Sola Scriptura

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Is the so-called New Testament a canon, a corpus of writings seen as authoritative unity? The establishment of the NT as canon went hand in hand with the demotion of the OT Scripture to subordinate status.

Sola Scriptura

by Lloyd Gaston

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I always rather liked the slogan *sola scriptura*. It is a Reformation phrase I learned from Karl Barth, and I have not really thought about it very much since. It serves as a useful tag to express the conviction that Scripture ought to have authority not just in but, over the church. I kept that conviction when I taught in a. department of Religious Studies - a, very safe place in which to preserve one's theological illusions - but it caused problems when I came to a theological school, where I thought that if Scripture has authority over the church I should naturally have authority over colleagues who taught only church history and church doctrine and church practice. Needless to say, I did not get away with that! Clearly, I need to think about *sola scriptura* again.

The concept of canon, on the other hand, has never seemed very interesting The insistence

that the Word of God could be heard within the carefully defined boundaries of specific documents and nowhere else appears to be a peculiarly Protestant obsession with no historical and little theological justification. With respect to the New Testament, I rather like the more common-sensical definition of C.F. Evans: "These are writings which have accompanied the Christian movement; they are the best, we have and they have proved themselves."[1] After all, what we work with as exegetes is the extant literature of ancient Israel and the early Christian church. To be sure, there is no immediate apparent reason why these two enterprises should be combined in one single society, the Canadian Society of Biblical Studies, but that is a sleeping dog we can safely let lie. At least that was so until Brevard Childs made so much noise opening his can of worms as to awaken all those sleeping dogs. With respect both to the principle of *sola* scriptura and the disciplines of our Society, I believe that the concept of canonical criticism holds out both a promise and a threat. The threat is I think best expressed in Childs' latest book, The New Testament as Canon: An Introduction, and I begin with that.[2] It is a work which deserves to be taken seriously. Because the terms of the discussion are set by Childs, this address will be more theological than perhaps is appropriate, it will concentrate on problems of the New Testament canon, and it will initially continue to use the terms "New Testament" and "Old Testament."

Childs' enterprise is either complex or confusing or more likely both. Not only is the word "canon" used in three different senses to apply 1) to the final form of a redacted writing, 2) to a corpus of writings seen as a authoritative unity, and 3) to the principle of authority itself; but the adjective "canonical" is applied to so many nouns as to be superfluous. Let me then try to summarize his thesis as best as I can, without using the word "canonical". First, I think his major concern is with an erosion of the authority of the New Testament in the church, a concern which I deeply share.

But it is not at all clear how his proposals will advance the cause at all. To insist on the importance of redaction criticism is very salutary, although Childs insists that he means more than this and it is hard to see how this would help the church, which in its worship hears Scripture in pericopes and not in books. It is also quite problematic to insist that parables, for example, be interpreted solely in their present literary settings, as he seems to say in a murky excursus. When Childs says that one must try to understand how an ancient text was "transmitted, shaped, and interpreted in order to render its message accessible to successive generations of believers by whom and for whom it was treasured as authoritative,"[3] we can heartily concur if what he means is history of interpretation of *Wirkungsgeschichte*, but the word "shaped" appears to indicate that something more than that is meant.

The most problematic part of Childs' proposal lies in his appeal to the canon as an authoritative collection of writings, whereby an absolute authority is given to the collection as such, even at the expense of the individual writings contained in it. The early church in collecting those writings has great problems with the "particularity of the epistles"[4] and the "plurality of the gospels."[5] Since Childs is a consequent thinker he sees the same problems and proposes that the New Testament canon forces us to understand Paul as bracketed between Acts and the Pastoral Epistles (in fact, how Paul was assimilated by the ancient church) and that we "transcend" the four gospels in favour of a "harmony of the gospels" (tried already by Tatian). Even in textual criticism the guiding principle is to be not the recovery of the earliest possible text but rather of what Childs calls the "canonical text," the text received by most of the later church. For example, the secondary ending of Mark is taken as the authoritative text for harmonizing

the Resurrection appearance stories in all the other gospels. Childs consciously contrasts the historical Paul and the canonical Paul,[6] the Paul of the letters and the Paul of the church,[7] with authority lying only with the latter. But that is to downplay the authority of Paul and the gospels in favour of the authority of the church in the third to fifth centuries, by appealing to an idea of canon which was not; even their primary authority. The overall effect of the canon appears to be to shut the New Testament writers up in a cage of the church's making. It is curious that Childs does not discuss a parallel and even more serious simultaneous development: the taming of the Torah through the formation of a canon of the Christian Old Testament. The two processes cannot be unrelated, for the end result is to subordinate the cage called Old Testament to the cage called New Testament. Not only do the two cages not relate to one another very well, but the valley between them tends to be grossly neglected when it goes under the name of "Intertestamental." We have come far from our initial nostalgia for *sola scriptura*, and it seems that it is the problem of the canon and the two cages which first needs rethinking.

First, however, it might be helpful to survey some of the recent work done on the history of the formation of the OT and NT canons. In the course of preparing this address I was surprised at how I had to give up most of the received wisdom I had learned only 25 years ago. One need only look at the two articles in the *IDB (S)* by Freedman and Sundberg to see that the formation of the OT was much earlier and the formation of the NT much later than the old consensus would have it. There are some historical conclusions we will all have to come to terms with, even if Freedman and Sundberg do not yet represent a new consensus.

It might help to begin with some definitions. "Canon" is probably not an appropriate term to use. It is a word widely used in the Hellenistic period for "criterion," "norm," "standard of excellence," or the like, and it was used in the early church largely in three phrases: canon of truth (*kanon tes aletheais, regula veritatis*), canon of faith (*kanon tes pisiteos, regula fidei*), canon of the church (*kanon tes ekklesias, regula ecclesiastica*). By extension the term was also used specifically to designate decrees of church councils, church law, monastic regulations, the central part of the mass, and elevation to sainthood. A secondary meaning of the word, a "list," was not applied to a group of writings before the late fourth century and may well have come about because of a technical innovation: the invention of the codex. "Canon" in this sense is then only an instruction to the copyist (later printer): when you produce a codex or Bible, copy the items on this list and in this order. We often say "canon" where we ought to say "Scripture."

One could define the formation of Scripture (or "canon" in modern parlance) as the deliberate selection and collection of ancient traditions into a new authoritative group of writings which have a normative function for a community such that any other later normative writing or speaking must be seen in relation to it. It is clear that that is a very decisive event in the life of a religious community and one which probably can happen only once. The formation of Scripture of course establishes "stability," to use the terminology of James Sanders, but if that were all, the community would soon die of arteriosclerosis. Canon must also be "adaptable for life,"[8]

which means being open to midrash,[9] to innovative interpretation in new situations. It is doubtful, however, if a second canon can be added to the first, for

then the new canon becomes the real canon, to which the old must relate itself in order to establish its legitimacy, reversing the time sequence of Scripture and midrash. At least I believe that to have been the case in the Christian movement, where the establishment of the NT as canon went hand in hand with the demotion of the OT Scripture to the subordinate status.[10]

Was such a Scripture created in Israel? D.N. Freedman argues that it was.[11]

According to him, a radically new redaction and reordering of the traditions occurred during the exile (580-550 B.C.E.) to produce Torah, Former Prophets, and Latter Prophets, as "public documents, for which the highest religious authority was claimed, promulgated by an official... group in the Jewish community."[12] A generation or so later (c. 500 B.C.E.), extensive additions were made to the corpus of the Latter Prophets. Such a baldly stated thesis is of course in need of refinement, which I think Blenkensopp has provided in his Prophecy and Canon.[13] The Writings, most of which were in existence at the time, were not part of the Scripture, and when they were later collected and edited, it was in conscious relation to Scripture, a "canon conscious redaction," as Sheppard calls it, as a kind of midrashic response.[14] They might be called "deutero-canonical" from a Jewish perspective if "canon" were a Jewish word. In any case, the existence of Scripture, including at least many of the Writings, can be assumed as authoritative documents by at least some groups certainly by the beginning of the first century B.C.E.[15] One of the reasons[16]

for saying this is that if Scripture produces midrash, then conversely midrash presupposes Scripture, and as Vermes says, "in exegetical writings of the second century B.C. the main haggadic themes are already fully developed."[17] There

was never a church council at Jamnia, and the Rabbis did not seriously debate inclusion or exclusion.[18] But the place of Scripture within Judaism is not my topic, and I can only refer you to an interesting forthcoming book by Jack Lightstone.

To come now to the formation of the NT canon,[19] it seems to have been shifted from the end of the second to the end of the fourth century, at least partly because of a new dating of the Muratorian Fragment.[20] For the most part it did not involve "canon-conscious redaction," nor did it occur at a crucial time in the life of the church.[21] It is rather a miscellaneous collection of various occasional writings. Its boundaries have no self-evident validity, and every criterion mentioned: apostolicity, catholicity, orthodoxy, traditional usage, has important exceptions both of inclusion and exclusion. In particular, inspiration was never adduced as a criterion for canonicity in the early church,[22] because the Spirit was held to be given to the whole church.[23] None of the writings in the NT claims canonical authority for itself (Revelation claims apocalyptic authority), and most refer specifically to Holy Scripture outside themselves. No one has ever been able to find a unity in the NT canon[24] (as there is in Freedman's OT Scripture), but instead we have learned to speak of the varieties of NT religion.[25] Since one cannot do NT study today without speaking of the importance of church tradition (and its continuity with "post-canonical" tradition), the old Reformation distinction between Scripture and tradition has lost all historical basis.

It can fairly be said that the Reformation has lost that battle. The separate writings contained in the NT are all products of tradition, especially the gospels but also the epistles, being applied in very specific situations.[26] Two phenomena which were of great embarrassment to the early church, the plurality of the gospels and the particularity of the Pauline epistles, lie at the very heart of contemporary understanding of these texts. It is true that "The New Testament is the Church's book"[27] not only in that the church created the canon in the fourth and fifth centuries but also with respect to the composition of the individual writings in the first and second centuries. Nevertheless, the principle of *sola scriptura* remains essential if there is to be any transcendental criterion by which the church can judge and reform itself. As Barth said, if all we have is tradition, "the church is not addressed but is engaged in a dialogue with herself."[28]

Let us see if we can find such a transcendent criterion against which the traditions of the church can be measured and to ask how it can help in the interpretation of the New Testament writings.

In response to the theological question of identifying an authority which is not a product of but transcendent over the church, the answer within a Christian context seems at first blush to be obvious, Barth's formulation was that Jesus Christ as the first form of the Word of God has authority over Scripture as the second form of the Word of God which has authority over the proclaimed word as the third form of the Word of God. If it seems obvious that Jesus Christ is the canonical principle, it is not at all obvious how one can understand that statement as anything other than a purely formal principle. We can look at two classic attempts to put flesh on the principle.

First is the hierarchical concept of the ancient church which says that authority runs:

God - > Christ - > apostles - > bishops - > church. This can be seen, e.g., in I Clement 42: "The apostles received the gospel for us from the Lord Jesus. Jesus Christ was sent from God. Thus Christ is from God and the apostles are from Christ. In both instances the orderly procedure proceeds from God's will, ... and the apostles after preaching in country and city appointed their first converts to be bishops and deacons of future believers. And this was no novelty,... since Scripture says, 'I will appoint your bishops in righteousness and your deacons in faith (Isa 60:17)." Or in Justin, I Apology 39, "The Spirit of prophecy speaks... in this way: 'For out of Zion shall go forth the law and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem...' (etc. Isa 2:3). For from Jerusalem there went out into the world men, twelve in number and these illiterate, of no ability in speaking, but by the power of God they proclaimed to every race of men that they were sent by Christ to teach to all the word of God." Note how both Justin and I Clement base their argument on Scripture! This theory of apostolic succession was popular in the ancient church, and its effects are still very much with us today. It is only this theory which justifies the position of the gospels first in the New Testament and the special liturgical honour given to the gospels in certain church traditions. The problem is that it is manifestly untrue! The only apostle to have contributed any writing to the NT, Paul, hardly ever passes on tradition received from Jesus and even boasts that he never knew him (2 Cor 5:16). It was a nice theory, but here surely theology has no historical or Biblical basis on which to build whatsoever.

The modern attempt to base revelation on tradition stemming from Jesus has had no greater success. Again it seems at first quite reasonable to ascribe to the teaching of Jesus

greater authority than the gospels which report it, perhaps even to print his words in red ink. But it is perhaps significant that the church never thought to preserve the teaching of Jesus in the language in which he spoke it. Here the *Leben Jesu* movement flounders on the phenomenon which already worried the ancient church: the plurality of the gospels. Quite apart from any modern judgments about the authenticity of individual sayings, the gospels seen synoptically show that the gospel writers were quite prepared to alter the Jesus tradition rather freely to address their own particular situations. The teaching of Jesus is not a given but must be reconstituted. The problem is that no two reconstructions are the same and they all show evidence of selectivity based on modern religious desires. The quest for the historical Jesus finally dug its own grave, for the more it tried to recover the teaching of Jesus the more it became apparent how much that teaching differs from the Jesus figure liberal theology wanted to find. Here is very shifty sand indeed, and the enterprise has been quietly dropped in theological circles even if its influence is still very much in evidence in popular piety.

Before giving up on the attempt to find in the teaching of Jesus the revelatory link between God and the church, we might speculate on how the situation might have been different if Jesus had written a book. If such a book emphasized discontinuity we might have had a new religion and a new Scripture, with little relationship to what went before, as is the case with the Qur'an. Under such circumstances, but only under such circumstances, Marcion's proposal might have succeeded. But if, as I believe would have been the case, such a book emphasized continuity, we would have had no church at all, for those attracted to the teaching of Jesus would have followed his call to become better Jews. As Gentile Christians we may well be grateful that in the providence of God Jesus decided not to write a book.

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Is there another criterion, a *kanon tes aletheias*, which stands above the church's canon, in the sense of a list of authoritative writings? The Lutheran tradition in particular has been concerned with the question of the canon within the canon. Note how the word "canon" is being used in two senses, "criterion" and "list." The same ambiguity has plagued much of the discussion since ancient times.[29] Luther's classic statement is: "That is the true test by which to judge all books... when we see whether or not they promote (*treiben*) Christ... Whatever does not teach Christ is not yet apostolic, even though St. Peter or St. Paul does the teaching. Again, whatever preaches Christ would be apostolic, even if Judas, Annas, Pilate, and Herod were doing it."[30] Here is a way of putting Christ in the centre, not as a link in passing revelation through apostolic succession but in terms of what God has done in Christ's death and resurrection. Here is a criterion above the church's canon, which effectively relativizes the individual writings under the centre of the gospel. It is however much more seriously deficient in its subjectivity: if James does not promote Christ for some, that writing does for others. It is perhaps such considerations which have led E. Käsemann to propose a more specific and objective canon-within-the-canon or "material centre" (*Sachmitte*), namely the justification of the ungodly. This is perhaps a bit theological and certainly very Paul-centred, but it is also not as objective as it seems. With equal persuasive force, Stuhlmacher can argue that the centre ought rather to be "reconciliation."[31] While it is true that every church tradition and many individual Christians have their own canon-within-the-canon, unconscious or acknowledged, there is no criterion to adjudicate their rival claims. As Käsemann argued, "the NT canon does not constitute the foundation of the unity of the church."[32] But he can also give no compelling reason why that unity must be achieved on his terms, and the church remains in dialogue with itself, with no *sola scriptura* to address it.[33]

It seems that we could be on surer footing if we were to appeal not to a modern but to an *ancient regula fidei*, not to apostolic succession but to "apostolic" tradition of the second century. This has the great advantage not only of concentrating on the Christological centre but of doing so with more essential detail than the abstract modern examples cited. It is not that I intend to express anything but basic agreement with the *regula fidei*, but a number of points must be noted. First, the *regula fidei* was not meant to be a compendium of the faith but presupposes the authority of Holy Scripture for theology and practice. Second, the *regula fidei* was not derived from a NT canon, which did not yet exist, but was at least in part a guide to the midrashic interpretation of Holy Scripture (=OT). Third, the *regula fidei* was only a part of the apostolic tradition (*regula ecclesiastica*), which also included "apostolic" liturgies and church orders. Fourth, there exists enough diversity in the "apostolic" tradition that it is quite misleading to speak of *the*

tradition: there were only traditions and any consensus which developed was a secondary phenomenon.[34] Finally, we are after all speaking of traditions and not of a criterion (kanon) which transcends the church. Nevertheless, we have heard a hint of a *sola scriptura,* a scripture not created by the traditions of the church.

It is possible to push the concept of apostolic tradition into the first century. Many will agree with the method, though no longer the content, of Bultmann's NT theology. He begins with the *kerygma* of the Jerusalem and Hellenistic church (sing!) as primary, continues with Paul and John as the (only!) great "theologians" and concludes with

a long section on "Development toward the Ancient Church,"

including non-canonical material.[35] If the first is naive and the second too restrictive, our interest is with the final section While Bultmann is right in seeing the continuity between the "sub-apostolic" writings in the NT and the early church, he sees it as a decline into "early catholicism." R.E. Brown[36] and R.H. Fuller,[37] on the other hand, see the movement more positively and would understand post- apostolic writings not as containing the gospel but as authoritative indications of how the gospel is to be transmitted to later generations. There are great advantages in leaving the lower limits of the NT canon quite permeable.

The NT canon is not a unity and cannot serve as a norm. That is true not only of the individual writings but also of the *kerygmata* they contain. Scholars as different as W. Bauer and J.D.G. Dunn agree that the early Christian movement began with a rich diversity of *kerygmata* and gospels and Christologies and theologies. That is only to be expected, since we are dealing after all with church traditions and both the communities that formulated them and the communities for which they were being adapted. Insofar as there is unity, it lies in the conviction that God has acted in Jesus Christ and that this God is the God of Holy Scripture. The significant subtitle of C.H. Dodd's According to the Scriptures is The Substructure of NT Theology. Scripture is the criterion, the canon, to which the early Christians appealed, and it is definitely not the creation of the church. Here, then, we have found our *sola scriptura*.

The second part of the proposal I think follows inevitably from the first, the anchoring of the *sola scriptura* principle firmly in the Holy Scriptures of ancient Israel. The second thesis is that it is best not to speak of a canon of the New Testament at all but rather of midrash (J. Sanders) or *explicatio* (J. Calvin).[38]

It really does make a difference when one recognizes, along with C.F. Evans, that "Christianity is unique among world religions in being born with a Bible in its cradle."[39]

As the new discipline of canonical criticism points out, the creation of a canon of Holy Scripture is a decisive step in the life of a community. It lies in the nature of canon to provide stability. While one can in theory or in practice neglect parts of it or reject the whole to start a new religion, no new canon can be added to canon once it is created. At the same time it lies in the nature of canon to he "adaptable for life," and if it is truly to function as Scripture it cries out for constant reinterpretation in the ongoing believing communities. A necessary counterpart to canonical criticism is "comparative midrash," which includes but is more than history of interpretation. If it is true that once a canon is formed revelation is restricted to the canonical text, it must also be emphasized that revelation does occur again and again in the believing communities in their various situations, sometimes with radically new meaning. If the concept of inspiration (and thus of revelation in a post-canonical situation) is to be meaningful, it must refer not just to a private transaction in the past but to what God does in the present. Inspiration occurs whenever a community, in its own particular situation in time and space, within the continuity of the whole tradition of interpretation is inspired to hear what God says to them in the words of Holy Scripture. "Every Scripture, whenever (from time to time) it

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is inspired by God, is profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and training..." (2 Tim 3:16). "*Ubi et quando visum est deo*," as the Reformers said. As revelation is more authoritative than an ancient text, so midrash can be more authoritative for the community than the canon as such. There is a tension between the exegetical meaning of a text, which can be more or less established historically, and the homiletical, even inspired meaning, which is true for its time and place but is not authoritative for other situations in the same way as is the exegetical meaning. The canon remains as *sola* scriptura as a control over interpretations which claim to be revelation but are not or are no longer such.

There were major problems involved when the church thought it had two canons, an Old Testament and a New Testament.[40] The problem is of course much greater than the names, although they contribute to it. As is well known the word "Testament" is a famous mistranslation by Tertullian,[41] and while "Covenant" might well be appropriate for the first canon, it does not adequately characterize the second. The real problem, however, lies in the adjectives "Old" and "New," insofar as they are held, consciously or unconsciously, to have any meaning at all. Again, I refer to the Babylonian captivity of Hebrew Scripture under the chains of the concept "Old Testament." The concept "New Testament" can and almost always has led interpreters of these documents into a hermeneutic of antithesis. In what follows, we shall look at some of the theological consequences which accrue from a hermeneutic of continuity, which in turn depends (I think) on the concept of canonical Scripture and authoritative midrash. If we eliminate the concept of "New Testament" we shall have to find another name to refer to it. For lack of anything better, I shall follow the example of Paul van Buren and speak from now on of the

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Apostolic Writings.

It is clear that the teaching of Jesus is to be understood completely in Biblical categories and that none of it is intended to be in antithesis to them. His teaching can in particular be understood as authoritative midrash of the Scriptural passages proclaiming the kingdom of God, saying that now they were about to be fulfilled. Jesus' teachings and his deeds are to be interpreted without remainder as part of the .Judaism of his day, in continuity with Scripture and the tradition of its post-Biblical interpretation. That means that by incorporation into Jesus as the one in whom God has acted for their sake Gentiles have complete access to Jesus' Scripture (and its living interpretations) and to Jesus' God who speaks in them. The doctrine of the Trinity has logical priority over Christological doctrines,[42] something obscured by too abstract formulations.

What is said is that the "Father" to whom the "Son" relates is none other than the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of Sarah and Rebekah and Rachel and Leah, the God of Moses and Jeremiah and Ezra and Esther. The doctrine of the Trinity formulates the fact that through the Son and the Holy Spirit this is the God Gentiles worship too.

Also Christology depends on Scripture, as an interpretation of it and not an addition to it. The earliest creedal formula in the Apostolic Writings, in its shortest form, states that "Christ died in accordance with the Scriptures... was raised in accordance with the Scriptures" (1 Cor 15:3-5). Even the resurrection is not in itself revelatory but is an ambiguous event which is in itself mute. No church was ever founded on the basis of the resurrection of Lazarus or Jairus' daughter or the widow's son or Tabitha or Euthychus,

or on the ascension of Enoch or Elijah or Moses or Mary. What makes Jesus' resurrection unique and gives it revelatory voice is that it was "according to the Scriptures." The risen Christ "beginning with Moses and all the prophets interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (Lk 24:27). Failure to recognize this could lead us to misunderstand, even to trivialize, the claims made by the Christology of the earliest Christians.[43]

Paul claims that his gospel was "proclaimed beforehand to Abraham" because "Scripture knew beforehand that God would justify the Gentiles from faithfulness" (Gal 3:8), that "the Gospel of God concerning his Son was promised earlier through hisof mphets in Holy Scriptures" (Rom 1:2), and that "the Law and the Prophets testified to the righteousness of God through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ" (Rom 3:21f). It was expected that Scripture was the criterion for the truth of the gospel: those who received the word "examined the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so" (Acts 17:11). And yet this tends not to be recognized by modern scholars. Vielhauer[44] in particular complains that Paul's interpretation of the "Old Testament" is completely arbitrary and need not be taken seriously. All of this is because of the concepts of "New Testament" and "Old Testament," and the fact that the former seems not to relate very well to the latter. But if we begin with the concept of Holy Scripture, then we need to take seriously its living transmission in the midrash of subsequent communities. The task of the Pauline interpreter is then not to contrast Paul and the Old Testament itself but to try to reconstruct something of the history of interpretation of the text and to locate Paul with respect to these midrashic traditions. Insofar as this can be done, Paul's own midrash, while creative, is not at all arbitrary and outlandish. Here is a good example of how a change of concept might enrich exegesis and give

more, not less, authority to the Apostolic Writings.

Understanding the Apostolic Writings as midrash means that there is no sharp line separating NT and early church. That is of course true historically, but it also has important theological consequences. We ought not to try to jump from the "letters from heaven" posted in the first century directly to our own time but (Christians should recognize that they are only the most recent stage in a process, which began with Easter in the light of Ezra, of receiving tradition and hearing Scriptural midrash to illuminate their own present. Even in the fifth century, liturgy and the *regula fidei* and a living tradition were much more important than drawing up a list of books. For the first and second centuries, Cullmann[45] argued long ago that the emerging tradition and the rule of faith (creeds) were more authoritative than the writings which contain them. This is the truth in what Catholic doctrine has always claimed. There are important elements of the Christian tradition not contained in the Apostolic Writings and there are aspects of the Apostolic Writings which have only relative importance as a stage in the transmission of that tradition. Other aspects of the Apostolic Writings seem to many to be theologically and ethically problematic - the anti-Judaism of some of them is only one example - and we now have a criterion transcending both ourselves and the church which gives theological justification for that conclusion, namely incompatibility with Holy Scripture as the *sola scriptura* which stands above the church.

The proposal to abolish the New Testament in favour of Christian traditions and Christian midrash also has consequences for the work of our Society. I do not seriously propose

renaming it the Canadian Society for the Study of the Hebrew Bible and its Post-biblical Midrash/La Société Canadiènne pour l'Etude de la Bible Hébraique et son Midrash Post-biblique. Nevertheless, I hope that many of us adopt this perspective. I refer in particular to those who study as I do the Apostolic Writings. We are freed from the shackles of thinking we must try to find antithesis to Scripture where none is intended, but we also have a serious and difficult obligation. That is to seek to recover the midrashic tradition that began when Scripture first became Scripture and to situate our interpretation of the Apostolic Writings within that tradition. This means not only to acknowledge the legitimacy of other midrashic understandings but also to see that the writings we study subordinate themselves to the overall authority of Scripture and are to be understood from that perspective.

We return to Brevard Childs but stand him on his head. The church does indeed need a canon to act as a transcendent criterion to adjudicate among conflicting church traditions. We look for that canon, however, not in the collection of certain church writings on the list but in the authority they themselves appealed to: the Scripture of Israel here is our *sola* scriptura.

Notes:

1. C.F. Evans, *Is Holy Scripture Christian?* (London: SCM, 1971). He also says, "It is, after all, obvious that the Christian church was meant to have a holy scripture in the sense of the Old Testament, which it succeeded in demoting but which it fatally took as a model" (p.17).
2. B. Childs, *The New Testament as Canon: An Introduction* (I,ondon: SCM, 1984).
3. Ibid., 323.
4. See N.A. Dahl, "The Particularity of the Pauline Epistles as a Problem in the Ancient Church," *Neotestamentica et Patristica* (Leiden: Brill, 1962) 261-271.
5. See 0. Cullmann, "The Plurality of the Gospels as a Theological Problem in Antiquity*," The Early Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1956) 39-54.
6. Childs, 427.

7. Ibid., 240.
8. The two terms are J.A. Sanders'. See his *Canon and Community: A Guide to Canonical Criticism* (Philadelphia.: Fortress, 1981) and *From Sacred Story to Sacred Text: Canon as Paradigm* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), or, even more conveniently, his article on hermeneutics in IDB(S).
9. As with any currently popular term, the word "midrash" is used in widely different senses. D. Patte, *Early Jewish Hermeneutics in Palestine* (Missoula: Scholars, 1975), tries to introduce terminological clarity by making distinctions between a) literary genre, b) hermeneutical methods, and c) hermeneutical convictions. The first may (or may not) he present in the NT (Heb). The second is found in important parts of some NT writings, which cannot be understood except as part of a. long midrashic tradition (i.e., cannot be related directly to an "OT' without doing violence to both). The third, a midrashic hermeneutic "takes place between the two poles 'Scripture' and the 'worshipping community'" (p 319) and can be said to characterize all the NT writings. J. Sanders seems usually to intend this third sense.
10. See my "Legicide and the Problem of the Christian Old Testament: A plea for a New Hermeneutic of the Apostolic Writings," *Transformations in Judaism and Christianity after the Holocaust* (ed. I. Greenberg, et al.; Bloomington: Indiana University Press)
11. D.N. Freedman, "The Law and the Prophets," *Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 9* (I,eiden: Brill, 1962) 250-265
12. Ibid., 251.
13. J. Blenkinsopp, *Prophecy and Canon* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1977).
14. See G.T. Sheppard, *Wisdom as a Hermeneutical Construct* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980)
15. See the essays in S.Z. Leiman, *The Canon and Massora of the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Ktav, 1974).
16. Another is the unmistakable attestation of all parts of the OT at the end of the first century by 4 Ezra, Josephus, and the NT.
17. G. Vermès, *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism: Haggadic Studies* (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 228. See also D. Patte (note 9).
18. Generally recognized since J.P. Lewis, "What Do We Mean by Jabneh?," JBR 32 (1964) 125-132.
19. Here I rely to a large extent on the excellent short book by H.Y. Gamble*, The New Testament Canon: Its Making and Meaning* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985). Cf. also H. von Campenhausen*, The Formation of the Christian Bible* (London: Black, 1972).
20. See A.C. Sundberg, Jr., "Canon Muratori: A Fourth Century List," HTR 66 (1973) 1-41.
21. The crucial period in the life of the church produced not a canon but a fundamentally new midrash in occasional writings which have been treasured by the church ever since.
22. See A.C. Sundberg, Jr., "The Bible Canon and the Christian Doctrine of Inspiration," Int 29 (1975) 352-371. Very helpful in general is P. Achtemeier, *The Inspiration of Scripture: Problems and Proposals* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980).
23. I Clement claims to be inspired by the Holy Spirit as e.g. Romans does not. We can also note that I Clement had more authority than Romans in most places in the second century church.
24. In dealing with the criteria in the early church for inclusion in the NT canon, "one can only speak of the principle of having no principle," K. Aland, *The Problem of the New Testament Canon* (London: Mowbray, 1962).
25. See W. Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971). J.D.G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament* (I,ondon: SCM, 1977), and R.L. Wilken*, The Myth of Christian Beginnings* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1971).
26. Of course the same could be said of the separate writings of the OT, but the point is that they do not contain *church* tradition.
27. W. Marxsen, *The New Testament as the Church's Book* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972). For growing Protestant recognition of the importance of tradition see E. Flesseman van Leer*, Tradition and Scripture in the Early Church* (Assen Van Gorcum, 1954).

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28. CD I, 1, 118.
29. Cf. I. Lönning*, Kanon im Kanon: Zum dogmatischen Grundlagenproblem des neutestamentlichen Kanons* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1972).
30. Luther's Works (Philadelphia: Fortress), Vol. 35, p 396.
31. P. Stuhlmacher, "The Gospel of Reconciliation in Christ; Basic Features and Issues of a Biblical Theology of the New Testament," HBT 1 (1979) 161-190.
32. E. Käsemann, "The Canon of the New Testament and the Unity of the Church*," Essays on New Testament Themes* (London: SCM, 1964) 95-107.
33. There has been much ferment in German Lutheran theological circles, conveniently collected by E. Käsemann, *Dahiteue Testament als Kanon; Dokumentation und kritische Analyse zur gegenwärtigen Diskussion* (ed. E. Käsemann; Göttingcn: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1970), with his own comments, but they are singularly unhelpful since all the contributors assume that the OT is not really Holy Scripture.
34. See the fundamentally important work of W. Bauer (note 25).
35. It is becoming more and more customary to ignore the limitations of canon in writing "introductions"; cf. e.g. H. Koester, *Introduction to the Nee Testament* (2 vols; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982).
36. R.E. Brown, *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind* (London: Chapman, 1984).
37. R.H. Fuller, "The Development of the Ministry," Lutheran-Episcopal Dialogue (Maxi, n.d.) 76-93.
38. "In speaking of the Scripture Paul means what we call the Old Testament; how can he say that it makes a man perfect? If that is so, what was added later through the apostles would seem to be superfluous. My answer is that as far as the substance of the Scripture is concerned, nothing has been added. The writings of the apostles contain nothing but a simple and natural explanation of the law and the prophets along with a clear description of the things expressed in them" Commentary on 2 Tim 3:17.
39. C.F. Evans, "The New Testament in the Making*," The Cambridge History of the Bible*, Vol. I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970) 232-284
40. See my "Legicide" (note 10).
41. Actually he preferred the term "Instrumentum."
42. As pointed out by Blenkinsopp (note 13) p. 15.
43. This is not to say that we ought to take the midrashic methods of the early church as a model of how we ought to read Holy Scripture. But we cannot understand early Christian writings unless we understand their positive relation to Holy Scripture, as opposed the perspective of the later canon which demotes Holy Scripture to mere "Old Testament".
44. P. Vielhauer, "Paulus und das Alte Testament," *Oikodome* (Munich: Kaiser, 1979) 196-228.
45. O. Cullmann, "The Tradition," *The Early Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1956) 59-99. Cf. W.G. Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1966) 358, "We can recognize what rightly stands in the canon only on the basis of the apostolic witness contained in the canon."
46. (First published in *Bulletin of the Canadian Society of Biblical Studies,* Vol. 47, 1987)

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