The Making of a Canon: Impact of the Old Testament Scriptures in the Christian Canon Development

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Abstract. The formation of the Christian canon was not a one day venture. Some scholars maintain it spanned from the first up to about the fourth centuries. This paper has three main parts: the first draws a linear process of canon generation, beginning from text to scripture and possibly becoming canonical. The second focuses on the creation of the Christian canon by exploring the stages and the implications of naming the canon as 'Testaments'. At the heart of the study is a consideration of the use and inclusion or exclusion of the Jewish scripture by Christians as discussed by a heretic (Marcion) and three Anti-heretics (Justin Martyr, Irenaeus and Tertullian) in the 2nd and/or 3rd centuries of the Roman Empire. The third part takes an example of a modern church (Church of Christ) whose reception to the Old Testament is one of skepticism. Furthermore, the level of usage of the Old Testament by the Church of Christ is key for the thesis of this paper. It is, therefore, important to assess a possible relationship between Marcion and the Church of Christ. Historical, theological and interview methods are employed to explore these developments. The paper concludes that by the naming of the Christian canon and inclusion of the Jewish scriptures, the Christian identity can be described as Judeo-Christian. This description has impacted Christian formation and development, a great deal from antiquity to the modern era. Marcion and his followers did not take this lightly in the first four centuries of the Christian history. On the other hand, in the nineteenth century the Church of Christ seemingly follows this example in antiquity on including the Old Testament as part of the Christian canon.

Introduction

The Christians canon is a subject of great interest to scholars because of the processes and the identity it creates for the Christians.¹ Going back to basic issues, this paper first and foremost discusses the definition and relationship between text, scripture and canon. The second part is concerned with the formation of the Christian canon, where attention is focused on the form, content and formation of the Christian canon including how the early Christians developed a vocabulary for the canon designated; Testaments. This section will explore the issue of inclusion (why some Jewish and early Christian scriptures were included in the Christian canon while some were not). The final main section of this paper transports the discussions in the patristic era into modern times by considering a church tradition that believes the Old Testament is not useful for Christian doctrines and formation.

In dealing with the subject of this paper, primary sources written by some early Church fathers who were anti-heretics such as Justin Martyr, Irenaeus and Tertullian all between the 2nd and 3rd centuries will be analyzed. In addition other recent scholarly materials on the subject will be looked at in order to situate the primary sources in the historical and theological context of the time while interpreting the sources in dialogue with previous scholarship. This paper adopts both

¹Due to the many references to Jewish texts in the New Testament and later Christian texts and due to the inclusion of some Jewish text in the Christian canon as the Old Testament, Christianity is seen as closely knitted with Judaism.

theological and historical approaches in dealing with the engaging questions. The theological approach is useful because the arguments by the inclusionist² and exclusionist³ are expressed in some theological undertones. The theological method will also help to deal with questions such as why the Christian canon is named 'Testament'. In order to better understand the theological arguments, we need to put the arguments in the context of the time hence the historic approach. This is very crucial because theological formulations or understandings are often heavily influenced by the times and seasons in which the theological formulations or ideas were born. An understanding of the issues by the two sides (inclusionist or exclusionist) is to take a considerable look at the religio-political situation between the 2nd and 3rd centuries based on the primary sources of this project. This is where the historical method becomes useful in addressing the factors that led to the development of the canon and the stages of the development of the canon. Additionally, the contact person is interviewed by responding to some questions as well as some internet sources in relation to the reception and usage of the Old Testament among the members of the church of Christ. To this end this paper explains the relationship between texts, scripture and canon. Furthermore, it explores the formation of the Christian canon as well as ideas of the Church of Christ with regard to the Old Testament.

“Scripture and Canon”

Jews, Christians and Muslims have developed their own scriptures. However Christians and Muslims have also in different ways appropriated or modified the Jewish scripture in their canons.⁴ Scriptures form an authoritative source on which most actions of a religion find expressions. Scriptures will in this paper be defined as texts that are believed and presented as being revealed to the community in question and humanity at large. Canon, on the other hand, is a list of scriptures accepted as authoritative for use by a religious group. It thus can be said that not all scriptures have a place in a canon, but canonical texts are scriptural. These two concepts are similar and related to a large extent. It must be stressed that, sometimes people even use them loosely in an interchangeable manner as synonyms. However, for the purpose of this paper attempts will be made to show a rather thin line of distinction between them.

Scriptures

Every religion that thinks of the future, wishes to be able to equip the coming generations with their set beliefs so that the religion does not become extinct [1].⁵ If there should be continuity, then it is about passing on to the future generations the values and history of the religious traditions. It is in this sense that scriptures are a key feature of many surviving religions. Scriptures can be defined as inspired text from a person believed to be supernatural to guide the activities of mankind. The use of the term 'text' does not necessarily suggest that scriptures are always written [2]. David Brakke believes a text by which a group may be formed need not necessarily be in written form; it may be either written or oral [3]. All three Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) had some of their scriptures in oral forms such as stories before they were later codified into documentary text. In African Traditional Religion, scriptures are still oral, kept in proverbs, stories, rituals, etc. [4]. It is, however, the case that oral forms of scriptures are likely to be adulterated with time, because it is hidden in the language of the people, hence often times, not readily accessible. Written scriptures are not easily adulterated; it is accessible and readily passed on to the unborn generations [2].

²Those who support the references and inclusion of the Jewish scriptures in the Christian canon, such as Tertullian etc.

³Those who reject the references and inclusion of the Jewish scriptures in the Christian canon such as Marcion.

⁴There are so many aspects of the Jewish scriptures imprinted in the Christian canon, in the case of Islam, some aspects of the borrowed Jewish texts have been modified.

⁵The author of the *Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicity* shows that the account is to feed the future generations with what had gone on. *Mart. of Perpetua and Felicity* 1:2.

In most cases, what makes a text scriptural for the religious community is related to ideas about the provenance of a given text: the source. A scripture is believed as coming from a deity to the whole of humanity especially the adherents of that religious faith. The origin essentially makes the text sacred or inspired for use. Ferguson Everett cites sources from Christian antiquity where scriptures are described as texts “handed down or received” [5]. This idea of scripture as being handed down or received has two major implications with regards to the source.

Firstly, it can be argued that scriptures are believed to be emanating from a place the receiver reveres, which is often from an object of worship. The human authors in these cases present themselves only as a medium and not the originators or authors in the sense of authorship of a novel or a textbook. Sometimes, as in the case of the Prophet Muhammad, the inability of the author to pen or otherwise conceive of those important instructions and directions are highlighted.

Secondly, it implies that the current handlers of the scriptures are not the only users but that (apart from the first receivers) their forerunners have used it and will equally be used by those after the current users. In some cases a chain of authoritative or at least credible prior users of the text is also emphasized in later discourses on scripture. The texts are in such cases claimed to have been handed down to the present users by a succession of trustworthy figures. To this extent, a scripture serves as a link or relationship between the current users, their predecessors and later users. The concept of scripture being ‘handed down or received’ shows that scriptures often have the component of ‘a giving and receiving for the future’. There is therefore reverence and veneration⁶ of the text in some sense. Scriptures create a form of community and identity for a group of people. Brakke suggests that scripture has capacity to create a community which he calls a ‘textual community’ [3].

On the other hand, should anything perceived as coming from a deity or the ancestors, be seen as instructive for the building of a religious community, hence accepted as scriptures? There are indeed some considerations to be met before accepting a text as being revealed, inspired or normative for the use of generations. It is in this light that John Barton identifies some of these conditions/features that make a text truly inspirational for the use of a religious group in the building of faith [6]. Firstly, scriptures are not about trivial things but very important issues of life. The subject matter of scriptures is not just on inconsequential, but crucial issues; not forgetting the minor issues however. Secondly, Barton maintains the subject matter of a scriptural text must cut across generations. The relevance of a scriptural text must be applicable to even unborn generations. This is important, though society is dynamic, scriptures must still be relevant to the dynamism of society across time. Thirdly, scriptural texts must have a universal appeal. Thus scriptures must be applicable to changing situations despite culture, race, sex and age of the user. This is important because the text may be used by adherents in other regions of the world where users in these parts must also be able to find the texts relevant. Brakke holds that:

They (scriptures) address a general audience of churches, not just individual communities with their parochial problems and interests (even if they were originally sent to specific churches). Or, if they are directed to individuals, ‘an ordination of churchly discipline’ has rendered them holy ‘in honor of the universal church’ [3].

Successful (in terms of numbers of adherents and long-term survivability) religions spread and so there is need for their scriptures to be meaningful to other socio-cultural and political contexts. It further shows the belief that scriptures must not address the existential problems of adherents only but also even non-adherents of the particular religion. Fourthly, Believers of a scriptural tradition tend to believe that a scriptural text is for all of mankind, a standard of living for all. The Jewish position seems to challenge this observation, since the special covenant between the tribes of Israel and God is often highlighted. Even here, however, we find the idea of Israel being a light to the nations. This is why when an adherent of a religion is in an argument with a non-adherent of a his/her faith, often argues based on his/her scriptural text as the frame of reference wishing the non-

⁶ A Muslim will have to perform ablution before touching the Quran and a Jew will not sit beside the Torah on a bench.

adherer of his/her faith to see reasons with him/her.⁷ Thus the scriptural space is not only perceived to be for adherers but very importantly, also for non-adherers too. Fifthly, scripture must be consistent in its content. Unlike the Quran which is believed to have been received by only the Prophet Muhammad, the Tanakh and Bible are believed to have been received and compiled by many people over a long period of time and in different places. It is therefore very important that the content of the various texts do not contradict each other. Consistency is emphasized because even though more than one person writes at different times and places, the belief is still that their singular object of worship passed on whatever text the human authors write down. The principle therefore is that, there cannot be contradictions from the same deity to different people. Sixthly, Barton identifies that the language of scripture is not always straightforward; it often may employ symbolism, analogies, parables and poetry forms. It hence gives room for various forms of interpretation and applications. These features make the role of scripture in religions not just important but also very decisive.

These features are certainly crucial in identifying a scriptural material and its significance from other class of texts. Not all texts may have such qualities which make them revered and useful for building a community identity. However, for a scriptural material to be considered as a canonical text, other qualifications are considered, which implies a text may be scriptural but may not be considered canonical especially based on the Christian process.

Canon

The word 'canon' is derived from the Greek word **κανών** "*kanon*" which means a 'list, norm, rod, cane, rule or measure' [5, 6]. A canon can be understood as a standard of accepted scriptural texts. In religious and particularly scriptural terms, Barton defines canon as a list of closed accepted scriptures authoritative for use by a religious organization [7]. Based on his definition, two important distinctions come out between scripture and canon.

Firstly, canon contains some of the scriptural materials available for use. This feature has two connotations; inclusion and exclusion. Canonization is about a conscious selection from available scriptures. Not all the scriptural texts available are accepted into the canon for various reasons. The discussions on the formation of the Christian canon, will include some of the reasons in view of the Christian example. The second idea is that, canons are closed permanently and are not subject to any future changes, not even by the succeeding generations. The canon therefore links the dead, the living and the yet to be born, since they all have either used, use, or will use the same text. This link creates identity and personality for a common religious group. Put together, we can therefore say that scriptures are inspired religious texts whiles canon is a closed collection of some of the scriptures.

Secondly, in defining the content and features of a canon, the role of the community involved cannot be downplayed. This is because canons are expected to be perpetually authoritative text used by a religious organization. The people are to a large extent expected to use the canon as a frame of reference, so their particular existential issues must be considered. Since human beings differ in various ways, some may support certain scriptural texts while other persons or groups may not accept those materials, for instance. This is what Brakke calls the "discursive fight" where what should be included or excluded from a canonical exercise turns to a controversy [3]. For example the Greek Jews preferred the Septuagint while the Hebrew Jews maintained the Hebrew version [8]. Among the Christians, the Gnostics supported different scriptures from the orthodox Christians. Today, the Catholics have the deuterocanonical texts as part of their canon while the Protestants do not accept and use the deuterocanonical texts. In Islam, the various traditions, especially the Sunnis and Shias, have differences in their collections of the Hadith [9]. Indeed canon creation may stir up some dissenting ideas among similar religious traditions of the same religious faiths, which can even lead to schism at times.

⁷Lactantius actually accused the Christians for doing the same. Lactantius, *Divine Institutes* V.1.

In all these, we see that the creation of a canon in any religious tradition is not arbitrary, but to a large extent, conscious. The 'first people' (progenitors) decided to do it and they took time to standardize what should be used. The choice of the content of the canon can also bring about dissenting groups. Canonization is often prompted by certain events in the history of the religious organization. The formation of the Christian canon was prompted by the need to define acceptable Christian practices [3].

The Christian Canon

By the 4th or 5th centuries, Christians were deemed to have fixed a collection of closed scriptures [3, 10]. The Old Testament containing some of the Jewish scriptures, and the New Testament, which were Christian inspired texts. There are two main scholarly positions on the Christian canon-formation [3]. The 'conservatives' stress a collective effort where already from the 1st Century some texts such as the letters of Paul and the Gospels would have gained a higher circulation and be more used than others. The 'liberals' also emphasize decisions of authoritative figures and/or synods stipulating in lists which texts should be included in and excluded from the canon. The liberals therefore argue that the crucial decisions in the canon-formation were reached in the 4th century. Some, mostly liberal scholars, also argue that the Emperor Constantine greatly influenced the standardization of the Christian canon due to his request for fifty copies of the Bible [3]. This may imply that the conservatives feel the Christian canonization process was natural while the liberals hold that this process was prompted. However, their thoughts can also be suggested to mean that, the popular texts prompted this closed collection of scriptural texts which Emperor Constantine must have requested from the Church Fathers. This aspect of the paper investigates, what prompted the formation of the Christian canon and why the Christians call their canon 'Testaments'. The central focus of this section will question why the Christians chose to include some Jewish scriptures in their canon and how it impacted Christian development.

Formation of the New Testament

The New Testament is made up of twenty-seven books written by different authors at different times and at different places.⁸ The formation of the New Testament and the whole Bible was influenced by some internal and external factors. Internally, there was some diversity of Christian expression in the Christian fraternity and among the various geographical places. There were differences in the type of scriptures used by the different churches. The scriptural texts in circulation at the time were not evenly distributed. There were some scriptures found in some places which only sparingly "traveled" to other places. Again groups such as the Gnostics and the Montanists also facilitated the formation of the Christian canon. The Gnostics⁹ were a philosophical Christian group who claimed to have certain secret knowledge. The Montanists, on the other hand, were a prophetic group, who recorded their prophecies and treated them as scriptural [11]. The early church came to regard groups such as the Gnostics and Montanists as heretic [8]. This charge of heresy was, to a large extent, due to some of the scriptures used by those groups. There were some writings which, for instance, rejected either the humanity¹⁰ or divinity¹¹ of Jesus and some of the scriptures were mystical in nature.¹² It is in reaction to some of these 'heresies' that some of the canonical Christian texts like Luke is apologetic in nature [8]. Internally the uneven distribution of scriptures and the activities of heretics impelled the institution of a common canon among the Christian fraternity.

⁸ There are still debates among scholars about the authors, dates and places of some of these scriptural materials. For example, the author of Hebrews is still not certain.

⁹ Marcion who rejected the inclusion of the Old Testament in the Bible was seen as a Gnostic.

¹⁰ Like the Gospel of Thomas.

¹¹ Like the Gospel of Philip.

¹² Like the Infancy Gospel of Thomas.

A major external factor which informed the development of a Christian canon was the persecution and martyrdom of the Christians. Most scriptural texts were to encourage Christians 'overseas'. The persecution led to the spread of Christianity overseas, so the Apostles and other Christians needed to keep in touch with such Christians, hence the writing and circulation of texts. Most of the Christian scriptures are therefore in the form of letters, the gospels point to the life, works and sufferings of Jesus, while the epistles, especially the Pauline,¹³ make the Christians feel they were not alone in their sufferings.¹⁴ These writings indeed helped the churches abroad and those who were persecuted. As a result, after one Christian group had read such letters, they passed it on or copied it to other Christians elsewhere or closed by [1].¹⁵ There were therefore circulation and exchanges for these scriptural writings among the various Christian communities across the societies.

It must be emphasized that the Roman authorities realized the impact of these circulated texts in breeding and strengthening the Christians despite their efforts in killing them to extinct the faith. So during the Diocletian persecution around 303 in Rome, Christian property, including their scriptures, were confiscated. Ferguson cites Eusebius who reports: "We saw with our very eyes...the inspired and sacred scriptures committed to the flames in the marketplace" [5]. This shows the conscious effort made to eradicate the scriptures during the era of the persecution. In this instance, the persecution was not against the Christians but rather, that which made them who they had become, or their identity (scriptures).

Therefore, as a result of the activities of 'heretics' (Gnostics and Montanists) coupled with the persecution and martyrdom of the Christians, including the uneven distribution of the circulated scriptural texts, there was the need to accumulate the accepted scriptures for use of the churches, especially those abroad. These internal and external factors identified incited the definition of the Christian canon.

Stages of the Christian Canon Development

The internal and external factors which contributed to the formation of the canon were not instantaneous but developed over a period of time. Barton presents three stages in the development of the canon as spanning from around the 1st to 4th centuries [16]. It must be noted that many of these debates are influenced by the definition of canon and where the emphasis is placed: whether a canon is a closed text or inspired collection. Barton's first stage include a scholar like Theodora Zahn, who maintained by the 1st century, the early church already had a canon which consisted of the gospels and some epistles.¹⁶ These were collections of the teachings, miracles, parables and passion narratives of Jesus, as well as some letters addressed to churches. This school of thought is highly argued against by other scholars that it would be too early to talk about a canon around the 1st century. Brakke for instance argues against the conservatives when they talk about canon around this period because it was not even possible to talk about a canon even in the 2nd century [3]. The second stage is around the late 2nd century, referred to as the 'graphe' period [6]. This was the period of scriptural circulation with Gnostic and heretic writings involved. This was a period of conscious inclusion and exclusion of scriptures for use as a distinctive development against heresy. Joseph Lynch agrees that, by this period, a New Testament was already emerging [8]. The third stage held by scholars like A.C. Sandburg, maintain the canon formation entered even the 4th century. Issues on canonization became very important at this stage.

In developing the Christian canon, some criteria were used for the inclusion and exclusion of the scriptural texts. Lynch discusses the criteria for the selection of scriptures and canon of the

¹³Many of which were written while Paul was in prison, often to deal with particular problems of the churches planted 'oversees'.

¹⁴I Thessalonians 3:1-13; 2:1-4; II Thessalonians 1:1-12, II Timothy 2:25-26; 3:12.

¹⁵Colossians 4:16; the account of the Martyrdom of Polycarp is copied to many churches Martyrdom of Polycarp 20:2, 22:2-3.

¹⁶These are those Brakke calls the 'conservatives'.

Christians [8]. The authors of the texts had to be either an apostle or a student of an apostle. This was helpful to some extent since it confirmed the source of the author.¹⁷ It is believed that the Gnostics are noted for rather indicating other old people's names in order to gain attention [3]. This thereby gave room for the second principle, that the content of the scripture should not contradict the doctrines of the church and other aspects of the whole bible. Marcion actually builds on this idea of contradictions which will be discussed later in this paper. Furthermore, the widespread nature of the text was considered too. If the text was used by a lot of congregations then it had already received large audience hence acceptable to the various congregations.¹⁸ The Christians were scattered and one element that united them was their texts which they considered as scriptural [3]. This would also invariably mean that a used scripture by a certain congregation was attested by a church father¹⁹ as authoritative. In effect, for a scriptural text to be considered into a canon, four criteria are espoused here: apostolicity, content, universality and attestation by a church father were used to define the accepted scriptures for the Christian canon.

Naming of the Christian Canon

Tertullian, around the 3rd century, introduced the Latin version of covenant, "*Testament*", in reference to the two parts of the Christian canon and this is still used today [8]. In Tertullian's work against Marcion; Book III, he draws an analogy of two sharp swords coming from the mouth of God which he wants his readers to understand as the "two Testaments of the Law and Prophets" [12]. However, later in Book IV, he introduces the terms 'Old and New Testaments' [12].

The major issue here, however, is why the Christians described their scriptures in terms of a pact. Tertullian's preference for Latin²⁰ '*Testamentis*' is also translated as a 'will'. The Jews and Christians see their scriptures as evidence of their relationship with God. The Torah was delivered as a sign between the Jews and God in the covenanted encounter at Mount Sinai during the Exodus.²¹ God sought to formalize His relationship with the Israelites and the 'how to' is stipulated in the Torah. The Christians also continued this theme of a relationship by way of their canon. Jesus is quoted as saying he did not come to abolish the law (Torah) but to fulfill it.²² At the Last Supper, Jesus promised of a new covenant in his blood and body.²³ To, therefore, understand '*testamentis*' as '*will*' shows that the Christians are inheritors of a promise from a 'dead' or 'absent' father. Thus, the one who bequeathed this 'will' to them is absent or not present at the moment but the 'will' is the evidence or witness of their inheritance, while legitimizing their relationship. In essence, the naming of the Christian scriptures as Testament points to a relationship between the Christians and their God.

The Old Testament

The Jews had their own scripture called the Tanak, which contains the Law, Prophets and Writings. Owing to Hellenisation and other factors, the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into Greek called the *Septuagint* (LXX), believed to have been translated by seventy or seventy-two independent translators [13]. This translation had some major differences from the Hebrew version. The Hebrew version combined the books of Kings and Samuel as one book and maintained the Minor Prophets as one text. These differences in content and language made many Jews reject the Septuagint as authoritative [8].

¹⁷ Although some of the writings like the gospel of Thomas or Philip were in circulation and such characters could be pointing to apostles of Jesus, such texts were not accepted as canon because of their content.

¹⁸ Although not all widely circulated scriptures became accepted.

¹⁹ Such as Tertullian, Justin Martyr, etc.

²⁰ Which could be due to his background and passion for Latin.

²¹ Exodus 19-20 especially 19:3-6 and 20:1-21.

²² Matthew 5:17, 7:12.

²³ Mark 14:12-26, Matthew 26:17-30, Luke 22:7-30, John 13-14.

The early Christians used the Septuagint and later included it in their canon as Old Testament [4]. The inclusion and references from the Jewish Scriptures faced some opposition among a section of the early Christians. Those who did not support the inclusion of the Old Testament into the Christian canon are referred to as the exclusionists; championed by Marcion. On the other hand, those who supported the inclusion are referred to as the inclusionists; championed by some Christian apologists or anti-heretics such as Justin Martyr, Irenaeus and Tertullian. For the purpose of this work, the arguments by Marcion and his opponents are discussed to understand the rationale behind their respective positions as well as their impact on the Christian canon development.

The Exclusionists

Marcion (85-164 CE) is from Sinope and his father was a Bishop of Pontus. He was a very rich man who owned many ships but gave all up to live an ascetic life and invested all his riches for the course of the gospel [14]. He came to Rome around 130 CE and lodged with Cerdr, an eminent Gnostic Syrian Christian [15]. Marcion was branded a heretic and Gnostic by the Church in Rome due to some of the things he said and thought. He was excommunicated in 144 and Christians in other cities also wrote polemically against him [15]. He was nicknamed for example as 'wolf of Pontus and First Born of Satan' [14] because of his positions against the Old Testament. Marcion wrote the *Antithesis* [8, 16] 'Contradictions', which the original is lost, however his ideas are reconstructed from the works of Christian anti-heretical authors who quoted portions of his work in order to argue against him. It is possible to reconstruct Marcion's thoughts from the quotes/citations of his lost *Antithesis* from these anti-Marcion Church Fathers [8].

It is evident from these sources that Marcion held two important convictions about the Christian canon. Firstly, he maintained that the Jewish scripture should not be included in the Christian canon. This was because to him the God of the Old Testament was not a good God. According to Tertullian, Marcion described the Old Testament God as 'stern' and 'cruel' whose important attribute is justice [12]. Marcion brings out contradictions between this Old Testament God from the good, loving and merciful God of the New Testament. Based on the idea of coherence which was also one of the principles of determining the canonization process hinted above, Marcion maintains the Old Testament God is the creator of the world but the world is full of wickedness and that is also the more reason why the good God of the New Testament had to come to bring redemption. Marcion further holds that the good God of the New Testament was not the son of the 'just' God of the Old Testament. He draws contradictions between the two in a graphical manner cited by Raisanen that:

The creator is 'a judge, fierce and warlike.' 'Joshua conquered the holy land with violence and cruelty; but Christ prohibits all violence and preaches mercy and peace...The creator commanded the Israelites to leave Egypt with shoes on their feet, a staff in their hand, and a sack on their shoulders, and to take with them the gold and silver of Egypt; Christ sent his disciples into the world without shoes, knapsack, extra cloths or money...The creator prohibits work on the Sabbath but tells the Israelites to carry the ark around Jericho (...) for eight days in a row. He forbids images, yet tells Moses to make a bronze serpent [14].

These comments are meant to bring out the differences between the Old Testament God and the New Testament God. Therefore, the God of the Old Testament cannot be the father of Jesus in any way possible because they are divergently different [14].

The second important idea of Marcion in relation to the canon is its content. Raisanen maintains that Marcion was neither a systematic theologian nor philosopher but to a large extent a 'biblicist' who contemplated on texts [14]. Although the Christians often used allegories [4] to interpret the Old Testament texts, Marcion rejected this method of interpretation. He held that the Old Testament should be interpreted literally and not allegorically. He prescribed that the components of the Christian canon should be made up of a Gospel and Epistles. He accepted the gospel of Luke and ten Pauline letters as the Christian canon. He believes the other gospels rely too much on the Old Testament and hence not good enough to be used by the church. He even edited

the Gospel of Luke to get rid of all references to the Old Testament.²⁴ Marcion's collections, show that he believed in Paul.

Scholarship has been very much interested in the discussions on the importance or impact of Marcion on the early church. Earlier scholars such as Harnack see Marcion as an innovator who pushed the Christians to have canon. However Barton sees Marcion as a 'conservative' rather than an 'radical innovator' [6]. Barton argues against Harnack, because Harnack seem to exaggerate the role and impact of Marcion on the early church [16]. Barton believes that the idea of the canon was spontaneously underway from a conservative perspective. He argues that even as early as the 1st century, some collections of textual scriptures were seemingly gathered for use by the church. Again, Harnack suggests that the church followed Marcion's classification of the canon. However, Barton disagrees still because the boundaries of the Christian canon cannot be attributed to Marcion. The Christian canon as we have today goes beyond the borders of Marcion's collections. Marcion did not also name his canon, he did not have four gospels, his collections were more historical than scriptural and that the early church's use of allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament defeats the idea of Marcion setting the limits of the Christian canon. It should be emphasized that Marcion did not reject the divine authorship of the Jewish scriptures. He believes that although the Jewish scripture is a revelation, the revelation is from a legalistic God who demands strict morality.

The Inclusionists

Although Marcion and his followers strongly objected to the inclusion of the Old Testament from the Christian canon, there were others who strongly maintained that the Old Testament needed to be part of the Christian canon. They therefore argued strongly against Marcion. For the purpose of this paper, three church fathers who wrote against those they saw as heretics around the 2nd and 3rd centuries will be considered. Among the three, Justin Martyr is the first to speak in relation to the Christian canon in his *Dialogue with Trypho* where chapter XI shall be of great interest. It must, however, be pointed out that, Justin was not actually addressing Marcion but was discussing with a Jewish student (Trypho). The context and focus of their discussion was not in direct relation to the arguments of Marcion. However, their discussions show what some early apologists think about the Old Testament, their position on the relationship between the Old and the New Testament, as well as the early Christian usage of the Old Testament differently from how the Jews used it.

Justin was born to pagan parents but was trained in four philosophical traditions as a stoic, Peripatetic, Pythagoreans and a Platonist [17-19]. His major preoccupation as a Christian was the writing of apologies in defense of the Christian faith. It was a result of some of these apologetic writings that led to his death by scourging and beheading, together with some six other Christians. They refused to sacrifice to the gods of Rome under Emperor Marcus Aurelius [17].

The other apologist against Marcion is Irenaeus, Bishop of Laudanum of Gaul in the 2nd Century and a disciple of Polycarp.²⁵ His major contribution to early Christianity was his contribution to peace of the various Christian traditions and his attack on the Gnostics [17]. Of particular importance is his work "*Against Heresies*" Book 3:25:2-4 and Book 4:8-30, especially chapter 13 will be used in this project.

Tertullian²⁶ was an early North African, son of a Roman centurion who studied Language, Literature and also trained as a lawyer [20]. He later gave up his profession to become a Christian and is believed to have been responsible for the training of baptismal candidates [20]. He contributed immensely to the development of Christian theology and standards [17]. He is strongly believed among many scholars to have had some great association with Montanists [20]. He wrote against Marcion in the fifteenth year of Severus [12]. Chapters 11 and 12 of his Book 2, and

²⁴ He removed the infant stories, genealogy of Jesus and other Jewish elements.

²⁵ Polycarp is believed to have been schooled by the Apostle John.

²⁶ His full name was Quintus Septimius Florentinus Tertullian (160-220) from Carthage.

chapters 1 and 2 of Book 4 of Tertullian's *Anti-Marcion* are instrumental to the discussions in this study.

Justin Martyr asserts that the God of the Christians is the same as the God of the Jews because the Jewish patriarchs are also the fathers of Christianity [21]. However, he holds that the Old Testament was for the Jews only, although he sees the Christians as the 'Spiritual Israelites'. He then draws a lot of analogies from Isaiah and Jeremiah that there was a promise of a New Covenant already in the Old Testament. He says "For the law promulgated on Horeb is now old, and belongs to yourselves²⁷ alone; but this is for all universally" [21]. This shows Justin believes the Old Testament is either past or less important and for a specific people. However, the New Testament is for all mankind. He however disagrees that the God of the Old Testament is any different from the God of the New Testament. While Marcion maintains the God of the Old Testament is different, Justin Martyr believes they are the same.

Irenaeus holds the same position as Justin that both covenants (Old and New) were inspired by the same God. He cites passages from Psalms and Jeremiah that there was the idea of a promised New Testament. However, unlike Justin, Irenaeus says Christ did not abrogate the law but came to fulfill it. Irenaeus uses some phrases such as "for it has been said that... but I say... (and) ...unless your righteousness exceeds" attributed to Jesus to show that the New Testament is a continuation of the Old Testament. Irenaeus justifies the reception of the New Testament that the Old Testament was enslavement and so there was need for liberty [22]. The law was also restrictive and there was need for inclusion of people of all nations. On the attributes of God in the Old and New Testaments, Irenaeus believes a good God needs both justice and goodness in order to give salvation.

Tertullian, on his part, maintains that the God of the Old Testament is the same as that of the New Testament. He argues that God's actual nature is the 'goodness' but his 'just' aspect came as a result of the fall of man in the Garden of Eden. God's goodness is seen in the creation where God created a beautiful world out of a chaotic world, but the sins of Adam and Eve made God demand for morality hence, justice. Tertullian says it was through justice that during the creation, God separated darkness from light, day from night, heaven from earth. Tertullian does not see anything wrong with justice, so he argues: "Justice is an evil thing only if injustice is a good one" [12]. So justice is very positive and not negative as Marcion makes it sound. Like Irenaeus, Tertullian maintains that goodness and justice are different sides of the same coin: "goodness is firmly established where justice also is" [12]. Regarding authorship of the books of the New Testament, Tertullian's Book 4 argues against Marcion, by maintaining that the other gospels apart from his edited version of Luke were also inspired by God and had apostolic backing. This argument is built against Marcion because he accepts only an edited version of the Gospel of Luke (thus direct disciples of Jesus, who were part of the twelve) while rejecting the other gospels. Tertullian draws Marcion's attention to the point that the gospels of Matthew and John were written by apostles²⁸ themselves but Mark and Luke were rather students of apostles (who did not even walk directly with Jesus during his earthly ministry). This is to point out to Marcion that since he accepted the gospel of Luke, written by a student of an apostle, he could have accepted the other gospels because Matthew and John were direct students of Jesus while Mark and Luke were not. To this end, Tertullian fully supports and goes along with the Old Testament as part of the Christian canon and has no difficulty using the other gospels as a Christian.

The support for the inclusion of the Jewish scriptures was because the Christians saw themselves as the fulfillment of the Old Testament. The Old Testament promised a new covenant which would be all inclusive. This is what Barton refers to as "*argument from Prophecy*" [6]. Furthermore, the Christians believed that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament. The Christians including Paul²⁹ hence shifted the boundaries of who a Jew is to include the Christian universal idea to imply that God's command is for all of humanity. Justin Martyr called the

²⁷Because he was in a dialogue with a Jewish student.

²⁸One of the twelve who followed Jesus.

²⁹In Romans 2:28-29 Paul claims true Jews are those whose hearts are with God.

Christians `spiritual Israelites` to embrace all people. The Old Testament also supports the Christian message, so the Christians saw it as scriptures hence the possibility of `adopting` and using it. I Corinthians 15:3-4, 10:4, 11, II Timothy 3:15-17 Paul says the Jewish Scriptures were inspired and hence useful to the Christians for teachings, training and following its practices.

The Church of Christ

The purpose of this section is to discuss the reception of a modern church to the Old Testament. The motivation is to show how relevant the disagreement regarding the Old Testament has impacted Christianity today. Generally, Mark Shipp argues that Protestants love the moral aspect of the Old Testament but not the ritual and legal aspects of the laws in the Old Testament [23]. Robert Owens describes the reception of the Old Testament as `Hebrew scriptures` which has brought `trouble` into Christian history [24] while Shipp posit that it has divided the church since history till today [23]. He recounts an experience of a seminarian who preached from the book of Jeremiah in the absence of the Minister-in-Charge and after the service was reprimanded by two elders that their church was a New Testament church. According to Shipp, the church today read the Old Testament backward through the lens of the New Testament, its time of relevance is past, as abolished and of no significance today[23], the Old Testament is seen as temporal, negative and of no value today[23]. These responses and attributions to the reception of the Old Testament by Christians is influenced by the ideas that according to Owens, the Old Testament is an “artifact of a defunct religion” [24]. However, Shipp argues strongly that based on II Timothy 3:15, the Old Testament must be valuable and useful to Christians today [23].

Notwithstanding, it is interesting that a modern church has almost the same ideas as Marcion had by delimiting the role of the Old Testament in Christianity. This study uses an email interview correspondence to gather data, especially on the history of the church, organizational structure and their theology of the Old Testament. The respondent to the interview preferred that the interview questions were sent to him so that he will answer them and send them back. He is a member of the Business Committee of the Church of Christ in his branch. The Church of Christ uses pluralistic leadership whose relationship is one among equals or horizontal. The first level of leadership of the church is by a group of Elders, the second is the Business Committee which may be called by different names by different congregations. The respondent has been a member of the Church of Christ for over twenty-nine years with twelve years in leadership. Apart from this email interview correspondence, some internet publications in the form of tracts of the Church of Christ are accessed. Jeffery W. Hamilton's tract is published on the website of the La Vista Church of Christ, titled *Why we don't follow the Old Testament* [25]. The use of `we` in the title indicates that he is a member of the Church of Christ. A further internet search shows he is a prolific writer on the teachings and practices of the Church of Christ and other Christian doctrines. Another Church of Christ member who writes extensively on issues concerning the Church of Christ used in this analysis is Harold Hancock who has been preaching in various places in the USA including Alaska, Georgia and Texas since 1969. His publication is published on Timberland Drive Church of Christ website entitled *Does the Church of Christ Believe in the Old Testament?* [25].

The Church of Christ was established in response to denominationalism. The belief is that Jesus established one church and not a divided church. However, with the rise in denominationalism various doctrines and teaching began to spring up which have brought about divisions to the body of Christ. In order to come back to God's original idea of `church`; the Church of Christ was born. For this reason therefore, the Church of Christ congregations are autonomous, associated with each other by their common beliefs and practices. They are sometimes referred to as `The True Church of God, Church of the Lord, Church of the First-Born, Church of the Living God, The House of God as well as The People of God`. The church has been in Ghana well over fifty-four years from the USA. The USA breed was initiated by Alexander Campbell who is strongly against naming a church after a single person such as Lutheran, Wesleyan, Reformed, etc. Campbell holds two major positions against the Old Testament, firstly that the Old Testament can best be seen as a

`constitution` of the Israel nation and secondly the Old Testament is not a theological document but a government system[23, 24].

The Church of Christ believes in the Bible as the basis of human activities. Their reception towards the Old Testament is quite close to the thoughts of Marcion. Hamilton begins his publication by asking why the Testaments are described as Old and New. The respondent in the study maintains the adjectives `Old and New` are descriptive of their relevance. He argues for example that Ghanaians will not quote from the 1957, 1960 or 1979 constitutions but the 1992 constitution because those constitutions are old and replaced by the new. Hancock also argues that the Old Testament must give way to the New Testament because the new is recent. Hamilton defines Testament as a will. Therefore with the introduction of a new will the old will have no legal representation. Hamilton grounds his argument of the change in the usefulness of the Old Testament on scriptures from Hebrews 1:1-2 and Jeremiah 31:31-34. Hancock cites the same scriptural passages but includes Colossians 2:14. They argue that the introduction of a new covenant or testament was already predicted even in the Old Testament itself, which implies the old has given way to the new. Hamilton argues that based on the Hebrew text that there are three changes in the old covenant. In the first place, there is a change in priesthood. Hebrews 5:1-10 shows that the new High Priest is Jesus Christ although He is not a descendant of Aaron. Secondly, there is a change in the covenant treaty at Sinai; in the Old Testament, the Law bound man to sin but Christ frees mankind from sin according to Galatians 4:21-31; 5:1-4 in the New Testament era. Thirdly, there is a change in sacrifice where the Old Testament had a yearly sacrifice practice but the new offers a single sacrifice of Jesus as enough for the salvation of mankind through the ages. In effect, he argues that Jesus brought to completion, the Old Testament according to Romans 10:4. Paul further says Jesus nailed the old law on the cross, according to Colossians 2:14 and Ephesians 2:15. Therefore the relevance of the Old Testament was brought to an end by the death of Christ at Calvary. Hancock even suggests that the Old Testament lost its usefulness at the Transfiguration of Jesus. This is because although Moses and Elijah were present, the voice from heaven affirmed Jesus' ministry.

Hamilton further raises the question that probably, the Christian should use both the Old and New Testament since they are both inspired by God. He addresses this issue with an analogy that

God said that he took away the first to establish the second (Hebrews 10:9). We became dead to the Old Law, so that we might be joined to a New Law (Romans 7:4-6). It is the same situation as a husband whose wife had died. While his wife is alive, he cannot be joined to a second woman (Romans 7:1-4), but after his first wife dies he is free to marry [25].

To this end he argues that if the Christian combines the two testaments, it will be tantamount to "spiritual adultery." Therefore there is no reason keeping both testaments.

Despite these comments, it is however interesting that the Church of Christ still uses the Bible with both the Old and New Testaments. Since to the Church of Christ, the Old Testament is not relevant today, it would be anticipated that they use or carry only the New Testament or do not read it at all as part of their worship or make references from it when preaching or teaching. However Hamilton posits that the Bible should still contain the Old Testament. He argues that the Old Testament is useful to understand New Testament traditions. His argument is based on Galatians 3:24-25 that the Old Testament is a `schoolmaster` which brings mankind to Christ. Hancock supports the use of the Old Testament to better understand the New Testament. He argues in these words:

Members of the church of Christ believe in the Old Testament. The Old Testament contains the first thirty-nine books of the Bible. We do not deny the existence nor the authenticity of the Old Testament. We believe that it was inspired by God (**2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20,21**) and that it is a part of God's revelation to man. The Old Testament pointed to Christ and the New Testament (**John 5:39**). We study the Old Testament and learn from it, but it is the words of Christ and the New Testament that will judge us in the last day (**John 12:48**)[24].

These remarks strongly emphasize the point that though the Old Testament has been replaced by the New Testament, it is still useful to understand the context of the New Testament. Hancock actually begins his work with the remark that:

Sometimes, we who are members of the church of Christ are accused of not believing in the Old Testament. The accusation is made because we teach that one must follow the teachings of the New Testament. To teach that one must follow the New Testament does not mean that we do not believe in the Old Testament. The allegation that members of the church of Christ do not believe in the Old Testament is false [26].

The respondent on this project on his part in addressing this question holds that the Old Testament helps to understand how God dealt with the people of the past which can guide the Christian in the New Testament dispensation. It is only pedagogical but its laws, customs and practices are not relevant to the New Testament context. The Christian must learn from how God lived with the Jewish people but the Christian must not practice the worship forms under the Old Testament. To this extent, the Church of Christ does not use musical instrument, pay tithe, and celebrate the Passover or Sabbath etc.

In relation to the development of the early church, it must be stressed that the emergence of the Church of Christ has no relationship or influenced by Marcion. The respondent did not know him and has not heard that name before. One of the tract by the Church of Christ, *Does the Church of Christ believe in the Old Testament*, argues against Marcion [26]. This tract disassociates the Church of Christ from the theology of Marcion because Marcion does not believe in the God of the Old Testament. The Church of Christ believes that though the Old Testament is not relevant in practice, it is useful in order to understand the practices of the New Testament. The tract also contradicts Marcion's rejection of other gospels apart from some portions of Luke and some Pualine writings. The Church of Christ maintain, the whole Bible is inspired and useful to the church. The Church of Christ therefore has no relationship with Marcion but in general terms like Marcion have issues regarding the application of the Old Testament to Christian living. It is interesting that some aspects of the position of the Church of Christ affirms some of the positions of the early church fathers discussed here. Although the Church of Christ affirms the position of the early church fathers on the inclusion of the Old Testament into the Christian canon they disagree on the usefulness of the Old Testament. Whereas the Church of Christ maintains the Old Testament is useful only to understand the New Testament its practices are not to be continued. Therefore the subject of the inclusion of the Old Testament into the Christian canon has had a toll on Christian history and development even today.

To a large extent, based on the arguments put forward by Marcion and the Church of Christ compared to the arguments of the Church Fathers, the place of the Old Testament in Christian discipline, identity and ideology is valuable. Both Owens and Shipp advance many arguments to drive home the significant place of the Old Testament to Christianity even today [24, 23]. In the first place, Jesus as well as the apostles used the Hebrew Scriptures in their ministries. Jesus and his later apostles cited a lot of the times the Old Testament as basis for their actions. Jesus for example in Matthew 21:13 or Mark 11:17 in attempts to justify his actions for disrupting activities in the temple quoted, Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11 as the bases for his action. Likewise, Peter in providing the basis for replacing Judas in Acts 1:20, quoted Psalm 109:8 to give credence to what they needed to do. Secondly, it is assuring to note that Jesus himself called the God of the Old Testament Father. In John 8 he affirms the God of Abraham as his father and again on the cross, in Matthew 27:46 one of his last words before dying is to lament that this father had forsaken him by quoting Psalm 22:1. Thirdly, Jesus' messianic roles in the New Testament are understood from the Old Testament. To better understand Jesus' title as the 'Son of man, Lord, Son of David, Lamb of God, Christ etc' are all better understood and appreciated by reading the Old Testament. Fourthly, the early church including the church Fathers saw themselves as a continuation of the Sinai covenant on which the Old Testament is built. The early church called themselves, inward Jews (Romans 2:29), the branch grafted onto the vine (Romans 11:17), true Israelites (Galatians 6:16) and many other descriptions and imageries that have basis from the Old Testament. Fifthly, the Old

Testament provide basis for Christian theology; for example Paul's description of Jesus as 'second Adam' in I Corinthians 15:45 is best understood from an understanding of the creation account in the Old Testament. Therefore many instances, beliefs and practices such as the incarnation and Christology in the New Testament is better appreciated if there is knowledge of the Old Testament. Additionally, regarding the Church of Christ idea that the Old Testament is defunct and oldfangled but only useful to understand the Old Testament; it can be argued that even Jesus in Matthew 5:17-18 is categorically recorded to have said that he did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it and that his kingdom shall not come until every part of the law is fulfilled. This statement suggest the Old Testament is not only useful to understand the New Testament but also useful for teaching and development of doctrines. In view of these factors and elements, it is right to maintain that the Old Testament is and has always and will continue to be useful to Christianity.

Conclusion

In an attempt to crystallize the discussions, it is evident that scriptures are very important for the continuity of a religious tradition. These scriptures serve as a link between the dead, living and the unborn. However, not all scriptures get to be included in a canon. A canon is here defined as a closed collection of scripture accepted as normative for a religious community. The canon serves as the foundation of acceptable norms and behaviors among a religious group. The Christian formation of a canon was not without resistance especially regarding the inclusion of Jewish texts as well as what should be accepted and what not to include. Marcion believes and argues strongly that the God of the Old Testament is different from that of the New Testament; thus while the God of the Old Testament is noted for justice, the God of the New Testament, is noted for love. Therefore, Christians should not have anything to do with the Old Testament but the canon should only include an edited version of the Gospel of Luke and ten Pauline letters

On the other hand, the Christian church fathers who were apologists and anti-heretics (especially in this case anti-Marcion) do not agree with Marcion at the very least. To them, the Old Testament gives reasons for the New Testament traditions and practices. The God of both Testaments is the same because justice and love are both sides of the same coin. Additionally, the Church of Christ in the modern era, appreciate the importance of the Old Testament, even though they maintain strongly that its practices are not relevant to Christian practices today. To this end, this study has shown how important the generation of a canon creates a community identity. Eventually, this paper has argued that the Old Testament is of great importance to Christian development, theology and discipline.

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