

EDITORIAL

With the extensive acclaim given to the Oxford Annotated Bible including the Apocrypha by Catholics and Protestants alike many questions concerning canonicity are being reopened for discussion. Throughout colleges and seminaries this volume with its cross references, study helps, supplementary articles, and annotations is the text through which students in courses in religion are introduced to the Bible. For the laity this volume will likewise offer a consensus of scholarship in guiding their approach to the Scriptures.

According to this volume the canonicity of the Old Testament was not a reality in history until about A.D. 100. By a gradual process in the post-Solomonic centuries the Pentateuch was compiled and adopted as the Law of Moses by about 400 B.C. Subsequently other books were regarded as authoritative so that by the time of the Jamnia assembly, ca. A.D. 90-100, the question of disputed texts was settled. Concerning the Apocrypha assertions are made that they were definitely excluded at this meeting (cf. B. Metzger, *An Introduction to the Apocrypha*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1957, p. 8).

The question of the canonicity of the Bible, especially of the Old Testament, needs careful restudy in modern research. What evidence is there that any decisions were made at Jabneh affecting the canonicity of the Old Testament or the Apocrypha? Those concerned with any statements assigned to a "Jamnia Council" do well to consider the scholarly study represented in the article by Jack P. Lewis "What Do We Mean By Jabneh?" (*The Journal of Bible and Religion*, Vol. XXXII, no. 2, pp. 125-132).

In need of critical evaluation is the assertion that the Pentateuch was adopted as the Law of Moses under Ezra or that Deuteronomy was declared to be authoritative in Josian Times. Subject to question is whether or not either of the above assertions can be supported by the careful exegesis of the scripture passages cited as the basis.

The basis question in canonicity is whether or not any assembly—a Jewish legislative body or a Church Council—ever made any part of the Bible authoritative or canonized any part of it. Could it be possible that the books now in the canon possessed and exercised divine authority before any such bodies ever considered them or made such pronouncements?

Consider the example of the Pentateuch. For those who do not limit the authority of the Bible to matters of faith and practice but consider it trustworthy in its entirety the text in Deuteronomy thirty-one indicates that Moses provided a written copy of the law. This book of the law was not ratified, adopted, or made authoritative by public assembly. It was regarded as authoritative for Joshua and the Israelities. Frequent apostasy in subsequent periods does not invalidate its divine authority. Under

Josiah and Ezra the people pledged themselves to obedience which hardly warrants the assumption that this gave the law divine authority.

Could it be that the Pentateuch and subsequent books were regarded as authoritative when given because they were justly believed to be of divine origin revealed through Moses and others who followed after him? This raised the question of revelation—did God really reveal Himself to Moses or did the latter merely interpret from his human perspective the “mighty acts of God” which were later enlarged as stories in oral transmission and finally reduced to written form in subsequent centuries? Was the religion of Israel a revealed religion as recorded in the Pentateuch or is there historical data to support the theory for the compilation of the Pentateuch under prophets and priests during the divided kingdom era and the century following?

Recently in addressing the Pacific School of Religion Dr. Nathan M. Pusey, president of Harvard, asserted, “The religion established in the world by Christ—though in need of continuous human interpretation, the more learned the better—was not finally a human construct. The stumbling-block for many today—including many in the churches—is that they cannot quite accept this.” (Founders’ Day Convocation, Oct. 11, 1966). Could it not likewise be said of the Scriptures that they were not finally a mere human construct? Could it be possible that we have naturalized or humanized the Bible to the point where we have failed to recognize the divine operation of the Holy Spirit through revelation and inspiration? Previously in the opening Convocation of the Harvard Divinity School Dr. Pusey pointed out that “A new kind of humanism seems to be engulfing even recently updated formulations of the faith. To many no creedal formulation now seems possible because, it is insisted there can be no supernatural reference to undergird such a creed. And if the creeds go, what then becomes of the Church?” Perhaps our basic problem is in our failure to allow for the supernatural in the revelation of Israel’s religion, to allow for the activity of the Holy Spirit in recording that which was revealed as well as the historical setting in which it was given, and to allow for providential guidance in the formation of the canon.

The canonicity of Scripture consequently offers an area of study that deserves the best in scholarship. It is hoped that the discussion of canonicity at our annual meeting as well as the articles in this issue will stimulate further study and investigation. More scholarly research is needed in order to make a constructive contribution to the current dialogue on the canon of Scripture.