](#), [Baruch](#), [Letter of Jeremiah](#), the additions to the books of Daniel, Esther, and [2 Baruch](#), were deemed fit for teaching and exhortation, first by one or more streams of pre-Christian Judaism, then by one or more branches of Christianity. Enoch and Jubilees rule faith and practice in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church to this day.

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<sup>13</sup> On the *non*-biblical origin of much early halacha, see Jacob Neusner, *Judaism. The Evidence of the Mishnah* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); *Scripture and the Generative Premises of the Halakhah. A Systematic Inquiry*. I-IV (Academic Studies in Ancient Judaism series; Binghamton: Global Publications, 2000). On the *non*-biblical style of much early prayer, see Stefan C. Reif, “The Bible in the Liturgy,” in *The Jewish Study Bible* (ed. Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) 1937-48.

Christians went on to supplement inherited literature with a body of literature of their own making, narrative, didactic, and visionary in character. It resignifies the old through the prism of the life, death, and resurrection of the one they knew as Messiah and Lord.

### Lines of Evidence

In the assessment of the canonical status of a particular writing, six lines of evidence deserve consideration.

(1) The existence of *pesharim*, *midrashim*, or other forms of commentary on a particular text is strong evidence for said text ruling faith and life in a given context. Thematic [pesharim among the Dead Sea Scrolls](#) comment on passages from the following writings; each, in other words, was understood as canonical in the functional sense: Deut, 2 Sam, Exod, Amos, Pss, Ezek, Dan, and Isa (4Q174); Deut, Num, and Josh (4Q175); Isa and Zech (4Q176); Pss, Isa, Mic, Zech, Ezek, and Hos (4Q177); Jer (4Q182). Continuous *pesharim* are attested for the following writings: Isa, Hos, Mic, Nah, [Hab](#), Zeph, and Pss. The focus of these texts on actualization in contemporary figures and events, and their appeal to the above writings and no others, is comparable to the contents of a remark attributed to the risen Christ in Luke: “This is what I meant by saying while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and in the prophets and psalms was bound to be fulfilled” (24:44). Cf. Luke 3:3-6; 4:16-21; and Matt 11:2-6, 10.

In rabbinic Judaism, exegetical and homiletical energies focused on the books of Moses, with actualization on both the halakhic and aggadic levels. Midrashim with a strong halakhic emphasis include [Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael](#) (on Exod 12:1-23:19; 31:12-17; 35:1-3); the [Mekhilta de Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai](#) (on Exod 3:2, 7-8; 6:2; 12:1-24:10; 30:20-31:15; 34:12, 14, 18-26; 35:2); [Sifra](#) (on all of Lev); [Sifre](#) (on the legal portions of Num and Deut, and a portion of the narrative of the latter); and [Sifre Zutta](#) (on Numbers). The hallmark of strongly aggadic midrashim is actualization in terms of a metanarrative current at the time of composition. Examples, in chronological order of composition: [Bereshit Rabbah](#); [Wayiqra Rabbah](#); [Pesiqta deRav Kahana](#) and [Pesiqta Rabbati](#) (on the readings of the feasts and the special Sabbaths); [Tanchuma](#) (on the whole Pentateuch); [Devarim](#), [Bamidbar](#), and [Shemot Rabbah](#); [Midrash Yonah](#), [Eichah Rabbah](#); and [Midrash Tehillim](#). Traditional commentary on the Torah is collected in [Midrash Hagadol](#); on the Pentateuch and the Five Scrolls, in [Midrash Rabbah](#); on the prophetic writings and Psalms, Proverbs, and Job, in [Yalkut haMakhiri](#); on the entire Tanakh, in [Yalkut Shimoni](#).

The exegetical and homiletical output of early Christianity was also prodigious. A few examples may illustrate. [Hippolytus](#) (c. 170-c. 236) is credited with commentaries *On Genesis*, *On the Blessings of Isaac, Jacob, and Moses*, *On the Blessings of Balaam*, *On Judges*, *On Ruth*, *On the Books of Samuel*; a homily on David and Goliath and a treatise on David and the Ark are also known; *On the Psalms*, *On Proverbs*, *On Ecclesiastes*, *On the Song of Songs*, *On Parts of Ezekiel*, *On Daniel*, *On Matthew*, and *On Revelation*. [He](#) (or another whose name is now lost) resignifies the Old Testament in terms of Christ and his Church.

[Origen](#) (c.184-c.254) sought to interpret the text along three different lines (*On First Principles* 4,2,4): literal, moral, and allegorical. He wrote commentaries on Song of Songs, Matthew, John, and Romans; scholia on the Octateuch (Gen - Ruth), Lamentations, and the Psalter; and homilies on the Octateuch (extant remains cover Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Joshua); Jeremiah, and the [Song of Songs](#). In the same vein as Origen, Didymus the Blind (c. 319-98) commented on Genesis, the Octateuch and Kings (Gen – Ruth + 1 Sam – 2 Kgs), Zechariah, Psalms, Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes; John, Acts, Romans, Corinthians, and the Catholic Epistles. He is also known to have commented on Isaiah, Matthew, and the Apocalypse, but nothing thereof has survived.

[Jerome](#) (c. 342-420) stands out for his programmatic attention to the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek originals he translated and commented upon. His first exegetical work, *Treatises on the Psalms*, is an adaptation of an earlier work by Origen; his commentaries on Philemon, Galatians, Ephesians, Titus, and Ecclesiastes contain more that is new. Jerome the text critic and philologist is evident in his mature works: the *Hebrew Questions on Genesis*, and commentaries on the major and minor Prophets, including Daniel. His commentaries on Matthew, Mark, and the Apocalypse are less original.

[Theodore](#) of Mopsuestia (c. 350-429) attended to the historical sense and commented on Genesis, Exodus, and the other books of the Pentateuch; the Psalms, Job, and Ecclesiastes; the major and minor Prophets; Luke, John, Acts, and Paul's major and minor epistles. [Theodoret](#) of Cyrrhus (c. 393-c. 466) wrote quaestiones on the Octateuch, Kingdoms, and Chronicles, and commentaries on the major and minor Prophets, the Psalms, Song of Songs, and Paul's epistles.

It is noteworthy that among the extant examples of the chief genres of exegetical literature of the first six centuries - continuous commentaries,

scholia, and quaestiones – [Ben Sira](#), [Wisdom of Solomon](#), [Judith](#), [Tobit](#), and [1-2 Maccabees](#) are not treated, nor for that matter, are 1 Esdras, 2 Esdras (= Ezra-Nehemiah), or Esther. Commentaries on Chronicles and [Baruch](#) are extant from one author only (Theodoret). On the other hand, comment by three authors on the Song of the Three is extant (Hippolytus, Origen, and Theodoret); on Susanna, Bel, and the Dragon, by two (Hippolytus and Origen).

The fact that writings commented on more than once in extant exegetical literature cover the entire collection of writings now contained in the Tanakh with the exception of Esther, Chronicles, and Ezra-Nehemiah, plus the additions to Daniel, but, as far as inherited Jewish literature is concerned, *nothing beyond*, requires an explanation. In my view, the preponderance of attention paid to the Octateuch, Kingdoms, Prophets (including Daniel and Lamentations), Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs reflects the fact that precisely said works, *ab antico* or more recently, had previously attained pride of place in Jewish tradition.

To be sure, canonicity and the fact of forming the base text for a commentary stand in partial correlation only. The book of [Daniel](#) may illustrate. In rabbinic Judaism, commentaries were not written on Daniel, nor was it read in the synagogue, but it would be wrong to conclude that it lacked authority or was not foundational to teaching. It was. Pre-rabbinic, extra-rabbinic, and rabbinic Jewish eschatological hopes depended heavily on the four kingdoms scheme of Daniel (the fourth kingdom now Rome). The book's importance as a source of exempla of heroic faith is also well-attested.<sup>14</sup>

It is sometimes possible to be specific about the debt Christian exegesis owed to Jewish exegesis. Comparing the Pentateuch with the Prophets, it has been noted, "Clement of Alexandria's quotations or references stand in the

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<sup>14</sup> E.g. the eschatological hopes of Josephus (*Ant.* 10.11.17), 4 Ezra (12:10-11), and 2 Baruch (39:1-8) depend on the four kingdom scheme. A satisfactory description of rabbinic eschatology has yet to be written, but it cannot be doubted that the same remark applies. See Robert P. Gordon, "The Targumists as Eschatologists," *Congress Volume, Göttingen* (VTSup 29; Leiden: Brill, 1978) 131-48; and Uwe Glessmer, "Die 'Vier-Reiche' in der targumischen Literatur," in *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception* (2 vols.; ed. John J. Collins and Peter W. Flint; VTSup 83; Leiden: Brill, 2001) 2:468-89. Glessmer (471, n. 5) cites M. Maher, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Genesis. Translated, with Introduction and Notes* (The Aramaic Bible 1B; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1992) 60, n. 20: "The Midrashim frequently find a reference to the four kingdoms . . . in Gen 15:12; see *Mekilta* to Exod 20:18 (2, 268); *Gen. R.* 44:17; *Exod. R.* 51:7; *Lev R.* 13:5; *PRE* 28 (201)."

proportion of 5 to 3.”<sup>15</sup> In the New Testament, the situation is reversed. An explanation lies near at hand. The focus of [Clement](#) (d. 215) on the Pentateuch, the treatment of the hexaemeron (six days of creation) by Hippolytus, Origen, and [Basil](#) of Caesarea (c. 329-379), and of the life of Moses by Clement and [Gregory](#) of Nyssa (d. 385), depends on Hellenistic Jewish exegetical tradition. The exegetical opus of Philo in particular was treasured in Christian antiquity. Philo’s writings, along with those of Josephus, exercised a profound influence on Christian tradition and became part and parcel of it.

### Deuterocanonical Literature

Alongside writings enjoying pride of place among Jews and Christians alike, additional writings came to serve as quarries of prooftexts for the establishment of truth and action. An early catechetical work, *Testimonia ad Quirinum*, may illustrate. Attributed to [Cyprian](#) of Carthage (d. 258) in the manuscript tradition, it provides scriptural proofs for a series of traditional teachings. Book One intends to demonstrate the nullity of the Jewish faith; Book Two treats christology; Book Three, the correct comportment of the believer. The pattern of citations is remarkable.

Book One cites the Old Testament profusely, 74x total: the Pentateuch, 13x; Josh-2 Kgs, 5x; Isa, 25x; Jer, 13x, Ezek, 1x; Dan, 1x; Pss, 9x; Prov, 1x; Ezra-Neh, 1x. New Testament confirmation is added on a few occasions from Matthew, Luke, John, Acts, and Paul’s Epistles. No other writings are cited.

Book Two cites both OT and NT profusely, and across a wider spectrum of texts. A christology is built up out of passages from the same books as before, except Ezra-Neh, with a preponderance of proofs from Isa and Pss. But, besides Prov 8 and 9, Ben Sira 24, [Baruch](#) 3 (under the title “Jeremiah”), and [Wisdom](#) 2 appear. The same NT books are cited as in Book One, with the addition of 1 Peter, 1 John, and a host of references to the Apocalypse of John.

Like Book Two, Book Three cites both OT and NT profusely, but across an even wider spectrum of texts. Job, Prov, and Eccl are cited often; Ben

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<sup>15</sup> William Horbury, “Old Testament Interpretation in the Writings of the Church Fathers,” in *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* (eds. Martin Jan Mulder and Harry Sysling; CRINT 2/1; Assen/Maastricht: Van Gorcum; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990) 727-789; 763, citing William B. Tollinton, *Clement of Alexandria: A Study in Christian Liberalism* (2 vols.; London: Williams & Norgate, 1914) 2:198, n. 3.

Sira, more often still. Wisdom, Tobit, 1-2 Maccabees, Susannah, and the Song of the Three are also cited; Wisdom and Tobit, several times. From the NT, Mark, 1-2 Timothy, Titus, and 2 Peter make their appearance. On the other hand, Esther, [Judith](#), Hebrews, James, and Jude do not, in the *Testimonia* or elsewhere, in Cyprian's writings. Evidently, none of these works, if they were known, were deemed suitable to appeal to in the African church tradition *Testimonia* reflects.

Output in the field of scriptural exegesis waned by the end of the patristic age. Anthologies of exegesis culled from earlier works were compiled from the 6th cent. forward. Called *catenae*, the form they commonly took in the Greek tradition was the following, as Carmelo Curti observes: "the biblical text, written in larger letters, is in the centre of the page, against the inside margin; round it on the three outside margins are arranged the exegetical extracts; more rarely, they occupy all four margins, in which case the scriptural text is in the exact centre of the page."<sup>16</sup> A core canon is once again in evidence. [Procopius of Gaza](#) (465-c. 530), the first attested *catenist*, collected comment on the Octateuch, Kingdoms, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs. His most illustrious successor, Nicetas of Heraclea (11th-12th cent.), composed *catenae* on Job, Psalms, the major Prophets, the Gospels, and the Pauline epistles.

Non-inclusion in a core set of authoritative writings notwithstanding, quotes from a text in teaching documents nonetheless imply that said text was deemed suitable for purposes of instruction in a given time and place. For example, attributed and unattributed quotes from Hebrew Ben Sira occur in the Talmuds and other rabbinic documents. The example is instructive. A book might be deemed worthy of study but not considered a basis for establishing a direction of thought or action, nor fit to read in assembly. In a nutshell, that is what discussions of Ben Sira in the Talmuds demonstrate.<sup>17</sup>

On the other hand, attributed quotes of Ben Sira, sometimes introduced by a phrase like "scripture says," are found in teaching documents of the early church. The example of *Testimonia ad Quirinum* was already given. To be sure, Athanasius ([Festal Letter, 39](#)), Rufinus (*Comm. in Symb. Ap.* 37-38), and Jerome ([Prologue to the Books of Solomon](#) [Vulg.]) move in a different direction. According to them, Ben Sira might be deployed in catechesis, and

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<sup>16</sup> Carmelo Curti, "Catenae, Biblical," in *Encyclopedia of the Early Church* (2 vols.; ed. Angelo di Berardino; tr. Adrian Walford; foreword and bibliographic amendments, W. H. C. Frend; New York: Oxford University Press, 1992 [1983-88]) 1:152-53; 152.

<sup>17</sup> For a brief overview, see the following [post](#).

they acknowledge it was read in the churches, but they deny that it should be used to establish a point of dogma. Others, however, dissented, Augustine foremost among them (*De Doct. Chr.* 2, 8; *De Civ. Dei*, 18, 20, 1). On this view, Ben Sira and Wisdom were just as useful as Proverbs for the establishment of doctrine. A canon agreed upon by all Christians, even by those of roughly the same tradition, did not exist in antiquity.

### The Liturgical Use of Authoritative Literature

(2) Examples of the use of an excerpt from a book in the liturgy of one or more branches of Judaism or of one or more branches of Christianity. A distinction must be made between attributed and unattributed use. The unattributed use of parts of the Hebrew Ben Sira tradition in Jewish liturgy to the present is one thing. The attributed use in worship of a passage of [2 Baruch](#) (78.1-86.1) to which lectionary manuscripts of the Syriac church tradition attest is another. Express quotation and public proclamation are strong indications of the sense that Syriac-speaking Christians had that God continued to speak to them through said 2 Baruch.

In Jewish practice, after a reading from the Torah and another from the Prophets, the homily might begin with a *petiḥta* or proem in which a verse from the Psalter or Proverbs is interpreted first of all. Thus, when preaching on the text, “And Abraham was old” (Gen 24:1), the following verse might be quoted: “The hoary head is a crown of glory; it shall be found in the way of righteousness” (Prov. 16:31) (*Genesis Rabbah* ad loc). The body of the sermon consisted of halachic and aggadic exposition of details of the Torah passage. The *Ḥatimah* or conclusion might be eschatological in nature and depend on the Haftarah. Quoted biblical verses and rabbinic dicta form the warp and woof of early sermons; in later times, citations from Aristotle, other philosophical material, or the Kabbalah are attested.

In Christian practice, a Gospel passage was often but not necessarily the read out and preached text. The practice of reading through an entire Old or New Testament book on successive occasions is also attested. More often than not, preaching method followed patterns taken over from inherited Jewish tradition, transposed, of course, onto specifically Christian themes.

The texts of greatest authority in a given setting, it stands to reason, are to be identified with the texts most often preached. A study of extant sermons in the various traditions with a view to identifying the texts which were expounded most frequently, and in what context, remains to be done.

Not all church oratory was scripture-based. The traditional oratory of the ancient church includes collections of homilies, sermons, and hagiographies.

Generally speaking, one or the other of the three genres occupied the central place in liturgical celebration. A homily, by definition, took its cue from a scriptural text. The point of departure of a sermon was often a specific topic or occasion. The texts occasional and topical sermons appeal to is a subject matter of interest in its own right. A hagiographical oration took its cue from traditional accounts of the acts, passion, and/or martyrdom of saints. By this and other means, early Christianity appropriated, reconfigured, and supplanted a prevailing feature of pagan antiquity, the commemoration and veneration of the dead.

The evidence provided by Jewish and Christian lectionary traditions is of great interest. For Christian tradition, [Kevin Edgecomb](#) provides a wealth of primary [data](#). Extant Jewish and Christian tradition reflects realities of a relatively late period (4th cent. CE forward). Cases of direct borrowing from Jewish into Christian tradition are rare; I point out an example [here](#). In Christian tradition, earlier evidence reflects a sparser use of excerpts from writings which achieved deuterocanonical status than later evidence. Jewish tradition also read entire and excerpted a larger subset of the literature of the Tanakh in post-Talmudic than in earlier times.

Lectionary traditions demonstrate the need to distinguish between formal and actual canons. The old Slavonic tradition may illustrate. The canon in this tradition, insofar as it is reconstructible, was as inclusive as the Greek tradition to which it is indebted. Extant witnesses to the *prophetologium*, the Slavonic tradition of Old Testament liturgical lections, attest however to a selective deployment of its contents. Lections drawn from the Octateuch and the Prophets are numerous (Genesis, Isaiah, etc). Wisdom of Solomon, however, is equally or better represented (2:1, 10-22; 3:1-9; 4:1, 9-15; 5:15-6:3; 6:11, 17-18, 21-23; 7:15-16, 21-11, 26-27, 29-30; 8:2-4, 7-9, 17-18, 21-9:5; 9:10-11, 14; 10:9-10, 12; 15:1; 16:13). [Baruch](#) 3:36-4:4 appears as a lection. Both Psalms and Odes (an anthology of songs excerpted from a full range of canonical literature, the anthology is traditional and taken over from Greek tradition), the Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Youth included, are prominently deployed. But lections from Ruth, 1-2 Kingdoms, 1-2 Chronicles, 1-2 Esdras, 1-4 Maccabees, Esther, Song of Solomon, Ben Sira, Qohelet, Lamentations, and Epistle of Jeremiah are unattested.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Francis J. Thomson, "The Slavonic Translation of the Old Testament," in *The Interpretation of the Bible: The International Symposium in Slovenia* [1996] (ed. Jože Krašovec; JSOTSup 289; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998) 605-920.

### Patterns of Explicit Quotation

(3) Patterns of explicit quotation in Jewish and Christian literature bear on the question. Unfortunately, investigations have seldom been conducted with methodological rigor. Devorah Dimant lists and classifies explicit quotations of authoritative texts in late Second Temple period narrative literature.<sup>19</sup> Across the corpus (which she fails, unfortunately, to delimit), quotations from the Pentateuch preponderate, for a total of 13 out of 19x. Amos, Isaiah, and Ezekiel are each quoted explicitly once; Psalms twice; and Proverbs once. The literature with explicit quotations she covers: Tobit, Judith, Susanna, [Baruch](#), and 1-4 Maccabees. [4 Maccabees](#), however, as Dimant notes, is not a proper narrative, but a philosophical encomium. It is also the latest writing in the sequence, perhaps mid. 1st cent. CE. It quotes from authoritative literature more often than all the others (9x), and over a broader range of texts: the Pentateuch, the Prophets, Psalms, and Proverbs are all represented. The patterns Dimant explores are far from haphazard or coincidental.

The range of literature excerpted in late Second Temple period narrative is consonant with the range of literature excerpted for entirely different purposes in the Qumran *pesharim* and expressly quoted elsewhere in Qumran sectarian literature. Patterns of scripture quotation in the New Testament point in the same direction. Aside from two or three outliers (4Q228 Frg. 1 i 9, which explicitly quotes [Jubilees](#); [Damascus Document](#) [Cairo Geniza A] 16:1-3, which promotes the authority of Jubilees; Jude 14-15, which explicitly quotes a passage from Enoch), express quotation of authoritative literature in Jewish and Christian writings through the end of the first century of the current era is limited to the following corpus: the literature that later came to be contained in the first two divisions of the Tanakh (the Pentateuch and the Prophets), plus Psalms, Proverbs, and Daniel. Expressly quoted scripture through the end of the Second Temple period, so far as the evidence takes us, is limited to these texts.

Other texts, of course, were also treasured. Allusions to figures and events written up in other works within and beyond the limits of canons finalized later are scattered throughout late Second Temple Period literature. Sir 49:13 evokes the figure of Nehemiah in terms which prove familiarity with the

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<sup>19</sup> Devorah Dimant, "Use and Interpretation of Mikra in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha," in *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* (eds. Martin Jan Mulder and Harry Sysling; CRINT 2/1; Assen/Maastricht: Van Gorcum; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990) 379-419; 385.

relevant material in Ezra-Nehemiah; 49:14-16 idealizes the figures of Enoch, Joseph, [Shem](#), Seth, Enosh, and [Adam](#) in accordance with extra-Pentateuchal tradition; Hebrews 11:35-38 evokes the Maccabean martyrs and the fate of Isaiah as recounted in popular legend; Jude 9 summarizes an event in the life of Moses recounted in the *Testament of Moses*. My point in drawing up this list is not to suggest that writings as diverse as *Life of Adam and Eve*, *Prayer of Enosh*, [Enoch](#), *Testament of Moses*, Ezra-Nehemiah, and 1-2 Maccabees, belong on the same plane. I would side with rabbinic judgment on these books in each and every case. The point is another. It is clear that Ben Sira, the author of Hebrews, and Jude did not feel bound to stick to information contained in a collection of writings they otherwise recognized as authoritative when it came to describing events and figures of the past. That only makes them *like*, not different from, Josephus, the selfsame rabbis, and the ancients in general. It follows that Ben Sira's laud of Nehemiah is a slender basis on which to conclude that Ezra-Nehemiah functioned canonically in the 2nd cent BCE on a par with texts expressly quoted in that and the following two centuries.

Express quotations that involve an appeal to authority are an incontestable index of canonicity; allusions, in and of themselves, not so much. Popularity and canonicity do not correlate either. The case of Tobit may illustrate. Its attestation in multiple copies at Qumran (Aramaic and Hebrew) and across the entire sweep of ancient Christendom (Greek, Latin, Syriac, Coptic, Ethiopic, and Armenian) is an index of popularity. Nevertheless, few authors in Christian antiquity cite it to establish a point of doctrine, and when so used, often if not always in conjunction with other witnesses. Perhaps because it contradicted halacha on marriage, rabbinic Judaism chose not to transmit it. To be sure, Tobit attained canonical status in the historic Christian churches. Its popularity contributed to the achievement. But it is false to assume that since it was popular in a given period or place, it must have been canonical. Popularity and canonicity are two different things.

#### Canon Lists

(4) Canon lists in Judaism and Christianity reflect the culmination of lengthy historical processes. They are attested relatively late in the game. They are important witnesses to the concept of canon, but are not as revealing as patterns of actual use of their contents. The oldest surviving Jewish list is the one found in the Bavli, [Bava Batra 14b-15a](#), a *baraita* attributed to the 2nd, but in its final form not necessarily earlier than the 4th cent. CE. Its components coincide exactly with those listed by the 4th cent Jerome. B. B. lists the Prophets and the Writings in an order rarely attested

in later masoretic codices; the latter attest to a variety of orders. The order of the books in Christian traditions is different again, and subject to variation within the same tradition.

Handy overviews of historic Christian lists are found [here](#) and [here](#). Note that the Ethiopic Orthodox canon, the Coptic Orthodox canon, and the Armenian Orthodox canon include books that, based on their attestation among the Dead Sea Scrolls, were understood to constitute authoritative revelation by one or more strands of Judaism before the Christian movement existed. The following books incontestably fall into this category: [Enoch](#), [Jubilees](#), and the [Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs](#).

It is probable that proponents of a variety of Jewish formations became followers of the Way and brought their diverse understandings of what constituted authoritative revelation with them. This is also the best explanation for the express quote of the book of Enoch in Jude 14-15. The author of Jude regarded the book of Enoch as authoritative revelation, as is the case to this day in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. He explicitly quotes from it for that reason.

#### The Witness of the Pandects<sup>20</sup>

(5) The great Bible manuscripts of antiquity also bear on the question. The Hebrew and Aramaic codices Aleppo (10th cent.) and Leningradensis (1009), the Greek Alexandrinus (5th cent.), the Syriac Ambrosianus (6th-7th cent.), and the Latin Amiatinus (8th cent.) come to mind. Except for the order in which the components of the second and third divisions of the Tanakh are presented, ancient Jewish Bibles are remarkable for their virtual textual identity. Ancient Christian Bibles, on the other hand, are remarkable for their inclusion of broad ranges of texts. None, furthermore, matches the other.

[Alexandrinus](#) contains the protocanonical writings, along with the usual additions to Jeremiah (Baruch and Epistle of Jeremiah, with Lamentation placed between them), Daniel (Song of the Three, Susanna, Bel and the Dragon), and Esther. Tobit and Judith are placed after Esther; then comes 1 Esdras (an edition of Ezra materials at variance with 2 Esdras [=MT Ezra-Nehemiah]) beside 2 Esdras, followed by 1-4 Maccabees. The Epistle to Marcellinus attributed to Athanasius, the Hypothesis of Eusebius (a table of contents of the Psalms), the Periochae of the Psalms (synopses of each

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<sup>20</sup> Pandects or manuscripts containing all of the biblical books were rare. Portions of the Bible, e.g. the Pentateuch in Hebrew or the Gospels in Latin, were more common.

Psalm), and the Canons of the Psalms (assignation of the Psalms to daily services) are prefaced to the Psalms. Psalm 151 also appears. The Odes, excerpted from surrounding books plus the Prayer of Manasseh, follow; then Wisdom of Solomon and Ben Sira. The New Testament concludes with [1 Clement](#) (lacking 57:7-63); 2 Clement (up to 12:5a), Philemon, and Revelation. James, 1-2 Peter, 1-3 John, and Jude appear earlier, placed between Acts and Romans. [Psalms of Solomon](#), no longer extant, comprised an appendix.

[Ambrosianus](#) contains, beside the usual additions to Jeremiah and Daniel, Wisdom of Solomon, Ben Sira, and Judith; but *not* the additions to Esther known in Greek and Latin tradition, *nor* Tobit. It also contains Ps 151, 2 Baruch, 4 Ezra, 1-4 Maccabees, and Josephus, *Jewish Wars*, Book 6! The New Testament *lacks* 2-3 John, 2 Peter, Jude, and Revelation.

[Amiatinus](#) contains, beside the additions to Jeremiah, Daniel, and Esther known from Greek tradition; Tobit, Judith; Wisdom of Solomon, Ben Sira; and 1-2 Maccabees, but *not* 3-4 Maccabees known from Greek and Syriac tradition. 3 Esdras [=1 Esdras above], 4 Esdras (=5 Ezra, 4 Ezra, and 6 Ezra, in that order) and Psalm 151 are found in an appendix. It also contains prologues by Eusebius and Jerome to various books. It *lacks* the Epistle to the Laodiceans, a work widely attested in early Vulgate manuscripts. This last, once extant in Greek, was dismissed as inauthentic by Theodore of Mopsuestia (c. 350-429), but was often considered to be one of Paul's letters in the West (e.g., by Gregory the Great [c. 540-604], *Moralia in Job* 35:20).

Each of these Bibles represents a *different* understanding of the limits of authoritative literature. The inclusion of books like [Joseph and Aseneth](#) and the *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs* in Armenian Bible manuscripts attests no less to the fact that said writings were deemed worthy of study in the context of a larger authoritative corpus. Whether or not Joseph and Aseneth and the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs were read in worship or taught to catechumens in the Armenian church are separate questions.

### Ancient Manuscripts of Books

#### With a Claim to Canonicity in One or More Traditions

(6) Counts of copies of ancient manuscripts of books with a claim to canonicity in one or more traditions, taken together with other lines of evidence, are an index of the relative importance attached to said books.

Counts of copies of books discussed in this essay in the caves of Qumran are as follows: Gen (15); Exod (17); Lev (13); Num (8); Deut (29); Josh (2); Judg (3); 1-2 Sam (4); 1-2 Kgs (3); Isa (21); Ezek (6); the Twelve (8); Ps

(36); Prov (2); Job (4); Song of Solomon (4); Ruth (4); Lam (4); Qoh (3); Esther (0); Daniel (8); Ezra (1); Neh (0); 1-2 Chron (1); Tobit (4); ben Sira (2); Letter of Jeremiah (1); Psalm 151 (1); precursors of 1 Enoch (20, counting copies of the Book of Giants); Jubilees (15 or 16); precursors to the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs (7 or 8).<sup>21</sup>

The books/traditions which appear in the most copies are the following: Psalms (36); Deuteronomy (29); Isaiah (21); Enoch (20), and Jubilees (15 or 16). That Jubilees in particular was accorded a high degree of authority by the Qumran sect is suggested by several indicia; the high number of extant copies is, taken with the others, one more.<sup>22</sup> The fact that Psalms, Isaiah, and Deuteronomy (in that order) are the most quoted books in the New Testament suggests that said books enjoyed the widest currency in a cross-section of late Second Temple Judaism.<sup>23</sup>

That Esther is missing is probably not a coincidence. The sect did not celebrate the holiday the book mandates. The holiday and the book that mandates it may not have gained general currency until the first cent. CE. It received universal or near universal approbation later still.

Pre-Christian biblical papyri in Greek, including Qumran fragments, attest to the following books: Gen (1); Exod (1); Lev (2); Num (1); Deut (4); Epistle of Jeremiah (1); the Twelve Prophets (1). The pattern of attestation is a witness to the exceptional importance of the Pentateuch, and Deuteronomy in particular, in 1<sup>st</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup> cent. BCE Greek-speaking Judaism.<sup>24</sup>

Christian biblical manuscripts of the 2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> cent. CE attest to the following books: Gen (8); Exod (8); Lev (3); Num (1); Deut (2); Josh (1); Judg (1); 2 Chr (2); Esther (2); Job (1); Ps (18); Prov (2); Qoh (2); Wisdom of Solomon (1); Ben Sira (2); Isa (6); Jer (2); Ezek (2); Dan (2); the Twelve (2); Bel and Susannah (1); Tobit (2); 2 Maccabees (1).<sup>25</sup> The importance attached to Psalms, Genesis, Exodus, and Isaiah by early Christians is reflected in the counts.

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<sup>21</sup> Data from James C. Vanderkam, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) 29-42; 149-58.

<sup>22</sup> For further discussion, see Vanderkam, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 153-55.

<sup>23</sup> The alignment of Qumran and NT data in this sense is well-known. Cf. Martin Abegg, Jr., Peter Flint, and Eugene Ulrich, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible* (New York: HarperCollins, 1999) xvii.

<sup>24</sup> Data from Johan Lust, "Septuagint and Canon," in *The Biblical Canons* (ed. Jean-Marie Auwers and H. J. de Jonge; BETL 163. Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2003) 39-55; 42.

<sup>25</sup> Data from Larry W. Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts: Manuscripts and Christian Origins* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006) 19-20.

## Summary

As discussed above, the pluriformity of the textual tradition, the felt need for authorized translations of authoritative literature in the vernacular, and the relationship of scripture to metanarrative and other context, is compatible with the [view](#) Doug Chaplin ably articulates for his readers: “[T]he inspired text is the one the church reads, which brings tradition, text, church and translation together in a rather complex relationship.” The sentence is phenomenologically descriptive. It also posits divine supervision in the same set of contexts as was done in antiquity. At the same time, the picture that emerges is compatible with principles reemphasized by the Reformation, to wit, that scripture is meant to stand in judgment of those who read it, not the other way around; that the text itself is inspired, quite apart from the interpretation tradition provides it, and so on. It’s a both/and proposition.

### A Three-Way Distinction

Distinctions made in antiquity by Athanasius and Augustine might be reappropriated today by Orthodox, Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, Reformed, and evangelical Christians alike. With regard to Jewish literature inherited by the church, Athanasius advocated a three-way distinction: “canonical” books (those to which one may appeal to establish a point of doctrine); “read” books (those that are read in the churches, but which are not suitable to appeal to in establishing doctrine); and “apocryphal” books (literature unsuited to be read in the churches and unreliable on questions of doctrine, but still of interest for other purposes) ([Festal Letter](#), 39). Augustine also advocated a three-way distinction. His category of “canonical scriptures” includes the “canonical” and the “read” scriptures of Athanasius, but he distinguishes between canonical scriptures received by some and those received by all: “among the canonical scriptures [the skillful interpreter of the sacred writings] will judge according to the following standard: to prefer those that are received by all the catholic churches to those which some do not receive” ([De Doct. Chr. 2, 8, 12](#)).

Applied to today’s context, Augustine’s counsel would result in a differentiation of use among the books in question at variance with the one he advocated. If the combined counsel of Athanasius and Augustine were heeded today, the books called deuterocanonical in Catholic tradition and their equivalents in other historic churches might continue be read in churches which have always done so, but said books would not be accorded the same authority as the others in teaching and preaching.

If the “twenty-two books” Jerome regarded as canonical and the text form (proto-MT) that served as Jerome’s primary but not exclusive point of departure for his translation of them came to be valued as “The Scriptures Held in Common” by Jews and Christians of all persuasions, the common good would be served. As I point out elsewhere, a straight-up translation of MT remains a desideratum; the Jewish Publication Society versions do not qualify.<sup>26</sup> Notes in the margin of a translation of MT might indicate the more significant departures from it attested in Jewish tradition elsewhere (e.g., in ancient Aramaic and Greek translations).

At the same time, a study edition of the entire range of texts treated as authoritative scripture in Judaism and Christianities past and present is a desideratum. [Reflections](#) by Kevin Edgecomb move in the same direction. A study edition of the statutory prayer tradition across confessional lines and the synagogue/church divide would also be welcome.

Public reading and preaching of excerpts from extra-canonical books among, Lutheran, Reformed, Methodist, Baptist, and Pentecostal Christians seems unlikely. In those contexts, it is nonetheless easy to imagine using non-canonical texts consonant with the witness of texts within the canon in the form of unison prayers, responsive readings, or illustration on appropriate occasions. Examples with precedent on their side include those cited in *Testimonia ad Quirinum* (see Appendix B).

Within the bounds of the preaching canon as understood by rabbinic Judaism on the one hand and the churches of the Reformation on the other, it is possible to cite passages from non-canonical books as illustrations in a sermon based on a canonical text. It is also possible to include texts from outside the Bible in a prayerbook (a normal practice in traditions that make use of one). It is not possible to cite a non-canonical text in support of teaching unless it has independent support from a canonical text.

For my part, I will continue to teach and preach from the [TNIV](#) or [ESV](#) as the case may be in accordance with practice in my neck of the religious woods. Precisely those books Athanasius regarded as canonical, it might be remarked, are contained in the above translations. (Proto-) MT, the form of the text that served as Jerome’s primary but not exclusive point of departure for his translation of the “twenty-two books,” furthermore, served the same purpose for the (T)NIV and ESV translators. To be sure, I do not hesitate to depart from a standard translation in the text I presuppose and the nuances I

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<sup>26</sup> See my [essay](#) entitled “Taking Stock of Biblia Hebraica Quinta.” A [comment](#) that moves in the same direction was posted by Randall Buth on the Evangelical Textual Criticism [blog](#).

highlight if my conscience so prods. My parishioners know I work from the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. I fold in references to the wording of the original languages as the occasion permits.

I may never cite or expound on them for more than a sermon illustration, and I may never include more than a few lines from them as part of a unison prayer or responsive reading, but I still want both the Hebrew and Greek Ben Sira traditions in the next study Bible I purchase. On top of the other extra-canonical books printed in the superb NRSV study Bibles available today, add in Enoch, [Jubilees](#), 2 Baruch, Psalms of Solomon, and Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs. The matrix from which rabbinic Judaism and early Christianity developed is documented by these writings in unique and illuminating ways. And if you, like me, hold a position close to Jerome's, for whom "all the apocryphal books" contain "many faulty elements in them," but still some "gold in the mud" (*Epistle* 107,12), I say to you as I do to myself: let the gold rush begin.

### Concluding Observations

The pre-rabbinic and extra-rabbinic Jewish literature alluded to above is widely taught and studied today in rabbinical seminaries and in universities with a primarily Jewish student body in Israel, the United States, and beyond. Reappropriation proceeds apace. To re-accord it an authority on a level with what it once had in specific strands of pre-rabbinic or extra-rabbinic Judaism is not under discussion.

In a Christian context, among the writings inherited from Judaism, a strong case can be made for according the greatest authority to the books and text form Jerome referred to as the "Hebrew Truth." These are the scriptures Jews and Christians of all persuasions hold in common. A case can also be made that neglect of the wider set of Jewish writings treasured in ancient Christian traditions impoverishes the intelligence of contemporary Christians.

The textual worlds of Judaism and Christianity are among the great cultural legacies of all time. Said worlds are shot through with a myriad tensions, but are united by a central conviction, namely, that God speaks, even now, through textually mediated past events. As we read, "It is not with our fathers that God sealed this covenant, but with us, the living, we who are here today" (Deut 5:3). In the repetition of these words, it is understood, God still speaks. The expected response is obedience to the one whose voice is heard.

Parts of the canon report God's word. Other parts furnish models of obedience to that word. What incredible models they are: Job, Psalms, and Lamentations; the patriarchal narratives; the careers of Samuel, David, Elijah, and Elisha; Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Daniel; Ezra and Nehemiah; in the New Testament, the careers of Peter, Stephen, and Paul; the letters of Paul, James, and John. Even more incredible: examples of obedience furnished by those for whom the *bat qol* (the heavenly voice) was not constitutive to their reported experience: Qohelet, Esther, and Song of Songs.

The self-understanding of Judaism and Christianity stands or falls on belief in a God who speaks to "us, the living, we who are here today." Apart from this belief, said faiths would never have fashioned canons in the first place.

## Suggestions for Further Study

### Definitions

The notion of canon as a closed list of books, however defensible from a historical point of view, explains exactly nothing. What matters is the role texts play in life and discourse.

If a writing is inquired of –the mantic metaphor is appropriate – in order to prove something, and more especially the truth of something, it is canonical. Interpretation becomes an act of divination.

The truth of something, furthermore, should not be defined narrowly. Truth has to do with what is true in *all aspects of life*. This is *not* the same thing as saying that scripture is a vademecum of history and astronomy, though of course it has been construed in that way, and some would so construe it today. It *is* saying that the contents of the canon describe the direction and inner dynamic of history, and the sun, moon, and stars as elements in God's orderly creation.

But defining a text as canonical if it can be appealed to for the purpose of distinguishing truth from falsehood is also reductive. A collection of canonical writings does more than that. A canonical collection's contents occupy the central place in the religious imagination of those who transmit it. It's the place one goes to be still and know that the LORD is God.<sup>27</sup> It's the

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<sup>27</sup> A play off of Ps 46:11. In its near context, Ps 46:11 is a call to warring nations to stop their strife. In its far context, all of scripture, it is a call to drop everything and listen.

place one tastes the goodness of the LORD.<sup>28</sup> The act of turning to a text and construing it as a lamp unto one's feet is the central religious fact of both Judaism and Christianity. The more often a text is turned to in this sense, the more canonical it is.

The works listed below make points of their own.

Halbertal, Moshe. *People of the Book: Canon, Meaning, and Authority*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997.

Hughes, Aaron. "Presenting the Past: The Genre of Commentary in Theoretical Perspective." *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 15 (2003) 148-168.

McEvenue, Sean. "The Old Testament, Scripture or Theology?" *Interpretation* 25 (1981) 229-242.

Neusner, Jacob. "Scripture and Tradition in Judaism. With Special Reference to the Mishnah." *Henoah* 2 (1980) 285-305.

Neusner, Jacob. "Beyond Historicism, After Structuralism: Story as History in Ancient Judaism." *Henoah* 3 (1981) 171-196.

Smith, Jonathan Z. "Sacred Persistence: Toward a Redescription of Canon," in *Approaches to Ancient Judaism: Theory and Practice 1*. Ed. William Scott Green; Brown Judaic Studies 1; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1978) 11-28. Reprinted in *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982) 36-52.

#### Online Resources for the Study of Judaism and Christianity

The day is coming when all serious research will be done electronically in whole or in part. The medium surpasses paper in various ways. To be sure, the potential of the electronic medium has yet to be fully exploited. A fine example of what can be done is Steve Mason's [Project on Ancient Cultural Engagement](#), which majors in [Josephus](#) and [Polybius](#).

Three online encyclopedias are particularly helpful for the study of the textual worlds of Judaism and Christianity.

[The Jewish Encyclopedia \(1901-1906\)](#). *JE*. If the site is down, the entries are still available in less helpful form at [Bible Wiki](#). The more recent and

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<sup>28</sup> A play off of Ps 34:9 (and 27:13). In its near context, Ps 34:9 is a joyful acknowledgment of Yahweh's saving acts. In its far context, it describes what one experiences in reading scripture.

now updated [Encyclopaedia Judaica](#) (<sup>1</sup>1972, <sup>2</sup>2006), not available free online, supplements but does not replace it.

[The Catholic Encyclopedia \(1917\)](#). *CE*. Comparison of equivalent entries in *JE* is a study in contrasts. [New Advent](#)'s online editions of the Bible, the Fathers, and the Summa are also useful.

[Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia](#). A work in progress. It often excerpts and condenses entries from *JE* and *CE*. Occasionally, the entries are excellent.

In the field of Judaica, three sites provide superb access to primary sources in Hebrew and Aramaic.

[Mechon Mamre](#). Tanakh, Targum Onkelos, Mishnah, Tosefta, Talmud Yerushalmi, Talmud Bavli, and Rambam's *Mishneh Torah*. Also available: The 1917 JPS translation of the Tanakh. Coming online: a bilingual edition of *Mishneh Torah*.

[Sifrut haQodesh](#). The same Hebrew and Aramaic texts found on Mechon Mamre, plus Midrash Tanhuma.

[Seforim Online](#). A wealth of Judaica in PDFs. Examples: Saadiah Gaon's *Emunot veDeot*; Rambam's *Guide for the Perplexed* in Arabic, Hebrew, and English; the *Divan Shmuel HaNagid*; C. D. Ginsburg's *The Massorah* (6 vols.); M. Friedländer's *Essays on the Writings of Abraham ibn Ezra*; *Shirei Moshe ibn Ezra* (2 vols.); *Shirei Shlomo Ibn Gabirol* (5 vols.).

For the Bible in Greek, one site is particularly helpful.

[The Resurgence Greek Project](#). Fully tagged and accented Greek Old and New Testaments.

For an incomplete but still helpful range of Greek and Latin works, two sites are helpful.

[The Perseus Digital Library](#)

[Bible, Judaism, Christianity](#)

My hope is that all Jewish and Christian classics will be "Libronixed" in the coming years. Those familiar with the Libronix system know well what a blessing it is to have a reference tool within the [Logos Library](#).

### The Canon Debate

Opposing errors are rampant in discussions of canon. On the one hand there are the maximalists, who insist that a set of books identical to the "twenty-four" of mature rabbinic Judaism existed within the precincts of the

Temple from the mid-second century BCE forward. The MT goes back to them in a straight and uneventful line. Aside from the lack of evidence in favor of this reconstruction, it misidentifies the defining fact of scriptural authority. Uniformity of the word to which one turns is not what counts. It is the turning itself that matters. First of all, it is God who is understood to turn to the listener in the text that is read. The reader/listener turns in response. Scriptural authority is realized in that event, or it is not realized at all.

On the other hand, there are those that emphasize the degree to which interpreters and readers control what the canon has to say. On this view, the text has no meaning of its own, or if it does, it is assigned a new one in a process of resignification. Cartloads of evidence might be cited in favor of this reconstruction. It is still wrongheaded. The purpose of canonizing a text is to allow it to stand *over against* the one who hears it. The maximalists, therefore, are right to insist that the concept of canon correlates with an unparalleled degree of consent on the part of those for whom the canon is meaningful. Canon-making, furthermore, is about according authority to *this* text and not another. A particular text is accorded authority, even if maximalists define that particularity with unconscionable inflexibility.

Whether the consent that is given is genuine is another matter. To claim that it never is, based on an appeal to reader-response theory or a postmodern hermeneutic, is fashionable but preempts the possibility of a genuine discussion. Given that the definition of fashion is something that goes out of fashion, the wisest response may be to pay no heed. To those who pleasure themselves with the deconstruction of non-postmodern interpretation, I say: enjoy your miniskirt while you can. You will turn a few heads; in the long term, you are likely to be ignored.

Of course the hearer shapes the text in the act of interpretation. The point of canon is another. Genre-specific explanations may illustrate. Setting apart a narrative text in a canon is meant to facilitate the appropriation of the particular past the text embodies, and the particular future to which it points. Setting apart a text of ethical construction in a canon is not meant to stop ethical construction in its tracks, but to provide an inevitable point of departure for subsequent ethical construction. Setting apart a collection of texts which fuse oracle and diatribe establishes a model of predictive discourse in which soothsaying and parenesis reinforce one another. Setting apart a collection of texts which envision the past, present, and future in terms of an apocalyptic hope – the book of Daniel – establishes the terms of redemption of universal history. Setting apart a collection of cries of despair and hymns in a canon is meant to furnish models of prayer and praise.

Setting apart a comedy<sup>29</sup> – the book of Esther – sanctifies a specific instance of a genre which might otherwise be thought to fall beyond the reach of redemption. Setting apart a collection of aphorisms in which wisdom herself demands obedience sanctifies everyday ethical behavior. Setting apart a book like Job sanctifies the protest of the innocent in a world of injustice. Setting apart the ruminations of a grumpy, wise, and self-absorbed old man – the book of Qohelet – was, in brief, a stroke of genius. Even when a text is treated as a *tabula rasa*, as in traditional interpretation of Song of Songs, the resignification of the text is far from arbitrary. The resignification reflects a metanarrative whose fixed points cannot be ignored by the interpreter. At the intersection of scripture and metanarrative, God is presumed to speak.

The works listed below are merely representative of a discussion that generates hundreds of contributions each year. It should come as no surprise that contributions to the debate tend to be driven by anxieties characteristic of the intellectual and confessional commitments of their authors. Liberals seek concepts of canon, inspiration, and authority that are as innocuous and inoffensive as possible, except to conservatives. Conservatives hone concepts of canon and authority that burn as many bridges as possible, so as to better indulge their magnificent obsessions. My own anxieties and my own stance, that of a bridge-building conservative, are evident, I presume, in the foregoing essay.

Auwers, Jean-Marie, and H. J. de Jonge, eds.. *The Biblical Canons*. BETL 163. Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2003.

Bowley, James E., and John C. Reeves. “Rethinking the Concept of ‘Bible’: Some Theses and Proposals.” XXV 2003. Online [here](#).

Davies, Philip R. “Loose Canons: Reflections on the Formation of the Hebrew Bible.” 1997. *JHS* online [here](#).

Flint, Peter W., ed. *The Bible at Qumran: Text, Shape, and Interpretation*. Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001.

Helmer, Christine, and Christof Landmesser, eds. *One Scripture or Many? Canon from Biblical, Theological, and Philosophical Perspectives*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

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<sup>29</sup> For this characterization of Esther, see Adele Berlin, *Esther: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation [and] Commentary* (JPSBC; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society) xv-xxii.

Kelsey, David H. *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975.

Kooij, Arie van der, and K. van der Toorn, eds. *Canonization and Decanonization*. With an Annotated Bibliography compiled by J. A. M. Snoek. *Studies in the History of Religions* 82. Leiden: Brill, 1998.

MacDonald, Lee Martin, and James A. Sanders, eds. *The Canon Debate*. Peabody: Hendrickson, 2002.

Mulder, Martin Jan, and Harry Sysling, eds. *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*. *Compendia rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum*. Section 2, The Literature of the Jewish People in the Period of the Second Temple and the Talmud 1. Assen/Maastricht: Van Gorcum; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990.

Polk, Timothy Houston. *The Biblical Kierkegaard. Reading by the Rule of Faith*. Macon: Mercer University Press, 1997.

Sæbø, Magne, ed., in co-operation with Chris Brekelmans and Menahem Haran. *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of its Interpretation*. Vol. 1, Parts 1-2. *From the Beginnings to the Middle Ages (until 1300). Antiquity*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996, 2000.

Troyer, Kristin de, and Armin Lange; with the assistance of Katie M. Goetz and Susan Bond, eds. *Reading the Present in the Qumran Library: The Perception of the Contemporary by means of Scriptural Interpretations*. SBLSS 20. Leiden: Brill, 2005.

Ulrich, Eugene. *The Dead Scrolls and the Origins of the Bible*. *Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999.

Vanderkam, James C. *The Dead Sea Scrolls Today*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994.

## Appendix A

### Loci of Authority at Qumran:

#### [1QSerek](#) haYahad 8:1-16 and Beyond

The authority of a text to author a way of life, to distinguish truth from falsehood, and to serve as a light unto one's path cannot be divorced from the authority granted to other texts, acknowledged teaching authorities past and present, and the ongoing process of interpretation among the faithful. A

passage from a constitutional document of the Qumran sect serves as a point of departure for a discussion of loci of authority in the sect.

#### Text and Translation

בעצת היחד שנים עשר איש וכוהנים שלושה תמימים בכול הנגלה מכול התורה לעשות אמת וצדקה ומשפט ואהבת חסד והצנע לכת איש אם רעהו לשמור אמונה בארץ ביצר סמוך ורוח נשברה ולרצת עוזן בעושי משפט וצרת מצרף ולהתהלך עם כול במדת האמת ובתכון העת.

In the assembly of the community, twelve laymen and three priests, perfect in all that has been revealed of the Torah, are to practice truth, justice, judgment, the kindness of love, and unassuming behavior each with his fellow; keep faith in the land with self-control and a contrite spirit; atone for sin as doers of justice, suffer tribulation, and comport themselves with all by the standard of the truth and in accordance with the time.

בהיות אלה בישראל נכונה העצת היחד באמת למטעת עולם בית קודש לישראל וסוד קודש קודשים לאהרון עדי אמת למשפט ובחירי רצון לכפר בעד הארץ ולהשב לרשעים גמולם. [ ]

When such exist in Israel, the assembly of the community is truly established, an eternal planting, a temple for Israel, the sodality of the Holy of Holies of Aaron, true advocates of justice, the accepted chosen who will atone for the land and mete out deserts to the wicked.

היא חומת הבחן פנת יקר בל יזדעזעו יסודותיהו ובל יחישו ממקומם [ ]

Said assembly is a tested rampart, a precious cornerstone, whose foundations shall not shake or depart from their place.

מעון קודש קודשים לאהרון בדעת כולם לברית משפט ולקריב ריח ניחוח ובית תמים ואמת בישראל להקם ברית לחוקות עולם.

A fortress, a Holy of Holies for Aaron, in which all acknowledge the just covenant and offer a sweet savor; a blameless and true house in Israel, whose purpose is to establish the covenant by perpetual enactments.

בהכין אלה ביסוד היחד שנתים ימים בתמים דרך יבדלו קודש בתוך עצת אנשי היחד. וכול דבר הנסתר מישראל ונמצאו לאיש הדורש אל יסתרהו מאלה מיראת רוח נסוגה.

When these are established in the sodality of the community for two full years in perfect behavior, they shall be set apart as holy in the midst of the assembly of the men of the community. Let no charge which is hidden from

Israel but revealed to the Interpreter be concealed from them for fear of the spirit of apostasy.

ובהיות אלה ליחד בישראל בתכונים האלה יבדלו מתוך מושב הנשי העול  
ללכת למדבר לפנות שם את דרכ הוואהא כאשר כתוב במדבר פנו דרך ייי  
ישרו בערבה מסלה לאלוהינו.

When such exist in Israel, they shall separate themselves from the abode of perverse men in order to go the wilderness to prepare there the way of the Lord, as it is written, “In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.”

היאה מדרש התורה אֲשֶׁר צוה ביד מושה לעשות ככול הנגלה עת בעת  
וכאשר גלו הנביאים ברוח קודשו.<sup>30</sup>

Said (way) is the study of the Torah which he enjoined through the agency of Moses, so as to act according to all that is revealed of the times ahead, and according to what the Prophets revealed through his holy spirit.<sup>31</sup>

#### Commentary

A secondary and interlinear gloss in 8:10 is omitted in translation.

Lines of authority are clear in this passage. The Torah and the Prophets are the means by which God reveals precept and vision. The Interpreter or Exegete is the one who efficaciously inquires of the Torah. The results of said inquiry comprise the community’s halacha and eschatology, but are not to become common knowledge. After two years of service as part of the number that govern a community (of which there were many scattered throughout the land), community members were permitted to go to the wilderness to inquire of the Torah and the Prophets. This is portrayed as the highest imaginable calling. It should not be assumed that “the Torah [God] enjoined through the agency of Moses” refers *sic et simpliciter* to the Pentateuch. It probably encompasses [Jubilees](#), which also presents itself as

<sup>30</sup>Text from Abegg, Martin G. Jr., *Qumran Sectarian Manuscripts*. Bellingham: Logos Research Systems, 2003 (adapted). The translation is my own.

<sup>31</sup> Other translations and bibliography: Florentino García Martínez and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, eds., *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition. Volume 1 (1Q1-4Q273)* (Leiden: Brill, 1997) 68-99; 89-90; Elisha Qimron and James H. Charlesworth, “Rule of the Community (1QS),” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls. Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek Texts with English Translations. Volume 1. Rule of the Community and Related Documents* (ed. James H. Charlesworth; The Princeton Theological Seminary Dead Sea Scrolls Project; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994) 1-51; 35-36; Michael Wise, Martin Abegg, Jr., and Edward Cook, *The Dead Sea Scrolls. A New Translation* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996) 123-43; 137-38.

vision and precept transmitted to Moses. Cf. [CD A 16:1-3](#), where the “Book of Time Divisions by Jubilees and Weeks” (=Jubilees) is understood as the community’s roadmap of the days that awaited them. In CD B 20:1, the “Beloved Teacher,” the one referred to as “The Interpreter” here, is spoken of as the founder of the congregation of the men of perfect holiness.

In the Qumran sect, the hermeneutical process was carefully controlled, and stood at the very heart of the community’s self-understanding. It is probable that the *pesharim*, and perhaps a part of the so-called parabiblical literature - much of it actually predates the sect, are products of this self-understanding.

As was noted in the body of this essay, thematic [pesharim among the Dead Sea Scrolls](#) comment on passages from the following writings; each, in other words, was understood as canonical in the functional sense: Deut, 2 Sam, Exod, Amos, Pss, Ezek, Dan, and Isa (4Q174); Deut, Num, and Josh (4Q175); Isa and Zech (4Q176); Pss, Isa, Mic, Zech, Ezek, and Hos (4Q177); Jer (4Q182). Continuous pesharim are attested for the following writings: Isa, Hos, Mic, Nah, [Hab](#), Zeph, and Pss. The focus of these texts is on actualization in contemporary figures and events.

The scope of parabiblical literature attested among the Dead Sea scrolls is determined by an interest in and elaboration on the following figures: *Enosh* (4Q Prayer of Enosh); *Enoch*, *Lamech*, *Noah*, *Shem*, *Ham*, and *Japheth*; and *Abraham* (1QapGen); *Enoch* (Book of Watchers; Book of Giants; Enastr; Book of Dreams; Letter of Enoch); *Noah* (4Q Birth of Noah ar); *Jacob* (4QTJacob? ar); *Judah* (Testament of Judah; 4Q538); *Joseph* (4QTJoesph ar); *Naphtali* (4QNaph); *Levi* (1QTLevi ar; 4QLevi ar); *Kohath* (Levi’s son; 4QTQohath ar); *Amram* (Kohath’s son; 4QVisions of Amram); *Moses* (4Q174; Jubilees; Apocryphon of Moses); *Joshua* (Apocryphon of Joshua); *Samuel* (4QVisSam); and *Ezekiel* (4QpsEzek). Ben Sira 49:14-16, with its idealization of the figures of *Enoch*, *Joseph*, *Shem*, *Seth*, *Enosh*, and *Adam* (in that order), is an independent witness to the importance of parabiblical alongside of biblical literature in Second Temple period Judaism.

In the broadest of terms, textual authority at Qumran may be described as follows. The Law, the Prophets (including Daniel), and the Psalms ruled faith and practice, but not in isolation from a broad range of other texts. Commentary, parabiblical, and other literature functioned as “preservative additions” to the aforementioned group of texts. [Jubilees](#) in particular enjoyed authoritative status. 4Q228 Frg. 1 i 9, explicitly quotes from it. [Damascus Document](#) [Cairo Geniza A] 16:1-3 promotes its authority.

Calendar and eschatology as understood in Jubilees became foundational to the sect's own understanding of the same topics.

## Appendix B

### Canonical Use of the Deuterocanonicals in Christian Tradition: An Example

Those without experience in a tradition which reads from Ben Sira, Wisdom, [Baruch](#), Tobit, 1-2 Maccabees, and other Jewish literature of late Second Temple times according to a lectionary cycle are unlikely to know what it is like to read passages from said literature according to Christian coordinates. A port of entry into this world is provided by *Testimonia ad Quirinum*. Each string of testimonia listed below, a sample only of the work's contents, is a *tour de force* of intertextuality.

The Latin text of Books Two and Three of *Testimonia ad Quirinum* I draw from is that found in PL 4 (1891) cols 723-810, online [here](#).

#### [Book Two](#)

1. Christum primogenitum esse, et ipsum esse sapientiam Dei, per quem omnia facta sunt.

*That Christ is the First-born and the Wisdom of God by whom all things were made.*

Prov 8:22-31; Ben Sira 24:3-7; Ps 89:27-33; John 17:3-5; Col 1:15, 18; Rev 21:6; 1 Cor 1:22-24.

6. Quod Deus Christus.

*That Christ is God.*

Gen 35:1; Isa 45:14-16; 40:3-5; Bar 3:35-37; Zech 10:11-12; Hos 11:9-10; Ps 45:6-7; 45:10; 87:5; 68:4; John 1:1; 20:27-29; Rom 9:3-5; Rev 21:6-7; Ps 82:1; 82:6-7; John 10:34-38; Matt 1:23.

14. Quod ipsum sit justus quem Judaei occisuri essent.

*That he is the Just One whom the Jews should put to death.*

Wisdom of Solomon 2:12-22; Isa 57:1-2; Exod 23:7; Matt 27:3-4.

#### [Book Three](#)

1. De bono operis et misericordiae.

*On the benefit of good works and mercy.*

Isa 58:1-9; Job 29:12-13, 15-16; Tobit 2:2; 4:5-11; Prov 19:17; 28:27; 16:6; 25:21; Ben Sira 3:30; Prov 3:28; 21:13; 20:7; Ben Sira 14:11; 29:12;

Ps 37:25-26; 41:1; 112:9; Hos 6:6; Matt 5:6, 7; 6:20-21; 13:45-46; 10:42; 5:42; 19:17-21; 25:31-46; Luke 12:33; 11:40-41; 19:8-9; 2 Cor 8:14-15; 9:6-7, 9, 10-11, 12; 1 John 3:17; Luke 14:12-14.

4. In nullo gloriandum, quando nostrum nihil sit.

*We are to glory in nothing, since nothing is our own.*

John 3:27; 1 Cor 4:7; 1 Sam 2:3-4; 1 Macc 9:12; 2 Macc 2:62-63.

15. Ad hoc tentari homines a Deo ut probentur.

*To this end are men tried by God, that they might be proved worthy.*

Gen 22:1-2; Deut 13:3; Wisdom of Solomon 3:4-8; 1 Maccabees 2:52.

20. Fundamentum et firmamentum spei et fidei esse timorem.

*The foundation and strength of hope and faith is fear.*

Ps 111:10; Ben Sira 1:14; Prov 28:14; Isa 56:2; Gen 22:11-12; Ps 2:11; Deut 4:10; Jer 31:31-41; Rev 11:16-17; 14:16-17; 15:2-4; Susannah 1-3; Song of the Three Youth 14-19; Dan 6:24-28; Mic 6:6-9; 7:14-18; Nah 1:5-7; Hag 1:12; Mal 2:5; Ps 34:9; 19:9.

95. Bonus convivendum, malos autem vitandos.

*We are to keep company with the good, but avoid the bad.*

Prov 24:15; Ben Sira 9:16; 6:16; 9:13; 25:9; 28:24; Ps 18:25-26; 1 Cor 15:33.

109. Infirmos visitandos.

*We are to visit the sick.*

Ben Sira 7:39; Matt 25:36.

In *Testimonia ad Quirinum*, the passages listed above are cited *in extenso*. The reported text sometimes represents a tradition at considerable variance with that found in Bibles today. Textual variety, as often emphasized in this essay, was typical in this period. For preliminary discussions of individual cases, see Michael Andrew Fahey, *Cyprian and the Bible: A Study in Third-Century Exegesis* (Beiträge zur Geschichte der biblischen Hermeneutik 9; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1971).

## Appendix C

### Soft and Hard Supersessionism

[Supersessionism](#) takes many forms. If the term is used exclusively to refer to a variety of replacement theologies (as in, the New Covenant renders the Old null and void; the Quran is the one inspired divine word such that the

Old and New Testaments are deprived of authority; the teachings of [Bahauallah](#) supersede all others; etc.), the tip of an iceberg only is described.

The larger reality is that replacement and displacement are universally deployed strategies of religious and doctrinal development. Christianity “baptizes” and supplants pagan practices in the celebration of Christmas. Judaism endows originally non-religious activities with a religious meaning in the celebration of Purim. New tradition inevitably displaces old tradition even if the old is retained. A vital religious tradition will, by definition, *replace* competing tradition in its environment with an alternative of its making (Hanukkah thus becomes an alternative to Christmas), and *displace* tradition within its own matrix by retaining and transcending said matrix in a larger unity (e.g. *Mishneh Torah* and *Shulchan Arukh* over against precedent tradition).

Avowedly tradition-less traditions (an oxymoron, I know) replace and displace as well, but lack a vocabulary to describe what they do. Avowedly tradition-bound traditions continuously abrogate precedent tradition, but the emic vocabulary used to describe the dynamic conceals rather than reveals the extent of what takes place.

Examples of soft supersessionism include: the New Testament, which, correctly understood, retains and transcends the Old; the Mishnah and the Talmuds, which retain and transcend, in halachic and aggadic terms, the contents of the Tanakh.

Jewish and Christian scholars now agree that the historical sense of the contents of the Tanakh/Old Testament (in whatever iteration) is of exegetical interest *apart from* the resignified sense of same reflected in subsequent Jewish and Christian tradition. Of course, not all Jewish and Christian scholars subscribe to this consensus.

Inklings of a positive valuation of the historical sense of the writings which came to be included in the Tanakh/Old Testament *apart from* and even *against* or *in tension with* subsequent resignification thereof are detectable in the history of Jewish and Christian interpretation. *Respect for* and *an interest in* the historical sense of the text *and* the history of the text’s appropriation in subsequent tradition is modeled by two commentaries:

Childs, Brevard S. *Exodus. A Critical Theological Commentary*. OTL. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1974.

Tigay, Jeffrey H. *Deuteronomy. The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation [and] Commentary*. JPSTC. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996.

I argued in the body of this essay that it is possible for Christians to adopt a position like that of James as reported in the New Testament whereby the preaching of Moses and the preaching of the gospel, independently of each other, are understood to have a permanent place in the divine economy.

I also argued that Judaism on the one hand and Christianity on the other are supersessive in the soft sense with respect to the inherited literature that now forms the Tanakh/Old Testament (in whatever iteration). That is, they transcend and retain (not supplant, not consider null and void) the historical sense of said Tanakh/Old Testament. What it means to retain the historical sense of said literature is the core vocation of the discipline of Tanakh/OT studies in our day.

The bibliography related to the subject at hand is immense. The following list features titles which describe competing Jewish and Christian self- and “other”- understandings in antiquity. Crisscrossing particularisms and universalisms characterize Judaism and Christianity from inception. Both God and the devil, of course, are in the details.

Becker, Adam H. and Reed, Annette Yoshiko, eds. *The Ways that Never Parted. Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages*. TSAJ 95. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003.

Boyarin, Daniel. *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity. Divinations: Rereading Late Ancient Religion*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006.

Cohen, Shaye J.D. *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.

Chilton, Bruce, and Neusner, Jacob. *Judaism in the New Testament: Practices and Beliefs*. London: Routledge, 1995.

Donaldson, Terence. *Judaism and the Gentiles: Patterns of Universalism to 135 CE*. Forthcoming.

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- Gabriele Fassbeck provides an excellent and more broadly representative [bibliography](#).