
Almost unsurprisingly, the history of the process of biblical canonization enjoys great popularity in academic teaching and research on the Bible around the world. From the last decade of the 20th century down to the present, there has been considerable interest in this field of research—a field of inquiry which affects almost all the branches of the biblical sciences, from the hermeneutics of textuality (inter-textuality or trans-textuality), to archaeology and codicology, ranging on into church history and the history of theology down to the present.

Thus, it does not come as a surprise that elements which also can be of interest to the academic audience have been reworked, as for example the question of the lost scriptures: scriptures that by sheer accident, coincidence or deliberate action have not survived and come down to us. That is also the case with McDonald’s book on Forgotten Scriptures. The author claims that “the early Christian church had a variety of Scriptures and other source material that informed their faith and shaped their thinking. But after a few centuries the church decided to keep the twenty-seven books of our present New Testament and to treat them as a canonical in faith and practice. But what of the other books?” (book jacket). The study promises to be revolutionary and therefore dangerous to the orthodoxy of today’s churches. Yet he adds the pedagogical proviso and note: “learning about these texts can help today’s Christians form a deeper understanding of the early church.”

The book consists of three parts: the first deals with introductory questions; the second is devoted to the “First Testament Scripture”; the third treats what he terms the “Second Testament Scripture.” In “Challenges and Directions,” the author introduces the topic and focuses on the problem of adequate language, i.e., the question of the basic definition of what constitutes a “canon.” He rejects former definitions as Bible, or Old Testament et similia because they are later definitions of the “church” and “synagogue.” His adequate delimitation of the field we are concerned with is the well-known phenomenon of books which had their validity in a certain period. In part two (“The First Testament Scripture”), the author deals with the topic of the lost scriptures in early Judaism. He offers a detailed analysis of all documents mentioned in the Bible (38-40), the Jewish apocryphal and pseudepigraphal writings (40-50), writings of the Essenes and Qumran (50-56), and of Diaspora Judaism (57-61). He then devotes a chapter to the question of what the ancient manuscripts tell us (65-84); the ancient translations are the subject of ch. 5 (85-97); a further chapter is devoted to the text and stabilization of Hebrew scriptures (99-121). The conclusion of this part of the book is pedagogical: “this is not a plea for opening the biblical canon. . . . But they (the lost books) do add consider-
ably to our understanding of the context and development of the Jewish and Christian traditions" (121).

The third part is devoted to the Second Testament Scripture (ch. 8-10). Using a similar procedure, McDonald presents the ancient Christian manuscripts and their contents (153-171); texts and translation of Scripture (173-192), a conclusion and finally a postscript: the search for a perfect Bible. Seen from the perspective solely of the number of pages, the reader cannot overlook the evident imbalance between the treatment of Hebrew and Christian Scripture: McDonald devotes half of his space (ca. 50 pp.) to the Christian production of (canonical) writings, over against 100 pages devoted to the Hebrew/Jewish Scripture. One reason is surely the importance that the so-called inter-testamentary tradition has attained in the academic community.

The book is well written and presents some old and fresh new insights and topics relating to canon history. Yet, there are some questions imperative to underscore here, namely pertaining to the problem of adequate language as McDonald develops his discourse: (1) 

*Synagogue*. McDonald wants to be precise in vocabulary. My question is why he uses general concepts, such as “Church and Synagogue”? Ancient Judaism never adopted the definition of being a religion in a synagogue (modern Reform Judaism speaks likewise in the main of a “Temple” to self-define the place of ceremonial liturgy). *Ecclesia* and *Synagoga* are two definitions of later specifically Christian origins, based on the Apocalypse of St. John in his world of the binary Christian understanding of history. (2) 

*Canon Revolution*. The author likes to emphasize that his book is revolutionary because of its stress on forgotten scriptures. In my view, the question is not if and when there were forgotten scriptures. One should focus on the tradition of a canon. One need to know what forces at what times decided on what the community should follow. In this way, authority is constructed. If new (historically venerated) authentic words of Jesus have no impact on Christian society, there is no chance for their “canonicity.” Only authority can make a body of text into a canon valid, not the scientific scholar. (3) 

*Second Testament*. The use of the definition of a “Second” Testament to avoid the term *New Testament* is, in my humble opinion, quite odd, and clashes head-on with the usage of the Church fathers, who supported only the latter. What is the value of a “Second” Testament or covenant with humanity? Of course, it signifies the abolition of or improvement on the first, and that is also the meaning of “new.” Avoiding the ecclesial use of “New” (see Hebr 8:8) and accepting “Second,” we can arrive at the same conclusion: the First/Old Testament is not more valid, or is valid only for the “first,” i.e. “old” Jews. I do not see the real need and additional value of such linguistic or indeed perhaps ideological change.

Nonetheless, the author is correct in putting a strong stress or accent on the lost scriptures to understand the phenomenon of the development of the canon. Every generation of scholars and students should interrogate the tradition, asking about the accents of former scholarship/authorship/authority to understand old and