

Was the Proclamation of the Canon a Medicine or a Poison?

A Comparison between Ruling Christianity and minjung¹ (“the oppressed”) Judaism

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Introduction

Did Christianity’s proclamation of the biblical canon serve to expand Christian thought? Or did it limit it? Early Christianity experienced its share of persecution in its beginnings from the Roman Empire. However, after its legitimization as the national religion in the fourth century, it came to serve the side of the European countries which expanded their lands for gaining profit through the wars of the age of the Roman Empire, the time of the Crusades, the period of colonialist expansion, the ages of imperialism and the global empire until today in history. Either intentionally or unintentionally, Western Europe’s theology has been justifying the ways of the Christian empire as well as utilizing the Bible to strengthen the ruling ideology in keeping and reinforcing religious power. Then, what roles did concepts like “the expansion of the world of God” and “the prohibition of idolatry” play in the expansion of these? Ever since Christianity was legalized by the Roman Empire, why did Christianity persist in maintaining the canon and not accept any other thought, philosophical idea or religious idea for the last two thousand years? I think that the role of the canon may have been an excellent shield for the Bible and also served historically to tear down the religious and aboriginal, indigenous cultures of Asia, Africa

¹ Suh Kwangsun, “A biographical sketch of an Asian theological consultation,” in Kim, Yongbok (ed.), *Minjung Theology* (Singapore: CTC-CCA publication, 1981), pp. 15-37, 17-18. Minjung is a Korean word, but it is a combination of two Chinese characters ‘min’ and ‘jung.’ ‘Min’ may be translated as ‘people’ and ‘jung’ as ‘the mass.’ Thus ‘minjung’ means ‘the mass of the people.’ Minjung is a term which grew out of the Christian experiences in the political struggle for justice against dictator government which oppressed the people. Minjung theology is an accumulation and articulation of theological reflections on the political experiences of Christian student, labours, the press, professors, farmers, writers and intellectuals. It is a theology of the oppressed in the Korean political situation, a theological response to the oppressors.

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and South America. I seek not to address the historical tendencies in the defense of the canon through the protection of Christianity, but to search for the canon's meaning in a new perspective in the context of the history of ruling Christianity and of minjung Judaism.

Israel's people opposed the Babylonian empire and were destroyed by it in 587 BCE; after that, they continued to oppose the Roman Empire from the 2nd century BCE to the 2nd century CE, but failed to succeed in their efforts. The Jews were politically controlled by the Romans, then discriminated against and alienated by Christianity after it rose to political power by the Emperor Constantine in the 4th century CE, restrained by the Muslims after the 7th century, massive victims to the Crusades in the 11 - 13th centuries, expelled and massacred in Spain and Eastern Europe in the 16 - 18th centuries, and massacred to the extent of 6 million by the Nazis during the Second World War. The Minjung Jews were forced to be victims throughout their whole history, until they established a new nation in 1948.

In this paper, the terms "ruling or dominating" Christianity and "the oppressed" Judaism are used as ideological terms, describing the history after the two religions that came from the common origin of Moses, but split during the time of Jesus Christ. During the past two thousand years, one religion existed as the ruling one, while the other as the ruled and oppressed. This paper will attempt to highlight how Christianity's canon has worked like a medicine, positively affecting history; while on the other hand, like a poison that negatively steered the course of history.

This paper also will demonstrate the moments in history when the canon was at its peak, or at its lowest, and I will try to examine Christianity's canon through the eyes of minjung Judaism.

In Christian terms, "canon" means "straight rod," or "bar," hence "rule," "norm," or "standard." In the Christian Greek of the second century CE, it came to mean "rule of faith," the revealed truth of the church.³ The Torah (Law, 5th-4th century BCE) means the Pentateuch in a narrow sense, the canon of the Old Testament. The Torah in a wide sense receives the highest of regards among the three, which also include Nebiim (Prophets: Former and Latter, 3rd Century BCE) and Kethubim (Writings or

³ Shaye J. D. Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1989), p. 175.

Hagiography, 100 CE). It took many generations to form these into a book, going through the continual process of selection, addition, deletion, and revision as reflecting the historical, social, religious contexts. This process is either called “Canonization” or “the formation of the Biblical Canon.” The definitive determination of the O.T. as a whole probably came only at the Synod of Jabneh or Jamnia, 90 CE. In the 2nd century, the Christian Bible signified “rules of faith,” while in the 4th century, after Constantine the Great advocated the legalization of the Church, the early fathers who related with the emperors, or high class of society, fixed the Bible as ‘the canon’. This is the general concept of a “canon”.

The Jewish scholar, D.S. Russell, writes of the Old Testament canon that in 90 CE, the scholars in the Jamnia council debated and fixed the establishment of a code for the canon of the Hebrew Scriptures.⁴ However this code was variable and unstable in establishing books as ‘authoritative canons’. Even the Septuagint, which was used in the church at its earliest stage, had materials that were not included in the Hebrew Canon.⁵ Therefore it is equally unsatisfactory to look to the Council of Jamnia in 90 CE as the determinative factor in any process of recognition.⁶ He presented a negative perspective on the process of Christians establishing the canon.

Furthermore, Shaye J.D. Cohen, also a Jewish scholar, says of the state of things, “From the orthodox’s point of the view, the fact that Christians dealt with the canon of the Bible as neither sacred nor inspired, became an important task.”⁷ He expresses discomfort and displeasure in the very idea that the new religion (Christianity) would judge the sacred documents of the long established religion of Judaism. For that reason, he views “the works eliminated by the canon, not as pagan, but as second rank works, that may be included in the apocryphal books (Ben Sira, Solomon Wisdom, Maccabee, Judit, Tobit).”⁸ Jews, for sure, did not use the term “canon”, and even Philo, Josephus, and the New Testament used the terms “scriptures”, “holy scriptures”, and “holy books” instead.

⁴ D. S. Russell, *From Early Judaism to Early Church* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1986), p. 30.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 31-32.

⁷ Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, p. 175.

⁸ Ibid.

The difference between the positions of the Jewish and the Christian scholars about the canon was the question of tradition, and whether or not one was more orthodox than the other. Here, the separation occurs due to the understanding of the Jews crucifying Jesus Christ and the idea of Salvation. I think that the more crucial things of the separation are whether the canon is limited only to the Bible, or can be expanded more according to the historical process.

Judaism's historical process and its sacred books

Ancient Israel, the homeland for both Christianity and Judaism, is surrounded by Babylon to the north and Egypt to the south. The idea of survival is natural due to the fact that it is surrounded by desert to the south and east and the Mediterranean Sea to the west. After a brief moment of national independence during the time of King David (1000 BCE), it collapsed because of Babylon (587 BCE). It continued to experience constant threats from Persia (6th century BCE) and also during the era of Alexander the Great (356-323 BCE), and the period of the Roman Empire.⁹ From this era, it experienced a natural cultural amalgamation when Hellenism brought Western and Eastern cultures together. During the Hellenistic period, Jewish people were influenced by mysticism, astrology, cosmology, eschatology, etc., from the east. Through Hellenism, Jewish people came across a diverse set of cultures and religions. On one hand, the Jews considered Hellenistic views as superior, and attempted to reform Judaism.¹⁰ However, on the other hand, an independence movement against Hellenism occurred through the Roman Empire. In 168 BCE, the resistance of the Jews to the Roman Empire began with the Maccabee's revolt, and continued through to 70-66 BCE, and, although Bar Kokhba led a war against Rome in 135-133 BCE, came to a dismal defeat. The small Minjung Jews continued to revolt against the Roman Empire in three tries. Through these miserable defeats, Judaism and the Jews were persecuted and oppressed politically, socially and religiously by the Roman Empire.¹¹ Rabbinical teaching therefore, focused on the internal faith necessary to

⁹ James C. VanderKam, Ch.1. "The Time of the Second Temple," in *An Introduction to Early Judaism* (Michigan, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000), pp. 1-52; Lester L. Grabbe, "Ch. 1. Introduction: Background and Sources," in *An Introduction to First Century Judaism* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), pp. 1-28.

¹⁰ Martin Goodman, *Judaism in the Roman World* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

¹¹ Richard Kalmin, "Ch.1. Roman Persecutions of the Jews," in *Jewish Babylonia between Persia and Roman Palestine*

endure with patience for the long-term restoration of the Jewish community. Although Hellenism spread all over the Mediterranean with great force, minjung Judaism survived alongside Christianity, and protected the commandments of the forefathers. Through resistance and struggle against the Roman Empire, the minjung Jews found the religious and ethnic self-consciousness for survival. Furthermore, through internalized religious practices and following of the commandments, the minjung Jews who had Hebraic traditions did not lose their identity despite a prevailing Hellenistic culture and so the nation endured its hardships.

Hebrew scriptures arose like waterfalls from the Babylon exile in the middle of the 6th century BCE, and during the early Christian era these books were divided into 'canonical' and 'extra-canonical', the latter being called the Apocrypha.¹²

Pseudepigraphal books, more difficult than Apocryphal in terms of finding their identity and basis, were written between 200 BCE and 100 CE by Jews and Christian Jews in the diaspora and in Palestine. Russell praises the Pseudepigrapha and Apocrypha as showing the people of the time that Judaism was a religion devoted to God's commandments and founded upon personal compassion.¹³ Judaism did not lose its identity while accepting a diverse set of literary documents.

History of minjung Jews (2nd century BCE – the end of the Second World War)

Scriptures of Judaism and early Christianity in this period include the following: the Dead Sea Scrolls found in Qumran (150 BCE - 68 CE), the work of the Alexandrian Jew, Philo (20 BCE - 50 CE), Josephus (37 CE - 100 CE), rabbinic writings – Mishnah, Targum, or exegesis of Aramic scriptures, Nag Hammadi (Coptic, 1st -4th century CE) - most of which is of Gnostic, and the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the New Testament.

After 70 CE, the Christian and Jewish people in the diaspora and Palestine were alienated and segregated by the Roman Empire. But Constantine the Great legalized Christianity in 312 CE. Finally, Christianity had become the dominant religion in the

(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 19-36.

¹² Roman Catholic and Anglican Church canons use the Apocrypha. It contains Tobit, Judith, the Wisdom of Solomon, Maccabees, etc.

¹³ Russell, *From Early Judaism to Early Church*, p. 22.

Roman Empire. Christians began treating the Jews with religiously charged animosity and persecuted them.¹⁴

Christianity, as the dominant religion of the Roman Empire, oppressed and persecuted the Jews and pagans.¹⁵ The Minjung Jews fled to other parts of European countries in order to escape religious adversity. The 13th century Catholic Pope Gregory the IX began the Inquisition, which lasted until the early 19th century, torturing tens of thousands, or even burning these people alive. In 15th century Spain, the treatment of Jews reached its worst, and the tortures and exiles continued and forced the minjung Jews to escape to Portugal or Eastern Europe. During World War I and II, about 6 million Minjung Jews were killed due to religious and racial contempt and persecution in Russia, Nazi Germany and Eastern European countries.

The minjung Jews continued to suffer through wars against Christians and Muslims. The Catholic Church distrusted Islam and Judaism, and while Islam gave the Jews some freedom and peace, it was never stable enough. Therefore, the minjung Jews had to struggle against religious and political coercion from both Islam and the Catholic Church. Although the three religions have the same monotheistic God, and many theological aspects and teachings overlap, they, nevertheless, display a violent and belligerent relationship, an irony, indeed. The minjung Jews lived in and suffered a long history of torture.

The evolution of Jewish scriptures

Halakah's Interpretation

Halakah

The Bible can be divided into two main parts, the "Law" including regulations and morals, and the other, historical "stories" that show what role the Jewish community plays within the relationship with God. And then there are Psalms and Wisdom Literature.

¹⁴ Judith Liew, John North and Tessa Rajak, "The Jewish Community and Its Boundaries," in *The Jews Among Pagans and Christians: In the Roman Empire* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 9-28.

¹⁵ Fergus Millar, "The Jews of the Graeco-Roman Diaspora Between Paganism and Christianity, CE 312-438," in *The Jews Among Pagans and Christians*, pp. 97-123.

Halakah is the interpretation of the “Law,” and the Haggadah is the interpretation of the “stories.” The word Halakah means “to go” or “path”, and therefore signifies the path of actively practicing and abiding by the oral Torah. The question and answers about these laws are quite free and frank. For example;

“Rabbi A says this and that. Rabbi B does not agree, but the Halakah is ...”¹⁶

Torah declares the commandment, “Thou shalt not murder,” as an edict. However the Halakah includes interesting and new ideas, debates, questions and answers about the topic of murder. Hyam Makobi writes, “To think that Halakah is simply Rabbi’s thoughts about the biblical commandments is wrong. The Halakah goes beyond the text, but deals with high level value and morality.”¹⁷ From this we can see that Judaism does not demand only one preferential way of following the laws, but encourages various opinions and consciousness. This is very different from Christianity, which puts the commandments and doctrines before all others, and advocates blind faith.

Hyam Makobi writes that the authority of the Halakah “does not come from the power of the law. The reason is due to the opinions of the minority. The Halakah is made up of diverse debates and decisions. Therefore, although the decisions do not hold the same kind of spiritual authority as the canonized books, they still hold societal power. It then becomes the foundation for new decisions.”¹⁸ The legitimacy and the authority of the Halakah does not come from above, but rather from the minority, as they can express a diverse set of opinions, and therefore, lead the minjung Jewish community in a communal way. I think this free and diverse interpretation and holding of opinions gives a great motivation and inner capacity against outer oppression and persecution. We can see through all the calamities and darkness, that democratic debates about religious laws have led the social and religious communities.

Mishnah

¹⁶ Hyam Maccoby, *Early Rabbinic Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 18.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 20.

While the Torah was passed down through oral and written traditions, the Mishnah was passed on orally.¹⁹ The Bible that Christianity formed was the product of the first downfall, 70 CE, while the rabbinic literature was the product of the second calamity, 135 CE. The Mishnah expresses the message that explains the historical significance of the Law, religion, philosophy and society which experienced these two wars.²⁰ Jacob Neusner, a Jewish scholar, says the following about the 1st and 2nd century which became the background of the Mishnah, “the first century can be characterized by hope and courage as sacred men and heroes appeared, while the nation fought for their rights. However, the second century was a time of dejection and collapse. A minority began to make plans and goals through the Mishnah, and wise men wrote books. The Jewish people had switched to a more active approach. That was philosophy and an internal reconstruction. By doing that, they overcame difficulty, dreamed of utopia, and made laws that would form dreams of the ‘here and now’.”²¹

Those rabbis who survived the national tragedies of the 2nd century decided to gather all the traditions and customs of Judaism and unify them with the law. They wrote the Mishnah keeping in mind the law that was alive at the time, and how the law had developed over time through change in the environment and new challenges different from those of the old Israel. The Mishnah can be seen as the oral Torah that was passed down by the rabbis who overcame the difficulties of the first and second centuries, through the knowledge of the contemporary values and awareness, to unify Jewish society.²²

The Mishnah sets importance on what people should do or not do by being based on agriculture, calendar’s sacred times and seasons, family life, civil law and institutions, and cosmological order.²³ The moon and the sun, constantly moving with the earth express an infinite pattern. Plowing, planting, harvesting, birth, marriage, procreation, death; work and rest; sunrise and sunset, and above all, the law – all endured the torment and problems of the present time. The Mishnah speaks of the infinite present time, and

¹⁹ Jacob Neusner, *Ancient Israel after Catastrophe* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1983), pp. 2-7.

²⁰ Etienne Nodet, “Ch. 1. From Cyrus to the Mishna,” in *A Search for the Origins of Judaism* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1997), pp. 1-62.

²¹ Ibid., pp. 7-8.

²² Maccoby, *Early Rabbinic Writings*, pp. 7-11.

²³ Neusner, *Ancient Israel after Catastrophe* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1983), p. 2.

the intelligent response to suffering. The Mishnah teaches that everything has changed. The rabbis comprehended the 'here and now' through nature, and then contextualized them into historical knowledge.²⁴

What is the exact goal of the Mishnah? The Mishnah shows that although the Minjung Jews suffered twice through national disasters, they did not retaliate, but they expressed a realistic outline, their sense of the inner, stable and recoverable, structure of reality for disciplining of the chaos of thought.²⁵ Although the Mishnah does not belong to one particular nation, it pieces together the different parts of the Jewish community, and displays the wisdom and active approach to the recovery of the Jewish community. Therefore the Mishnah protected the Jews by entering into the minds of the conquered nation, and by making them remember the great nation that they truly are. It did not make allusion to the current political situation, and instead looked at the long history while having apocalyptic hope. Thus, it took the past and made it into the present, while looking towards the future. In Judaism, politics and religion are very intimately intertwined. After the liberation from Egypt, politics became a big religious topic of Judaism. They could not forget the political persecution due to the Roman Empire, and therefore recollected upon the documents of the past.

Instead of choosing the direct political battle against the Roman Empire, the Jews after the second century chose the Mishnah, an internal and a wiser approach. While 1st century Israel anxiously awaited the apocalyptic hope, 2nd century Israel exalted eternity in the inner world.²⁶ The message of the Jewish law was not to simply look at the past through the notions of obligation and obedience, but by looking at the present and the future, the law sublimated into a historicized way of foreseeing the world. The Mishnah was a very appropriate progress, by helping the minjung Jews have dreams, visions and hopes out of their reality, from having overcome the 1st and 2nd century disasters. Living without a temple in Israel, they waited for recovery outside Palestine, and expressed these hopes through faithful lives. Jacob Neusner writes "How can you express the holiness of living without a temple after two consecutive wars? The answer to this is expressed in the Mishnah as God emphasizes the 'action' of holiness, and therefore, the Mishnah is not

²⁴ Ibid., p. 17.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 33.

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 7-9.

about collapsing, but about hopes and reconstruction and recovery.”²⁷ Israel, by emphasizing the ‘here and now’, saw that sacredness was in obedience in the life of the present time, and saw that as salvation. The Mishnah is the manifestation of the Torah into reality by overcoming the difficulties of the present, and is a hopeful message that makes one look at the future.

Talmud

The third critical moment for the minjung Jews was when they were persecuted by Christianity after the 4th century Roman Empire. Christianity and Judaism had been competing for 300 years since the first century. When Christianity became the national religion, it obtained secular power as well. Therefore, the ruling Christianity mistreated the minjung Jews through political and religious discrimination. The Jews did not accept Christianity, and only showed loyalty to the Torah. If the Mishnah can be seen as a product of the 1st and 2nd century wars and their defeats, then the Talmud can be seen as a product of persecution from the 4th century Roman Empire’s Christianity. The Talmud expresses the philosophy and outlook of Israel’s history, and includes stories that answer the questions about the significance and order of the recovery of Judaism.²⁸ The Talmud adopted the construction of Mishnah’s commentary 200 years after in 600 CE.²⁹

Haggadah’s interpretation

The Haggadah is not about Biblical laws, but instead is a collection of stories. Hyam Maccoby said about the Haggadah, “The Bible put the Torah into the history of the world, with a climax of ‘the end of days’ and has the Israelites as its actors. The Haggadah is a collection of stories that actualize the topics and folklore from the Oral Torah.”³⁰

Haggadah literally means “telling” (‘aggadah). During every Passover festival, the Haggadah includes Exodus 13:8, the story of the escape from Egypt, and therefore

²⁷ Neusner, *The Emergence of Judaism*, pp. 8-9.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 11.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 19.

thanking God.³¹ The Haggadah is not a new religion or idolatry, but instead provides how one can actively follow the Halakah by looking at the stories of God and God's promise to the people of Israel.³² While the Halakah can be seen as an important educational document for home or school, the Haggadah can be seen as an important document to be used in synagogues, to show how the passionate God will bring the promised land, and therefore uses the story of Egypt as an analogy.³³

The Haggadah is an extensive literature that includes an abundant amount of important religious values, and signifies instructions for the populace, and brings God's mysteries into the contemplative dimension.³⁴ Here the authority of the Haggadah comes out. All Haggadic opinions bring about poetic imaginations. One poet does not battle against another for a difference in opinion. Even if there are clear oppositions, instead of getting rid of the opponent or disagreement, they advocate mutual exchange and agreement and therefore display a conversational consideration.³⁵ Thus, the Haggadah is historical, epochal, theological, anthropological, or folkloristic.³⁶ The Haggadah does not require intelligence; instead it requires poetic imagination.

Hyam Maccoby says about salvation, "The nucleus of Christianity lies in salvation and therefore in theology, creed, and faith, salvation is the most important aspect. However, in Judaism, the covenant is a guarantee for salvation. Therefore, Judaism does not emphasize the achievement of salvation, but instead producing and maintaining the society that the Torah subscribes and carrying out the covenant."³⁷ Even if the opposition's opinions may be different, the Haggadah does not attempt to persuade, and instead opens up a dialogic method in order to promote free imagination and innovative interpretations within the current generation. Here, we see the vitality of minjung Judaism, while the ruling Christianity is trapped by doctrines, that if one slips off even the slightest, one is called a pagan. And if there are differences in opinion about faith, people divide. Christianity's limits are tight about reasoning in order to keep its authority and doctrines, while the Diaspora Jews choose flexibility in order to maintain

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ William Scott Green (ed.), *Approaches to Ancient Judaism: Theory and Practice* (Scholars Press, 1978), p. 34.

³⁵ Neusner, *The Emergence of Judaism*, p. 21.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 22.

Jewish reason and thinking even when undergoing religious, social, and political torturing persecution.

Midrash Interpretation

Rene Bloch explains the character of Midrash as follows; “Midrash’s beginning is also the Bible. The Midrash is not an academic genre, but is popular and instructional. Rabbis’ interest is questioning ‘why?’ and interpreting for ‘answer.’ Its goal is not study, rather is more about the practice, and therefore is a guide for religious life and faith.”³⁸

To actualize the text of the past means that the scriptures must become alive within the people of God and individuals. In order to do this, we must open up all new interpretations, applications and situations of the message.³⁹ Judaism sets its goal upon actualization of the ancient scriptures in order to start the present life, and the content and form are not bound. The Midrash, thus, allows for intellectual curiosity and leads people towards religious maturity.⁴⁰

The genre of Midrash evolved continually, the rabbis making one remember the models which the evolution is based on from the Hebrew bible as being naturally progressive.⁴¹ Thus, the Bible becomes a part of the current social life, and the rabbis continue to read repeatedly, and realize the goals of the teachings, and through contemplation and prayer, teach the people.

Traces of Midrash interpretations within the Old Testament

Usually the Old Testament scholars decide which texts belong to the original writer when parallel phrases arise within the Old Testament texts, by comparing literary methods. However, the Midrashic interpretations that had been comprehended a long time ago since the time of the Old Testament by the Jews, appear in many places within the Old Testament. When looking at the traces of the Midrash within the Old Testament, Isaiah

³⁸ Renee Bloch, “Midrash”, pp. 29-73, in Green, *Approaches to Ancient Judaism*.

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 31-32.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 33.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 37.

asked Amos, Jeremiah looked at Hosea's influence, and Ezekiel used Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and particular Jeremiah for the Holiness code.⁴² And Psalms, the Lamentation, and the Song of Songs are closely related.⁴³ Reinterpretations like these appear in the literature after the years of the Babylon exile. Writers at this time, instead of creating new contents, expanded the former texts, made them more abundant, and altered their sequence or order, and therefore contemporized them. They used these old texts very freely in order to respond to the contemporary needs and problems, and did not hesitate in finding new meanings and applications of these old texts.⁴⁴ The prophets emphasized the Pentateuch of the Scriptures as the center of society, and used the past texts in order to solve current problems.

The interpretation of Midrash became another biblical text in itself. Here is where the creativity lies. The old text through reinterpretation based on contemporary situations had become a new text. We can see that even within the tradition of the Hebrew Bible, the text is completed through a creative evolution and process. Although Bloch acknowledges the literary criticisms of the Bible as non-essential with a tendency to make excessive hypothesis and as criticisms towards limited interpretations, they emphasize the importance of researching and studying Midrash genre and methods for explaining the Old and the New Testaments. Looking at Bloch's opinions, the fundamental problems of Christianity's methods of historical and literary criticism are revealed. It is not simply to find the original text through tracking evidences of editing, but what kind of historical, social situations the successive societies experienced, and how the document should be altered in order to be applied to current situations. Midrash interpretation was freely interpreted in order to match the contemporary times and situation.

Other Midrash⁴⁵ include the Vatican's Leviticus Rabba and Genesis Rabba, which are 10th and 11th century works, and the Palestine Targum (written in Aramaic), Genesis

⁴² Bloch introduces some examples from the Bible. Chronicles is dependent in principal sources from the Pentateuch, the books of Samuel and Kings, especially P. As the Chronicler concerns the facts of history, Isaiah chapter 60-62 are considered to belong to the time of Haggai and Zachariah, and Is. 40-55 after the exile. Prov. 1-9 is taken from Deuteronomy, Jeremiah and Isaiah (especially 40-66). The Song of Songs directly and consistently used the central motif already developed by Hosea, Jeremiah, and III Isaiah after the period of Nehemiah. 39-41.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 41.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 37.

⁴⁵ Guenter Stemberger, *Vom Umgang der Rabbinen mit der Bibel*, (Munchen: Verlag C. H. Beck oHG, 2002).

Rabba, Bereshith Rabba. During the 11th-15th century, many Midrash came out at the same time as the Crusades, while the diaspora minjung Jews who spread out throughout Europe developed new ways of interpretations based on their individual and geopolitical circumstances. Even through the Crusades and crisis and oppression, the minjung Jewish community prevailed while making a diverse literature and reinterpreting it creatively.

In this manner, the Rabbis rather freely expressed different opinions even during the times of oppression of the minjung Jewish people. The rabbis were not hindered by what the Hebrew text transmitted, instead they freely analyzed and imagined. Could this kind of free analysis be possible in the Old Testament academia within Christianity? Within Christianity, interpretation or explanation of the Bible does not depart from the actual words, and it only acts as a method of transmitting the objective truth. One who possibly expresses even a slightly different interpretation by using a little bit of imagination is considered pagan, or the interpretation itself regarded as not Biblical, or as against the doctrines. Usually then by considering these acts as going against the Word, these free thoughts are rigorously restricted.

How was it possible for the minjung Judaism to survive?

Minjung Judaism had to endure through political and religious oppression and persecution from the Roman Empire as well as from the ruling Christianity. The Diaspora minjung Jews who spread out through Europe and the Middle East had to experience racial discrimination, while being sandwiched between Islam and Christianity. These historical, political and religious circumstances turned Judaism into a minjung religion, and to survive through this minjung Judaism chose the inner mind instead of a political battle. It was to continue the intellectual tradition, and within a reality where one was to continuously encounter diverse thoughts and philosophies. These people, on one hand, passed down the basic consciousness about the Torah, while on the other, accepted new ideas, and philosophies. This opened up a liberal approach to the Torah and Jewish texts, and allowed for dynamism and vitality in contemporary circumstances. Even while being

physically constrained, the minjung Jewish people could endure the pain through an intellectual, mental and spiritual freedom.⁴⁶

Jacob Neusner says about the historical conditions which the Jews endured, “The Jewish people as a minority had to endure through the cultures of the dominant. Christianity blamed the Jews for killing Jesus Christ, while Islam treated them with scorn and contempt. Christianity spread out through European nations after the 4th century, and in the 7th century, Islam occupied the Middle East, Egypt, North Africa, and Spain. What purpose could God have had in such great events? Judaism just had to explain the two clashing religions.”⁴⁷ This shows how minjung Judaism as a minority survived in between the ruling Christian and Islamic empires. He says, “Even through all the political and religious persecution, Judaism centralized the importance of Israel’s inner life. The values are reconciliation, compromise, loving one’s neighbor, forgiving other, helping the weak. They were able to endure and adjust to the political circumstances, and recreate these values as a creed.”⁴⁸ Thus Judaism, which survived as a minjung religion, although still a minority, withstood all the segregations and persecutions.

Arrested Development of the Christian Canon

Why is it a Canon?

Canon is when the original text is transmitted, and then at one point is declared to be closed and it is finally decided that nothing more will be added or subtracted from the work. If there was an original text of the Bible, there would be no need to proclaim a canonization. If it was recorded by the original writer after a revelation from God, then

⁴⁶ Robert Brody & Moshe D Herr., *Collected Writings in Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press, 1999); R.C. Musaph-Andriessse, *From Torah to Kabbalah* (London: SCM Press LTD, 1981).

⁴⁷ Neusner, *The Emergence of Judaism*, Judaism was able to meet the challenges of Christendom and Islam because of its power to match the inner life and outer circumstance. Judaism created the condition of acceptance of a subordinated but tolerated position. Christianity blamed the Jews for the death of Christ, and Islam treated the Jews with contempt. How come Christianity enjoyed its triumph in the fourth century at the time of Constantine, and commanded the Loyalty of most of Europe? pp. 95-97, 96. He claims that it was this internal life that allowed Judaism to endure through all the challenges from Christianity and Islam.

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 98-99.

that in and of itself is a canon, and there is nothing else like it that would have a religious authority.

However, canonization is not only in Christian texts, but also in other authoritative documents. A Latin theologian, Argentina's J. Severino Croatto says about the canon, 'canon' of writings is a phenomenon of all traditions - religious, philosophical, historical, political, or what have you. Authentic texts of Plato, Thomas Aquinas, and Marx, as well as of the sacred books of religion (the Vedas, the Qur'an, the Bible, or myths) are also canons.⁴⁹ It's almost as if there are no religious documents that aren't canonized. As such, many authoritative and respected original books all have canonical power. Art, music, and architecture also produce massive amount of works. Here, what can be considered a true original? A Jewish scholar, Shaye J. D. Cohen says the following about the relationship between a canon and an imitation:

"All artistic creation is the product of imitation and originality. All painters, authors, sculptors, and composers imitate their predecessors even while they try to assert their own originality. This is 'canonical'."⁵⁰ Cohen writes that the Canon is also influenced by contemporary trends, and when that trend goes away, a new trend appears, and therefore creativity takes imitation as a prerequisite.⁵¹ Even in the Greek world, people imitated past writers, and their works were studied, imitated and preserved. Thus because the Jewish culture was influenced greatly by surrounding cultures, the canon can not only be considered special, but it can also be considered universal and all-encompassing. In reality, the fact that the Hebrew Bible was influenced by the religions, theologies, cults, festivals, laws of Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Canaan, was already proven through the archaeology and literature of the ancient near east. Therefore, the Bible's canon was not just God's creative revelation, but rather was formed with many other religious cultures as its background. Thus, a canon should not be an absolute, but the necessary product of the contemporary circumstances.

⁴⁹ J. Severino Croatto, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1987), p. 43.

⁵⁰ Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*. Because artists imitate their predecessors, we can recognize certain styles that extend over considerable periods (for example, Baroque architecture, Romantic music). In artistic development imitation ceases because it has become impossible. The old style is replaced by a new old ways. They are deemed "classics" of enduring worth, and are studied or imitated. In other words, they are "canonical." P. 177.

⁵¹ Ibid.

An East-Asian studies scholar, Shin Young-bok, indicates that many books in ancient China were produced in the Spring and Autumn Period (722-481 BCE) and the Warring States Period (476-221 BCE), but after Confucius (551-479 BCE), these books were only interpreted. It means that the canon, Confucianism, changed to be a ruling ideology to the people.⁵² Croatto also said, “Forming a canon is a phenomenon of ‘closure’: it excludes other readings of an earlier tradition even as it orients the interpretation of new practices. Every closure of a canon is part of a long hermeneutic process. At a determination moment in the course of this process, a “cut-off,” a delimitation occurs, with respect to the (oral or written) texts representing the interpretation of the events that have given rise to this tradition.”⁵³ Once it becomes a Canon (closure), other literature cannot come in, and thus turns into a process of interpretation, and therefore results in blocking the world that is up ahead. Then it also means that when there is a ‘closure’ to the original text, its development and maturity also stops. It shows an exclusive character.

In order to promulgate the early Christian Canon, the debates and research that went on were quite amazing and their results were also respected. At that moment in time, it was closely related with the surrounding ideas, religions, philosophies, etc.

However, Cohen says, “The phenomenon of ‘canonization’ is not restricted either to Judaism or to antiquity. Canonical Jewish texts have been written from ancient to modern times, and will continue to be written for as long as Judaism remains a living culture.”⁵⁴ Canonization is not a recording of the past, but a continuing process in present and future. Furthermore, the choice to do so is also given, “canonization is a process, not an event. In the Jewish community, not some elite, which determines canonicity, since for a book to become canonical it must be accepted by the community as authoritative. Different communities had different canons, and viewed their canons differently.”⁵⁵ Jewish societies choose the canons depending on their areas and their circumstances. The Jewish texts of the Qumran community, and the Diaspora Jews are all different. It is,

⁵² Shin, Young-bok, *Kangoui* (Lecture) (Seoul: Dolbege, 2004), p. 91.

⁵³ Croatto, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 43.

⁵⁴ Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, p. 182.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 192.

therefore, completely different from Christianity, which has one canon, one system of dogma that is exactly the same all over the world.

The Canon and the Method of Historical Criticism

From the end of the 19th century, the method of historical criticism has studied the literature of canon's original text, and this contributed greatly to the progress of biblical scholarship. Historical criticism methodology compares many ancient original texts and their transmissions, including Masoretic texts, Hellenistic texts, Samaritan texts, Qumran manuscripts, et cetera. Other criticism methodologies such as redaction criticism, source criticism, canonical criticism, sociological criticism, rhetorical criticism, feminist criticism and post-colonial criticism appeared and allowed for a diverse approach to the canonical texts.⁵⁶ Furthermore, archaeological study opened up a space to look at Israel's religion from an ancient near east. However, the methodology of historical criticism rests in the interest in the origin and writer of the texts, parallel structures within or outside the Bible, and others. Therefore, if looking at it from a Jewish perspective, there is no approach to how texts came in and applying new texts in the contexts and the realities, such as the interpretation and application of the Torah in Psalms, the Prophetic messages in the Prophets, or the Wisdom literature in the Psalms. The Old Testament scholars usually focused on finding parallel structures.

The methodology of historical criticism only focused on recovering the original text so that it only set its goal on strengthening the canon in the 1st century CE, and the New Testament Canon from the 4th century. After that, Christianity through the 'canon' conquered many nations with the ruling ideologies, mainly monotheism, the prohibition of idolatry, the salvation only through Jesus, the Kingdom of God, Gospel mission, good and evil, etc. There is not any examination of other dominant nations and religions. Biblical scholars only find interest in Biblical eras, and are not linked with the whole history of the early-middle-pre-modern ages. If Biblical scholars are not conscious of the historical flow, such as the histories of Judaism, Islam, Greek Orthodox, then their

⁵⁶ Steven R. Haynes & Steven L. McKenzie, *To each Its own meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticism and Their Applications* (Westminster : John Knox Press, 1997). In here it is introduced in diverse recent critical methods.

reasoning will only be the same as those of the past when Christianity abused its religious power.

While Childs writes in his book, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*,⁵⁷ that the final form of the Canon is the point at which the sacred text is completed, I view the 'final form' as something that brings about exclusivity and seclusion from other views, and criticize it for bringing rigidity of thought about faith. If there was an influx of other philosophies, Christianity would have been more flexible towards other religions, would not have attacked or persecuted them, would have been anti-violent, would not have started wars, and would not have exploited in Asia, Africa or Latin America. However, I view that because Christianity depended upon the closed limits of the Canon and used up church power and social power, this resulted in self-imprisonment.

When emphasizing the authority of the Canon excessively believers begin to put too much importance on biblical fundamentalism, and they can become violent and argumentative towards other religious people. Thus, it is necessary to become more open and flexible to the Bible. Unfortunately, once it is proclaimed as the Canon, inclusion of imagination, philosophy, literature and history is denied, and the flexibility and vividness ends, and will only arrive at a point where it had to be interpreted under the premise of being the Roman Empire's national religion. The canon, different from early Christianity when it was being persecuted, became a tool for the Roman Empire to rule using church power.

From the early to the middle ages and to the present time, Christian scholars still display the imperial tendencies as they emphasize the absolute authority of God. European ruling Christian nations colonized Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The mission of God's Nation aligned with colonization, and allowed for destroying these areas' religions and cultures, and calling them satanic and evil. This became a psychological shield to not only the missionaries, but the European soldiers as well. Especially in some hymnals, we see allusions to armies. This shows the superior attitude

⁵⁷ B. S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament As Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979); *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985). In contrast with that, James A. Sanders emphasizes "canonical process." In his *Torah and Canon* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972); *Canon and Community* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).

of the missionaries and the soldiers towards Asia, Africa and Latin America. Thus, European-ruling Christianity used the Canon as its tool for conquest, and it therefore has a tendency to be exclusive and argumentative.

Canons of the Ruling Christianity and of the minjung Judaism

Previously, the Diaspora minjung Jews, while from the Hebraic Biblical times, through the Crusades, the Middle age, to the current times, experienced persecution, exile, execution, and much pain. Even then, their scriptures as canon have gone through so much development and evolution in contrast with the Bible which did not develop at all. They were able to overcome all the painful experiences – racial, religious, geo-political, historical – by creating Canons that fitted their contemporary circumstances. Thus, keeping the doors to its intellectual tradition open, and interpreting the Torah according to the contemporary circumstances, allowed Palestinian and Diaspora Jews to adjust to new thoughts and cultures. The Canon for minjung Jews was a tradition passed onto them and a constantly maturing text to help them get through the present time, and not like in Christianity where they are trapped with a closed door.

As such, from the Biblical times until the end of World War II, minjung Judaism experienced isolation and dangers and sufferings, and thus depended on the wisdom of overcoming through religious strength. Diaspora minjung Jews always lived as a minority and as outsiders, were isolated from the rest of the society, and became the target for Christian and Islamic religious societies. Furthermore, they lived through all the pressures by firmly asserting their own religion, and lived as minjung.

When Judaism bore through as a minjung religion, it emphasized the importance of family for the sake of blocking outside pressures. Furthermore, in the synagogues the Rabbis taught the freedom of interpretation, and the synagogues were a place for psychological freedom during hard times. However, in today's world, Jews and Judaism in Israel are no longer minjung. They attack and kill Palestine minjung peoples by using high tech military arms.

Looking from Judaism's perspective, early Christianity is a new and pagan religion, which used the Hebrew Bible as its Old Testament, and proclaimed Jesus Christ

as the Messiah. Christianity had an inner power to spread Christ's truth and tried to stop any other books or thoughts that would taint that, and therefore proclaimed the Canon. This was also an inner centripetal force during the time when it received persecution from the Roman Empire. However, when it became the national religion, it also became a ruling religion in co-operating with political power. It wasn't simply a personal conversion of the Roman Empire's rulers, but rather that they found a way to use Christianity as its tool, and saw it as a way to best govern and dominate. 'Pax Romana' aligned with 'Pax Christi'. Although Jesus Christ is ultimately humanity's salvation, Jesus' name was used in violence and in wars throughout history.

The Roman Empire and the church made an alliance. The canon was a way to strengthen the ideas of monotheism and abolition of idolatry, which they took from the Hebrew Bible. Through it they were able to govern the people, justify their governing other pagans and other nations, and religions. Hence, the canon was the best strategy for government in order to assure political and religious power during the Roman Empire-Middle Ages-colonial periods-through to capitalism in modern time.

Early Christianity shows a positive side as it was able to preserve the ancient Old Testament and New Testament documents by emphasizing the Canon. However, the proclamation of the Canon put a chain around ideological, religious, cultural, and philosophical development as the early Church leaders only emphasized the importance of obeying these texts. After the 4th century, the canon and the ruling Christianity may have appeared to have grown, but instead became "the power and a slave to its own national power". This is the past 2000 years of Christianity's history.

Canonization's new beginning

The 21st century is called the era of dialogue with civilizations. However, violent religious wars are still occurring. In the center of it all lie Christianity, Islam and Judaism, which all came from one root in the desert. Each one of the three religions claims that theirs is the truth, and display argumentative tendencies and for the past two thousand years, continued to fight each other. The three religions all speak of peace in the name of truth, yet the world has seen no peace due to the three religions. Can't the three religions

give up their truth? Human pride and selfishness have used God's revelation in order to persecute other religious people and to justify violence and war. Nations craved land, slaves and other exploitation, and therefore continued to justify their actions with God's name and revelation. In Christianity, Jesus Christ is the ultimate savior who brings life everlasting; however, during the Crusades, he became a symbol of terror and war for Muslims and Jews. Islam's Jihad is also an object of fear for Christians. Currently, Israel is persecuting the Palestinian Muslims and Arabs. If the three religions disappeared, would there be world peace? God will have to be responsible for the past two thousand years, where there were wars because of him, his sons, and his prophets. Of course, it is human selfishness that was the true reason behind all the fighting. The canon, which records all of these, should peel away the layers that stubbornly emphasize absolute power. In reality, it can be said that religious power and social power is what is covering the canons and scriptures, and what is fulfilling people's selfishness.

Even if the Canon is pure and full of truth, when it is not actively practiced within society and history and used as a tool for persecution and war, then it is no longer a canon. Our intent in reading the canon, practicing it, and preserving it, is to achieve peace. What is more important than God's promise of the afterlife and salvation is peace on earth.

In a world where things are constantly changing, the process of canonization, reinterpretation, renovation, should begin again now. The three religions should not only be looking from their own perspectives, but be regretting their awful deeds. We need to courageously critique the canon's past authority to bring about violence, and instead make new canons with peace and future in mind. Croatto is concerned to say that the canon has not closed everything, but opened and include new tradition.⁵⁸ He emphasizes that the canon will be polysemous, after all, it is a text.⁵⁹ He suggests that the canon is not the beginning of a tradition, then, nor is it its end, it is a moment in a continuous journey.⁶⁰ The canon is only a moment in the continuum. We cannot stop the process of reinterpretation.

⁵⁸ Croatto, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 47.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 48.

Early Christianity hid God's revelations through political power and proclamation of the canon, and afterwards the Church power did not find any other revelations necessary. Because they had all the power, they did not need any more revelations.

Minjung Judaism has continued to reinterpret and canonize, and not be trapped within the boundary of the 'Canon' during the past two thousand years despite being persecuted, discriminated against, and murdered. As a result, new and diverse canons were born, and through the process, people were able to be patient and survive. Minjung Judaism overcame all the difficulties that were presented to them in each era, and displays a continuing intellectual tradition. Today, canonization is trying to continue with revisions and hermeneutical process, in the contexts of globalization, new liberalism, the global empire, the crisis of eco-surroundings, economic inequality with developing countries, women and children, religious conflicts. There are inter-textualities, inter-scriptures, and also intra-faith, to bring to the process of canonization with neighboring religions, thoughts and philosophies. The canon is not tainted and will be more vital.

Conclusion

Canon means 'close.' That close acts as a barrier for the present and future, but however, gives an exclusive character which is not inclusive of others. After ancient China's Confucianism became canonized, it became a ruling religion, and the Confucianism of Korea's Chosun Dynasty (13-19th century CE) also was trapped within canonization. When looking at these Eastern and Western histories, religious powers were put on top of the canon, and through secular power, the canon of Confucian books acquired an enormous power in Korea to control people for 600 years with high class and royal class patriarchy. By cutting off other thoughts the Christianity which was ruling lost the function and role of making a peaceful world in history. The 'Jesus' image became the symbol of the Roman Empire, of the Crusades, and of the United States' world domination. On the other hand, minjung Judaism was able to survive through accepting and applying the diverse thought of many canonical books.

Minjung Judaism is in the forefront through their free approach to other thoughts, and through their creativity. Education in Jewish synagogues and in Jewish homes was

not merely about reading the Torah and memorizing it. Instead, the Rabbis opened up the doors for creativity and diverse interpretations and understanding, and this inner spirituality became their strength during hard times.

I want to say that the biblical canon was used as a ruling ideological means of persecution and oppression by the tyrannical power of the priest class which has the narrow dogmatic and exclusive doctrinal and royal (political) power. The United States of America, currently, has the world at its feet militarily, political, economically and culturally. It is ruling Christianity that also gives it another governing power, expanding territories, earning and exploiting all kinds of things using the 'Kingdom of God,' 'prohibition of idolatry,' 'salvation only through Jesus,' 'my witness to the ends of the earth,' to Asia, Africa, Latin America in the past. I think theology has helped this ruling Christianity for the last 1600 years directly and indirectly. As a result, the biblical canon has acted rather as medicine than poison in world history. Its original meanings and intentions were very badly changed by ruling Christianity with its secular power.

Another ironic problem is today's Israel. Israel allied with the U.S. and western European (Christian) countries continues to attack Palestine with enormous military strength. It is ironic, and completely different from the minjung Jew and Judaism of the past two thousand years.

We need to be rid of the era of the ruling Christianity, tied together by the canon. It is necessary for the Bible to be re-edited, re-written and re-interpreted with diverse ideas in modern times. This is not a personal matter, but rather many groups and communities that have been reasonable, peaceful, and seeking social justice should understand the historical significance, and begin the process. We must escape the Christianity which ruled, persecuted, and oppressed for the past 1700 years, and begin to work towards overcoming the New Liberalism, Global Empire, ecological crisis, the big inequalities between nations, between men and women and children, religious conflicts, Minjung, etc., again and try to solve each and every problem through flexibility and mutual dialogue.

Theology is not dogma, doctrine and fixed idea, but reflected new ideas in the new contexts. I expect that theology has to open, dialogue and makes new canon with diverse

ideas, philosophies, religions in new global contexts for viewing the next future centuries.

Abstract

This article asks what is the Christianity with relating the biblical canon in Church history. Canon of the Bible has taken the absolute power to Christianity, however, Judaism has developed to sustaining the Hebrew Scriptures and at the same time accepting diverse ideas, philosophies. For what and why are raised the big differences? I think that canon of the Christianity did not need to accept other thoughts, because Christianity had political and church power after Roman Empire, 4 AD for expansions in history. On the contrary, as Jews were persecuted from Christianity and Islam, they endured oppressions to keep their traditional scriptures and to adjust receiving new thoughts in Diaspora areas. Holy Scriptures of Christianity did not grow up its thoughts in the barrier of the canon at all. Political and church power always have made use of the ruling ideologies and exclusive attitudes for their benefits and profits be supported by theology. I search what is the meaning and the reconsiderable value of canon in the context of new liberalism, global empire, 21st. I expect that Anglicanism has to open, dialogue and makes new canon with diverse ideas, philosophies, religions in new global contexts for viewing the next future centuries.

Keywords: canon, historical criticism, Christianity and Judaism history, minjung theology, Roman Empire, global empire