

The Authority of Scripture After the Shoah

By Clark M. Williamson

1. Introduction

Entirely apart from the perplexing problems raised for Christian theology by the Shoah, the issue of the authority of scripture was already sufficiently puzzling. The collapse of authoritarian ways of doing theology in the modern and post-modern eras in itself poses the question of whether scripture can any longer be regarded as authoritative, and if so how and in what sense, with enough rigor to require a carefully considered response. Further, the awareness of the thorough-going historicity both of scripture and its interpreters requires the abandonment not only of traditional but of most modern responses to the question of scriptural authority. A convincing and affirmative answer to the question of scriptural authority is not easily found.

The effort to rethink Christianity after the Shoah, in the light both of the adversus Judaenos mode of interpreting scripture and of claiming its authority and in the light of the reality of Judaism and the Jewish people, understood in ways categorically removed from inherited and pejorative views of Judaism, compounds the problem of scriptural authority in ways not yet considered by most Christian

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theologians.

In this paper, no attempt can be made to offer a comprehensive solution to the question of the authority of scripture that would be adequate to the issues raised. What will be attempted is to show (1) how the problem continues to bedevil contemporary efforts to rethink the Christian witness in our time, (2) how traditional and revisionist views of the authority of scripture fail to be appropriate and credible after the Shoah, and (3) to offer a suggestion as to how scriptural authority might be reaffirmed by a Christian theology committed to affirm God's continuing covenant with the Jewish people.

II. The Continuing Problem

How the issue of scriptural authority, particularly the authority of the New Testament, is a continuing puzzle is aptly illustrated by two recent responses to the work of Paul M. van Buren.

In a highly appreciative reply to Van Buren's work, Lloyd Gaston comments favorably on what he calls Van Buren's "most radical proposal" (Gaston, 56). Recognizing that anti-Judaism is to be found in the New Testament itself (Gaston, 55), Van Buren frees the New Testament from "an almost impossible bind" (Gaston, 59). How does he do this, that is: "By what criterion can one designate significant parts of the New Testament as no longer authoritative for the Christian Church" (Gaston, 59)?

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The answer is ingenious. "By restricting the term 'Holy Scriptures' to Tanakh, and by consistently referring to the 'Apostolic Writings,'" says Gaston, "van Buren solves many problems with a single stroke. Holy Scripture now becomes the criterion for determining what is authoritative in the Apostolic Writings" (Gaston, 59). The Tanakh now becomes the criterion for determining which parts of the Apostolic Writings are authoritative. The question here is not whether Gaston's interpretation of Van Buren is accurate (a case could be made for the authoritativeness of Paul in Van Buren's theology), but whether Gaston's view of the authority of the Apostolic Writings is adequate.

The strengths of Gaston's view are that the Apostolic Writings are now seen in continuity with Holy Scripture, that they are no longer set in antithesis to Holy Scripture, and that they speak directly to the situation of Christians in our post-Shoah era. These strengths are not to be minimized.

The weakness is equally glaring: it is simply that the Apostolic Writings are no longer Holy Scripture and therefore, it would seem, no longer authoritative. Authority is analytic in the name "Holy Scripture." If we decide no longer to use this name for the Apostolic Writings, we decide that they are no longer authoritative for us. If the problem for the post-Marcionite church was whether the Old Testament is biblical, for Gaston it is

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whether the New Testament is biblical.

The issue is nuanced and subtle. If scripture is authoritative but not authoritarian, then its authority must be a rule-conferred authority. The scriptures are a norma normata, a norm or criterion that is standardised by reference to a higher norm. That is, interpreters of the scriptures are not simply at the mercy of authoritarian scriptures; they can appeal to a higher norm, a norma normans, a norming norm that is not in turn normed. It is to this norma normans that we turn for what is authoritative and it is this that is "scripture" in the strict sense of the term. This determines what is derivatively authoritative in the scriptures. It is this that Gaston locates in the Tanakh, and not in the Apostolic Writings. Whatever in the latter might be authoritative is determined to be so by reference to the norma normans, the Tanakh.

Appealing as this may seem to Christians concerned to re-envision Christianity in the light of the reality of Judaism and the Jewish people, is it adequate? I do not disagree with Gaston that the Apostolic Writings are a normed norm. But it is worth pointing out that the norming norm can no longer be called Christian. Another way to make this point is to note that for him the Apostolic Writings are post-scriptural tradition and therefore not authoritative except insofar as they can be shown to be appropriate to the Tanakh. This looks like a Protestant

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view of scripture as preceding tradition and authoritative over against it, pushed back one historical step.

Alternatively, it is a view of the authority of the Apostolic Writings to which Jews might respond warmly, but which they would accept as applicable neither to the Mishnah and Talmud nor to the subsequent tradition of rabbinic decision-making down to today. The right of Rabbis to interpret and change the Torah is not authorized by the Torah, yet their tradition of doing so has its authoritative moments or diverse set of authoritative moments for different groupings within Judaism. How can we expect Christians to accept a view of the authority of Christian midrashim that Jews would not accept of Jewish midrashim? If we grant, with Gaston, that the Apostolic Writings constitute a normed norm, a rule-conferred authority, can we not find that rule within them?

Another response to Van Buren's work, also one that claims to appreciate his perception of "the need to reiterate the organic-covenantal linkage between Jews and Israel and to remind the Church of the essential Jewishness of Christianity" (Glasser, E5), shows the problem of the authority of the Apostolic Writings from a radically different perspective.

Arthur F. Glasser claims that "the underlying issue" presented by Van Buren's work is that of "truth as revealed in Scripture" (Glasser, E5). That the truth is indeed

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revealed in the New Testament (Glasser does not use the term "Apostolic Writings") is a point on which Glasser is not prepared to yield. He rejects Van Buren's reconstructed view of Jesus categorically and claims that Jesus is truthfully presented in the gospels: "Fortunately, the church has continued to believe that the mind of Jesus Christ is accurately portrayed in the Gospels. Indeed, there is no a priori reason why this portrayal of Him may not be accurate nor why it may not correspond with His own self-understanding" (Glasser, 67). The crucifixion and resurrection account for the "data" of the New Testament, not some present-day reconstruction (Glasser, 67). For Glasser the truth about Jesus is found in the New Testament, a book "written by Jews within two brief generations of Jesus' death and when its details could be confirmed by Jewish eyewitnesses still living" (Glasser, 68).

Whereas Gaston is apparently willing to re-locate authority outside of the New Testament because of its anti-Judaism, Glasser is unwilling to admit that there is any anti-Judaism in it: "down through church history some Jews and Gentiles, in their reading of the Scriptures, all too often poured into certain texts the accumulated prejudice and hostility of centuries to the neglect of their plain meaning" (Glasser, 68-69). Although he does not in this context use the word, the New Testament is clearly "inerrant" for Glasser, an inerrancy he attempts to justify

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with such historical-critical results, e.g., J. A. T. Robinson's dating of the gospels (Glasser, 68) as comport with his views.

The result is an incoherent blending of the traditional scripture principle with a conservative use of historical-critical method, not recognizing that such a method, regardless of its results, can not get beyond probabilities on historical matters (Tillich, 227). Using a probabilistic method to support an absolutist position is an odd way of doing one's theological business.

The theological pay-off of Glasser's approach to the authority of the New Testament is the reaffirmation of a supersessionist interpretation of it:

If there had been no resurrection, there would never have been a Christian Church, a gospel of life-transforming power through the resurrected Christ, a conversion-to-Christ experience untold millions have subsequently experienced, the subsequent replacement of the Jewish Sabbath by the Lord's Day and the existence of the New Testament (Glasser, 71; emphasis mine).

The Lord's Day here displaces the Sabbath. It is probably fair to take these two as standing for two religious systems and peoples, one of which replaces the other. Not only is this clearly supersessionist, carrying the implication that the replaced religious system should no longer exist because it has been replaced by God, but it calls into serious question Glasser's opening affirmation of the "organic-covenantal linkage" between Israel and the church. Is it intelligible to speak of an

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organic-covenantal linkage between the church and a replaced Israel?

There we have the continuing problem posed between two positions, one of which affirms continuity between Israel and the church but denies the authority of the New Testament and the other of which affirms the authority of the New Testament without qualification yet also affirms the supersession of Israel by the church. The question this stand-off poses is whether and how Christians can claim both God's continuing covenant with Israel and the authority of the Apostolic Writings or New Testament.

III. The Scripture Principle

A. Its Traditional Form

We turn now to look at alternative models for construing the authority of the New Testament, with the purpose of seeing if any one or more can lend warrant to the claim of post-Shoah Christian theology that God remains faithful to the covenant with Israel.

The oldest model of scriptural authority in Christianity is called "the scripture principle." Here I shall summarize Farley and Hodgson's account of it. This principle apparently originated among Jews in the Diaspora subsequent to the Babylonian Exile. No longer having the land, temple or priesthood they created in their place the synagogue and the written Torah (Farley and Hodgson, 63). While representing a tremendous advance in Israelite

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religion, this development was not totally lacking in ambiguity.

With it the idea of scripture came to entail a written deposit of complete and definitive revelation that functioned to authorize cultic and moral regulations. According to Farley and Hodgson, the scripture principle exhaustively locates revelation in the past and claims that the text is "totally and equally valid in all its parts and details" (Farley and Hodgson, 63).

The scripture principle periodizes history, which unfolds through discrete stages with revelation fixed in the past. The past epoch is normative, there can be no new revelation. Although Christianity claimed that there had been a new revelation of God in Jesus Christ, it nonetheless adopted the scripture principle but, in doing so, had to reperiodize salvation history (Farley and Hodgson, 65).

The scripture principle presupposes an identity between what God intends to communicate and what comes to expression in scripture. Hence the text and its content are regarded as possessing the "qualities of inerrancy, infallibility, and absolute truthfulness . . ." (Farley and Hodgson, 66). Consequently, the contents of the text are leveled, the inerrant truth being distributed equally throughout it. Further, this truth is immutable, universally valid for all future generations (Farley and Hodgson, 66).

Farley and Hodgson overlook that the power of the

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scripture principle was broken in Judaism by the Pharisees, who laid the Oral Torah alongside of the Written Torah and developed an exegetical method ("you have read, but the meaning is") allowing them to revolutionize the immutable meanings deposited in the past (Rivkin, 209-311).

The church eventually adopted the scripture principle, in spite of some misgivings (Tertullian complained that "the Holy Spirit was chased into a book") and in spite of some modifications the principle had to undergo at Christian hands. The changes included: a shift from Torah to gospel as the genre of scripture, and a hyphenated scripture composed of an Old and a New Testament, with the former having only provisional validity. Such shifts would seem to invalidate the claims of the scripture principle to immutability and the fixing of revelation in the past, but the church nonetheless adopted it and its associated apparatus: "a canon of officially recognized authoritative writings, atomistic exegesis and proof-texting, and the establishment of revelation as the foundation of theology contained in human-historical deposits regarded as inspired and infallible" (Farley and Hodgson, 68). The work of the theologians, on the terms of the scripture principle, is to translate the truth of scripture for the present age. There is no room for critical inquiry into the scriptures.

Not surprisingly, the scripture principle is at work in Glasser's response to Van Buren. Glasser therefore rejects

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critical efforts to get behind the texts of scripture, and defends both the supersessionism that is built into the reperiodization of history presupposed by the Christian development of the scripture principle and the triumphalism involved in thinking of God in the mode of an in-the-world-being who intervenes in the world process with infallible communications.

Theologians who defend the scripture principle formally, no matter how much they might transcend it in their exegetical or hermeneutical work, can not help address the task of Christian theology after the Shoah, because the scripture principle is itself too large a theological claim on behalf of the church's supersession of Judaism and the Jewish people to be overcome.

The great theologians in the history of the church manifest a tension between their ways of interpreting scripture and their insistence on retaining the scripture principle, a tension no less evident in Luther and Calvin than in Augustine. Luther implicitly challenged the scripture principle but would not do so explicitly, and Calvin disallowed any challenge to the scripture principle, in spite of the fact that his covenantal theology went far to undermine it. Consequently, the principle was hardened in the era of Protestant scholasticism and remains so in contemporary representatives of that movement, for whom the scriptures remain the norma absoluta of theological

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reflection.

B. Calvin's metaphor

John Calvin used the metaphor of spectacles to explain how scripture functions as scripture. The knowledge of God that we can discern from the creation as such does not much help us, says Calvin:

Just as old or bleary-eyed men and those with weak vision, if you thrust before them a most beautiful volume, even if they recognize it to be some sort of writing, yet can scarcely construe two words, but with the aid of spectacles will begin to read distinctly; so Scripture, gathering up the otherwise confused knowledge of God in our minds, having dispersed our dullness, shows us the true God (Calvin, 25).

Helpful as the metaphor of scripture as a set of spectacles is, it has one drawback. The church has no power to judge scripture; rather it "recognizes Scripture to be the truth of its own God [and] . . . it unhesitatingly venerates Scripture" (Calvin, 36). Calvin assumes that all distortions are in the lens of the natural eye, none in the spectacles. But what if the spectacles introduce distortions into one's vision, distortions of which one would never "naturally" have thought? We reach the limits of helpfulness of Calvin's metaphor for the scriptures with the recognition that while without them we would not see things as we do, nonetheless they also introduce a profound nearsightedness into the Christian tradition--the nearsightedness of anti-Judaism.

C. Calvin trumped

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On two different occasions, many years apart, I tried to read The Book of Mormon and The Divine Principle of the Reverend Moon and the Unification Church. Each time I quickly gave up, because these two texts of holy scripture of their respective churches struck me as utter gibberish. I simply do not stand in the tradition of interpreting either of these texts. So with the Bible, if we had no tradition of reading and interpreting it in the church, of coping with it in historical-critical and hermeneutical ways, it too would be utter gibberish to us. Imagine walking on a beach one fine day, never having encountered a Bible before, and finding one washed up on the shore with some driftwood. Imagine picking it up and opening it for the first time. It makes no sense. You go on about your business.

Here we have the Catholic insight: "Look at the Bible through the spectacles of the Church" (Moehler, 40). It is ". . . better to contemplate the star with the aid of a glass than to let it escape your dull organ of vision and be lost in mist and darkness" (Moehler, 40-1). The argument goes something like this: scripture indeed is infallible, but its interpreters are not. Therefore the tradition of scriptural interpretation by the church constitutes the general sense of the meaning of scripture that must prevail against any merely individual interpretations. In the subjective meaning of the word, tradition is "the living

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word, perpetuated in the heart of believers" (Moehler, 39). In the objective sense, it is the regula fidei, the standard for interpreting scripture (Moehler, 39).

In some senses, this position is clearly right. We now know that tradition preceded scriptures (writings), that scriptures preceded canon, that tradition decided which scriptures were to be canonical, and that the canon was followed by an exegetical and interpretive tradition. Hard forms of the Protestant sola scriptura doctrine are no longer credible.

Yet a position such as Moehler's suffers from its own difficulties. It is authoritarian: the community, never the individual, has the truth (Moehler, 38-9). While Moehler has a high doctrine of scripture, in the last analysis, he has no need of it: ". . . when instruction through the apostleship, and the ecclesiastical education in the way described, takes place in the individual, the Sacred Scriptures are not even necessary for our acquisition of their general contents" (Moehler, 36). He therefore also overlooks that, if the tradition is so authoritative, then he should take seriously the fact that it was precisely the tradition that defined itself canonically. Lastly, the tradition also, no less than the scriptures, contains its own distortions, not the least of which is anti-Judaism. Never in the dogma, often in the doctrine, traditional anti-Jewish exegesis and hermeneutics heightens what

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anti-Judaism there is in the scriptures. This lens, too, is badly warped.

IV. Some Contemporary Options

A. Scripture "authors" identity

In what is probably the most influential proposal on the topic of scriptural authority on the current scene, David Kelsey argues the thesis that scripture is authoritative insofar as it operates ecclesially to form new human identities and to transform the life of individuals and communities. Says he:

In a Christian community it is precisely the biblical writings which . . . provide the images, concepts, principles, parables, etc., that serve to evoke, nurture, and correct the dispositions, beliefs, policies, emotions, etc., that are basic to the identities of members of the community and to the identity of the community itself. When used in these ways they may be said often to "author" new personal identities (Kelsey, 51).

Kelsey's proposal has several strengths that recommend it for careful consideration. Obviously, (1) it unites scripture and tradition. The biblical writings can function as scripture only in tradition, i.e., only in the act of handing on (actus tradendi) from generation to generation "a promise and a call through the use of these texts" (Kelsey, 51). Further, (2) the claim that scripture is authoritative is empirically grounded. Biblical writings are authoritative because, in fact, they have operated in this way. The very meaning of scripture, the naming of biblical writings with this term, recognizes "that they are

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authoritative de facto in the church and that that authority is functional" (Kelsey, 52). Also, (3) these texts function authoritatively in a variety of ways, as addressing the affections, the needs for reflective thought, and for regulating behavior. And (4) because scripture "authors" identity it also "authorizes" theological proposals.

In fact, therefore, scripture is authoritative. Should it be? Noting that de facto authority is not enough (it could be merely an arbitrary claim), Kelsey contends that scriptural authority must be grounded de iure. He acknowledges the correctness of Schubert Ogden's claim that de iure authority is "rule-conferred authority," i.e., that authority has a right to be acknowledged "only when there are rules that govern legitimation of authority" (Kelsey, 54). Rule-conferred authority prevents any heteronomous authority from being exercised by or on behalf of scripture. Therefore, scripture is "normed norm" (norma normata).

Traditional ways of affirming the de iure authority of scripture (the scripture principle) isolated Heilsoeschichte from ordinary history, resulting in an "intellectually dishonest special pleading" with regard to historical study of the biblical writings and a docetic picture of God's involvement with the world (Kelsey, 56). More recent attempts by Barth, Bultmann, and Tillich to stress, respectively, "word," "kerygma," and "message" as grounding the de iure authority of scripture do not help,

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because these terms lack "any determinate content at all" (Kelsey, 56). They cannot be formulated as norms by which to assess the appropriateness of theological proposals.

What does Kelsey propose as an alternative to both the scripture principle and to recent efforts to substitute something else (the Word of God or the Kerygma) for it? His constructive suggestion is that the de iure authority of scripture be grounded in God's role as transformer of human identity, i.e., in the Holy Spirit. Scripture is, he says, "a heterogeneous collection of images, parables, metaphors, principles for action, beliefs, emotion-concepts, etc., each of which is determinately particular and concrete" (Kelsey, 57). This heterogeneity elicits and demands a theological judgment about "what can serve as a norming norm [norma normans] by which to select, order, and interrelate the scripture to which appeal is made" (Kelsey, 58).

The content of this norma normans "is the actuality of the inauguration in and for the world of the eschatological rule of God in the resurrection of the crucified Jesus" (Kelsey, 58). Specifically, it is the narratives about Jesus' life, ministry, death, and resurrection that bring focus to the heterogeneity of biblical writings.

Kelsey's proposal is influential for good reasons; it has many strengths and represents an advance beyond major earlier 20th-century suggestions as to the nature of biblical authority. The scriptures must be a norma normata,

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and we do need to be able to specify the content of the norma normans. Granting all that (and more, for Kelsey's is a largely adequate statement), nonetheless we must ask how well it helps us address the theological task of developing a new theological proposal, one that overcomes the adversus Judeos tradition and affirms the solidarity of the church with the synagogue.

Here it seems not quite adequate, for the following reasons. While it is true that, de facto, scripture has authored Christian identity, one of the chief ways in which it has done this has been anti-Jewish. That is, the chief function of the adversus Judeos tracts and sermons was to use the scriptures in the shaping of Christian identity by telling Christians who they are. They are not Jewish, they are anti-Jewish, they are better than Jewish. They are a new people, not old, Gentile, not Jewish, spiritual, not carnal, ruled by grace, not by law, etc. Any de facto authority that scripture has must be derived from its de jure authority, not vice versa, because the character of its de facto authority has been at the heart of the problem.

Also, to define scripture in the strict sense (the norma normans) as the "actuality of the inauguration in and for the world of the eschatological rule of God in the resurrection of the crucified Jesus" is, once again, to make of the Tanakh a merely preparatory authority, one that anticipates but does not celebrate the actuality of God's

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rule. What it hopes for is inaugurated in Christian scripture, in that to which the New Testament attests.

There are two problems here. One is the question of credibility. Is it plausible to claim that God's rule was actualized or inaugurated in the resurrection of Jesus, even if this rule is defined as eschatological? What it might credibly mean to talk of God's rule is one issue. Whether this rule is effective only after the resurrection is another. In whatever sense it is credible to speak of God's rule, that rule can have been no less evident to Israel than to the church. Unless some credible way of talking of this rule is devised, a sober regard for the butcher block of human history will either falsify it or cause it to be viewed as meaningless.

The other problem is supersessionism. If the rule of God as attested to by Christian scripture is understood now to be actual, inaugurated, then all earlier witness to it will be regarded as standing in relation to the New Testament as mere possibility stands to actuality or as shadow to reality. I doubt very much that this is Kelsey's intent, but it does seem that it is the pay-off of his position. Farley and Hodgson are closer to the truth in their affirmation: "Faith in Jesus Christ is not a substitute for Israel's faith but a new universal availability of divine presence" (Farley and Hodgson, 25).

B. Scripture Re-presents God's Grace

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At this point Schubert Ogden's proposal for construing scriptural authority promises to be of greater help to Christian theologians attempting to rethink the Christian witness in the light of the reality of Judaism and the Jewish people. Scripture, as Ogden approaches the matter, can be authoritative only with respect to the appropriateness of Christian theological assertions, "with respect to the end of bearing the distinctively Christian witness of faith" (Ogden, 1976: 245), not with respect to the intelligibility of those assertions.

Scripture is the norming norm for all theological proposals, yet even its normative character is rule-conferred. Although it is normative with regard to all other theological norms, "it itself ultimately stands on the same level as those who are subject to its authority vis-a-vis Jesus the Christ" (Ogden, 1976: 246). That is, we who are subject to its authority are not thereby deprived of our theological freedom. As with any authorized authority, we can appeal over the head of scripture to the one who authorizes it. Its authority is not authoritarian, but governed by that to which it is the authoritative witness.

Ogden tries to get at scripture as norma normans by reconsidering the issue of the canon. In one sense, canon refers to a collection of writings recognized by the early church. In this sense it is an invention of the post-Marcionite church, although its contents were

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previously available (Ogden, 1976: 250). In the proper sense of the term, canon is "whatever of or in those writings [that] is in fact authorized by Christ through the church's continuing experience under the guidance of the Holy Spirit" (Ogden, 1976: 250). The true test is whether these writings are genuinely apostolic, which is the criterion to which the tradition itself appealed in the establishment of the canon. In establishing the canon, however, the early church applied the criterion of apostolicity (whether a writing was authored by someone in turn authorized by Christ himself) ambivalently. It decided questions of apostolicity by reference to the content of books. Orthodox content implied apostolic authorship.

But if one insists on using the early church's own criterion, then it must be the apostolic witness to Jesus Christ itself that is the canon, the norma normans sed non normata, in relation to which the New Testament is to be scrutinized. That is, one task of theology is to criticize the Christian witness in the light of the norm of appropriateness, the canon. The New Testament is criticizable Christian witness. The canon, accessible only through historical reconstruction from the New Testament, is the apostolic testimony to Jesus (Ogden, 1976: 252). Therefore, merely to show that an assertion is found in the scriptures fails to authorize it as theologically appropriate. One must further establish that this

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scriptural source "is itself authorized by the apostolic witness of faith" (Ogden, 1976: 257). It is this stratum of witness, the earliest that can be reconstructed, that "is itself the norm of appropriateness" (Ogden, 1982: 63).

The content of this apostolic witness lies behind the New Testament, but can also be found in it, in Paul and elsewhere. Paul succinctly formulates the Christian witness: "Yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist" (I Cor. 8: 6). Ogden interprets Paul to say that "what it means to have God as our Father is existentially the same as having Jesus Christ as our Lord" (Ogden, 1966: 201). God the Father is "the covenant God of Israel who has disclosed himself in Israel's history, and thence through the law and the prophets, to be the God of a unique promise and demand" (Ogden, 1966: 201). Hence Paul's intent is to affirm that the revelation of God in Jesus Christ "is the decisive revelation to all mankind of the same promise and demand re-presented by the Old Testament revelation (cf. Rom. 3: 21)" (Ogden, 1966: 202). The word spoken to us in Jesus Christ is "precisely the same word" that was earlier "re-presented through 'the law and the prophets'" (Ogden, 1966: 203).

The strength of Ogden's proposal, particularly in relation to the task of constructing an appropriate

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post-~~Shoah~~ Christian theology, lies in its total avoidance of the works-righteousness inherent in all forms of supersessionism. The "new" knowledge of God of which Christians can lay hold, for Paul, is exactly identical with the primordial revelation of God previously re-presented in the faith of Israel. Our salvation does not "become possible" in Christ--a statement that the New Testament nowhere affirms--but in him what was always possible now "becomes manifest" (Ogden, 1961: 143). This view comports with a thorough-going acceptance of the principles ~~sola-creatio--sola fide~~: When "the event of Jesus becomes a condition apart from which God is not free to be a gracious God, the heretical doctrine of works-righteousness achieves its final and most dangerous triumph" (Ogden, 1961: 145). In other words, Paul rightly affirmed that Abraham is "the father of us all" (Romans 4: 16) not because Abraham believed in Jesus Christ, but because he "believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness" (Romans 4: 3; Ogden, 1961: 142-143).

Ogden's understanding of scriptural authority renders explicit the theocentric basis of the Christian witness--that "we are Christ's," but that "Christ is God's" (I Cor. 3:23; 11:3)--and makes the only condition of salvation one that can be formulated without reference to Jesus Christ, as stated in the parable of the Last Judgment (Matt. 25:31-46). The only demand we must meet to receive

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salvation is that we accept God's love for ourselves and thereby become freed to respond to the concrete needs of the neighbor (Ogden, 1961: 144). All Christian triumphalism and exclusivism are hereby rejected.

There are two reasons for wondering, however, whether Ogden's view of scriptural authority, helpful as it is, is quite adequate to the needs of a post-Shoah theology. One is that the earliest witness of Christian faith, the norma normans, must be reconstructed from behind the writings of the early church by historical-critical method. This earliest witness, the "Jesus-Kerygma," will be subject, as a result, to the variableness of historical-critical method itself. Historical-critical method can never claim to reach results that are more than probable and that are not subject to further correction. We are left peering over the edge of an archaeological dig, hoping that what is dug up will not be an exclusivistic witness. But what if it is? Do we then take our medicine and admit that exclusivism is inherently Christian?

The other difficulty is that the authority of the Hebrew Bible may not be adequately stated on this proposal. Obviously, Ogden does not subject it to the Apostolic Writings. They are subject to the Jesus-Kerygma, as is the Hebrew Bible. Ogden's view of the authority of the Hebrew Bible is that it "document[s] the particular linguistic form of the question of human existence . . . to which the

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Jesus-Kerygma presents itself as the answer" (Ogden, 1976: 260). The meaning of the Jesus-Kerygma is that it is a development of the understanding of existence "variously expressed in the writings of the Old Testament" (Ogden, 1976: 260). The Hebrew Bible, therefore, stands in relation to the Jesus-Kerygma as question to answer or presupposition to assertion. This does not deprive it of theological authority, because "the authoritative answer to a question must endow the question itself with an equivalent authority" (Ogden, 1976: 261).

Here Ogden seems to have fallen into an inconsistency. If the Christian witness is a re-presentation of precisely the same word that was earlier re-presented through the law and the prophets, as Ogden has said it is, how then can this witness stand in relation to its earlier identical re-presentation as an answer to a preceding question? If the same word is in each place re-presented, is it not in each place an answer to the same question? The Hebrew Bible is not just a question, however important a question we may regard it as being. It is also an answer, an answer which, as Ogden rightly claims, has lately been re-presented to us. On these two points, then, the locus of the norma normans of distinctively Christian scripture and the affirmation of the authority of this Christian scripture without regarding it as the answer to the Old Testament's question, we have more work to do.

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c. Observing scripture's hermeneutical axioms

The suggestion offered by canonical criticism is that we look at the scriptures as distillates from a living tradition, something on the following order. At any point on their historical trajectory, we find the people Israel confronted with a hermeneutical task. They have a tradition and the new experience of the contemporary generation. They must interpret the new experience in the light of the tradition in order to understand it and to incorporate it in the living tradition. But to do this, they must reinterpret the tradition if it is to incorporate this new experience and be credible in face of it. They must do both in order to pass on their faith to the next generation. Hermeneutics is generational joining. "Process," as Sanders says, "was there from the start and continues unabated through and after the periods of intense canonical process of stabilization" (Sanders, 31).

Every time Israel interprets its faith it re-interprets it. We never find it simply luxuriating in uninterpreted experience (aside from the autobiography of a stone, as Whitehead once said, there is no uninterpreted experience). There is no need for Israel always to say the same thing that it said before, although its foundational commitments will be constant, and sometimes the re-interpretation will have to deny what was earlier claimed: "As I live, says the Lord God, this proverb shall no more be used by you in

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Israel" (Ezekiel 18:2).

Our attention therefore must be given to what we might call Israel's hermeneutical principles, the axioms in terms of which it interpreted and reinterpreted its tradition. This turn, it is hoped, will provide a clue to the norm of appropriateness or canon for Christian scripture. With Ogden, I take it that we do not look to scripture to find norms of credibility.

To look for the hermeneutical axioms of the biblical tradition is a move associated with canonical criticism. The relevance of canonical criticism to this discussion is noted by James A. Sanders: "Christianity has become so systemically Marcionite and anti-Semitic that only a truly radical revival of the concept of canon as applied to the Bible will, I think, counter it" (Sanders, xv).

Some of the hermeneutical axioms used in the canonical process, as Sanders analyzes them, are directly pertinent to our discussion. (1) The Bible is a monotheizing literature, i.e., it regularly struggles "within and against polytheistic contexts to affirm God's oneness" (Sanders, 52). (2) It reflects a broad theocentric hermeneutic, expressed in two hermeneutical axioms, the prophetic and the constitutive. The former stresses that God is the God of all, the latter that God is the particular Redeemer of Israel or the church. The constitutive axiom bespeaks promise, the prophetic challenge (Sanders, 53). Each gives

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voice to the grace of God. In situations that require it the prophetic mode is stressed, and Israel is reminded of God's love for Egypt and Assyria (Isaiah 19:25). At other times the constitutive mode is stressed and Israel is reminded that she is the first among God's beloved.

These same hermeneutic modes can be used to read a passage of scripture today. "No one comes to the Father but by me" (John 14:7) can be read in a quite exclusivist way. "In fact," states Sanders, "reading the Bible exclusively in the constitutive mode can issue in a totally denominational, if not tribal, reading of the whole Bible" (Sanders, 66). In an exclusivist reading, it denies to God the freedom to be gracious apart from Jesus Christ, thereby turning God's gift into a condition apart from which God is not free to be gracious. It can also be read prophetically in the light of John 10:16, "I have sheep not of this fold," to show that an exclusivist reading is self-serving and "canonically false" (Sanders, 67).

A difficulty with canonical criticism is its insistence that "everything is a gift of God" (Sanders, 55). While in an ultimate sense it is possibly true to say this, since without God we would receive no gifts whatever, nonetheless the proposal to monotheize, as Sanders expresses it, forgets that some gifts are not from God. Was the Shoah, Hitler's attempt to make the earth Judenrein, a gift of God? Such a claim suffers from being incredible as well as being

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inappropriate to the prophetic axiom that God is the gracious, all-inclusive God of everyone for whom God commands justice. The deeper problem with canonical criticism seems to be, therefore, that it collapses criteria of intelligibility into criteria of appropriateness.

V. A Proposal

My proposal for the scriptural authority of the New Testament, therefore, is that it is authoritative where it struggles to monotheize the Christian witness, where it theocentrically articulates the all-inclusive, free grace of God, proclaiming also the constancy of God's faithfulness to God's particularly beloved people. However much the New Testament may reinterpret Israel's faith, and in it surely we find many attempts to interpret this new event of Jesus Christ in the light of the traditions of Israel ("according to the scriptures," they said) and to reinterpret that tradition in the light of this new event, it does so appropriately where it monotheizes its new interpretations, thinks theocentrically, and balances a constitutive hermeneutic with a prophetic one.

Paul the apostle, e.g., shows us all these moves in one passage: "For we hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law. Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one; and he will justify the circumcised on the ground of their faith and the uncircumcised through their

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faith. Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law" (Romans 3:28-31). As Sanders reads it, Paul "monotheized constantly in his reading of Scripture for his churches and pursued a theocentric hermeneutic in working out his understandings of Christology and ecclesiology" (Sanders, 58).

Where the New Testament uses biblical hermeneutics to interpret the Christian witness, it is as biblical as the Old Testament, no more, no less. Where it is supersessionist (or is interpreted as supersessionist), it or its interpreters fail to interpret their witness theocentrically, and turn God's promise of free grace offered to each and all and God's command that justice be done to each and all into a divisive and destructive idol.

What canonical criticism enables us to do is to locate Ogden's norm of appropriateness within the scriptures, not behind them, and to see this norm as the same hermeneutical axioms that were also Israel's. Additionally, it enables us to interpret scripture as it interpreted itself, certainly not a move inappropriate to scripture. This is true, provided scripture functions as canon only to provide a norm of appropriateness for Christian theology. Norms of credibility--such matters as width of illumination and coherence--must be kept distinct from norms of appropriateness.

The situation that faced the people Israel and that

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faced the apostle Paul also faces us: we must interpret the new events of our time, particularly the attempt in the most deeply Christian part of the world to see to it that not another Jew lived on planet earth, in the light of the Christian tradition, and we must reinterpret that tradition if it is to be credible and morally plausible after that event. Doing so is painful, if only because one discovers how deeply the Christian tradition was an accomplice to that crime. Radical change necessitates radical reinterpretation (Ogden, 1971: 173). The question faced by this essay is whether the New Testament can still function authoritatively in this process of Christian reinterpretation or whether it must be abandoned for it to take place. I hope to have made a case for the former position. Unless we can do so, the logical conclusion points to the abandonment of the tradition, not its reinterpretation.

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