

Inspiration, Authority and Hermeneutics

Kuo-Wei Peng

1. *Bible as a Book of Special Significance and Value*

Probably no one will deny that for Christians the Bible is a book, or more correctly, a collection of books, of special significance and value. This special significance and value is very often described in terms of “scriptural authority” which is related to and coming from the authority of God.¹ This special significance and value of the Bible has also been understood by certain special status conferred on the Bible in comparison with other writings and literatures. Therefore, we have terms such as “canon” and “sacred literature;” and these terms also indicate the existence of a borderline that separates those which are of this special significance and value and those which are not.

In addition to the above terms, which are basically descriptive or normative in nature, there are also terms having been used to provide the theological justification for the Bible’s special significance and value. “(Special) revelation,” “inspiration,” and “word of God” are terms that belong to this category. One common characteristic of these more-or-less theological terms is that the scriptural authority is basically ascribed to its divine origin: the content of the Bible is the outcome of God’s “revelation” in history; it was then recorded by certain people who were chosen and “inspired” by him;² In such a way, the Bible can effectively be seen as “God’s own word.” Since the emphasis here is the divine origin, it is quite understandable

1. Though there exist different understandings regarding how the scriptural authority is related to the authority of God (e.g., whether the scriptural authority comes directly from God or through the apostles or the church), regarding the domain that the Scripture exerts its authority (i.e., whether the scriptural authority is restricted to saving truth and rule of conduct or is on truth in general), and regarding who should be subject to the scriptural authority (i.e., only the believing community, or the whole human being, or the whole universe).
2. The process of “inspiration” can be understood by either the concept of “inspired authors,” which places emphasis on the chosen authors, or that of “inspired content,” which stresses the aspect that God so guided the authors that they were incapable of writing anything contrary to his will. A brief discussion of the distinction between the two views can be seen in Achtemeier, *The Inspiration of Scripture*, 29-35.

that the doctrine about Scripture is normally discussed under the doctrine about God in doctrinal or systematic theology.³

For some groups within Christianity, mainly within the Protestant branch of Christianity, theological construction of the scriptural authority as such should lead to the logical corollary that the Bible is therefore “infallible” and “inerrant.” To these groups, the issue of inerrancy is closely tied with the issue of truthfulness of the Bible.⁴ “For if God has given special revelation of himself and inspired servants of his to record it, we will want assurance that the Bible is indeed a dependable source of that revelation.”⁵ “Infallibility” and “inerrancy,” then for these Christians, are terms to explain why the Bible as the word of God is dependable for people holding such convictions.

Although different theologians may have different definitions for terms such as “inspiration,” “infallibility,” as well as “inerrancy,” if they are used,⁶ the approach delineated above represents a very popular version of the doctrine about the Bible among the Protestant churches. The basic thesis of this approach may be rephrased as this: the scriptural authority resides in its authorial dimension. It is because God was the ultimate origin, and hence the “ultimate author” of the Bible, and because he used the people especially chosen and inspired by him to record the Bible that the authority of the Bible is then established and warranted.⁷

This authorial approach to the scriptural authority has a profound implication for our understanding of canon and text. The implication is that the Bible should have fixed contents, both in terms of canon as well as in terms of texts. Since God is the ultimate source, or the ultimate author, of the Bible, the meaning of “canon” cannot be anything other than the list of books which have divine origin; and since a book is either of divine origin or not of divine origin, the borderline of canon should be a fixed one.

3. A good example can be seen in Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 175-262. Erickson discusses the topic of revelation, inspiration, and God’s word under the section of “Knowing God.”

4. For example, *Ibid.*, 225.

5. *Ibid.*, 221-2.

6. In his book, Erickson lists five different theories of “inspiration” and seven different conceptions of “inerrancy.” See *Ibid.*, 206-7 and 222-4.

7. Cf. Erickson’s formulation: “By inspiration we mean that supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit upon Scripture writers which rendered their writings an accurate record of the revelation or which resulted in what they wrote actually being the Word of God.” *Ibid.*, 199.

This authorial approach implies a universal authority of the Scripture over the whole human being because the content was directly originated from God. However, in a post-modern world in which a text can claim its independence of its author in interpretation,⁸ the assertion of any kind of universal authority because of authoritative origin will probably be not a valid claim for the people outside the believing community who hold this conviction. However, to the author, the real problem of this authorial approach does not reside in its validity to the people outside the believing community, but resides in the acute tension it generates between the theory and historical reality of the Bible. And this acute tension can be very well demonstrated by the practice of Bible translation.

2. The Tension Between the Authorial Approach to Scriptural Authority and Bible Translation

If the authorial approach to scriptural authority is followed, the task of Bible translation is then to translate the set of books originated from God. Moreover, since what really counts is what the inspired authors really recorded, the base texts used for Bible translation should be as close as possible to the autographs of the biblical authors. Therefore, it is only possible to have just one version of the original biblical texts upon which Bible translation is based.

As a theological foundation for Bible translation, this authorial approach to scriptural authority can be used to justify very well the translation principle that the translation of the NT should be based not upon the "Received Text" (*Textus Receptus*) but upon the text of UBS Greek New Testament because the latter is an attempt to reconstructing the autographs of the NT documents, while the former represents a type of text developed in later church history. However, there are also tensions between this theological formulation of scriptural authority and some of the present Bible Societies' practices in Bible translation regarding both canon and text.

2.1. The Issue of Canon

For the Bible Societies movement, the agreement between the Bible Societies and the Catholic Church's Secretariat for Christian Unity, published as "Guiding

8. This view can be exemplified by Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author."

Principles for Interconfessional Cooperation in Bible Translation” in 1968, was a significant move and breakthrough. This agreement and its later revision, published as “Guidelines for Interconfessional Cooperation in Translating the Bible” in 1987,⁹ have made possible the translation of a Bible which can be used for both the Protestant churches and the Roman Catholic Church that actually have different views on the scope of biblical canon. Judging from the achievement in the past, the significance and contribution of this agreement cannot be exaggerated too much, while the tension between this agreement and the authorial approach to the scriptural authority mentioned earlier can also be easily seen. If the authority of the Bible resides in its authorial dimension in terms of inspiration, the Apocrypha or Deuterocanon can only be either inspired or not inspired and, therefore, either has the scriptural authority or does not have it. As a result, whether the Apocrypha or Deuterocanon should be perceived as part of the “Bible,” in the sense of the Word of God, is still a serious theological issue that needs to be settled.

The publication of *The Apocrypha in Ecumenical Perspective* by UBS in 1991 can be seen as a Bible Societies’ response to the tension by providing a kind of justification for the agreement between the Bible Societies and the Catholic Church. The approach adopted in this monograph is basically historical. The authors provide a very broad historical survey of the uses and the views of the Apocrypha or Deuterocanon in the Orthodox Church,¹⁰ in the Catholic Church,¹¹ in the Luther Bible,¹² in the Reformed Church,¹³ in the Anglican Tradition,¹⁴ in the Baptist tradition,¹⁵ in the Bible Societies movement,¹⁶ and in the context of North America.¹⁷ In his article in this monograph, Lack P. Lewis also provides a historical survey of the formation of the OT canon as well as both the Jewish and Christian scholarly thoughts on the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha.¹⁸

9. A copy of this revised version can be seen as an appendix in Meurer, *The Apocrypha in Ecumenical Perspective*, 208-220 and EB,1041-1093.

10. Oikonomos, “The Significance of the Deuterocanonical Writings in the Orthodox Church,” 16-32.

11. Stendebach, “The Old Testament Canon in the Catholic Church,” 33-45.

12. Fricke, “The Apocrypha in the Luther Bible,” 46-87.

13. Neuser, “The Reformed Churches and the Old Testament Apocrypha,” 88-115.

14. Chadwick, “The Significance of Deuterocanonical Writings in the Anglican Tradition,” 116-128.

15. Mallau, “The Attitude of the Baptists to the Deuterocanonical Writings,” 129-133.

16. Gundert, “The Bible Societies and the Deuterocanonical Writings,” 134-150.

17. Lewis, “Some Aspects of the Problem of Inclusion of the Apocrypha,” 161-207.

18. See *Ibid.*, 166-78.

However, it seems to the present author that the tension will not be eased by merely historical justification because we cannot say something is correct just because it exists historically. The historical fact that different traditions pass on different understandings about canon can still be read theologically from the viewpoint of the authorial approach to scriptural authority as the betrayal or misunderstanding of some of the traditions about the revelation from God in certain moments in the history. The practice of using different biblical canons for different confessional groups, therefore, needs something more than historical justification.

2.2. *The Issue of Base Text*

In areas where the Orthodox Christians are the majority, the situations are much more complex than the situation that the “Guidelines for Interconfessional Cooperation in Translating the Bible” intended to resolve. Not only does there exist no standard biblical canon for all the Orthodox Churches, but also the base text, or base texts, used in Bible translation varies with the textual traditions of the Bibles used in the Orthodox Churches. As a result, the guiding principle of the Bible Societies that the Masoretic Text should be used as the basis for translating the OT is not always followed in those areas. For the new Greek Translation, the decision of the Symposium in Athens was to use the Septuagint as the base text for the OT.¹⁹ For the Churches in Russia, Bulgaria, Belarus and Ukraine, the Slavonic Bible has been the Bible of the churches and some of these churches wanted a translation based on the Slavonic Bible.²⁰ The first complete Slavonic Bible, the Gennadian Bible of 1499, is uniquely eclectic, combining the influences of Masoretic text, Septuagint, as well as Latin Vulgate,²¹ while later revisions and retranslations were mainly done by referring to the Greek but Latin versions were also consulted.²² For the Ethiopian Church, the Geez Bible has been the Bible of the church and its translation into modern Ethiopian has been started.²³ The earliest form of the Ethiopic OT was a rather literal translation of the Septuagint, while later revisions in the fourteenth century and in the sixteenth century were based on the Arabic texts and Hebrew

19. The information is kindly provided by Dr. Manuel Jinbachian, through the help of Sarah Lind who established the link for me.

20. The information is also provided by Dr. Manuel Jinbachian. A very detailed survey of the Old Testament of the Slavonic translation can be found in Thomson, “The Slavonic Translation of the Old Testament,” 605-920. I owe this information to Sarah Lind.

21. See the discussion in Thomson, “The Slavonic Translation of the Old Testament,” 655-65.

22. See e.g. *Ibid.*, 677-84, 692-94.

23. This information is provided by Dr. Manuel Jinbachian.

Bible respectively.²⁴ The Armenian Orthodox Church has been using the Grabar Bible and it has been translated into modern language and was published in 1994.²⁵ The base text used in the early Armenian version was the Greek Septuagint; the canon includes all books in the Hebrew OT canon plus the Apocrypha (except for 4 *Maccabees*) while other apocryphal and pseudepigraphal books such as 4 Ezra and the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* also appear in many manuscripts.²⁶

As a response to this complex situation, a position paper, "Translation Principles for IBT-UBS-SIL Partnership Projects in the CIS," was drafted and in it the following statement can be found:²⁷

I - Base Texts

1. For the Old Testament the translation should in general follow the Masoretic Text (*Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*). In cases where BHS is not used as base text, semantically significant differences will be footnoted.
2. For the New Testament the translation should in general follow the Greek text of the UBS fourth edition (Nestle-Aland 27th edition). In cases where a traditional text is followed, significant differences will be footnoted.
3. Although the Russian Synodal version of the Bible may not serve as a base text, the textual tradition underlying this version may be taken into account where local circumstances make this appropriate, as stated above.

The spirit of this guideline is apparently to keep a balance between the need of using the fruit of contemporary scholarship of textual criticism in Bible translation on the one hand and the need to respect the tradition of the believing community on the other. Nevertheless, if the authorial approach to scriptural authority is to be adopted, this guideline is nothing more than an unwelcome compromise which will eventually obscure the borderline between the inspired Word of God and

24. See Zuurmond, "Versions, Ancient (Ethiopic)," *ABD*, VI:808.

25. This information is provided by Dr. Manuel Jinbachtian.

26. See Alexanian, "Versions, Ancient (Armenian)," *ABD*, VI:806.

27. This information is kindly provided by Harold Scanlin.

those non-inspired human additions or alterations, and therefore will downgrade the authority of the Bible. Although in general the Orthodox Churches do not make a very sharp distinction between canonical books and non-canonical books and, therefore, do not have the concept of inspiration as some of the Protestant Churches do,²⁸ being a movement starting from the Protestant context and still serving the Protestant Churches for the Bible cause, it is probably unavoidable for the Bible Societies to engage themselves with the theological justification of the ways that the Bible Societies work in the Orthodox context especially for the sake of the people and churches who believe the scriptural authority coming from its authorial dimension.

3. Historical Factors to Be Considered in Formulating the Doctrine of Scriptural Authority

Although historical facts such as the traditions of different believing communities may not be able to justify theologically the ways that the Bible Societies' practices for the Catholic contexts as well as for the Orthodox contexts, these historical facts somehow raise the question whether theologians, especially systematic theologians, have allowed themselves to be well informed with the complex historical phenomena when formulating their theology of Scripture. Theological formulations should treat history seriously. Although the tension between the authorial approach to scriptural authority and the history of the traditions of different believing communities can be understood as the failure and the betrayal of certain believing communities in regard to the divine authority of the Bible, it can also be interpreted, perhaps more properly, as the problem of oversimplification of the authorial approach which is just too neat and too simplified to handle the complex histories and traditions of different believing communities. The existence of these historical facts requires a more appropriate theological formulation for the authority of the Bible.

The histories and traditions of different believing communities are not the only historical materials that the theological formulation of the scriptural authority needs to take into account, however. As the histories and traditions of different believing communities find their roots in, and therefore are closely tied up with, the history of the formation of the Bible, any theological formulation about the authority of the Bible should also take into account the history of the formation of the Bible and its

28. A good example can be seen in Thomson's comment on the Slavonic Bibles. See Thomson, "The Slavonic Translation of the Old Testament," 647-48.

transmission before the “canonical process,”²⁹ or “canonization processes,”³⁰ was complete. As Barrera rightly points out, many of the problems of the history of the biblical canon have implications of a theological nature.³¹

The history of the formation of the Bible can be viewed from three different perspectives: (1) the literary history of the biblical canon, which focuses on the literary history of individual biblical books and the developments of the biblical canon or canons; (2) the social history of the biblical canon, which deals with the social setting in which the various literary elements that make up the Bible originated and were transmitted and also the study of the relationship that each canonical or apocryphal book could have with the various socio-religious groups in the formation period of the canon or canons;³² and (3) the textual history of the biblical books, which is concerned with the reconstruction of the “autographs” or “archetypes” of the biblical texts and, hence, belongs to the domain of textual criticism. The first two of the three are more related to the issue of canon, while the last one is more related to the issue of texts. However, they cannot be viewed as three unrelated topics independent of each other. They are actually three facets of the same historical phenomenon. As the scope of this article does not allow us to step into detailed descriptions and discussions of each of the three aspects of the history, only the conclusions relevant to the concern of the present discussion will be listed here.

3.1. *The Literary History of the OT Canon*

From the perspective of the literary history of the biblical canon, the formation of the canon was a gradual process for both the OT and NT. According to the theory proposed by Barrera,³³ the history of the formation of the OT canon runs in

29. This term is used by Sanders, *Canon and Community*, passim.

30. This term is used by Barrera, *The Jewish Bible and the Christian Bible*, esp. 151-152.

31. *Ibid.*, 148.

32. Cf. *Ibid.*, 208.

33. The traditional view of the formation of the OT canon was a process of three successive stages: the books of the Torah acquired canonical character possibly in the fifth century BC; the collection of the prophetic books entered the canon towards about 200 BC, after the Samaritan schism; the Writings entered the canon in the Maccabean period towards the mid-second century BC, according to some, or in the so-called synod of Yabneh towards the end of the first century AD; and eventually at Yabneh the canon was decisively closed with the exclusion of the apocryphal books. As this traditional theory has its shortfalls, a more refined theory is then proposed. See *Ibid.*, 154-155.

parallel with the history of the Temple and of the priestly institutions of Jerusalem. To Barrera, the history of the Temple can be well divided into four periods: (1) "first Temple," i.e., the period of Solomon throughout the monarchic period; (2) "second Temple," i.e., the Restoration in the Persian period until the Hellenistic crisis; (3) "third Temple," i.e., the Maccabean period; and (4) "fourth Temple," i.e., the Herodian period in the Roman era.³⁴

The history of the OT canon perhaps started at the end of the "first Temple" when the priests found the book of Deuteronomy in the Temple of Jerusalem in its original version (622/21 BC).³⁵ During the "second Temple" period, the Pentateuch became the definitive form of the Torah, with the abandonment of the other possible forms such as Hexateuch and Tetrateuch. The formation of the Pentateuch also led to the separation of Torah and Prophets; and the formation of a prophetic canon meant making a clear distinction between the prophetic period in which God had spoken to his people through the prophets, and the later period that the spirit of prophecy stopped. The collection of Writings also took shape in this period, basically wisdom in character. In the "third Temple" period, the three-part structure of the biblical canon was established and in the second century BC, the Jews acknowledged in general a canon formed of the Torah and the Prophets together with "other books," the Writings. During the "fourth Temple" period, rabbinic circles of Palestine completed a revision of the Greek text of some biblical books and the stimulus was the fact that the Greek text exhibited differences from the Hebrew text used in those rabbinic circles. The data of the revision reveal that only two books, Esther and Qoheleth, probably did not belong to the canon of the rabbinic circles of Palestine, while all the rest books of the Hebrew canon had been included in this canon.

Regarding the date of the closure of the Hebrew canon, there are no data for determining. What we can be sure is that it did not take place in Yabneh towards the end of the first century AD; and, rather, there are more data points to a much earlier date: the mid-second century BC, the date of the closure of the "Writings" in the Maccabean period.³⁶ However, this solution does not resolve the problems presented by the existence of a Christian canon of the OT, which is longer than the Jewish canon.³⁷

34. *Ibid.*, 156.

35. The information of this paragraph is based on the discussion in *Ibid.*, 157-65.

36. See *Ibid.*, 165-7.

37. *Ibid.*, 167.

3.2. The Social History of the OT Canon

The issue of different canons is actually linked with the social history of the social groups in which the biblical books have their origin and are transmitted throughout the centuries. In the Judaism of the Hellenistic period a wide spectrum of socio-religious groups can be found: Samaritans, Sadducees, Pharisees, Essenes, Hellenists, and later, the Jewish-Christian groups; and the Bible was an issue of both harmony and discord among all of them.³⁸

The Samaritans held a narrow concept of the biblical canon as they only acknowledged the Torah (Samaritan Pentateuch). The edition of the Samaritan Pentateuch was probably an outcome of the Samaritan reaction to the attacks by the Jews which culminated in the destruction of the temple of Garizim at the end of second century BC.³⁹ Since most of the prophets had originated in the kingdom of Judah and had preached against the kingdom of Israel, it seems very reasonable for the Samaritans to reject the prophetic books.⁴⁰

A similar view of canon to the Samaritans' could be found with the Sadducees, who restricted the canon to the five books of the Torah, or saw the Torah as the "canon within the canon."⁴¹ Their reason for not granting binding force to books other than the five of the Torah was different from the Samaritans, though. Since they were a group with special relationships to the priesthood of Jerusalem, the Sadducees considered only things connected with the legislation about the Temple and the cultic institution as essential.⁴²

With the Samaritans and the Sadducees at one end of the spectrum, the Essenes and the Hellenistic Jewish diaspora represented the other end of the spectrum regarding the scope of the canon. The Essene movement had its roots deep in the apocalyptic tradition and their apocalyptic concern led to the use of pseudepigraphal books, which might not be all considered as canonical but were of special values for their apocalyptic viewpoint.⁴³

38. See *Ibid.*, 208.

39. See *Ibid.*, 214.

40. *Ibid.*, 220.

41. See *Ibid.*, 217, 220.

42. *Ibid.*, 221.

43. *Ibid.*, 227-8.

The Greek biblical canon used in the Hellenistic Jewish diaspora, which was later transmitted by Christianity, includes more books (Tobit, Judith, Maccabees, etc.) and also inserts chapters in some books (the “additions” to Daniel, Jeremiah, Job, etc.). Although the additions and insertions were not caused by the existence of a kind of “Alexandrian canon” in Greek which was paralleled to the “Palestinian canon” in Hebrew, they implied that at least some circles of the Jewish diaspora did not hold the view of a closed canon or they were not concerned with the closure of the biblical canon.⁴⁴

Between these two ends, there stood the Pharisees who represented the mainstream Judaism and a middle road of gradual acceptance of a three-part canon (Torah-Prophets-Writings), with a list of books already defined in the mid-second century BC.⁴⁵ As the Judaism represented by the Pharisees finally led to the rabbinism of the period of the Mishnah and the Talmud, their view of the canon became prominent in later history.

Both the Jews and the Christians were well aware of the differences between the Hebrew text and the Greek text. As mentioned earlier, the rabbinic circles of Palestine had already completed a revision of the Greek text at the beginning of the first century AD for their own use.⁴⁶ In the second century AD the revision continued and the versions done by Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion were the fruits of this period.⁴⁷ Since these differences often generated different understandings and then deepened the tension between the Jews and the Christians,⁴⁸ on the Christian side the most significant attempt was probably Origen’s Hexapla, which was done in the first half of the third century AD and was in the format of six parallel columns containing six different texts: the Hebrew text, transliteration of the Hebrew in Greek, Aquila’s version, Symmachus’ version, LXX, and Theodotion’s version.⁴⁹ The other important Christian recension done in the third century AD was Lucian’s version and his revisions seem to have been primarily stylistic in nature.⁵⁰ The recensions produced by Origen and Lucian were the texts of the Greek Bible most

44. Ibid., 232-3.

45. Ibid., 222.

46. Ibid., 163.

47. Further discussions of these versions, see Jobes and Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint*, 37-42.

48. See Ibid., 38.

49. Regarding *Hexapla*, see Parker, “Hexapla of Origen, the,” *ABD*, III:188-89; Jobes and Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint*, 48-53.

50. Jobes and Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint*, 53.

commonly in use in the Christian church after the late third century AD⁵¹ and the Christian church probably did not use the Hebrew text as the primary base text until Jerome's translation of the *Latin Vulgate* around the end of the fourth century AD and the beginning of the fifth century AD.⁵²

The social history described above shows two important aspects of the OT canon in its formation period. On the one hand, the Pharisee canon could be traced back to a tradition started in the mid-second century BC, but on the other hand, at the start of the Christian period, in both Palestine and Alexandria, the canon as yet had no exact limits.⁵³ In other words, the OT canon had its basic shape on the one hand while the shape was not entirely fixed on the other hand during the formation period of Christianity. The situation of no fixed canon probably contributed to the difference between the Christian canon and the Jewish one as the Christianity probably had the idea of an open OT canon,⁵⁴ and this idea probably provided the room for the addition of the NT to the OT to form the Christian Bible. This social history also shows that the text of the early church was mainly the Greek one. The favour to the Hebrew text coming from the rabbinic tradition was a later phenomenon and Jerome was probably one of the major contributors to this phenomenon.

3.3. *The Literary History of the NT Canon*

It should be stressed that Christianity did not begin as a scriptural religion but started with a person, Jesus of Nazareth, as the centre; and the NT as we think of it as the Christian Scripture was utterly remote from the minds of the first generations of Christian believers.⁵⁵ The first NT book (either was it Galatians or it was 1 Thessalonians) did not appear until about nearly two decades after the advent of Christian movement around 30-33 AD and it took around fifty years before all the twenty-seven books of today's NT were finished.

The collection of the NT writings was a gradual process. The earliest to be collected were probably the letters of Paul. As early as about 95 AD, a collection

51. *Ibid.*, 55.

52. On Jerome's view on the Hebrew text, see Müller, *The First Bible of the Church*, 83-89. I owe this bibliography to Sarah Lind.

53. Barrera, *The Jewish Bible and the Christian Bible*, 233.

54. See *Ibid.*, 234.

55. Rightly, Gamble, *The New Testament Canon*, 57.

of Paul's letters has been hinted to in *1 Clement*, the earliest Christian document outside the NT, and this process of collection continued until finally about the mid-second century AD when the collection of all the fourteen Pauline letters (including Hebrews) was complete.⁵⁶ Not all the Pauline letters were preserved in the Pauline Corpus, though. For example, the letters mentioned in 1 Cor 5,9 and 2 Cor 2,4 and the letter to the Laodiceans mentioned in Col 4,16⁵⁷ are not part of today's canon. Judging from manuscripts, patristic writers, and canon lists of later time, the earliest Pauline collection contained only letters to seven churches.⁵⁸ This seems to be based on the idea that Paul wrote to precisely seven churches and, by the symbol of "seven," the collection could have its relevance to the church at large even though the Pauline letters were dealing with particular issues related to particular local churches.⁵⁹

The gospels were probably circulated independently as each Gospel writer was to offer an adequately comprehensive document which would stand on its own.⁶⁰ Not until 180 AD do we hear of the *tetraeuaggôlion*, i.e., a collection of four Gospels regarded as equally authoritative accounts of the gospel story.⁶¹ However, even after the establishment of the "Four Gospels," the popularity of Tatian's *Diatessaron* (c.170 AD) suggests that the fixation of the texts of the Gospels was not an issue until later date, and even, as Gamble thinks, it attests "a still fluid situation in which multiple Gospels were known and used."⁶² In comparison with other gospels circulated during the second century AD many of which claim their apostolic authorship explicitly in the text,⁶³ none of the four Gospels betrays any clue about its authorship in the text. This suggests that apostolic authorship of the Gospels should not be emphasised too strongly for their canonicity.

For other writings, i.e., Acts, Revelation and the Catholic letters, they were firstly circulated as independent writings and it was not until late in the fourth century

56. For the early Church assumed Hebrews to be Pauline. See Aland and Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, 49.

57. Though Marcion probably knew this letter as the Letter to the Ephesians today. See Gamble, *The New Testament Canon*, 41.

58. *Ibid.*

59. *Ibid.*, 42.

60. *Ibid.*, 31. However, the Gospel of John may presume the existence of other gospels.

61. See Aland and Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, 48-49.

62. Gamble, *The New Testament Canon*, 31.

63. For example, *Gospel of Thomas*, *Secret Book of James*, *Infant Gospel of Thomas*, and *Infant Gospel of James*.

AD all of their authorities were recognised.⁶⁴ The inclusion of some of these books into the NT canon was not straightforward. For example, although the authority of Revelation has been recognised as early as in the second and third century AD in the Western churches, it took much longer for the Eastern churches to recognise its authority.⁶⁵ The Acts of the Apostles, although composed as a companion piece to the Gospel of Luke, had a separate history from Luke and did not come to any broad currency until later, about the end of second century AD.⁶⁶

Although most of the books in today's NT canon gained canonical standing before the end of the second century AD, it should be noted that there were also books, such as *I Clement*, *the Epistle of Barnabas*, *the Shepherd of Hermas*, and *the Apocalypse of Peter*, which did not enter into the NT canon in later time but were widely circulated and valued as authoritative by the end of the second century AD.⁶⁷ Therefore, around the end of the second century AD both the idea and the shape of a Christian canon remained indeterminate,⁶⁸ and, if there were any idea or shape of a NT canon, it is surely different from what Christians would have in later time.

The final official resolution of the NT canon was not reached until the late fourth century AD. The earliest conciliar pronouncements is associated with the Council of Laodicea, held in 363; and in the west the two North African synods of the later fourth century AD (the Council of Hippo, held in 393, and the Council of Carthage, held in 397) both named the twenty-seven books of our NT as canonical.⁶⁹ However, this resolution was not recognised universally and even today some of the Eastern Orthodox and the Nestorians still do not fully recognise the canonicity of the book of Revelation.⁷⁰

3.4. *The Social History of the NT Canon*

Since the Christian community was started around a particular historical person and a particular historical period, it was essential for the church to recount the teachings of Jesus and the events of his life, death, and resurrection. At first

64. See Aland and Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, 49-50.

65. *Ibid.*

66. Gamble, *The New Testament Canon*, 47.

67. *Ibid.*, 48-49.

68. *Ibid.*, 50.

69. *Ibid.*, 55-56.

70. See McDonall, "Canon." 134-44.

the recounting was provided through the direct witness of the apostolic preaching and oral tradition. In the very beginning, the meaning of the term “gospel” was basically theological in nature to designate Jesus’ message of the appearance of God’s kingdom and sometimes the whole story of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus⁷¹ that were recounted in the oral tradition. Only when oral tradition began to dissipate and grow wild, written gospels came increasingly into use.⁷² However, the acquaintance of Christian communities with multiple Gospels, which sometimes differ significantly in their contents, created some difficult problems.⁷³ The popularity of Tatian’s *Diatessaron* can be then understood as the need for a solution for the multiplicity of Gospels. The final inclusion of four Gospels into the NT canon, according to Gamble, can only be seen as “a compromise striking a precarious balance between an unmanageable multiplicity of gospels on the one hand and a single, self-consistent gospel on the other.”⁷⁴

In addition to the intrinsic factors as exemplified above, there were also extrinsic factors in the formation of the NT canon.⁷⁵ The theological controversies over Marcionism, Gnosticism, and Montanism in the second century AD collectively had their impact on the formation of the NT canon. These movements required their opponents to define more exactly the substance of the Christian confession, to specify its proper resources, and to safeguard it against criticism and deviation.⁷⁶ This was probably the reason why the Acts of the Apostles did not gain broad currency only until the later part of the second century AD when it was used as a proof of the unity of the apostles and their preaching.⁷⁷

The slow recognition of Revelation in the east also had its socio-historical reason. That the millennialists gave the work a literal interpretation and conjured up expectations about an earthly kingdom generated tensions and troubles in the east.⁷⁸ As a result, the Eastern Churches were hesitant in accepting its canonicity. In the west, Hebrews was the point of contention. The Montanists view of no second repentance after baptism was based upon the teaching in Hebrews (6,4-8; 10,26-

71. Broyles, “Gospel (Good News)”, 282.

72. Gamble, *The New Testament Canon*, 58.

73. See *Ibid.*, 24-32.

74. *Ibid.*, 35.

75. See *Ibid.*, 59-67.

76. *Ibid.*, 65.

77. *Ibid.*, 47.

78. *Ibid.*, 52.

31; 12,14-17) had caused the tensions in Christian communities.⁷⁹ The canonicity of Hebrews was eventually acknowledged before the end of the fourth century AD but the canonical status of Revelation, though acknowledged by most Christian communities, never achieved unequivocal universal acceptance.

3.5. *The Textual History of the OT Books*

The textual history of the OT books should start with the completion of the individual books. However, the oldest extant witnesses can only help us to trace back to the time around the third century BC which was much later than the time that the OT books were written. As a result, we can only have theories and conjectures about the origins of the OT texts.⁸⁰

The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls (or the Qumran Scrolls) and other early manuscripts in Palestine has enabled us to have a picture about the textual history of the OT books starting from about the third century BC and onwards. From the third century BC to about the end of the first century AD, it was the period of instability and fluidity of Hebrew texts.⁸¹ The study of the Qumran Scrolls shows that some Qumran manuscripts are closely parallel to what later became known as the Masoretic Text; others are similar to the textual tradition of the Septuagint, and still others resemble the textual tradition of the Samaritan Pentateuch. In other words, several text types existed concurrently during this period.

Only after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 AD, the establishment of the standardised Hebrew text began. From the text types transmitted before 70 AD the rabbis adopted one type of text, which could be called proto-masoretic; and the fixation of the text was probably complete around the mid-second century AD.⁸²

For our discussion, what is particularly significant is that this process happened after the Christian movement had started and also happened when the Jews and the Christians started to part their ways. Therefore, the discussion about the base text to be used in translating the OT should take this factor into account.

79. Ibid.

80. A succinct discussion about the origins of the OT texts can be seen in Barrera, *The Jewish Bible and the Christian Bible*, 291-300.

81. Barrera, *The Jewish Bible and the Christian Bible*, 284-90; Brotzman, *Old Testament Textual Criticism*, 42-46.

82. Barrera, *The Jewish Bible and the Christian Bible*, 279-80.

3.6. *The Textual History of the NT Books*

The textual history of the NT books started in the second half of the first century AD when the NT books were written. Two significant periods in the textual history of the NT documents were the persecution under Diocletian (ca.303-313 AD), and the age of Constantine (d.337 AD) which followed. One of the major characteristics of the Diocletianic persecutions was the systematic destruction of church buildings and also the MSS found in them. The result was a widespread shortage of NT manuscripts when the persecution ceased.⁸³ The tremendous growth of Christianity after Diocletianic persecutions caused the problem of lack of manuscripts even more acute. The outcome was then a period of “mass production” of manuscripts by large copying houses.

The exemplar used in such production centres was mainly related to the exegetical school of Antioch, which provided bishops for many dioceses throughout the east; and in such a way this type of text (i.e., the Koine text type) soon widely spread and eventually influenced the type of text (i.e., the Byzantine text type) used in the Imperial capital, Constantinople, later when entering into the age of Constantine.⁸⁴ The only region that was not influenced by this text type was probably the region around Alexandria of North Egypt, where the church was governed with a tightly centralised administrative structure. A different text type (i.e., the Alexandrian text type) was then probably produced here due to different church administration.⁸⁵

Between these two text types,⁸⁶ the Alexandrian text type, represented by most of the papyrus manuscripts and several uncial manuscripts of the fourth and fifth centuries, is considered by most of the textual critics today as the text type closest to the original, while the Byzantine text type, which can be found in about eighty percent of minuscule manuscripts and almost all the lectionary manuscripts, is considered by most textual critics as the least valuable one in reconstructing the original text because the editorial work done to this text type was mainly for practical, liturgical, or theological purpose and not for textual.

83. Aland and Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, 65.

84. See *Ibid.*, 65-66.

85. See *Ibid.*, 65.

86. The third major text type is the so-called “Western” text type. However, this text type was not as influential as the other two text types in the later history.

However, in the later history it was the Byzantine text type, as the Imperial text, that circulated the widest. When Erasmus edited his Greek text, he generally followed this text type and his Greek text later became the “*textus receptus*” behind the German Luther Bibel and the English King James Version. Only until the nineteenth century AD, did scholars begin to challenge the authority of the “*textus receptus*” with the Alexandrian text type, as the later is closer to the original.

3.7. Some Observations

From the above survey, we may have the following observations:

Firstly, the canonical forms of the biblical texts that we have today are actually the results of collecting and editing in a very long period of time and this process actually happened within the context of a believing community or several believing communities. Therefore, their authority cannot be understood merely in terms of their authorial dimension. Our survey shows that the belief, the situations, and the interests of the believing community or communities all played roles in the formation of the canon. The different beliefs and interests of the faith groups in the Hellenistic period result in the co-existence of different views about the scope of canon. And it is probably because the early Christians held a view of “open canon” of the Hebrew Scripture that they were able to include the “New Testament” books as the second part of the biblical canon, which has equal authority to, if not higher authority than, the authority of the *Tanakh*. The contention about the canonicity of the books of Revelation and Hebrews also demonstrates how the situations and experiences of the believing communities affected the formation of the canon. Therefore, it is probably appropriate to say that the collecting and editing should be understood as the active engagement of the believing community or communities in the formation of the biblical canon. The believing community or communities were the recipients and readers of the biblical books while, at the same time, they were also the locus in which the canon or canons were established.

Secondly, to say that the believing communities actively engaged themselves in the formation of the canon does not mean that the believing community or communities took full control of the formation of the Bible just according to their beliefs, needs, or interests. There were criteria of canonicity that were more-or-less independent of the situations of the believing communities. As our survey shows, despite of their differences of canons in the Judaism of the Hellenistic period, all socio-religious groups agreed on the authority of the Torah, many agreed on the authority of the Prophets, and none viewed contemporary works as authoritative.

Barrera therefore rightly observes that “the process of establishing the *Old Testament canon* was guided by the basic criteria of *authority* and *antiquity*” and “sacred character was accorded to books which could prove a Mosaic or prophetic origin, going back to a period before the time when the continuous succession of prophets was finally broken.”⁸⁷ For the NT canon, the formation was not merely determined by contingent historical factors, either. As Gamble observes, “the church also engaged in a reflective evaluation of its literary and theological heritage, and in setting apart certain documents as specially authoritative, it appealed to certain principles.”⁸⁸ Among these criteria we can find apostolicity, catholicity, orthodoxy, and traditional use.⁸⁹ Although these criteria were not used with great rigor or consistency, the existence of these criteria indicates that the tradition started with Jesus’ teaching and his cross and resurrection was a crucial determining factor in the formation of the NT canon.

Thirdly, the “closure” of the biblical canon probably cannot be understood in a theological fashion as the completion of collection of the inspired books of divine origin. This is not merely because inspiration was not one of the major criteria for canonicity as discussed earlier.⁹⁰ This is also because, on the one hand, there never existed a canon that was recognised universally by all believing communities, and on the other hand, after the establishment of the OT and NT canons, especially during the time of Reformation, the canonicity of certain biblical books were still discussed and even some of them were excluded from the canon for certain believing communities as a result.⁹¹ Therefore, the “closure” of the biblical canon is better understood as the stabilisation of the biblical canon, and probably more correctly, the stabilisation of the biblical canon in a particular believing community because the reality is that different believing communities have slightly different canons. It is, therefore, not the inspired nature of the canonical books but the tradition of the believing community that maintains the stability of the biblical canon and prevents it from addition and alteration. Thus, it is probably crucial to clarify “whose canon” that we are dealing with in the first place whenever we deal with the issue of canon.

87. See Barrera, *The Jewish Bible and the Christian Bible*, 153.

88. Gamble, *The New Testament Canon*, 67.

89. *Ibid.*, 67-71.

90. See also *Ibid.*, 71-72.

91. Regarding Luther’s view on OT and NT canon, a good survey can be seen in Fricke, “The Apocrypha in the Luther Bible,” 46-55.

Fourthly, due to the limitation of the textual witnesses of the OT documents and the instability and fluidity of Hebrew texts before its fixation at the end of the first century AD, the reconstruction of the autographs of the OT documents are probably something unattainable. What the textual critics could achieve is probably only the archetype or archetypes. Therefore, the nature of the choice of the base text for Bible translation is basically a choice between traditions. One implication of this is that in terms of text the scriptural authority of the OT has more to do with the tradition as well as the believing community passing on the tradition and not so much, if any, to do with the authorial dimension of the text. A doctrine for the scriptural authority resorting to certain inspired authors is then probably not very meaningful as this kind of formulation cannot be proved or falsified. However, to say that it is a choice between traditions is not as simple as the choice between the rabbinic tradition of the Masoretic Text and the Christian tradition of the Septuagint as Müller tries to argue.⁹² The facts that Origen tried to compare the differences between the Hebrew and the Greek texts and that Jerome used the Hebrew text as the base text for his *Vulgate* suggest that the early Christians, at least some of them, were well aware of the Jewish root of Christianity and attempts have been made to bridge the gap between the two. Any solution for the base text for Bible translation should take into account both the phenomenon that during the period of textual fluidity Christians and Jews did use different text bases and the fact that in later history some of the Christians, especially in the west, did try to reconcile the two. Since the textual choice for the OT is mainly a choice of traditions and in view that the textual traditions of later believing communities can always be traced back to the textual choices done in an earlier period, in addition to the above two factors, the tradition of the believing community to which the target audience belongs may also be respected and considered in Bible translation.

Fifthly, in comparison with the textual phenomenon of the OT it is more possible to talk about the reconstruction of the “autographs” for the NT documents in view of the vast amount of witnesses and the early dates of some of them. It is therefore possible to judge which text type is closer to the original in comparison with other text types for the NT documents. This is not the sole reason that a text which is close to the original is preferred in Bible translation, though. A probably more important reason for this is that, unlike the situation of the OT documents, the NT documents are records closely related to a particular historical person and a

92. Müller, *The First Bible of the Church*.

particular historical period and, to have reliable information about this person and this period, the reconstruction of these documents as witnesses to this person and this period is therefore essential. The textual tradition or traditions established in later history are not unimportant, but these later traditions should not override the significance of the reconstruction of the original because it is through the latter that a fuller picture of that person and that historical period can be reconstructed.

4. Other Factors to Be Considered: From Recent Critiques of Inspiration and Reformulations of the Theology of the Scripture

At the end of his article, Lewis laments that, “the view that Scripture text went through a long period of being sacred story before it became sacred text and the view that texts were early accepted because they came from what was believed to be an inspired origin are views not reconcilable with each other.”⁹³ In view of the above survey, what one needs to do is probably not to reconcile these two views but to reformulate the doctrine of scriptural authority in light of the history of the formation of the Bible. Before we propose our formulation, we shall firstly survey some of the critiques and reformulation of the doctrine of inspiration.

4.1. Paul J. Achtemeier

Paul Achtemeier’s groundbreaking work, *The Inspiration of Scripture*,⁹⁴ is probably the first attempt to challenge the authorial view of inspiration by resorting to contemporary biblical scholarship. In this book, Achtemeier argues that the fundamental problem with both the liberal view and the conservative view is that they rest on the prophetic model of inspiration, which a modern, critical understanding of the way the Bible came into being has rendered obsolete.⁹⁵ In line with the observations presented above, Achtemeier thinks “much of [the] material in both Old and New Testaments was assembled to serve functions within the religious community. The material was inspired by the community’s experience, was told for the benefit of the community, and hence owned its origin more to a communal than to an individual.”⁹⁶ Therefore, he proposes that the locus of inspiration is not

93. Lewis, “Some Aspects of the Problem of Inclusion of the Apocrypha,” 187-188.

94. The revised and expanded edition is published in 1999 with the title, *Inspiration and Authority: Nature and Function of Christian Scripture*.

95. Achtemeier, *The Inspiration of Scripture*, 99; his critique of the two views, see also chap. 2.

96. *Ibid.*, 102.

the authors but the interrelationship of tradition, situation, and respondent.⁹⁷ In other words, the people who were inspired were not the authors but the readers, who understood themselves by way of the traditions passed unto them from the past, and used and modified the traditions in facing and responding new situations.

Achtemeier is well aware that the reading or hearing of the written Scripture does not necessarily lead to understanding it or accepting its witness as true; some further act is necessary before the words of Scripture are able to convince the reader or hearer of their truth.⁹⁸ He thinks that this “further act” is the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit (*testamonium internum Spiritus Sancti*) and because of this internal testimony of the Holy Spirit, “inspiration does not cease with the production of the writing, but must also continue with the reading.”⁹⁹

One of the strengths of Achtemeier’s formulation, or reformulation, of the doctrine of inspiration is that, unlike the conservative formulation, it is fully informed by contemporary biblical scholarship and at the same time, unlike the liberal formulation, it does not sacrifice the authority of the Bible for critical scholarship. However, it should be noted that this reformulation has changed entirely the semantics of the term “inspiration” from the process of writing to the process of reading. Considering that traditionally the term “inspiration” has been understood in the former sense, we would ask whether this is still the best term used for describing the scriptural authority.

4.2. John Goldingay

This question is actually one of the starting points of John Goldingay’s work, *Models for Scripture*. Thinking that the nature of the Bible cannot be conceptualised by merely one model, Goldingay proposes to use four models in formulating the doctrine of the Scripture. He defines these four models as “Scripture as Witnessing Tradition,”¹⁰⁰ “Scripture as Authoritative Canon,”¹⁰¹ “Scripture as Inspired Word,”¹⁰² and “Scripture as Experienced Revelation.”¹⁰³ Goldingay associates these models

97. See *Ibid.*, 134, see also the discussion in 124-34.

98. *Ibid.*, 137-8.

99. *Ibid.*, 138

100. Detailed discussions see Goldingay, *Models for Scripture*, 19-82.

101. Detailed discussions see *Ibid.*, 83-198.

102. Detailed discussions see *Ibid.*, 199-284.

103. Detailed discussions see *Ibid.*, 285-371.

mainly with different genres appeared in the Bible. Scripture as a “witnessing tradition” is associated with the narrative books with their concern to pass on testimony to the events of Israel’s history and the history of Jesus; Scripture as “authoritative canon” is associated with the instruction material in the Pentateuch and elsewhere; Scripture as an “inspired word,” both human and divine, is associated with the prophecy; while Scripture as “experienced revelation” is associated with those “experiential-reflective” material appearing in the poetic books and in the epistles as well as the strictly revelatory material in the apocalypses.¹⁰⁴ Goldingay does not suggest that each of the models is only applicable to certain particular genres and, hence, particular parts of the Bible. In the discussion of each model, he also explores the many ways that other models are related to this particular model when the Bible as a whole is understood in terms of this particular model.¹⁰⁵

Goldingay’s approach deserves close critical engagement and some of his presuppositions may need discussion. For example, whether different genres can be seen as having different natures and, hence, used as different models is still a question to be discussed. Even if different genres can be seen as the realisations of different natures of material, it may be a bit over-simplified to view the Torah just in terms of the genre of authoritative canon or to view the Prophets in terms of the genre of “inspired word.” In the Torah we have both law and narrative and it would be very difficult to separate these two in a way that everyone will agree, while the narrative sections of the prophets are also hardly to be understood in terms of “inspired word.” Therefore, the situation can be more complicated than what he presents. Despite these minor shortcomings, Goldingay successfully draws our attention to the richness, multiplicity and complexity of biblical material which cannot be reduced merely by a single over-simplified formulation or model; and this richness, multiplicity and complexity should be fully appreciated in any formulation of the doctrine of the nature of the Bible.

4.3. *G.W. Bromiley*

In his article “History of the Doctrine of Inspiration,” Bromiley briefly surveys the conception and development of the doctrine of inspiration in early Church, patristic period, medieval Church, Reformation, Post-reformation period, and eighteenth century Rationalism from the viewpoint of historical theology.¹⁰⁶ In his

104. *Ibid.*, 18.

105. See *Ibid.*, chaps 6, 13, 18, 24 and 25.

106. Bromiley, “History of the Doctrine of Inspiration,” 849-54.

view, the early Church's view of inspiration was affected by the Jewish or Judaistic understanding, which is a very high doctrine of inspiration. However, this high doctrine of inspiration carried with it a threefold danger: (1) it tended to abstract the divine nature and authority of the Bible from the human authors and situation; (2) it clearly abstracted the Bible from the object of its witness when it failed or refused to see in Jesus Christ the object of its witness, thus being left with a mere textbook of doctrine, ethics, and ceremonies; and (3) in rejecting Jesus Christ it refused the witness of the Holy Spirit, so that in its reading, the OT was deprived of its living power.¹⁰⁷ To him, the reason that orthodoxy since the Post-Reformation period has been "so feeble and ineffective in claiming the Bible and its inspiration for itself in face of [the] upsurge of the human spirit" is that orthodoxy itself has adopted "an abstract, schematised, and basically Judaistic understanding of inspiration."¹⁰⁸ Since orthodoxy no longer had full confidence in the witness of the Spirit but had to find for the Bible rationalistic support, the Bible became a mere textbook of dogmatic truth rather than a concrete and living attestation of Jesus Christ.¹⁰⁹

In Bromiley's view, the role of Holy Spirit in inspiration is not limited to the notion of the giving of messages through human speakers or writers with the activity of the Holy Spirit. "What is given by the Spirit must be read in the Spirit," and "To the objective inspiration of Scripture there corresponds the subjective illumination of the understanding."¹¹⁰ "Without the Holy Spirit [the Bible] can be read only at the level of the human letter."¹¹¹ The doctrine of the Scripture, therefore, cannot be formulated independent of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

5. Alternative Approach: from the Perspective of the Believing Communities

In view of what we have surveyed, the proper place for the discussion of the doctrine of the Scripture is probably not under the doctrine of God, as normally done in doctrinal or systematic theology, but under the doctrine of church (ecclesiology) as well as the doctrine of the Holy Spirit (pneumatology). The need to shift the discussion from under the doctrine of God to under the doctrine of church and the Holy Spirit is that, according to our survey, the authority of the Bible probably

107. *Ibid.*, 849.

108. *Ibid.*, 853.

109. *Ibid.*

110. *Ibid.*, 849.

111. *Ibid.*

does not come from its authorial dimension but is an outcome of the conscious engagement of the believing community or communities as the recipients of various writings available to them under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The weakness in using the term “inspiration,” understood as the Holy Spirit’s influence upon the writers to render their writings, as the theological foundation of scriptural authority is then apparent. This authorial approach does not help us to appreciate the dimension how the Holy Spirit guided the believing community in their recognition and appreciation of the scriptural authority and, eventually, to form the biblical canon for themselves. “Inspiration” in this sense is nothing more than one of the channels that God revealed and communicate himself to his people but by no means the ultimate reason of the authority of the Bible.

However, if “inspiration” is still to be used as a theological term for scriptural authority, a semantic shift is necessary. “Inspiration” should be understood not just as the influence of the Holy Spirit in the writing process but, probably more important, his guidance in the process of recognising the authority of the Scripture and properly understanding its contents. In other words, for the discussion of the authority of the Bible the “inspired people” is probably more important than the “inspired authors” or “inspired texts;” and the theological formulation of scriptural authority should include the description how the believing community, also being the community of the Holy Spirit, were “inspired” in the formation of the Bible in the history.

Even the composition and editing of the books that later became part of the Bible should be viewed and understood from within the context of the believing community. For both the OT and the NT, the authors and editors were not “outsiders.” They composed and edited for the benefit of the community and only writings coming from within the believing community or from the traditions with which the community identify themselves were accorded with authority. Should the authors and editors be viewed as “inspired,” it is because their works were eventually recognised as part of the authoritative Scripture by the people who were, and still are, “inspired” by the Holy Spirit.

The notion of “inspired people” allows the co-existence of slightly different canons and texts for different believing communities. The differences were probably mainly caused by the different traditions that the communities inherited and the different situations that the communities were facing and responding to.

However, the phenomenon of the co-existence of several canons has never been too diversified to have a unity among them. This diversity in unity suggests that, from the viewpoint of the believing communities, there is still a centre and focus for the biblical books.

This centre or focus of the biblical books is the historical person, Jesus the Nazarene, and the historical period of his birth, teaching, crucifixion, and resurrection. All NT documents were later developments because of this historical person and this historical moment; and even the inclusion of the Jewish Bible as part of the Christian Bible was because the Christians believed, and still believe, that Jesus is the Messiah promised and prophesied in the Jewish Bible. Therefore, the primary significance of the Christian Bible should reside in its witness to Jesus Christ. Since the Bible is out of the work of the Holy Spirit, it should also be viewed as part of the witness of the Holy Spirit for Jesus Christ. Having Jesus Christ as the hermeneutical centre of the Bible also implies a kind of philosophy of history, that not all historical moments have equal significances. The climax of the history should be the cross of Jesus Christ our Lord.

According to this understanding, the domain that the Scripture exerts its authority also needs discussion. To associate the authority of the Scripture with an “inspired people” implies that this authority is by no means a kind of universal authority which is recognised by all people, though those who subject themselves to this authority believe that all people should be subjected to this authority. Therefore, the subjection to the scriptural authority is actually the social boundary marker of the believing community, who believe that the Bible has the final say about truth, salvation, and morality. As a matter of fact, this is probably the real point of the injunction of 2 Tim 3:16: the Scripture is “inspired” because it is useful “for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (NRSV). Without the proper functioning of teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness, the Scripture is hardly said to have any authority at all over anyone.

6. Implications of This Alternative Approach in Bible Translation

If the above formulation is followed, for Bible translation both the issue of canon and the issue of text should be discussed in light of the relationship between the Bible and the historical period of Jesus’ birth, teaching, crucifixion, and resurrection as well as in light of the tradition and history of the believing community or communities.

For the OT, the instability and fluidity of Hebrew canons and texts during the time of Jesus should allow a more flexible approach to the decision regarding canon and base text. The first Christians were in a situation that both Hebrew and Greek texts were used and several text types for both were current when they recognised and confessed Jesus Christ as the Lord. In other words, the Holy Spirit bore witness to the first Christians through various texts and text types, and the instability and fluidity of canons and texts did not prevent the first Christians from being guided by the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, however, the situation that early Christians' self-awareness of having Jewish root encouraged them to reconcile the differences between the Greek text that the Christians used and the Hebrew text that the Jews used after the standardisation of the Jewish canon and text in the early second century AD. When we take into account these complex historical factors together and understand them theologically according to our formulation discussed above, we may say that the issue of canon and base text for the OT in Bible translation should allow variations. We need to trace carefully the history of the tradition of the believing community in question on the one hand, while on the other hand we need to maintain the Jewish roots of Christianity as a whole. The effort to find a balance between the two is by no means a compromise of the integrity of the Bible; it is actually the expression of our respect for the fact that the Holy Spirit who has guided this particular believing community with a particular canon and text until now is also the one who has guided the whole body of Christ until now.

For the NT, the slow recognition of the canonical status for Hebrews in the west and for Revelation in the east showed the struggling of the early Christians with the different situations confronted by them, while the fact that, despite different challenges faced by different churches, eventually most of the churches could agree on the extent of the NT canon can probably be interpreted and concluded as the result of the guidance of the Holy Spirit. As to the phenomenon that some of the Eastern Churches still do not recognise fully the canonicity of Revelation, it is because in the early period of these traditions the special situations confronted by them prevented them from drawing benefit from this book subsequently. This should also be interpreted as the Holy Spirit's guidance for these particular groups and it is similar to the situations for the OT canon and text as discussed above.

For the established canonical NT books, the conviction that the climax of the history is the cross of Jesus Christ should be the controlling factor for the decision for the base text in Bible translation, especially if Bible translation is to be

understood as an activity within the believing communities. As discussed earlier, *since all NT documents are records closely related to a particular person and a particular historical period*, the base text used for translating them should be as close as possible to the original. The textual traditions developed in later history, though bear significance of their own, should not override the significance of the reconstruction of the original.

7. Hermeneutical Implications of This Alternative Approach

The approach to the scriptural authority proposed here has several implications regarding biblical hermeneutics:

7.1. Jesus Christ as the Hermeneutic Centre

Firstly, since for the believing community the centre and focus of the biblical books is the historical person, Jesus of Nazareth, and the historical period of his birth, teaching, crucifixion, and resurrection, the hermeneutics of the scripture of the believing community should be characterised by its proclamation that Jesus Christ is the Saviour for all and the Lord for all. This is not to say that the Bible cannot be read literarily, psychologically, ideologically, politically, or in any other possible ways. The Bible is a collection of texts and, therefore, it is entirely legitimate to read the Bible in exactly the same ways as we read other texts, both sacred and secular. The readings generated by the people outside the believing community are not necessarily inferior to the readings generated inside the believing community. As a matter of fact, in Church history there have been occasions that Christians learnt from outsiders regarding the reading of the Bible. Reformers' adoption of the humanistic hermeneutics during the time of Reformation is just one of many examples of this kind. However, what marks the biblical hermeneutics of the Christians as unique should be their conviction that the Bible as a whole, both the OT and the NT, is to witness Jesus Christ as the Lord. This conviction should be the characteristic that distinguishes Christian "emic" reading strategy from other non-Christian "etic" reading strategies.

To say that Jesus Christ is the hermeneutic centre of Christian biblical reading does not mean that any kind of allegorical or anachronistic reading is legitimate as long as we can "read out" Christ from the text, however. In terms of hermeneutic principles and methods, the way that Christians interpret biblical passages should be exactly the same as the way that people interpret any other text. The difference

between the two is basically to do with viewpoints and concerns but by no means to do with principles and methods. In fact, only when Christians share the same hermeneutical principles and methods with people outside the believing community, can true dialogue and meaningful proclamation be possible.

For Christian community life, to say that Jesus Christ is the hermeneutic centre of Christian biblical reading also means that any reading deviates from or contradicts this focus probably cannot be seen as genuine Christian reading of the Bible. By using this focus as the touchstone of Christian biblical reading, the believing community can safeguard themselves from all kinds of novel, strange and eccentric readings of the Bible.

7.2. Authority Requires Submission in Action

Secondly, if the subjection to the scriptural authority is the hallmark of the believing community, the discussion of scriptural authority cannot be limited only to the theoretical and intellectual level without stepping into the level of praxis. The ultimate goal of Christian biblical hermeneutics, then, will not only be the apposite understanding of the meaning of the biblical text, but it will also be the appropriate responses and actions in light of the situations and challenges faced by the believing community. Authority requires submission in action, not just agreement in words.

7.3. The Significance of Tradition in Biblical Hermeneutics

Thirdly, the approach proposed here implies the significance of tradition in Christian biblical hermeneutics. Since the Bible was formed in the context of a believing community or several believing communities, and it was passed onto us through believing communities, in our reading of the Bible the traditions of believing communities cannot be overlooked. This is not to say that a Christian coming from the Presbyterian Church should read the Bible in a strictly Calvinistic way or a Lutheran should read the Bible in a strictly Lutheran way. The point here is that the meaning of a text is not merely determined by itself but also enriched and clarified by its context and its intertextuality. Textuality is not something self-sufficient. If the content of the Bible is centred at a historical person and a historical period which is outside the textual world of the Bible, we need somehow to listen to the tradition or traditions that passed on the Bible to us, even if in a critical way, when we listen to the messages in the Bible.

7.4. *Different Canons, Different Experiences*

Lastly, the phenomenon that since the very beginning of Christianity there has never existed a canon which was accepted by all believing communities reminds us that we need to respect the differences and diversity of other believing communities on the one hand and to learn from one's own tradition that passes on the unique form of canon and texts on the other hand. If we believe that the Holy Spirit who allots to each one individually according to his choice also allots to each believing community individually according to his choice (cf. 1Co 12:11), it should be more than acceptable that the Holy Spirit guided different believing community in a slightly different way with a slight different canon and text due to the different challenges experienced by them. Therefore, the reality that different believing community has a slightly different canon and text should not be the point for contention. On the contrary, this should be seen as an opportunity for all believing communities to appreciate the richness of the guidance of the Holy Spirit in which we can experience both the unity and the diversity, and in all kinds of diversity there is still a unity, which is the proclamation of Jesus Christ as the Lord. The more dialogue exists among different believing communities, the more the abundance of God we could experience and also the more the way that the Holy Spirit has guided the believing community to which we belong we could appreciate and treasure. Diversity implies opportunities: opportunities to have a broader mind and opportunities to understand oneself afresh.

Rev. Dr. Kuo-Wei Pent
13949, 28 Avenue
Surrey, British Columbia,
Canada Y4P 1T5

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