

within this research, let me hasten to definite what is a canon and what it refers the word is being used.

What is a canon?

The word “canon” comes from the Greek word *κανών* (*Kanon*) which means “rule” or “measuring stick.”⁶ It has come to refer largely to the standards of the Church. Church rules are called “canon law”; clerical vestments are sometimes called “canonics.” The most widely used sense of the word refers to the canon of Scripture; i.e., the list of books regarded by the Church as authoritative and divine. William LaSor renders it this way: “since the fourth century A.D. this term has been used in Christian circles to refer to the standard or official list of books that make up the Bible, as a rule of faith and practice for God’s people.”⁷

There are actually two points to consider in discussing the principles of canonicity; first, why the books are authoritative and divine and second, when and how they were accepted by the Church and collected into a canon. Particularly in the Old Testament field such a matter is complicated by the fact that much of this process took place in the distant past for which historical evidence is very scanty. Opinions may, therefore, differ somewhat, depending upon the viewpoint of the observer and the confidence he places in the evidence that is available.

Despite all the enigmatic issues surrounding the canonicity of the OT, there are still faithful folks today both in Judaism and Christianity who holds the OT in high regards for a number of reasons. For some, it is the stories of the OT, for others it is the law, the instruction, the significance and the relevance of these canonized books why they hold the OT in high

⁶ William S. LaSor, David A. Hubbard, Frederic Wm. Bush. *Old Testament Survey: A Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament*. 2nd. (Grand Rapids: MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1996), 598.

⁷ LaSor, et.al., 598.

The Authority of the OT

The implication of the belief that the Bible is God's revelation and that it is inspired by Him is that we must also accept it as authoritative.¹⁷ At the center of this authority is not so much what the Bible tells us to do, even though its commands and instructions ought to be heeded. The center of its authority is found in what it tells us to think and believe. The evidence of such statement is found in that the fact if the Bible tells us that an earthquake happened, we believe it happened; if the Bible tells us that someone or something existed, we believe that it did indeed existed; these are mere examples of the implication of its authority. Nevertheless, the core of its authority is to be found in what it reveals/tells us about God.¹⁸ Walton and Hill explains,

We are compelled by its (The bible) authority to accept its picture of God, place it in the center of our worldview, and make it the basis for everything we think and do. Its picture of God is true, and this picture demands our response. In our recognition of the Old Testament, we need to come to know the Old Testament not as laws and history, psalms and prophecy, but as God's authoritative revelation of Himself.¹⁹

The authority of the OT for Christians

The OT was the bible used by Christ, his disciples and the apostles. Almost uniformly the words "Scripture" or "Scriptures" in the NT referred to the OT (e.g. John 5:9; 10:35; Acts 8:32; Gal. 3:8; 2 Tim. 3:16) with 2 Pet. 3:16 being an exception. For about two decades after Christ the only parts of the NT I existence were only fragmentations (fragmentary accounts) of his life and teachings. During this period when a vital Church was extending its influence into Syria, Asia

¹⁷ John H. Walton and Andrew E. Hill. *Old Testament Today: A journey from original meaning to contemporary significance*. 1st. (Grand Rapids: MI: Zondervan, 1952-), 8.

¹⁸ Ibid, 8.

¹⁹ Ibid, 8.

different. For Wellhausen (1844-1918), authors and documents were the critical elements in any study of composition of the Bible. Drawing on the work of many predecessors, Wellhausen fashioned the classic statement for the source analysis of the first five books of the Bible. His version of the literary analysis of the Pentateuch entails four documents: J was the *Yahwist* Document/source (ninth century B.C.E.), E was the *Elohist* source (eighth century), D or *Deuteronomy* source (seventh century), and P or the *Priestly* tradition (fifth century). Wellhausen assumed that oral tradition lay behind the documents but consisted of individual stories only loosely related to each other and bound originally to localities having special features like sacred sites or geographical oddities reflected in the stories.²⁴

While Hermann Gunkel (1862-1932) accepted the general framework of Wellhausen's documentary theory, he displayed a much greater interest in the role of oral tradition in shaping the material which ultimately emerged as documents. Gunkel began from a basic distinction which he made between the literature of ancient peoples and the literature of modern times. While modern literature is marked by the dominant role of authors who produce, the literature of Israel is closer to folk literature.²⁵

The notion of *Gattung* (German), sometimes translated in English as "form" but more recently as "genre," is a key concept in Gunkel's general approach which he referred to as *Gattungsgeschichte* but which is known in English as "form criticism." In his view, most of the basic genres of Israel's literature were formed in an oral period when each had a specific setting in the life of the people (*Sitz im Leben*). Even when writing and authors took over, ancient patterns were still employed. Using this perspective, Gunkel made important contributions to the

²⁴ Culley, "Oral Tradition," 32.

²⁵ Ibid, 32-33.

worship, the testimony of their uniqueness, and most significantly, the revelation of the true and living God. It is a truism that Christianity was basically born with a book in her hands; the same book that Jesus and His sincere followers revered, the faithful OT which was of course the Hebrew Bible then. The Hebrew Old Testament consists of documents that comprise the first half of the Christian Bible (the OT). I have already examined and dealt with the word “Conon” in the introduction by way of definition; as a result, I will now quickly run deeper in the issue of canonicity.

Development of the OT Canon

Norman Geisler and William Nix have informed us that “there is not enough data to form a complete history of the Old Testament Canon.”⁵² Nevertheless, they have notified us that there are however, ample materials to provide us with an overall sketch and illustration of some crucial links. The rest, they purport, will have to be formulated and established by exercising reasonable judgments.

It is quite evident through history and scripture, that there was a collection and immediate progression of the prophetic writings/books included in the canon. These prophetic writings were seemingly preserved for posterity and held in high regards (Deut. 31:24-26; 2 Kings 22:8; Josh. 24:26). In addition to that (the collection, preservation and progression of prophetic writings), there appear to be some form of continuity among the writings themselves. Each of the leaders within the prophetic community seems to have

⁵² Geisler and Nix, 107.