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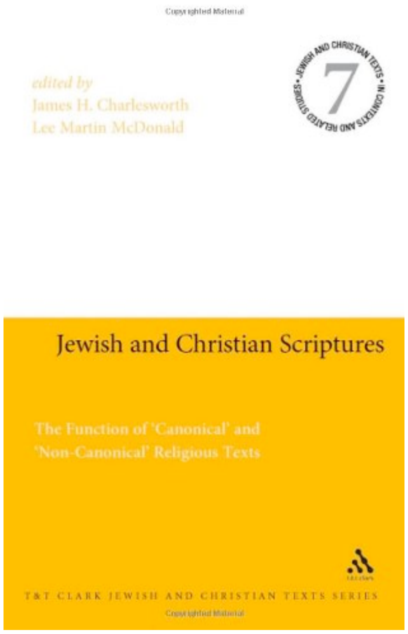

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JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN TEXTS IN CONTEXTS AND RELATED STUDIES 7

Jewish and Christian Scriptures

The Function of 'Canonical' and 'Non-Canonical' Religious Texts

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Jewish and Christian Scriptures: The Function of 'Canonical' and 'Non-canonical' Religious Texts

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This volume collects the papers presented at the section on "The Function of Apocryphal and Pseudepigraphical Literature in Early Judaism and Earliest Christianity" of the 2007 meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in San Diego. The sessions were co-chaired by the editors of this volume, which is intended to be the first of a series. The corpus of works denominated "Apocrypha" and "Pseudepigrapha" has grown enormously with the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls and publication of numerous other works. These writings largely neglected in previous scholarship are now recognized to be important historical sources, and their study has raised questions about their function in the communities that produced and preserved them, for many seem to have been accorded an authority equal to that of writings that came to be generally accepted as "canonical."

After an introductory essay by James A. Sanders, Lee Martin McDonald writes the programmatic contribution, "What Do We Mean by Canon? Ancient and Modern Questions." McDonald and other contributors rightly note that "canonical" and related terms are anachronistic for the centuries immediately surrounding the beginning of Christianity. On specifics MacDonald states that a "universally adopted" twenty-seven book New Testament canon "is first fixed by the Roman Catholic Churches in 1546 at the

Council of Trent" (21), but he correctly notes on page 27 that this canon was affirmed at the councils of Hippo (393) and Carthage (397). He comes out for a fourth-century date for the Muratorian Fragment over against a second-century date (35 n. 43) without considering the now-plausible case for its composition by Victorinus of Pettau in the third century. He fails to address my rejection of the characterization of the Muratorian Fragment as a "list" (24). Despite much repetition of what he has previously written, McDonald does not engage other ways of putting the development together than the simplistic paradigm he opposes. Loren L. Johns's response to McDonald helpfully applies "set theory" to canon formation. The church moved in its understanding of the Bible from a "centered set" to a "bounded set" (43).

James Hamilton Charlesworth, in "The Book of the People from the People of the Book: 1QpHab and Its Scribes," argues for the role of the community in shaping and transmitting the sacred scriptures. He takes as his illustration the work of the scribe in the pesher on Habakkuk from Qumran. Charlesworth concludes that 1QpHab was more authoritative for the community than Habakkuk itself (54). Does this confuse a result with an intention?

Andrei A. Orlov's response points out that the scribe was not doing anything different from interpreters after there was a closed canon (61). Indeed, my observation before reading Orlov's response was that the same circumstance of an interpretation becoming functionally more authoritative than the text interpreted happens with received texts in communities of faith today, so the scribal activity at Qumran offers no indication of reduced authority for texts commented on (if anything, the very act of interpreting was an indication of the text's authority). Orlov's comment is that at Qumran there was neither the absence of a canon nor a fully developed canon but a precanon or proto-canon.

Ken M. Penner, on "Citation Formulae as Indices to Canonicity in Early Jewish and Early Christian Literature," shows that how these formulae were used points to divine or authoritative texts. A different method of citation was used for clearly nonscriptural texts. There is no difference in the way Enoch and some other works were cited from the formulae used for "Scripture." This would indicate that the formulae themselves are not a sufficient criterion for how a work was classified.

Casey D. Elledge's "Rewriting the Sacred: Some Problems of Textual Authority in Light of the Rewritten Scriptures from Qumran" offers five criteria for evaluating the authority given to rewritten scriptures before the closure of the canonical process. According to these criteria it appears that Jubilees certainly and probably Psalms of Joshua, Reworked Pentateuch, and the Temple Scroll were regarded by the Qumran community as scriptural

(95). These writings were valued by the community, but when that community ceased to exist, so did whatever authority these documents had, unless they were accepted by others. Brent A. Strawn, in “Authority: Textual, Traditional, or Functional? A Response to C. D. Elledge,” suggests dependence on authoritative traditions instead of textual sources and observes that functionally authoritative literature is not necessarily the same as Scripture.

Jeremy Hultin’s “Jude’s Citation of 1 Enoch” considers different responses in ancient authors to Jude’s use of 1 Enoch: acceptance of 1 Enoch on the basis of Jude’s citation (Tertullian, Priscillian); rejection of Jude because of this quotation (testimony of Origen and Jerome); or acceptance of Jude but rejection of 1 Enoch on the grounds that no scripture existed before Moses (Athanasius) or that Enoch was a prophet but not accepted among the Scriptures preserved in the temple (Augustine) or that the quotation is an occasional citation like Paul’s citation of Greek poets (Jerome).

Leslie W. Walck suggests that, in addition to the decline of apocalyptic in early Christianity, there was a theological factor in the rejection of 1 Enoch: human agency in sin assumed more importance than attributing the source of evil to fallen angels (as in 1 Enoch). Another factor was the Jewish rejection of the calendar employed by 1 Enoch.

Craig A. Evans’s contribution, “The Pseudepigrapha and the New Testament: The Case of the Acts of the Apostles,” has a misleading title, for he deals principally with the influence of Joel on Acts 2. He includes a listing of over four pages of the parallels from the literature of late antiquity with verses in Acts.

Stephen J. Shoemaker’s “Apocrypha and Liturgy in the Fourth Century: The Case of the ‘Six Books’ Dormition Apocryphon” laments the neglect of Marian apocrypha in much of the study of early Christianity and argues for the New Testament Apocrypha not being failed scripture but a component of ecclesiastical tradition. This may apply to the Marian texts he studies, but I suggest a variety of motives were at work in the production of the varied literature. Shoemaker points out that the early and medieval church used apocryphal writings for reading at feast days of saints. The “Six Books” apocryphon was used already in the fourth century for the liturgical commemoration of Mary. He says that “supplementary rather than supplanting” (157) applies to much of the New Testament Apocrypha.

George T. Zervos’s response to Shoemaker prefers the term “Christian Apocrypha” over “New Testament Apocrypha” but thinks it better to abolish the term *apocrypha* and use the term *pseudepigrapha* for much of the New Testament as well. He represents the line of thinking that implies that if something was early it has as much claim to credence as what was judged authoritative or "apostolic" by the great church.

Simon Lee contributes "The Transfiguration Remembered, Reinterpreted, and Reenacted in *Acts of Peter* 20–21: An Exploration of the Dynamic Relationship between the Scriptures, Their Interpretive Traditions, and Their Interpreting Community." The Acts of Peter remembers the transfiguration in the first half of chapter 20 through the reading of the Gospel account, reinterprets it in the second half of the chapter in terms of the incarnation, that Jesus is both divine and human, and in chapter 21 finds it reenacted in the life of the community through the different ways Jesus is experienced. The response to Lee by Henry W. Morisade Rietz suggests Isaiah and Acts as antecedents as well as Mark.

Ten pages of abbreviations indicate the range of texts and modern publications used, but many of the authors appeal to the same works for their presentation.

Readers may find the individual contributions more significant than the overall perspective within which they are put. Several of the authors take as the position to be opposed an older paradigm of canon formation that no longer obtains and indeed is to some extent misrepresented. The book is an appropriate reminder that *apocrypha*, *pseudepigrapha*, *canonical*, *noncanonical*, and related terms are modern classifications that should not be read into the early sources and that early writers (Jewish and Christian) quote works not in their later canons as Scripture, but sometimes the impression is left (McDonald is more careful here) that this situation collapses what canon stands for or that the lack of precise boundaries meant there was no standard. Moreover, in our present circumstances, what other way are we to speak of these books? The plea not to import later terminology into the ancient texts should be accompanied by a similar generosity allowing modern writers to use the terminology of our time. As these papers demonstrate, the process of recognition of the Jewish and Christian canons was messy at the edges, but we should remember that there was little doubt about the center.