Timothy H. Lim, ed.

When Texts Are Canonized

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This volume contains seven essays, based on papers delivered at a conference entitled "Power, Authority, and Canon," held in Edinburgh on 6 May 2015. Timothy Lim describes in the preface how the volume contributes to existing canon research by considering both the processes that led to particular texts being canonized and the consequences of the canonical status of these texts. In Lim's words: "The essays of this volume … bridge the span between biblical criticism and biblical theology by focusing on the nexus between canonical process and canonicity" (xv).

In his essay, "An Indicative Definition of the Canon," Lim argues against the existence of a particular set of criteria that informed the canonicity or lack of canonicity of early Jewish writings. Discussing the oft-adduced criterion of divine revelation, Lim demonstrates how claims to and recognitions of divine inspiration are constructs by the authors and readers of particular writings. Divine inspiration in itself did not serve as a decisive criterion for canonization, as many writings (such as the Temple Scroll or 4 Ezra) claim to be divinely inspired, yet were not included in the Jewish canon as it eventually came to be. Lim holds, therefore, that the "definition of the canon is better explained by indicative rather than criterial logic" (12). To explain his take on this topic, Lim adduces Wittgenstein's concept of family resemblances. According to Lim, "an indicative definition points to the family resemblances that are shared among the books that were eventually included in the canon. The features of this family of texts are not unique but may be found elsewhere among other noncanonical texts" (15). As two such family resemblances, Lim identifies a concern with the history of Israel and an association with the figure of David. Showing how these

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two features of canonical texts were neither necessary nor sufficient, Lim concludes that "the search for criteria should give way to … an indicative logic that is nonessentialist" (24).

Manfred Oeming's "The Way of God: Early Canonicity and the 'Nondeviation Formula'" discusses the use of the "nondeviation formula" ("do not add anything to the word that I am commanding you, and do not take anything away from it") in the Hebrew Bible. By so doing, Oeming is looking to shed new light on the early stages in the canonical processes that eventually led to the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament. Before discussing the nondeviation formula proper, Oeming draws a suggestive parallel between processes of textual canonization and the development of standard measures of length, weight, and capacity. As Oeming writes, "long before κανών became a technical term for a closed list of fixed texts, various 'canons' (meaning 'steady scales, fixed measures') existed in daily life and were used" (26). Oeming further identifies several aspects of social life that would require a canon—in the sense of a "scale that provides practical standards for a community" (29)—and suggests that processes of canonization began to take place "with the rise of standardized literacy in the ninth century BCE" (27). The nondeviation formula, which Deuteronomistic circles in the seventh century BCE began to use in combination with other formulae, reflects this increasing authority of written texts in ancient Israel.

In "Uses of Torah in the Second Temple Period," John Collins illustrates the use of Torah in the Second Temple period on the basis of the book of Ezra and early Jewish rewritten Scripture texts. Collins shows how Ezra promotes the Torah as a charter of Jewish life in the land of Israel, serving to maintain boundaries between Judeans and others. In the Hellenistic period, "the authority of the Torah had been clarified and solidified considerably.… 'Considerably,' however, is not 'absolutely'" (50–51). Collins demonstrates how rewritten Scripture texts such as Jubilees and the Temple Scroll "not only extend the tradition of the Torah but revise it in decisive ways" (61).

Michael Satlow's "Bad Prophecies: Canon and the Case of the Book of Daniel" raises the question how and why oracles in Daniel that did not come to pass were considered canonical by Jews and Christians in the late Second Temple period. Satlow proceeds from a heuristic understanding of a canonical process that distinguishes the four stages of oral delivery, literary expression, acquisition of textual authority, and canonization. Applying this framework to the book of Daniel, Satlow argues that "Daniel's oracles gained traction only in the Roman period" (75). Before that period, Satlow holds, Danielic oracles had been transmitted within confined circles of scribe-scholars, the *maskilîm*. Only after the advent of the Romans to Judea in 63 BCE did these oracles become more widely known and did the book of Daniel reach its final form.

In "Canon and Content," John Barton "considers three loosely linked issues relating to canonical texts, all to do with the relation of canonicity and meaning" (82). To begin with, Barton discusses the relationship between form and content. Such a distinction is all-pervasive in our modern understanding of books and contents, yet, as Barton argues, was alien to the late Second Temple

period. Thus, according to Barton, "the idea of a fixed content of biblical texts is something of a chimera.… Biblical texts were holy books, not instantiations of holy content seen as existing independently of the actual manuscripts to hand" (86). Second, Barton challenges the interpretation of the reference to defiling the hands in m. Yad. 3:5 as being indicative of the canonical status of particular writings. In Barton's view, the defilement of the hands is related to the presence of the Tetragrammaton in the writings mentioned in Yadayim. Thus, the issue has to do with the *form* rather than the *content* of these writings. Third, Barton treats strategies of harmonization employed by Jewish and Christian exegetes, showing how the canonization of a text informs processes of harmonization and the establishment of a "coherent 'canonical' meaning" (93).

Craig Evans's "Jesus and the Beginnings of the Christian Canon" discusses passages from the gospels to show how Jesus employed the Scriptures of Israel. Evans concludes that Jesus's use of the Scriptures exhibits a noteworthy "versional 'openness'" (95). Hence, he concludes that "the textual diversity—in the Christian community—originated with Jesus himself.… Following the Master's example, early Christian teachers appealed to the Greek, as well as to the Hebrew and Aramaic" (107).

The final essay of the volume, R. W. L. Moberly's "Canon and Religious Truth: An Appraisal of *A New New Testament*," offers a critical evaluation of a contemporary project: *A New New Testament*, edited by Hal Taussig and published in 2013. After a detailed presentation of *A New New Testament*, Moberly formulates points of critique of the project. Moberly first acknowledges the difficulty of giving a dispassionate response, due to "the fact that the book has an obvious edge to it" (115). Second, Moberly shows that the genre of *A New New Testament* remains unclear: Is it a scholarly work, or does it aim to address a more general audience? Third, Moberly problematizes the decision to exclude Israel's Scriptures from this project by pointing out that "it is unclear how better understanding of the early Jesus movements is facilitated by inattention to those documents that were scriptural for them before their own documents attained scriptural status" (121). Finally, Moberly addresses "the nature and logic of the *existing* New Testament" and explicitly wonders: "Are we being invited, in the name of open-mindedness, to sell a birthright of amazing grace for a mess of rationalized pottage?" (129). Hence, Moberly concludes that "perhaps the greatest contribution that *ANNT* can make … is to promote a more rigorous and searching engagement … with questions of canon, community, and religious truth in relation to the knowledge of God through Jesus Christ" (135).

The essays in this volume raise intriguing and important issues, such as the connection between the canonization of measurements and texts, the relation between form and content with regard to canonical writings, the issue of how bad prophecies could acquire canonical status, or the connection between canon and community in both the ancient and the modern world. Hence,

When Texts Are Canonized offers novel insights into the development and consequences of the canonical status of particular writings and provides stimulating topics for further research.