

Crieff Study Weekend
28-30 March 2014

Is the Bible a Sure Word of God?
Origins, Canon and Biblical Narrative

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Outline

- Friday** Presentation (1)
 The Origins of the Bible: Two Approaches.
- Sabbath** Presentation with discussion (2)
 Canon and Church: Canonization and the Question of
 Ultimate Authority
- Presentation/Sermon (3)
 The Treasure in the Jar of Clay: Understanding the Divine and
 Human in Scripture
- Presentation (4)
 Bible as Story: From the Death of Scripture to a New
'Revelation'
- Presentation (5)
 Bible as Worldview
- Informal session
- Sunday** Presentation (6)
 Bible as Sure Word of God
- Wrap up and summary

Introduction to the Topic

One of the last persecutions that hit the Christian church, before it became a recognized religion, was Diocletian's persecution. It lasted about 9 years from 302/3 AD to about 311 AD. This persecution gave the church a final impetus through which some key questions about the Christian Bible were settled.

In Thessalonica we have an account of 3 Christian women Agape, Irene and Chione. These three women were interrogated by the prefect Dulcitius of Thessalonica who inquired: 'Do you have in your possession any writings, parchments or books of the impious Christians?'

Chione replied: 'We do not sir. Our emperors have taken these from us.'

On the next day when Irene was once again brought before the court, the prefect asked: 'Who was it that advised you to retain these parchments and writings up to the present time?'

'It was almighty God' - Irene replied - 'who bade us love him unto death. For this reason we did not dare to be traitors, but we chose to be burned alive or suffer anything else that might happen to us rather than betray them.'

After sentencing the young women to be placed naked in a public place, the prefect gave orders that the writings belonging to them were to be burned publicly. The account concludes by describing how, in March and April 304, the three became martyrs for their faith by being burned at the stake.¹

It is a very moving story and for us who live in religious freedom perhaps a very shocking one. The question of the weekend, "Is the Bible a sure word of God?" (whether or not they had the 'Bible' as we have it today) was undoubtedly answered positively by them. They gave their life as their answer.

We live in a different age and a different context and so perhaps for us the question "Is the Bible a Sure Word of God?" has a different connotation. We, today, have the Bible. In fact, we have it in many languages and even in its original languages. It is not illegal in most countries to own a copy, or even ten, if you so want. For us, perhaps the question of the Bible is linked with the question of its origins. Can we have trust in what we today call the Bible?

For the early Christians the gap between their time and the apostles' time was not that big. They did not ask the same questions but they also, at some point, discussed both texts and their origins.

¹ Herbert Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, (Oxford, 1972), 281-93.

I will suggest to you right at the beginning that it is normal and natural to ask if the Bible is a sure word of God. But we have to take careful steps to unpack the hidden rooms and sub-questions that the title, "Is the Bible a Sure Word of God?," is hiding.

The Design of the Presentations

In fact the question for this weekend is very clever. Because it does not say 'Is the Bible a Sure Word?' That would also be an appropriate question to ask. But that is not the question for the weekend. Have you noticed? If it was the question, then it would be enough if the subtitle contained only 'origins' and perhaps 'canon.' But the real question of this study weekend is 'Is the Bible a Sure Word *of God*?' This little addition at the end 'of God' adds a twist to our investigation of the possible answers. This is why the strap line includes also the expression 'Biblical Narrative' and not just 'origins' or 'canon'.

We will take systematic and progressive steps to answer the question. Each presentation will build on the previous ones and through each presentation we will get deeper into the discussion. So the presentations are meant to work together. However, I will also try to sum up at the end of each presentation what we learned. So if you come for just one or two you should be able to get the blessing out those. But really, the series has been designed in such a way that you will gain the full blessing of the topic or the presentations when you hear all of them.

Thus, for example, today's presentation aims at opening the discussion and laying a certain foundation. We will look at the question of origins of the Old Testament (OT) texts. Tomorrow we'll follow up, in the second presentation, with the subject of origins and canon of the New Testament (NT) texts. The third presentation/sermon will focus on the key aspect of why canonization happened - the inspiration of the biblical material. Then, in the afternoon and on Sunday, I will follow up by discussing the question of biblical composition or structure and its relation to the main question.

In many ways the first three presentations will be preparatory as ground clearing sessions and foundations' laying sessions. The last three, from Saturday afternoon on, will be the building sessions. The presentations and the topic will not be complete after the first three. So there will be gradation in the presentations and an element of progressive revelation or unfolding of the answers to our main question for this weekend.

I hope the organization of the material will make sense to you, if not immediately then when we come to the third or fourth session. I hope, by that time, it should be fairly clear what we are doing and why we are approaching the question this way. So, we will attempt to clear the ground today and begin to build the foundations.

The Origins of the Bible: Two Approaches

Let's start with the basic questions that could be asked right at the beginning:

Why would the way the Scripture is composed be relevant for the question of biblical authority, interpretation, or whether it is a word of God or indeed a sure word of God? Will a discussion about the origins of the Bible lead to a deeper relationship of trust towards what we call the Bible today? Is there a beliefs link, a direct link, between our belief or thinking about this book and the way the book was written and put together and how it came to be? And if we learn about how it came to be, would that lead us into a deeper trust towards the book or create, in fact, distrust towards the book? Which one, if any?

There are two basic models or ways the question of origins and the composition of scripture could be approached. The first is based in the historical investigation of available data and the drawing of conclusions regarding what this data means for the Bible and our reading of it. The second is a model based in the internal investigation of the Bible's structure and its themes as we have it, in its current form from about 4th century AD. Both are based on certain specific assumptions and lead to specific hermeneutical models. What is more, both have been tried out in the history of the church. The first could be termed the **inductive historical model**, the second the **deductive composition model**.

Inductive Historical Model

Both the classical medieval, and the 19th century model of getting under the skin of the Bible, are based on investigation of the historical data with an underlying assumption that scripture is like other works of human composition. So what applies in the case of other writings of antiquity in terms of its human transmission process, must – it is assumed – apply also in the case of the Bible. Surely this process could shed some interesting and important light on how the scripture was composed and whether the current text of the Scripture is comparable with the oldest manuscripts. What all this data however, in the end, implies about the nature of Scripture, is a somewhat unrelated matter.

The question of the composition of the Bible and the question of the nature of the Bible are not directly related questions. In other words, there is no direct correlation between the composition and origins of the Bible or its transmission process and the question of its nature. The relationship is not consequential. The question of scripture's nature and its interpretation could simply be related to the content of the Bible as such.

In other words, the content of the Bible could reveal something about the nature of the Bible. Maybe it does...

This is, then, a very different approach to the subject of Biblical authority from the classical medieval or especially 19th century approaches.

The 19th century scholarship, based on the humanist historical assumptions, has investigated the scripture and found that there are various traditions and composers behind it. As a consequence of this approach, it chopped the Bible into various segments, traditions and texts and suggested to us that we need to understand these in order to fully appreciate the original meaning of the texts and what the Bible is about.

Many 16th century humanists devised these models of philological and historical investigations. The problematic part is that we have become so familiar with this approach that we take it uncritically as a given model or way to understanding the nature of Scripture and its interpretation. We are completely blind to a radically different model that also is available to us.

Secondly, the deeply problematic part of this historical investigation of the origins of Scripture is that it has suggested a specific hermeneutical model of reading the Scripture which became known under the umbrella of Historical-critical methods.

So there is direct correlation between the purely human historical investigation of the composition and origins of Scripture and the hermeneutical method. So, as useful as historical investigation is, we should be mindful that it is based on specific assumptions about how history of composition or texts works and, by default, it could be overlooking the relevance of the internal message of the Bible by leading the reader to specific models of reading.

For example, by default almost anyone assuming and following this model would look at the Bible as a diverse material made of various traditions and texts. Hence, the reading - hermeneutics - would not even think about trying to bring together various traditions into a coherent and united vision.

Even in the latest books on the nature of the Bible, such as one published in 2012 *What is Bible?* one author, Gabriele Boccaccini in his essay, argues powerfully against using the terms Bible and biblical. He argues that the major deficiency of the term Bible is that it is theologically loaded and thus has 'devastating consequences of reading sources through a canonical lens.' He then goes on to present clearly what he believes to be the current scholarly mission: 'Our scholarly energies should entirely concentrate today on tearing down the canonical boundaries that still affect the study of ancient Jewish and Christian literature.' Instead of 'Bible' and 'biblical,' he suggests using the term

'ancient Jewish literature.'²The suggestion of Boccaccini is simple, we should investigate what we call the Bible without theological or canonical assumptions about its origins and just follow a pure historical approach. This option then is very much alive today.

Deductive Composition Model

The other alternative is a deductive structural model of investigating Scripture's nature and authority. By default, this approach would look at the Scripture's final form, as we have it today, and would focus on the Bible's own voice, read it with an eye to the unity of the material and not assume diversity in the first place. The canonisation process, which was centuries long and thus a several generations-long process, itself suggests that it was assumed possible to collect books and writings with different origins and authorships which on a the basic level display overall unity. In this view, if the basic collection process of what we call the canon, or Bible today, suggests overarching unity why would the reading be concerned – in the first place – with diversity of the material? In this sense the question of the editorial composition of the Scripture is secondary to the question of the canon. How do we open the question of canon when it was a one-time-event? Who can go back and say today that we would do it differently? Would we select books or writings on the basis of scientific language and historical basis?

The primary question of what is the Bible is not answered by understanding the composition process. It is answered by hearing the Bible's own testimony in the first place.

This is then the outset of how we can approach the question of the Bible's nature. The suggestion is not that we should altogether forget the historical investigation of the Bible's origins, but that we should equally carefully listen to the Bible's narrative and overall structure, because we may be surprised by what we can hear through this listening process.

Now, let's start with the first model - the historical investigation model - and listen to what kind of evidence it provides us with on the question of origins and on the question of the Bible's trustworthiness.

A Survey of the Biblical Origins of the Old Testament Text

When we use the phrase biblical origins what we mean is the history of the transmission, copying and preservation process. We do not study the actual origins - how the very first text was born - but rather what happened to the biblical texts once they appeared in public life. How did they developed into many copies and variations?

² Karin Finsterbusch and Armin Lange, eds., *What Is Bible?* Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology 67 (Leuven: Peeters, 2012), 433 pages.

Are these copies similar, or diverse and how do we know which text provides the 'original' reading? These questions are studied by three specific historical textual methodologies: Source Criticism, Redaction Criticism and Text Criticism methods. First, I will turn specifically to Source Criticism and attempt to provide you with a summary of this field of investigation as it applies to the Old Testament (OT) and tomorrow to the New Testament (NT) text. We begin with the Old Testament 'origins'.

1. The Masoretic Text (MT) of the Old Testament

'Masoret' means 'tradition'. The contemporary text of the OT is based on the, so called, Masoretic form of the text. It is a text from 1008 AD, technically called B19^a. It is stored in the library of St Petersburg and it serves as a blueprint for all translations of the OT. The final version of the Masoretic text was a result of labours of exclusively Jewish scholars or writers who worked on the text until it was finished in the 12th century AD. Until the time of the Reformation, Christians did not work on the original text of the OT.

What was the task of the Masoretes about? What did they work on? For most of the time - about 5 centuries - they worked on adding vowels to the consonants. That is on vocalization of the text, which in old manuscripts and papyri appeared without any breaks and in consonant form only. By adding vowels they suggested a specific reading of the text. Without vowels the consonants have broad meanings. So vocalization was an important step in assuring there is an authoritative text that is clear in its basic meanings of words.

The complete collection of the OT text itself, or what we call the OT today, or the OT canon was also a result of a centuries' long process. However, we do not know much about the OT collection or canonization process. We have information about it, for example from the school in Jamnia, where some scholars think that steps were taken to canonize the books of the OT into an authoritative collection. Maybe there was even a synod where this was discussed and decided, but some scholars argue that no such synod happened. Nonetheless, around 100 AD there is some evidence (for example from Josephus Flavius



around 100 AD claimed that after this time nobody dared to change anything on the text) that the OT canon was more or less accepted in the form in which we have it today.

Still however, the OT text was not entirely uniform. For the next 900 years plenty of work was be done on the text. The key work was the punctuation or vocalization of the text. That was an extremely difficult and slow process, because different punctuation systems existed. One was a Babylonian system, another a Palestinian system, still another a Tiberiadian system which eventually proved the most useful and, by the 14th century, was also accepted. Secondly, the masoretic scholars left, deliberately, evidence of their own editing in the OT text. There are 6 different editing categories in the current text of the OT that were left there for future generations to consider. These categories of editing suggest that the masoretic scholars either did not know what to do with the text or they deliberately altered the text for various purposes. Those types of changes are called:

- (1) **Puncta Extraordinaris** - Extraordinary Points. In 15 places there are 'points' above verses or words which indicate reservations among the masoretic scholars about the text.
- (2) **Nun Inversum** - Inverted Nun. 9 times, in Numbers 10 and Psalm 108, an inverted form of the Hebrew letter for 'N' - 'nun' - appears. Why? Nobody really knows today. Scholars speculate that the letter indicated that the masoretic scholars had some reservations about the text.
- (3) **Sebirin** - Assumptions. There are about 350 words in the OT which are highlighted by the masoretic people and they suggest that the copyists might have made a mistake at this place. They suggest the copyists used their own wording.
- (4) **Ketib and Kere** - Write and Read. Where the masoretic people have reservations about words, for whatever reason, they suggested, by using this particular punctuation mark, that it would be read differently from how it was written. For example God's name appearing in the form of a tetragram 'YHWH' was suggested to be read aloud as 'Adonaj' or 'Elohim'. So the actual written text would contain the word YHWH, but the reader would read aloud 'Adonaj,' instead. There are about 1300 ketib-kere changes.
- (5) **Tiqqune Soferim** - Scribal corrections. There are 18 places where the masoretic scholars have removed some 'too-anthropomorphic' images. For example Gen 18:22 originally stated 'The LORD (YHWH) stood before Abraham'. Because to stand before somebody, metaphorically, means 'to be in someone's service' (1 Kings 12:6),

for dogmatic reasons they changed the text to read 'Abraham stood before the LORD (YHWH)'.

- (6) *Itture Soferim* - Scribal omissions. The Babylonian talmud mentions that in 5 places the conjunction 'vav' is omitted. Moreover in 7 other places words that should be read are not mentioned.

This work on the text of the OT was so detailed that the masoretic people and the scribes who worked on the text counted every word of each book, section and verse and even every letter of the OT text. Thus for example they could say that the precise mid-point of the Torah is in Lev 11:42 in the word 'gachon' (belly) and it is the letter 'vav' which is punctuated as 'o' - וָחֹן.

2. OT Manuscripts

We don't have time to be comprehensive so we have to mention only the key manuscripts. The oldest and the rarest manuscripts of the OT text that we currently have are from the 9th and 11th century AD. A rich collection of Hebrew manuscripts is in the Saint Petersburg's library, as well as a good number of fragments.



The Great Isaiah Scroll 1Q Is a



Peshet Isaiah b 14Q162

In 1947, close to the Dead Sea, the so-called and today well-known *Dead Sea Scrolls* or *Qumran Scrolls* were found. These findings contained



Qahelot 14Q109

hundreds of text fragments and even whole OT books, like the book of Isaiah. What follows now is a chronological attempt to highlight the most relevant manuscripts we have today. A good scholarly, yet very readable, introduction into the content and significance of the scrolls is provided by the official web page of the Biblia Hebraica text: www.bibliahebraica.com.



The Great Isaiah's Scroll from cave no1 - 1Q Is^a. This is probably the oldest manuscript we have. Dating suggests 4BC- 2BC, which is about 1200-1400 years older than the oldest manuscript we had up until that time in St. Petersburg. The Great Isaiah Scroll measures 695 x 27cm (23 feet x 11

inches). The text of the scroll suggests a big number of differences from the masoretic text. The critical text of the Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia mentions 1375 variations and at the same time the text does not consider grammatical variations which could be as high as 4500. So the Great Scroll of Isaiah is not a very careful text as it was not copied with

great precision. The reasons for that could be various. Technically such a text is called a vulgar text, because it is not very precise. For example, another find of Isaiah's book (1Q Is^b), even though only in fragments, suggests a very careful copying process and the similarity with the MT text is much greater. Nonetheless, having said all this, there is a great overlap between the MT text and the text of Isaiah (1Q Is^a).

The Habakkuk Commentary 1Q^p Hab -

This is an interesting piece of text from the first century BC. It contains broken fragments from a commentary to the book of Habakkuk. The pieces we have contain a number of quotations from chapters 1 and 2 of Habakkuk and then the commentary follows. There are a number of variants from the MT text that deserve the attention of scholars. One being that God's name, YHWH, is written in the old Hebrew way or alphabet. However, the overall text displays amazing similarity with the MT text.



The Habakkuk Commentary 1QpHAB

The Psalms Scroll 11QPs - from about 30-50 BC.

Contains 41 canonical psalms and 7 apocryphal ones.

The sequence of these psalms is different from the MT text. The purpose of this scroll was probably liturgical, serving as a kind of hymnal, hence the differences. The scroll also contains God's name written in the old Hebrew alphabet.



The oldest OT fragment found other than Qumran is called **The Nash Papyrus** - The Nash Papyrus is a second-century BC fragment containing the text of the Ten Commandments combining both the Ex 20 and Deut 5 versions, followed by the Šema' in Deut 6:4ff. Prior to the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, it was the oldest known manuscript containing a text from the Hebrew Bible. The manuscript was originally identified as a lectionary used in liturgical contexts. Probably, it was a fragment of a prayer. Due to its age this small fragment is very important.

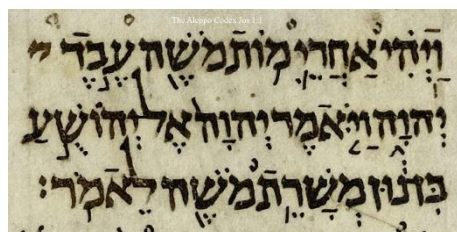
Apart from those already mentioned, there are other significant manuscripts which provide us with evidence of how the text of the OT we have today developed. Among those are the **Cairo Geniza Collection**. The Cairo Geniza is a collection of some 300,000 Jewish manuscript fragments that were found in the geniza or storeroom of the Ben Ezra Synagogue in Old Cairo, Egypt. These manuscripts outline a 1,000-year continuum (870 AD to the 19th century) of Jewish history and comprise the largest and most diverse



collection of medieval manuscripts in the world. The Genizah texts are written in various languages, especially Hebrew and Aramaic. The biblical fragments of the collection go back to 5 AD and these shed light especially on the work of work of masoretic scholars from Tiberias, near the Sea of Galilee, and their vocalization system.

Of similar value are the Ben Asher handwritten manuscripts, today called **Ben Asher Codexes**. Ben Asher was a descendent from a long line of Masoretes. His father, Moses ben Asher, is credited with writing the **Cairo Codex of the Prophets (C)** (895 AD). It is among the oldest manuscripts containing a large proportion of the Hebrew Bible. Umberto Cassuto used this manuscript as the basis of his edition of the Hebrew Bible. Aaron ben Asher himself, added vocalization and notes to the **Aleppo Codex**, correcting its letter-text according to the masorah. The last two manuscripts belong to the group called codexes.

The **Cairo Codex of Moses ben Asher**, from around 895 AD, is regarded as one of the oldest codex which contains former and latter prophets. Also called **Codex Cairensis**, it contains the complete 2nd section of the Hebrew Bible - the Prophets - Naviim



However the oldest codex which contains the whole text of the OT Bible together in one piece is the so called **Aleppo Codex**. This comes from the first half of the 10th century AD. Here, once again, Moses ben Asher was instrumental in vowelization of the text. His

vocalization was very careful because he wanted the text to be used as the blueprint text for later copying. And indeed, scholarly investigation of the text demonstrates that there are very few errors among the roughly 2.7 million orthographic details. The vocalization itself was meant to provide an explanation of why such reading is suggested.

The text itself, however, was damaged in 1947. Now, one quarter is now missing. Unfortunately, the section of Gen to Dt 28:12 as well as books of Daniel, Ezra, Ester, Qohelet are missing. Today the codex is in Jerusalem. Several books have now been published about the text, but the full scholarly report is yet to be released by Jerusalem scholars.

The **Leningrad Codex (L)** is the oldest complete Hebrew bible still in existence today. While there are older codex's of Bibles still in existence, like the Aleppo Codex, they are not the complete text of the Hebrew bible so do not contain all the books of the Bible. The Leningrad Codex is considered



one of the best examples of the Masoretic text represented by the Ben-Asher family. It is dated 1008 AD.

Apart from these, there are other important codexes such as the **Codex Babylonicus Petropolitanus (P)** from 916 AD which contains major prophets (Isa, Jer and Ez) and 12 minor prophets. The significance of this one lies in the fact that it follows a western masoretic, babylonian punctuation system. Then there are three codexes **E1**, **E2** and **E3** which are so the called **Erfurt Codexes**. They come from the 12th to 14th centuries.

Apart from these, there are a number of codexes and manuscripts which we know existed but are not in our possession. For example, there is the **Severus Scroll** (a lost manuscript from the 1st century AD) then the **Codex Hilleli** (from 6AD) as well as the **Codex Muggeh**, **Codex Jericho** and **Codex Jerushalmi**.

What we can learn from this discussion is that the large number of manuscripts reveal, on one hand, a huge number of variations which are mostly grammatical in nature. On the other hand, we also see a great deal of similarity and uniformity between various manuscripts and their texts. This second observation points to a strong overall sameness of the OT text. Consequently, one can have reasonable trust, based on literary evidence, that what we today have as the text of the OT Bible was the historical text of the Jewish people.

3. The Non-Hebrew OT Texts

Beyond the MT of the OT and its manuscripts there are two or three other major texts of the OT which do not share the same roots as well as a number of OT texts, in other than the Hebrew language, which are very old.

One of the key texts of the OT is the Greek translation of the Hebrew text called the **Septuagint (LXX)**. The translation began in the 3rd century BC and was complete in 132 BC. A number of other OT translations are based on the LXX text. Among these are Syrian, Coptic or Slavonic versions. So it is an important text. It is also important because the NT writers used the LXX text to a significant degree. In terms of the quality or similarity of the translation to the MT Hebrew text, the LXX is more or less a rather loose, or very contemporary, translation. Some scholars even say it is more like an interpretation than a translation. Secondly, the Septuagint contains apocryphal books which the MT does not contain. This especially proved problematic, since the Old Latin translation of the OT was based on the Septuagint, when the Christian church began to use the list of books suggested by the LXX text.

The Samaritan Pentateuch is another version of the OT text different from MT roots. While this one is in the ancient Hebrew language it shows considerable divergence from

the MT text. There are about 6,000 variations, out of these about 1,900 are non-grammatical and about 4,000 grammatical. There are also dogmatic and chronological variations from the MT.

Among other historical translations which shed light on the OT text are the **Aramaic Targum, Syrian Translation (Peshitto)** and the **Vetus Latina, Vulgate** and **Coptic Translations**. Space does not allow us to consider these, but there is plenty of discussion available about them either in printed books or electronically.

By way of a brief summary, we can say that the evidence of the OT origins leads us to the following three conclusions:

- (1) The MT text of the OT, alongside the other OT manuscripts, provides us with the same sensible text without any major variations. The OT text we have today, in English or other translations, is based on the best critical text of the OT which takes into account the most relevant variations. It is a sensible and consistent text which we can trust and use.
- (2) If there are departures or divergence from the MT in other texts or manuscripts, we have to follow the MT and consider the textual variations as a secondary reading.
- (3) If the other texts suggest different but probable readings from the MT, and there is no evidence of a secondary origin or of influence on these other texts, it is still important to give primacy to the masoretic reading.

The study of the origins of the OT thus suggests that indeed the MT is a solid and well-handled text.

Summary

In Biblical studies the area of specialty that deals with all these questions of sources is called Source Criticism. Apart from Source Criticism, scholars also developed Redaction Criticism and Textual Criticism methodologies to do redaction, historical and grammatical surgery on the Bible. While source criticism is (and to some degree textual criticism could be) a useful tool because it is concerned with the original form of the biblical texts, under the influence of purely humanist assumptions (meaning that the same conditions of textual development and formation apply to the text of the Bible as to other books of human production) these methodologies, in the past, lead to fragmentation of the Bible into various reading and source variants, editorial traditions and textual variants. Thus, the investigation could easily blind the reader of the Bible by focusing on the human aspects of the biblical text. Under the influence of strong historical or humanist assumptions these, in the past, lead to questioning the text and the interpretation of the Bible.

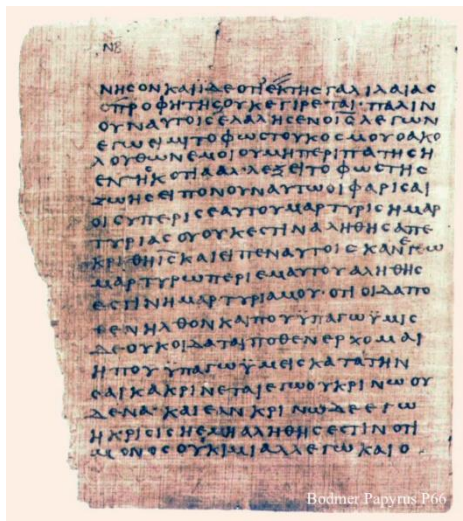
Indeed the history of the Historical Critical methods demonstrates that this was one of the unintended results of Biblical studies. This created a crisis of confidence in the Bible and also in its message, because the methods of source, redaction and text criticisms are closely linked with the hermeneutical task itself. What we perceive the text is, as a result of historical investigation, dictates what interpretation approach we will follow. In other words the focus on the origins of the Biblical text, that is on its human origins and the human transmission process, led to a specific hermeneutical-interpretative enterprise. Over time this began to undermine the invisible element of the Bible - its divine origin and message.

However, there is another complementary approach which we can follow. We can listen to the importance of what source and text criticism tell us but we can also accept with confidence that the overall value of the text does not lie in its historical evidence but in its divine credentials. How one sees and appreciates the divine credentials is a matter of assumptions and consequently a matter of a different approach; and to this we will turn from Saturday afternoon.

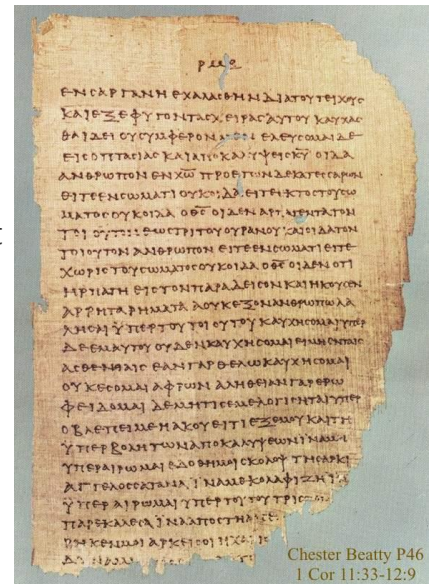
Canon and Church: Canonization and the Question of Ultimate Authority

The Text of the New Testament

Yesterday we discussed the question of the origins of the OT and also two ways we can approach the ultimate question of the authority of the text. Turning our attention to the NT, this morning we will look specifically at the question of canon and church and the tension that exists between these two with regard to which has the ultimate authority and why.



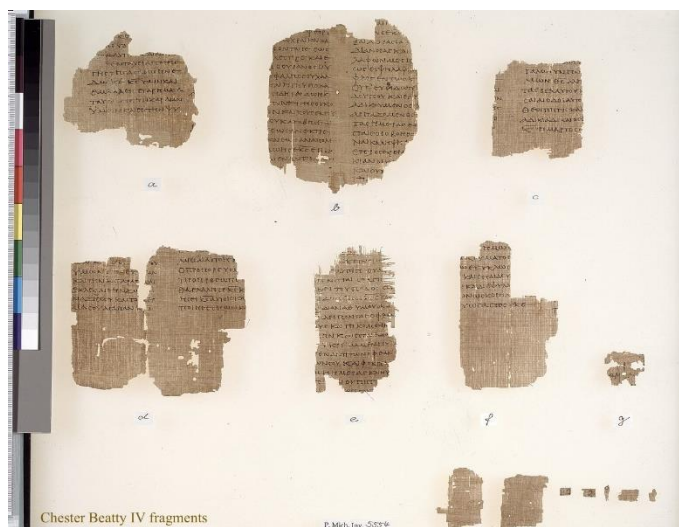
I will, briefly, start with the technical subject of the origins of the NT text and then move to the canon and authority question.



Source and textual criticism, as methods, deal with the identification of manuscripts and removal of transcription errors in the texts of manuscripts. The New Testament has been preserved in more than 5,800 Greek manuscripts, 10,000 Latin manuscripts

and 9,300 manuscripts in various other ancient languages, including Syriac, Slavic, Ethiopic and Armenian. Even if the original Greek versions were lost, the entire New Testament could still be assembled from the translations.

As far as manuscripts are concerned, we have plenty of them. How to know which ones are older and more reliable, as far as the originality and authenticity of the text is concerned, is precisely the task of source and text criticism. Over the years they developed their methods and means. The introduction to the United Bible Societies' NT text, the 28th Edition is



the latest version, contains a short and yet quite detailed discussion of how, what and why the manuscripts were used.

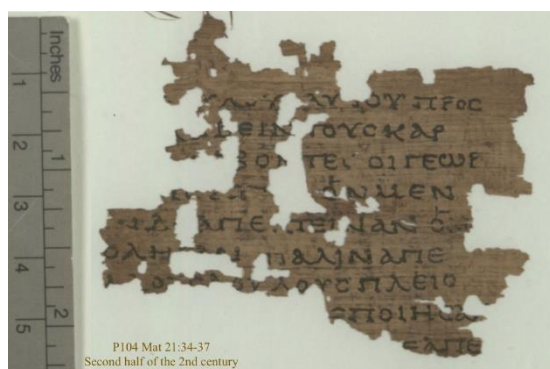
I'll say here that the earliest NT fragments we have today are from the early 2nd century. One of the early fragments is the **Chester Beatty Papyri**, especially **P⁴⁵**, **P⁴⁶** and **P⁴⁷**. These contain NT portions from gospels and Pauline letters. Secondly, also from the 3rd century, the so called **Bodmer Papyri** (**P⁶⁶** is the oldest in the Bodmer collection, dates to about 200AD). The **P⁷²** (3rd and 4th Centuries), **P⁷⁴** (7th Century) and **P⁷⁵** (early 3rd Century) are also well-known and contain fragments of gospels, Acts and general epistles. Also, among the oldest papyri fragments we have available for reconstructing the NT text are **P⁶⁴** dated to about the year 200AD, then **P⁶⁷** also dated to about the year 200AD.



Probably the most famous of all the NT manuscripts is a small, but well-preserved, piece containing the text of John 18:31-33 on one side and verse 37-38 on the other side. It is called the **Papyrus Rylands or St. John's Fragment**



and has a technical name of **P⁵²**. The dating of this small fragment suggest that it was written in the early decades of the 2nd century, probably between 100 and 150 AD. Some claim the year 117 AD and some 138 AD. Nonetheless, it is a very old fragment which confirms that the text of the Gospel of John, which was probably written very late in the 1st century AD, maybe around 95/96AD, was very soon copied and used by Christians. Of course, having this old piece of the gospel means we can check the later papyri and manuscripts and see whether the text has been altered or not.



Also among the oldest ones are two fragments - papyri **P⁹⁰** and **P¹⁰⁴**. They do not have any other fancy names, only technical names. Both of them come from the late 2nd century AD. The **P⁹⁰** contains the text of John 18:36-19:7 and **P¹⁰⁴** the text of Matthew 21:34-

37, 43 and 45. You can find the full list of all NT papyri nicely organized in a table form on various online sites.

One thing that, perhaps, is worth mentioning, is that in the process of sifting through

750		019, 0101, 0114, 0156, 0205, 0234	ⲡ ⁴¹ , 095, 0126, 0127, 0146, 0148, 0161, 0229, 0233, 0238, 0250, 0256	07, 047, 054?, 0116, 0134
800		044 (Catholic epistles)	044 (except Catholic epistles)	
850	33 (except Gospels)	010, 036, 0155, 0271, 33 (Gospels), 892, 2464	012, 025 (except Acts, Rev), 037, 050, 0122, 0128, 0130, 0131, 0132, 0150, 0269, 565	09, 011, 013, 014, 017, 018, 020, 021, 025 (Acts, Rev), 030, 031, 034, 039, 041, 045, 049, 053?, 063, 0120, 0133, 0135, 0136?, 0151, 0197, 0248, 0255, 0257, 0272, 0273?, 461
900		1841	0115, 1424 (Mark)	1424 (except Mark), 1841
950	1739 (Catholic epistles, Paul)	0177, 0243?, 1739 (Acts), 1891, 2329	051, 075, 0105, 0121a, 0121b, 0140, 0141, 0249, 307, 1582, 1836, 1845, 1874, 1875, 1912, 2110, 2193, 2351	028, 033, 036, 046, 052, 056, 0142, 1874, 1891
1050	1175, 1243, 2344	81, 323, 945, 1006, 1854, 1962, 2298	28, 104, 181, 323, 398, 424, 431, 436, 451, 459, 623, 700, 788, 1243, 1448, 1505, 1838, 1846, 1908, 2138, 2147, 2298, 2344, 2596?	103, 104, 181, 398, 431, 451, 459, 945, 1006, 1448, 1505, 1846, 1854, 2138, 2147, 2298
1100		256, 1735	1735, 1910	256
1150	1241 (Catholic epistles)	36, 1611, 2050, 2127	1 (Gospels), 36, 88, 94?, 157, 326, 330, 346, 378, 543, 610, 826, 828, 917, 983, 1071, 1241 (Gospels, Acts, Paul), 1319, 1359, 1542b, 1611, 1718, 1942, 2030, 2412, 2541, 2744	1 (except Gospels), 180, 189, 330, 378, 610, 911, 917, 1010, 1241, 1319, 1359, 1542b?, 2127, 2541
1200			1573	1573
1250	2053, 2062	442, 579, 1292, 1852	6 (Catholic epistles, Paul), 13, 94, 180, 206, 218 (epistles), 263, 365, 441, 614, 720, 915, 1398, 1563, 1641, 1852, 2374, 2492, 2516, 2542, 2718?	6 (Gospels, Acts), 94?, 180, 206, 218 (except epistles), 263, 365, 597, 720, 1251?, 1292, 1398, 1642, 1852, 2374, 2400, 2492?, 2516
1300			1342	
1350		1067, 1409, 1506, 1881	5, 209, 254, 429 (except Paul), 453, 621, 629, 630, 1523, 1534, 1678?, 1842, 1877, 2005, 2197, 2200, 2377	5?, 189, 209, 254, 429 (Paul), 1067, 1409, 1506, 1523, 1524, 1877, 2200
1400			2495	
1450		322	69, 205, 322, 467, 642, 1751, 1844, 1959, 2523, 2652	69, 181, 205, 429 (Rev.), 467, 642, 886, 2523, 2623, 2652?
1500			61 (epistles, Rev), 522, 918, 1704, 1884	61 (Gospels, Acts), 522, 918, 1704
1550-			849, 2544 (Paul)	2544 (except Paul)
		0245	ⲰⲚⲟⲓ, ⲰⲚⲁⲓ, ⲰⲚⲟⲓ, ⲰⲚⲟⲓ	
600	ⲡ ²⁶	ⲡ ⁴³ , ⲡ ⁴⁴ , ⲡ ⁵⁵ , 083	ⲡ ³ , 0164, 0199	
650	ⲡ ⁷⁴ , 098	ⲡ ¹¹ , ⲡ ³¹ , ⲡ ³⁴ , ⲡ ⁷⁹ , 0102, 0108, 0111, 0204, 0275	ⲡ ⁵⁹ , ⲡ ⁶⁸ , 096, 097, 099, 0106, 0107, 0109, 0145, 0167, 0183, 0200, 0209, 0210, 0239, 0259, 0262	ⲡ ⁷³ , 0103, 0104, 0211
700		ⲡ ⁴² , ⲡ ⁶¹	ⲡ ⁶⁰	

the thousands of manuscripts the scholars had to come up with a **categorization** of these which would indicate the value of the manuscript and hence provide a rule as to which reading of the text of the manuscript takes precedence if two or more vary. So the biblical scholars began to use categories 1-5 and place manuscripts into these. The rule, then, is that Category 1 manuscripts take precedence over Category 2 manuscripts and they are preferred over Category 3 manuscripts and so on. A good visual representation of this categorization, which includes many manuscripts, is in 'Categories of New Testament Manuscripts' as a Wikipedia article.

Apart from these early, but fragmentary, sources of the NT texts there is a good number of manuscripts which contain the whole NT text. Among these, the most famous ones are the **Codex Sinaiticus** - 01 (or **A** from the 4th century), **Codex Alexandrinus** - 02 (or **A** from the 5th century) and **Codex Vaticanus** - 03 (or **B** from the 4th century). The latter is stored in Rome and, as a matter of possible irony, it does not contain the book of Revelation. All three of them are Category 1 manuscripts.

The sheer numbers of manuscripts we have at our disposal (from which we can reconstruct the best text of the NT with a high degree of certainty that what we have today is the text that early Christians also used) when compared with other literature,

are a matter of interest. For example, the earliest copies of *The Jewish War* by Josephus (originally composed in the 1st century AD), come from nine manuscripts written in the 10th, 11th and 12th centuries. After the NT text, the next best preserved ancient work is Homer's Iliad, with 650 copies originating about 1,000 years after the original copy. With the NT text we have tens of thousands of copies.

This is why one of the most influential NT scholar of the last century, F. F. Bruce, concluded that: 'the evidence for our New Testament writings is ever so much greater than the evidence for many writings of classical authors, the authenticity of which no one dreams of questioning... It is a curious fact that historians have often been much readier to trust the New Testament records than have many theologians.'³

We are today, as far as the text of the NT is concerned (whether in Greek or in English) in the position where we can accept the text with full confidence. Obviously, even with good historical evidence, the question as to whether the Bible is a sure word of God, or not, is not answered. The evidence only confirms that what we are reading today is, with a very high degree of probability, what came out of the pens of the NT authors: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul or Peter. But whether we would, based in this historical evidence, regard such text as a sure word of God is a larger and different question.

We need to understand how the Bible came to be regarded a sure word of God. And this is the question of canonization. It is through this process of collecting NT texts that they became recognized as authoritative, or having the divine stamp. Let's now turn to this process and see what it can add to our main question.

The Canonization Question

At least three important heretical movements - Gnosticism, Markionism and Montanism - made the church aware of the fact that something needed to be done in order to protect the church's integrity and uniqueness from other religions.

Gnosticism was a syncretistic movement and teaching that tried to mix together elements of Hellenistic philosophy with the Christian message. The result of this effort was a strange blend which, however, was appealing to many people who came from a Hellenistic background.

Gnostic teachers claimed to possess divine authority for their doctrines and claimed that they received secret revelation, handed down to them by the apostles. So they claimed, for themselves, divine authority and even connections with the apostolic teachings.

³ F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1981), 9-10.

Gnostics also undercut the authority of the OT by arguing that a lesser deity – the Demiurge – was responsible for inspiring the OT. So they produced their own collection of sacred writings. These writings contained NT portions but even these were drastically edited. Thus, Gnostic teachers employed an approach of asserting the authority of one text against that of another. OT was, for them, less – if at all – inspired and hence not relevant or authoritative.

Somewhat similar was the case with Markion. His heresy was mainly that of excluding all the OT references from the NT, largely because he was convinced that the god portrayed in the OT was a different deity from the God revealed in Jesus Christ. In Markion's thinking the OT deity was a god of wrath, judgment and anger. On the other hand, God, revealed in Christ by way of contrast, was a God of mercy and forgiveness and unrelated to the wrathful god of the OT. All his reasoning led Markion to producing his own canon.

And then there was the charismatic and apocalyptic group of Montanists who claimed to possess both direct revelations from God and direct Spirit leading. They emerged in the second half of the 2nd century. They taught that the heavenly new Jerusalem was shortly to descend. They soon began to pronounce spirit-oracles and these began to be collected as prophetic sayings. They also began to purify the church from worldly influence because of the immanence of the New Jerusalem. In 206AD their biggest success was the conversion of the famous church father Tertullian. Their emphasis on the continuous gift of spirit-inspiration, they claimed, made the church aware of the apostolic writings' inspiration and their place in recognizing what was inspired by the spirit of God and what was not.

Summary of the key implications of heretics:

1. Implications for a normative canon – It is clear from the works of these movements that the NT canon in the first 4 centuries is somewhat fluid. This led heretics to their own compilations of sacred books.
2. Implications for an understanding of inspiration – Heretical teachers differentiated between the inspiration of different books of the Bible, particularly between the inspiration of the OT and the inspiration of the NT. This proved very problematic for the church and it has massive implications for what is normative.
3. Implications for interpretation – The heretics' Hermeneutical approach was based on ambiguous passages that could be interpreted according to the taste of those who used them.

All these three implications for the canon, inspiration, and interpretation had serious ecclesiastical consequences for the whole church. What was the reaction of the church

to these serious theological threats? There was a double reaction. One was what we call the canonization process and the other was an emphasis on church tradition. Both these reactions developed simultaneously.

Development of the Canon

At the end of the 1st century, the OT canon was accepted in the form we have it in today. What was problematic, in relation to the OT canon, was the unclear relationship between Judaism and Christianity. The Christian church didn't want to be perceived as one of the branches of Judaism. Thus, on many occasions the Christian relationship toward everything Jewish was negative. This was also true regarding the canon. In this sense, Markion was just a visible case (or tip of the iceberg) of anti-Judaist tendencies within the early church. These tendencies are visible also in the works of some of the Apostolic Fathers. The works of, especially, Hermas and Didache contain examples of these tendencies. Thus, for example in Didache, the author encourages Christians to fast on different days of the week to Jews. In general, the problem with the OT writings was not a problem of which books were authoritative, but was rather a problem with the relationship to the OT writings.

The situation with the NT was a bit different. It was, particularly, the case of Markion that suddenly opened the church to doing more thinking about an authoritative written norm as a basis for its theology and organization.

Markion separated himself from the mainline church in Rome in 144AD. Six years later Justin Martyr wrote with high regard for all four canonical gospels. However, it was only later that a definitive collection of sacred books, based on apostolic tradition, appeared around the end of the 2nd century. This, so called, Muratori canon (Ludovico Muratori discovered it in 1740) was written about 170AD and it lists books for reading at public worship.

There were also prominent church fathers involved in the process of canonization. This included names like Irenaeus, Tertullian and Clement of Alexandria. For them there were two principles that helped to identify true canonical books: a) Principle of Apostolicity – the book must have been written by an apostle and b) Content of the book – inner consistency, its agreement with the rest of the Scripture and its conformity with Christian experience were the aspects that were taken into consideration.

The result was that at the turn of the 3rd century, the west had arrived at a fairly fixed New Testament canon. The East debated the canonicity of Revelation. In 325AD church historian Eusebius divided the books under the consideration for canonicity into three classes: Recognized, Disputed (a- those known to most Christians, b- those that were not genuine) and Absurd and Impious writings (included Gnostic works). If we combine

Eusebius' recognized books with the disputed books 'known to most' we have the 27 book collection of our current NT.

Then in the year 367AD, Athanasius of Alexandria issued a letter in which he endorsed the same 27 books that are mentioned by Eusebius. After that, two subsequent synods held in Hippo (393AD) and Carthage (397AD), under the leadership of Augustine, made the canon of the 27 books official.

In this way, by recognizing the normative canon as a normative source for the church, the church was able to deal with the flood of strange teachings. This leads us to further questions. What is canon? What is it for? And what does it suggest about the authority of the Bible or the authority of the church? And consequently, what does this process suggest about the Bible being a sure word of God?

Q: Theological implications regarding the canon – What is canon? - Discussion.

An important point to mention is that the church did not create the canon, but confirmed, or recognized it. The official collection did not come as the result of any official announcement. Instead, the official declarations merely confirmed that the church had long accepted these books as God's word.

Q: What is the difference between creating and confirming the canon? What are the implications of creating canon for the relationship of the church and scripture? What is the consequence in the second case?

Q: The Roman Catholic church claims that it can change laws... On what basis can they make such claims? > A: Relationship between the church and the canon. If the church created the canon then the church has a right to juggle its content.

Church Tradition

An alternative source of authority, parallel to Scripture, also developed in the church at the same time as the church was discussing which books were most authoritative and inspired by God's Spirit. This was the source of oral church tradition. As the church was developing, and also in the absence of a canon before the 4th century, the church relied on the living orthodox voice which was provided by the leaders and the many church fathers. Over time the bag of various statements and synod conclusions became rather big. Yet, while it may have contained even contradictory statements, it was thought of as a useful tool for establishing orthodoxy.

In many ways, as early church fathers like Ireneaus explained, it was necessary to appeal to the living voice of the church against heretical claims. However, as centuries passed the living voice of the church - the church's own tradition - became a trusted source of authority.

So when the NT canon was accepted by the church in the 4th century, it did not automatically sideline or subordinated the tradition source as less authoritative than Scripture. The church saw no dichotomy, or tension, between the two. In fact, some argued that because Scripture was not always interpreted in the same way within the church, it needed guidance on how to interpret and this came from church tradition.

Thus, the confessions of the church, and the dogmatic conclusions to which the respected church fathers arrived, became the boundaries within which Scripture was read. If the reading of the NT text suggested something different from what the voice of the church tradition was saying, than such reading was seen with suspicion and regarded as unorthodox and potentially heretical.



So in an ironic historical twist, the church accepted the canon of the NT as authoritative voice of God and at the same placed this voice into a specific box of church tradition. This understanding of the canon and tradition is confirmed by [the council of Trent from 1545-1563](#) which was one of the most important councils in church's history. It confirms that the church 'receives and

venerates with an equal affection of piety' both scripture and tradition.

Where does this leave Scripture, you may ask? The question of whether the Bible is a sure word of God was answered by the acceptance of the authority of the NT canon. The Bible, a collection of inspired OT and NT books that are authoritative was born. But, this was just one part of the story. Whether the Bible was allowed to function as the word of God with full authority and force is another question. It's sphere of divine influence was curtailed by the ever-growing amount of the living voice of the church.

Summary

Historically, the church recognized the Bible as God's word but it did not allow the Bible to behave like God's only word. What we can learn from this is that it is not enough to

confess the belief in the Bible as a sure word of God; the church must let the Bible *demonstrate* that it is a sure word of God.

It is a question of creating space for the canon of the Bible to speak to the believers in the church, with its own voice, and to tell them the story of God. It is through such speaking, and our hearing of the voice of the Bible, that we may actually discover (on a deeper level that is different to the historical level) that the Bible is a sure word of God because of what it will tell us about God.

The historical evidence of the NT texts and manuscripts may strongly suggest that our text is trustworthy. But such evidence, even though very appealing, will not automatically convince us that the Bible must be a sure word of God.

Equally the canonization process may strongly indicate that many generations of early Christians accepted the authority of the Bible books and even made them into a normative collection. But that, once again, does not automatically make us see and experience the Bible as the sure word of God.

It is my suggestion to you, that the Bible can manifest itself to us as a sure word of God even without or despite of all the historical evidence. Just like the living word of God - Jesus, when he was tempted by Satan to provide external evidence of his origin as the son of God, did not do it because he *was* the son of God and that needed no external proof since it would be demonstrated 'naturally' throughout his ministry - the Bible does not have to provide any external evidence that it is a sure word of God. It can simply do it by ministering to us, by exercising its divine credentials, which have power to bring us into a communion with the almighty God of the universe. It is then, in this encounter with the Almighty, that we realize the true value of the Bible.

It is when we ask to hear the voice of the Bible, and try to enable the Bible to speak to the church with its voice, that we can experience something no amount of good historical investigation and data will be able to do for our confidence in the Bible and its Author. And this is the direction where we really have to go to address the question of this weekend, and we will start doing that this afternoon.

**The Treasure in the Jar of Clay:
Understanding the Divine and Human in Scripture**

Introduction

Inspiration of the Bible? What is that? Maybe the title is expressive of your thinking this morning. Just out of curiosity, if I say inspiration of the Bible, how many of you have any idea what I mean? And how many of you have no idea?

Now, interestingly enough, if you look into the world of Evangelical or Protestant Christianity today (you read a book, or watch something) you very soon discover that inspiration has in fact been a major point of discussions in the recent decades. What's even more interesting, if you look into Adventism and read some of its publications, you'll also very soon discover that the inspiration of the Bible is a prominent topic of discussion in this church. It has been so in the past and it is still the case today.

Example: This book was, for example, published in 1992. (1st slide - Inspiration book).

Generally speaking, the 20th century has witnessed heated debates between liberals and evangelicals, and even among evangelical themselves, or even among Adventists. And so we pretty soon discover that talking about the inspiration of the Bible is not that far from Christians or Adventists.

But, I'd like to raise the following question at the beginning: Is it in fact important to discuss inspiration? What good can come out of it? The Bible says: "thy word is a lamp unto my feet." Does it matter whether we know how the lamp works and how it was constructed? Is not the most important thing that it shines, without explaining how? Will it not shine with its full capacity if we don't understand the working of it? How the inspiration process works?

The question of the importance of discussing inspiration is even more interesting when we discover that, historically, the church has not been interested in this question at all. Since I am teaching historical theology I can tell you that the church, for the first 17 centuries of its existence, did not discuss in any systematic or comprehensive way what inspiration is or how it works.

To make things even worse, it is maybe shocking to discover that the earliest beliefs on inspiration in the church were in a very mechanical, dictation type of inspiration. The earliest views held that Bible writers were so closely led by the Holy Spirit that they were basically just like passive musical instruments through which the HSP was breathing. Something like flutes or pipes. (Picture).

This very mechanical view of inspiration, which gave no freedom to the human writer,

basically prevailed, as the majority view, until the 17th century. You can go through the most significant books during this time (which you will probably not do) and find one after another subscribing to what we call, in theology, the dictation type of inspiration. A theory, which we today, by and large reject as utterly inadequate or misleading.

After 17 centuries however, there was a rapid rise in interest in discussing how the Bible came to be. Why? Because of what came to be known as the time of Enlightenment and because of the new, more precise scientific type of thinking which was born at that time.

Scientific advancements, progressively emerging from the 17th and 18th centuries, very soon pushed religion to redefine its theology and its main source - the Bible. So Scripture, and its composition, came under the scrutiny and precision of scientific accuracy. Within this context the doctrine of inspiration was born.

Christian thinkers and preachers began to defend the nature of scripture as being the word of God, and having its origin from beyond this world, originating in the mind of God Himself yet through the inspiration process being given to humanity. So the church began to defend the platform on which the church was standing, through the doctrine of inspiration.

Scientific, precision-requiring thinking demanded that if Scripture should stand the test of the time, the age of reason, then it should be made logically clear that as a document coming directly from God it is indeed precise and without any error. Scripture would need to stand a scientific test of rationality and survive under close scrutiny. Inspiration therefore very soon began to be defined in terms of inerrancy, infallibility, trustworthiness or reliability. The word "inspired" began to mean without error, fully trustworthy, fully authoritative and face to face with what science was suggesting.

So the doctrine of inspiration emerges as a kind of defense in the new rationalistic and scientific age. The question, whether it matters to discuss inspiration, has thus firstly a historical answer to it.

But, what about today? What about contemporary, present-day, March 2014 relevancy? Does it have any relevancy for you to discuss it, or do you just say: "Inspiration of the Bible, what is that?" Does it matter how this book came to be or what was the process behind it? Does it have a present-day importance for you and me today?

Let me try to suggest to you, this morning, that discussing the inspiration of this book may actually have something to do with how we read this book eventually. Let's put aside all the historical baggage, all the defensiveness that historically characterized the debate. What I am trying to say is that there is a link between inspiration and interpretation. Between what you think about its nature and composition of the book

and how you read and understand it. And this is where I think the current relevancy is for you and for me.

This is the second sermon in a series of four sermons dedicated to better understanding the Bible, its nature and its interpretation. Since the overall aim of this four-part series of sermons is better understanding and more meaningful reading of the Bible, maybe discussing inspiration may not be that far out of hand.

So I hope you're beginning to get the point of having this topic. What you think about the nature of inspiration impacts on how you interpret the Bible.

Dr. Ray Roennfeldt, the president of Avondale College in Australia, has thoroughly documented the existing relationship between what people think about Scripture and how they read it in his doctoral dissertation. Ray Roennfeldt's work investigated the life of one prominent Protestant theologian of the 20th century, Clark H. Pinnock, and the very significant theological change he undertook. Roennfeldt investigates why Pinnock changed his theology so dramatically.

And what is his conclusion? Pinnock shifted his thinking because he changed his concept of inspiration in the first place. When Roennfeldt sent his work to Pinnock, Pinnock responded that he never consciously thought about it, but when he really considers it now, it is indeed the case.

Ok, I think this may suffice as an introduction and you hopefully are beginning to get the point. Let's now look closer at inspiration itself. I hope I have raised your appetite for tasting this delicious cake, at least a little bit, by now.

The Basic Structure of the Biblical Inspiration Process

When it comes to Biblical inspiration, at the very basic level, we have to recognize that there exists what we can call a **tripartite structure**. What does it mean? It means that there are three parts to how inspiration works. (1) There is the inspiring agent, (2) the inspired agent (3) the result of inspiration. In other words, there is God, there is the recipient (a prophet/author not the reader) and there is the message (Bible). (Pictures).

In order to have a balanced view of inspiration we need to keep all three parts together. So the biblical inspiration would therefore begin with an intelligent inspiring agent, in our case God, who then through various ways (could be visions, direct revelations, and leading of His Spirit) imparts his information to the recipient who under further guidance of the Spirit of God records what God put on his mind. And the result is the actual writing, which we can call the inspired writing. So this is the basic process. All three parts, when taken together, constitute what we call inspiration (Picture of all three in a balloon and with arrows).

This structure can also help us to distinguish between human inspiration and divine inspiration. When, let's say, an artist or a musician claim inspiration, the process really needs only a bipartite structure. The inspiring agent in this case is basically the inspired agent, so there is no additional intelligent agent, beyond the author, necessary. The inspiration begins in the human mind of an artist and not outside of his/her mind (Picture of bipartite structure).

This is, however, not what the Bible writers claim happened in their case. Both the OT and the NT writers claim that what they have received did not originate in their minds, but that there was someone else beyond them who gave them the thoughts to write.

If we take any book of the OT we soon discover that authors are claiming divine and not human inspiration.

Just take the major OT prophets. Without exception they are repeatedly saying: The word of the Lord came to me... and then they write it down (Ezekiel 1:2, etc.).

And it was not just the Major Prophets who claimed those things, but also authors of various psalms in the Book of Psalms. Even David, who wrote few those psalms, claims unambiguously divine inspiration for what he says.

2 Sam 23: 1-3 *These are the last words of David: "The oracle of David son of Jesse, the oracle of the man exalted by the Most High, the man anointed by the God of Jacob, Israel's singer of songs. 2 "The Spirit of the LORD spoke through me; his word was on my tongue. 3 The God of Israel spoke, the Rock of Israel said to me (etc.).*

The situation is no different in the NT. In the NT the role of the Spirit of God was to lead the apostles to remember and to write what happened to Jesus of Nazareth (more about that in few minutes), so that every other generation coming after them would believe because of what they had written.

Then the book Acts of Apostles should not really be called acts of apostles, but Acts of the Spirit. Paul, when writing to his younger colleague Timothy, also firmly claims that, as NIV nicely puts it: "Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:16). There is, therefore, an apparent difference between human and divine inspiration. One is bipartite, the other is tripartite. Inspiration of the Bible has divine origin.

If we take seriously the structure of Divine Inspiration, then we can further develop our understanding of how it works. I would like to draw your attention to one significant analogy which is actually hidden within this structure. If you closely observe our structure you can see that there are two key elements contributing to the overall composition of the Bible. The Inspiring Agent is divine and the Inspired Agent is human.

And so we have divine and human agents contributing together to the final product.

[Incarnational Analogy or Christological Analogy](#)

It seems, thus, quite natural to extend to inspiration what we call a Christological analogy. This is how it looks ([picture](#)). This analogy is based on the similarity between Jesus Christ who has two natures, divine and human according to Scripture, and the picture which shows the structure also has two natures working together. There is a divine author and a human recipient, just as Christ is divine and also human through Mary.

Gospel of John can here help us. [John says](#) that Jesus was the word that was at the beginning with God and that he was not only with God but he was also God (John 1:1). This word then, [John explains](#) became flesh and dwelled among us and we could see him, touch him and listen to him. John says, “the word became flesh” (John 1:14). And thus Christians recognize the mystery of divine incarnation into human flesh in their confession about Christ.

Similarly we can extend [the analogy to Scripture](#). It has also two natures. It was written by humans, having human imprint, in the form of the language, culture, grammar, sentence structure and even the logic human authors are using. On the other hand we cannot really say that it is their work only, but rather overall, it is God’s word.

So if we read the pages of the Bible, we hear the divine and the human at the same time. They belong together. They may be distinguished but cannot be separated.

So we [can recognize](#) the two natures Scripture has, but we cannot separate the human from the divine and develop inspiration theory based only on one element. I think this is quite important to appreciate and so let me dwell on this for few moments.

If we, for example, begin to push a one-sided approach to Scripture emphasizing, let’s say the human element, we could easily end up questioning the veracity and truthfulness of Biblical records and be consumed by never-ending arguments about whether what the author writes is part of his own culture or part of the divine message. Pretty soon we could also end up discovering errors in Scripture and so begin to claim that Scripture is errant in many ways.

The second option of taking only the divine nature and developing our inspiration theory from this angle is also problematic. For instance, one pursuing this course is usually in danger of overlooking the individual contribution of its human authors, making God responsible for every statement. The Bible developed through this logic will eventually be seen as inerrant in every respect. The divine aspect guarantees full inerrancy of biblical records. What is more, the scripture using this logic soon becomes

something, which is easy to interpret because there are no human traces or cultural gaps to be bridged in the interpretation.

Both these one-sided attempts have been tried in the course of church history and even in Adventist history. I would, however, point out that a one-sided approach, favoring either human or divine agent, destroys the basic tripartite structure, which essentially explains the working of Biblical inspiration. An inspiration theory arising from this structure will respect both natures and it will also respect Christological analogy of two natures.

I'd like to propose to you how we can understand the nature of Scripture taking both elements seriously. My proposal is based on what natures do not mean, instead of what they mean. This is my proposal.

The fact that Scripture has divine nature means that it is not errant. And at the same time, the fact that Scripture has human nature means that it is not inerrant. Only by keeping these two concepts side by side, we can avoid one-sided conclusions regarding the inspiration of the Bible.

A balanced theory of inspiration will therefore teach that we do not meet the word of God in Scripture face to face, unveiled in its glory. But it, nevertheless, is unveiled to us in the humanity of its writers. So the nature of the Bible is fairly unique, and maybe even mysterious to us. And we may not understand all the minute details of how the composition worked, yet we can be assured by Scripture's own testimony that there is a divine treasure in this human book.

The Bible itself puts it this way: *"But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us."* 2 Cor 4:7. What is the treasure the apostle Paul mentions? Read verses 1-6 and you'll discover that he talks about the word of God and the gospel of Jesus. So there is a treasure in this book, but it is in jars of clay, not golden or crystal vessels.

Words of Ellen White also nicely illustrate the point: *"The Bible is written by inspired men, but it is not God's mode of thought and expression. It is that of humanity. Inspiration acts not on man's words or his expressions, but on the man himself. The divine mind and will is combined with the human mind and will, thus the utterances of the man are the word of God"* (1 SM 21).

If we take both natures seriously and equally into consideration, we might be in a better position and not misread or misinterpret what Scripture is trying to say.

The place of the reader

Looking at the basic structure of inspiration we can discover that something is, however,

missing from there. We have here the Inspiring Agent, the inspired agent and the Bible, but where am I as the reader in the whole process?

Well, the answer is that I am not part of the inspiration triangle. It is quite obvious. So if we have to place ourselves somewhere it needs to be outside this structure. (picture).

The best way in which we can illustrate the whole dynamic of inspiration and the place of the reader is through the words of the Gospel of John. Let's read those words.

But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. (14:26)

We usually interpret the text as talking to all followers of Jesus at all ages. But in fact that's not what the text means in the first place. After all, the Holy Spirit cannot remind those who have not heard Jesus about everything he said. The Spirit can remind me only what the disciples wrote about what Jesus said. So, in the first place, the text has a unique meaning for the disciples. Only in the second place can the text mean something to us as readers.

If we then take these important passages in these two meanings, in its primary meaning for the disciples and in the secondary for all other followers then we can see the dual work of the Spirit.

In the first case the Spirit is working primarily on the disciples who were made to recall and remember what happened. And they did it by writing their recollections into gospels. This is what we would call the inspiration. (picture)

But if we apply the text to followers and see it as a promise given to them, then we are not talking any more about inspiration, but illumination of readers. As readers of disciples' recollections we are not inspired but illuminated. We are not the authors, but the readers. (picture)

If we apply the text to disciples, it is referring to Scriptural formation. If we apply it to readers, it is referring to scriptural interpretation. These are two different things. The authors of the Bible participate in the first function, the readers in the interpretation of the final product of the authors. The first process is called inspiration, the second is called illumination.

And so I am sorry today that I have to tell you this, but in the biblical sense of the word you are not inspired. But I am on the other hand glad to tell you, the good news is that you can however be illuminated to understand what has been written. It is part of the package you get with this book. This right part of the promise is for us, the readers.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I'd like to say this. Because of the unique process, the scripture has a unique dual nature and so it requires a unique approach. Just as you would not read Shakespeare as a scientific paper or as an economical budget summary or as poetry, respecting the nature and the process of the composition of these materials, so we need to respect the process and the nature of the Bible as a book whose author is ultimately God himself.

As a book containing primarily knowledge of God and the truth about humanity, the world and the grand vision of the restoration of all things. Because of its process it is a book with its own divine perspective and so a book with a unique worldview which has power to shape our own worldviews if we approach it from its unique perspective.

Just following human literary theories of language or theories of historical reconstruction will not do full justice to the Bible's nature. These techniques only uncover its human layers, play with the jar of clay and don't discover the treasure inside.

The beautiful thing about understanding a little more about the inspiration of the Bible (I don't know whether I have achieved anything today) is that you'll also begin to appreciate its power. Apostle Paul, who once persecuted the church and stood against it, says there is power in the Gospel. In Greek 'dynamis' from which we have dynamite. There is dynamite inside that jar of clay my friends. Be aware of that and handle it, therefore, with care. So what shall we conclude about the topic of the inspiration of the Bible?

Only this: *I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile (Rom 1:17).*

(4) Bible as Story: From the Death of Scripture to a New 'Revelation'.

(5) Bible as Worldview

(6) Bible as Sure Word of God

In his justly famous work *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, Hans Frei showed that biblical criticism lost contact with the Bible's most prominent feature - its narrative shape. Frei questions whether a method preoccupied with historicity and scientific data search can yield a theology that does justice to the actual shape, content and thought-forms of the Bible.⁴

Michael Legaspi, a Harvard scholar, in his book *The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies* (2010) is also arguing that the 'kinds of philological, critical, and historical analyses associated with modern biblical studies,' already present in the late 17th century, over the course of the next two hundred years, lead to 'the death of Scripture'.⁵

Exploring the Bible as story and demonstrating practically its coherence is necessary. It is not academic statements that will make the claim believable or create faith in the Bible as a sure word of God that is as relevant today just as it was in the 1st Century AD. It is only when we engage practically, in the task of demonstrating what the sure word of God looks like, we can understand the claims of the two models to the origins and significance of the Bible for today.

Put differently, we have to cook the pudding and eat it together to 'know' what the pudding tastes like, whether it is as I am suggesting or if it tastes anything like what I am describing it to you as. It is one thing to make claims both ways regarding the origins of the Biblical material, but it is an entirely different matter to experience the result of the claims practically in our lives and beliefs. If the Bible is a sure word of God – what does it taste like? Is it anything we have so far experienced? Does it taste like the dogmatic historical theology that past church doctrines suggested? Or does it taste something else. So the next three presentations will try to demonstrate to you what the sure of God tastes like.

The presentations will not be based on pure intellectual exercise or clever theologizing, but I will try to present to you the drama of Scripture as the Scripture presents it and in fact I will aim to draw you into the drama of Scripture. Or put differently, the Scripture

⁴ Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in 18th and 19th Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1974).

⁵ Michael C. Legaspi, *The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies* (Oxford Studies in Historical Theology), (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 4.

itself – if it is a powerful and sure word of God – will be able to cut into the marrow of the bone, as Paul says.

Ellen White and the Question of Bible's Origins

Slides 4-9

Let's start with a short but very important passage from the pen of Ellen White. This is quite often overlooked but provides a fundamental framework for how we can and must approach the topic of allowing the Bible to draw us into its own drama of God.

A Seven-stage Narrative Structure of the Bible With a Central Theme

Slides 10 - 21

Genesis 1&2 and Its Implications

Slides 22-25

Ellen White and Biblical Worldview

Slides 25-31

Exodus 20:11 – “For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day...” (NIV) - there are two dimensions of reality: creation and the Creator.

Ps 8:3 – “When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained” (KJV) -

Job 38:4-10 “Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it? On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone - 7 while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy? 8 “Who shut up the sea behind doors when it burst forth from the womb, 9 when I made the clouds its garment and wrapped it in thick darkness, 10 when I fixed limits for it and set its doors and bars in place, (NIV) - Where were you when I created the world? There are two dimensions.

Isa 42:5 – “This is what God the LORD says-- he who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and all that comes out of it, who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it:...” (NIV)

Isa 45:18 - “For thus saith the LORD that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited: I am the LORD; and there is none else.” (KJV)

Isa 44:13-21 - "The carpenter measures with a line and makes an outline with a marker; he roughs it out with chisels and marks it with compasses. He shapes it in the form of man, of man in all his glory, that it may dwell in a shrine.¹⁴ He cut down cedars, or perhaps took a cypress or oak. He let it grow among the trees of the forest, or planted a pine, and the rain made it grow. 15 It is man's fuel for burning; some of it he takes and warms himself, he kindles a fire and bakes bread. But he also fashions a god and worships it; he makes an idol and bows down to it. 16 Half of the wood he burns in the fire; over it he prepares his meal, he roasts his meat and eats his fill. He also warms himself and says, "Ah! I am warm; I see the fire." 17 From the rest he makes a god, his idol; he bows down to it and worships. He prays to it and says, "Save me; you are my god." 18 They know nothing, they understand nothing; their eyes are plastered over so that they cannot see, and their minds closed so that they cannot understand. 19 No-one stops to think, no-one has the knowledge or understanding to say, "Half of it I used for fuel; I even baked bread over its coals, I roasted meat and I ate. Shall I make a detestable thing from what is left? Shall I bow down to a block of wood?" 20 He feeds on ashes, a deluded heart misleads him; he cannot save himself, or say, "Is not this thing in my right hand a lie?" 21 "Remember these things, O Jacob, for you are my servant, O Israel. I have made you, you are my servant; O Israel, I will not forget you. (NIV) – Idol worship is to worship the wood instead of the Creator of the wood. It is wrong because it confuses the creation with the Creator.

John 1:1-14 – There are two dimensions: the trinity and everything that is created. V.4, life is something given by God which means that there is no life apart from God.

Colossians 1:15–19 – Through God's power everything was created, both the visible and the invisible. All things were made by Christ and continue to exist through him. The universe is therefore not spinning by itself; it stands in a radical dependency on the other dimension. There are 2 parts in Col 1:15-19. Both parts start with similar expressions> "os estin eikon" v15 and v 18 with "os estin arche". In part one we find Christ as a Creator and Sustainer and in part two we find Christ as Redeemer. So part one confirms the biblical worldview on creation.

Hebrews 1:1-3 – Hebrews opens with two fundamental statements: God is, and God speaks. All that follows in Hebrews hangs on these affirmations. Johnson says: "We can neither prove or disprove these statements. They are presuppositions, the building blocks of the universe of thought" (William Johnsson, The Abundant life, Hebrews, p 37). Later in the Hebrews the writer says: 11:6 "The person who comes to God must believe that he exists..." That is the way that we come to know him. So God is the first and major assumption of Hebrews." It's the same assumption that can be found in Gen 1.

The second assumption of the book is that God speaks. God's major activity is speaking. Two times is confirmed in the Hebrews that God's speaking creates the universe (1:3, 11:3). Moreover Heb. shows the trinity and thus shows that there is something more about God that is found in the OT. He is sustaining all things through his powerful way. Sustaining means that something is being held and therefore is dependent.

Acts 17:24-29 – It is God who made the world and everything in it. He is the one who gives breath and everything else. We are therefore not serving him; he is serving us. Whatever we need, God is supplying it on an ongoing basis. In him we live and move and are, shows that we are depending on God for everything. If everything depends on God sustaining, then God has to be connected to it. His presence is essential.

[God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands;] The Epicureans held that the world was not made by God, but was the effect of a fortuitous concourse of atoms, yet this opinion was not popular; and the Stoics held the contrary:

[Giveth to all life, and breath, and all things] God gives life, because he is the fountain of it: he gives breath. But, as much more is necessary to keep the animal machine in a state of repair, God gives the *ta panta*, all the other things which keep the living creatures alive.

The Athenians had a notion that they were self-produced, and were the aboriginals of mankind. Lucian ridicules this opinion: 'Atheenaioi phasi tous prootous anthroopous ek tees Attikees anaphunai, kathaper ta lachana. The Athenians say that the first men sprung up in Attica, like radishes' (Luc. Philo-pseud. 3.).

The Story of God - The Story of the Bible - A Sure Word about God

The Story of Promise, Patriarchs and Israel -- Slides 33 - 72

The Story of David --- Slides 73 - 116

The Story of Prophets --- Slides 117 - 154

The Promise of a New Heart --- Slides 155 - 167

The Promise of New Earth --- Slides 168 - 171

The WHEN Question --- Slides 172 - 181

The Story of Jesus --- Slides 182 - 226

The Story of the Church --- Slides 227 - 261

The Story of the Day of the Lord --- Slides 262 - 295

The Story of the New Creation --- Slides 296 - 303

The Summary of the Bible Story⁶

How, precisely, this human divine drama will develop, including its stages, is not revealed in the Genesis introductory story itself. Only the major plot-line and its underlying divine human rationale are revealed. Thus this primordial statement regarding God's double response logically implies that there will be a God directed story; a plot-line advancing in stages through divine actions to a divinely set goal of termination and restoration. Thus it presents the general conceptual logical framework for what is to be expected. The following sections will look more closely at the suggested seven stages including some sub-stages and the kind of divine actions that biblical writers highlight as transitional in the advancing plot-line.

(1) The Creation

The first stage – Creation (Gen 1-2) constitutes a kind of preamble and first major stage in the grand story. It tells about the good creation God has put in place with no hint of evil or deficiency (Gen 1:31). Humans were the image bearer of God and all was harmonious with the Sabbath rest of God and the goodness of creation as the expression of this harmony. The story will take a radical turn with the fall event that follows and thus mark this out as the unique first stage, subsequently lost.

(2) The Fall

However, the narrative enters into a new major transitional stage as the story introduces the serpent-event in which the serpent is seen as deceiving humanity through a lie about God and their dependency upon Him (Gen 3). Something went horribly wrong and the plot develops as the predicament unfolds. As a result of the fall, God takes drastic actions through termed curses which radically change the existential conditions for humanity including being exiled and excluded from the possibility of participating in the Creator's immortality (Gen 3:22-24). By its very nature, this clearly marks the first major transitional stage in the story, that is, Paradise lost.

(3) The Promise and the People

Nevertheless in the middle of the Fall story, a double promise is given to humanity (Gen 3:15) to undo the serpent and all he brought to the human experience - his lies and death. This double promise will be fulfilled through their seed or descendants. The genealogies in Genesis 5, 10 and 11 are thus parading descendants who are all seen as

⁶ Taken from a larger paper Gunnar Pedersen and Jan Barna, 'Towards a Biblical Theology Method: A 7-stage Theistic Narrative Methodology,' Tyndale Fellowship, July 2011.

being part of the same family; a story that will eventually narrow down into further subsections through the story of Abraham.

With the divine election of Abraham (Gen 12, 15, 17) the story for the first time “slows down” and thus narrows down as it apparently introduces a particular subsection of the larger narrative concerning the people of God. God is now depicted as advancing the double promise specifically through the family of Abraham; a restating of the original promise in the elaborate covenant with Abraham concerning the role of his family as the means of bringing the divine blessings on the world in opposition to the curse. Blessing being the designation for God’s original intent with Creation and thus another echo of the primordial blessing of Paradise. As such it appears to embody the essence of God’s creative purpose for the world (Gen 12:2-3).

From this moment on the story of Abraham’s family, according to the Genesis account, is the projected story of Israel as the divine redemptive agent of blessing in the world. Accordingly, this act of God appears as a subsection in the story of the people of God as God takes action to advance his specific plan for the world through the family of Abraham (Gen 12-49).

When the nation of Israel enters unto the scene in Exodus, they are seen as a collective seed of Abraham (Ex 1 & 19) delivered by the specific actions of God. This event thus marks another act of God directing the plot-line in the human drama understood as such by the narrators of the alleged event. Faithful to the covenant, God is seen as hearing their cry and brings rescue and redemption from slavery and oppression (Ex 3; 20). The Pentateuch thus clearly connects the exodus to the Abraham-event and thus this consciousness about Israel’s role and mission appear to be foundational for the Mosaic projection of the future story of Israel.

Accordingly, the original Genesis concepts of historical blessing and curses are seen as built into the covenant with Israel (Deut 27-30). Furthermore, the institutions, places, objects and offices within the community of Israel are seen as divinely instituted means to ensure Israel’s destined mission and as such they are anticipatory of things to come (Ex 25:8). The exodus thus marks another subsection in the story as God is seen as taking actions to further advance his plan for the world by constituting the nation of Israel. From this juncture the story is seen as advancing through the turbulent history of Israel, guided by the provisions of the covenant.

With the appearance of David and his kingdom the narrative again narrows down through a divine act. According to the narrators, David receives an extraordinary promise by God which sits firmly on all the previous promises but also provides a more explicit agenda for the kingdom theme (2 Sam 7, cf. Gen 17:6, 16) which will shape and

determine the Israelite consciousness of what God's plan for the world is all about. From now on the idea of the kingdom and David as king will take center-stage in the Israelite story. Thus kingship theology marks another subsection in the story as God is now seen as advancing his plan for the world through Israel, specifically through the agency of David (Psalms; Isaiah).

The story of the kingdom after David will, within the larger Israelite covenant setting, take various turns and twists and ups and downs. Another subsection in the story will emerge as the divine action of judgment upon Israel leads the people into the exile. The territorial blessing is partly lost and thus the conditions of the Israelite story takes crucial turn setting the stage for the future (Jeremiah; Ezekiel). In the context of the approaching expected exilic condition the poetic literature and the pre-exilic, exilic and post-exilic prophets will look forward as well as back with great anticipation to the promise given to David about his seed and the kingdom; a promise which in conjunction with the promise to Abraham provides a unique horizon within which the divine goal for the human history through the agency of Israel is going to be shaped according to the prophetic consciousness.

Thus the prophetic literature will greatly focus on the core predicament of human evil as the very issue that needs a resolution as a precondition for spiritual and physical restoration of Israel, humanity and all of creation. They will cast a grand vision of a glorious blessed future when God will enter upon his world-wide rule through the anticipated kingship of the coming son of David, who will terminate the reign of evil, restore humanity into communion with God through a renewal of hearts as a precondition for the coming of a renewed creation (Isaiah; Daniel).

Such a vision thus informed the post-exilic founders of Second Temple Judaism and their inter-testamental heirs (Ezra; Nehemiah; Daniel) and thus their expectations of the coming 'kingdom of God'. They anticipated this to be a state of existence in which the present 'curse' and rule of evil inaugurated in the fall-story would be terminated in a divine judgment and that God's true people would be restored and resurrected to participate in the 'blessing' of a restored new creation. The plot-line so far leaves the inheritors of this narrative with a massive build-up of expectation regarding a future transitional intervention of God; a divine action which will finally deliver on the promises.

(4) The Fulfillment in Jesus

Then the grand narrative enters into its central stage in the account of the New Testament gospels as Jesus is acclaimed as the fulfilment of promise and the fulfiller of promises. Jesus is presented as the promised descendant of Abraham and David (Mt 1:1)

in line with the prophetic promises in the advancing plot line of the Hebrew history. His life, ministry, death, resurrection and ascension are part of the "great exodus" from the continuing exile into which humanity has been plunged ever since the Fall (Lk 9:31, John 8:33-36). Thus, Jesus is depicted as dealing with more than a temporal predicament of one nation. He is depicted as dealing with the universal problem of human exclusion from God through the problem of human evil called sin. He is clearly presented as dealing with the primordial problem of all of humanity (Luke 24:47; John:34-36).

The Apostle will argue that with Jesus the great reversal in the human divine drama has occurred advancing the story into the era of fulfilment of the grand prophetic promises regarding God's plan for the world through the house of David. Jesus is proclaimed from day one, on the Day of Pentecost, to be seated at the right hand of God as the victorious great son of David and as the one authorized by God to advance the story to its ultimate goal (Acts 1-5). The Apostles not only connect Jesus with the past kingship promise package but also connect him with the central theme of the drama originating in Paradise lost and they explicitly claim that he has resolved the exclusion problem from God once and for all and thus regained Paradise definitively opening the gate for humans to return to God (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). Accordingly, the Apostles present the Christ story as the decisive act of God as the great transitional stage in the biblical meta-narrative.

(5) The Fulfillment and the People

However the drama does not end with Jesus' death, resurrection or even his ascension. Synchronized with his ascension a new stage in the story opens. In this new phase Israel is seen by the Apostles as relaunched as a community of faith centred in Jesus Christ without the support of a civil state (Acts 2-4, 10; Rom 3:28-29; 9-11). The story now widens to include all the nations promised to participate in the blessing given to Abraham. So people no more become part of Israel through national or bloodline connections with Abraham, but through the faith connection with the promised Seed. In this stage the newly constituted community of believers now tells the story of God's redemptive provisions for a fallen world and presents Jesus as the ultimate fulfiller of God's plan (Johan 15:26; Acts 1:8; Rom 1:1-6).

The apostolic testimony will subsequently outline how Christ is going to implement the grand Hebrew vision of the coming kingdom rule of God in an 'already' and 'not yet' phase (Rom 8:25; Acts 3:21; Matt 24:14). So Jesus is seen as presently leading humans into a permanent relation with God through his priestly ministry and ultimately leading them into a restored new creation through his kingly ministry, that is, the shalom of Paradise (Matt 25:31-34). Christ and his priestly-kingly work is thus depicted as

constituting the ultimate divine antidote to the problem of human depravity as introduced in Genesis and portrayed in the biblical story-line (Gal 3:13-14; Rom 3:24). Accordingly, it will strike the reader up front that the Christ story reinforces that the theme of human evil intertwined with the double response of God is the central perspective which structures and unifies the staged plot-line of the biblical material.

Methodologically speaking this is the most startling and transitional claim ever presented in the biblical narrative; a claim that only makes sense within the larger biblical plot-line as anticipated in Genesis but that is precisely the context in which it makes sense and the context in which it must be evaluated if the Canonical texts are to be allowed to tell their own story on their own premises.

(6) The Day of the Lord

However, there is still more to come according to the biblical material. The Day of the Lord and the New Creation phases are in the future from the apostolic perspective. The Day of the Lord stage is in the apostolic thinking a future 'not yet' activity of Christ in which he will fully execute his kingship as the judge of all the earth (Acts 10:42; 17:30-31; Rom 2:16). Thus this climactic activity of Christ is depicted as the final great transitional event in the human drama effecting the final great exodus of all humanity from the present post-Paradise state of existence. This is depicted by the Apostles, especially Paul, as a great transitional event which includes a whole string of synchronized divine apocalyptic actions such as the final judgment, the advent of Christ, the resurrection, the termination of the rule of evil and the final destruction of death as preparatory for the restoration of God's rule in all creation (1 Cor 15). Thus the Day of the Lord is not only about the Parousia of Jesus it appear to include a whole sting of eschatological events advancing the story through some transitional pre-advent, advent and post-advent judicial activities of Christ (Dan 7-9, Rev 16-20).

(7) The New Creation

Only after the termination of evil and death does the narrative finally arrive at the stage of God 'being all' in all and thus a renewed Creation (1 Cor 15; Rev 21-22). This is where the curse has ended as sin, death and all evil are no more and instead everything is restored to the shalom of Paradise. Heaven itself is depicted as coming down on earth as God will dwell with humanity in a build-up Paradise named the Holy City (Rev 21:1-10).

Thus in this stage of the story the curse of the Fall is now past and the exclusion from God's Paradise presence is now past and humanity will embark on its eternal journey with God participating in his immortality (Rev 21:4; 22:1-5). Then even Jesus according to Paul will hand over the kingdom to God so that God may be 'all in all' (1 Cor 15:24, 28).

In this final stage the “old” story is not forgotten either – it is in fact immortalized through the names of the 12 tribes of Israel and 12 apostles on the gates and walls of the New Jerusalem (Rev 21: 12-14) as an everlasting reminder of God’s infinite love for and faithfulness to his creation. This in our view is thus the last stage in the story according to the biblical projection as this is the moment at which the goal promised in Genesis is seen as realized; a promised hope expanded by the prophetic voice and enlarged by Jesus and crystalized into its final form by the Apostles. Thus the grand master-narrative concerning the human journey from Paradise lost to Paradise regained to Paradise restored has finally been accomplished.

Wrap up

We will end where we began. Remember the story of the three young Christian women in the year 303AD - Agape, Irene and Chione? To the question of the court: 'Who was it that advised you to retain these parchments and writings up to the present time?' Irene responded: 'It was Almighty God who bade us love him unto death. For this reason we did not dare to be traitors, but we chose to be burned alive or suffer anything else that might happen to us rather than betray them.'

Christian Scripture and texts were central to the identity of the church from its early years. They were so dear to the Christians that they would lay down their lives for them.

From other preserved accounts of the same persecution of Diocletian we learn about how raids on Christians produced big number of codexes. On a raid in the capital city of Numidia (today part of Algeria) Cirta reported how one sub-deacon brought a very large codex. The official then asks: 'Why have you given over only one codex? Bring forth the Scriptures which you have.' Then two sub-deacons in the account respond: 'We do not have any more, because we are sub-deacons, the readers (lectores - teachers) have the codexes.'

So, four consequent interrogations and raids on teachers homes produce altogether 36 codexes: some of them very large and some of them were in the making and still unfinished. This was the result of a single round of raids.⁷ Christian Scriptures were seen as central to the identity of the church, its life, devotion and mission. They had different questions then maybe than we have today but the centrality of Scripture as a product that is more than just a human book is something we share with our fellow brothers and sisters from early Christian centuries.

Ellen White's raised finger that catches our attention became the key summary of our approach to the Bible as a sure word of God: 'And the complete structure, in design and execution, bears testimony to its Author. Such a structure no mind but that of the Infinite could conceive or fashion' (Ed 123.3).

This is a statement of the right approach to the question of origins and authority of the Bible, I would claim. It is a very different approach from what classical medieval or 19th century scholarship with their emphasis on the historical approach suggested as a the way to understand *fully* the bible's history, nature and interpretation. The historical investigation of the source criticism and text criticism and their results could be indeed

⁷ *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*, xxvi, 186-188. Also in Augustine, *Contra Cresconium Grammaticum* (Against Cresconius the Grammarian), iii, 29. The entire account is translated in James Stevenson, ed., *The New Eusebius, Documents Illustrative of the History of the Church to A.D. 337*, (London, 1963), 287-289.

very helpful. They can even lead us to have confidence in the text we have today, and read today, as the text of the OT and NT. However this is only one side of the coin. This is still just the human side we see better uncovered by the historical investigation. But to gain the full perspective on the Bible we need the other side of the coin too. And that side is not uncovered by historical investigation but by internal investigation of the biblical material itself.

The first Christians or the Jews in the 2nd BC may not have had at their disposal all the text variants and results of the source critical investigation. They may have read text that was in many ways more inferior to the critical text we have today, yet, does this mean that they did not have confidence in the text or could not use the text as effectively for their life and faith journey as we can today? That does not seem to be the evidence we have from the early church.

It is an illusion of the modern age that we today, since the time of Enlightenment, are much more enlightened and critical and self-aware of the texts and our religion. It is the supposition and proposition of the humanist enlightenment dream that we are more developed today because of the technical advancements and textual advancements and so consequently confidence in something is gained only by hard core historical evidence or data. If there is no hard-core historical evidence, how can we believe in it? If we cannot prove something scientifically, we have reservations about that.

The early Christian generations may have not even had the canon of the NT and no MT text, but they had something that perhaps from a historical source point of view was imperfect and indeed very 'human', yet despite what they had as the 'Bible' they still could hear God speaking to them through those texts and they were responding in faith and life of obedience, even obedience to death. Were they delusional and fanatical by acting like that? Were their actions irrational?

It is because the Bible is more than just a human book, because the end-result of our encounter with the biblical text does not depend on having perfect human text, but because there is the invisible side to it that makes the life of faith possible.

So the internal claims and content and the structure of the bible can be something that we need to investigate to understand this other side of the Bible. This is what we called the deductive structural approach to the questions of origins and I hope that this is something that made sense to you.

At the end the words of Paul summarise very fittingly what we have tried to achieve during this weekend:

'Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart. But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor

handling the word of God deceitfully, but by **manifestation of the truth** commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them. For **we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord**, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake. **For it is the God who commanded light to shine** out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of **the knowledge of the glory of God** in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this **treasure** in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us' (2 Cor 4:1-7).