

CANON AND COVENANT

Part III

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III. CANON AND COMMUNITY

ANOTHER conceptual model of the Scriptures is suggested by the account of their beginnings found in the Book of Exodus. This other way of viewing the Bible is complementary to the foregoing identification of the Old and New Testaments as the documentary witnesses to the Lord's covenants, old and new. In fact, it brings out more clearly the specific function performed by Scripture in its character as a covenantal document, clarifying in particular the nature of the relationship between biblical canon and covenant community.

The timing of the birth of the Bible was precisely conditioned; there were definite historical prerequisites for its appearance. If the Scriptural form of revelation was to be what it is — God's covenant addressed to the kingdom of his earthly people — then the Bible could have come into existence only when it did. Not earlier, for the appearance of Scripture having the character of kingdom-treaty required as its historical prelude the formation of a community peculiarly God's own and, beyond that, the development of this people to the stage of nationhood under God's lordship.

In the midst of a fallen world and in the face of Satanic hostility manifested in various historical guises, an elect people of God could not attain to kingdom status apart from redemptive judgments delivering them from the power of the adversary. Only when the Lord God had accomplished this soteric triumph would the way be prepared for him to promulgate his kingdom-treaty, setting his commandments among his elect people and ordering their kingdom existence under the dominion of his sovereign will.

In the pre-Messianic age the Noahic deluge constituted a divine triumph of redemptive judgment by which a remnant community was delivered from the tyranny of the godless and lawless prediluvian world powers¹⁰¹ and made heirs of a new world. Yet the Noahic community was a family, not a nation to which a kingdom-treaty might appropriately be directed.¹⁰²

The necessary conditions were met only in the formation of the nation Israel and only at the Mosaic stage in the course of God's dealings with the Israelite nation.¹⁰³ Covenantal revelation was already addressed to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, with their households, offering them the kingdom in promise. But Scripture required for its appearance more than merely the promise of a kingdom. It was necessary that the promise and oath given to the patriarchs be fulfilled; the chosen people must actually attain to nationhood. Not until God had created the kingdom-community of Israel brought forth from Pharaoh's tyranny to the Sinai assembly could he issue canonical covenant of the biblical type. The appearance of canonical Scripture thus had to await the exodus victory

¹⁰¹ Cf. M. G. Kline, "Divine Kingship and Genesis 6:1-4," *Westminster Theological Journal*, 24, 2 (1962), 187-204.

¹⁰² Since we are dealing with the theological rationale of the matter, other obviously relevant factors, such as the later origin of writing itself, are omitted above. Theistic discernment will appreciate that the timely invention of writing too was embraced in that sovereign providential ordering by which everything was in readiness at the predestined hour for the introduction of Scripture in the historical administration of God's kingdom.

¹⁰³ There were other considerations in addition to the one emphasized above that made the existence of Israel as a special people of revelation a prerequisite for the development of the Scriptures, particularly, of the Old Testament. For example, once given the postdiluvian proliferation of nations with their diversity of tongues (Genesis 10 and 11), the elective separation of one people from the diaspora of peoples (Genesis 12 ff.) was necessary in order that this one people might serve as the linguistically unified and otherwise cohesive channel required for the production of an organically coherent revelation. The redemptive program was not, of course, conceived and executed for the sake of the Scriptures; but the ethno-centralized phase which redemptive history entered when God called Abram out of Ur of the Chaldees is to be accounted for in part by the exigencies of providing the Scriptures as an instrument of salvation.

of Yahweh. That victory signalized the fulness of time for the birth of God's treaty-Word.

The scheduling of the nativity of the written Word at precisely that historical juncture points us to the peculiar quality of canonical Scripture. Originating as it does in consequence of an awesome display of Yahweh's power in salvation and judgment, in accordance with prophetic promises given to the patriarchs, Scripture from the outset bears the character of a word of triumphal fulfillment. It is the incontestable declaration that the name of Israel's God is Yahweh, mighty Lord of the covenant. Although the Mosaic kingdom established at Sinai was itself still only provisional and promissory in relation to the Messianic realities of the New Testament age, yet unmistakably the Old Testament Word of God which heralded the Israelite kingdom was for the pre-Messianic stage of redemptive history a word of promises manifestly fulfilled and of Yahweh's triumphant kingship decisively and dramatically displayed. From its first emergence in the sequel of victory, therefore, canonical Scripture confronts men as a divine word of triumph.

And along with the triumphant there is an architectural aspect to the Bible. For, being, as we have seen, a covenant word, this triumphant word of God has as its function the structuring of the covenant kingdom. In this connection the imagery of God's "house" comes to the fore in the Book of Exodus. The canonical Scripture which proceeds from the victorious Yahweh is the word by which he builds his house.

In the epic ideology of the ancient Near East it is the god who by virtue of signal victory has demonstrated himself to be king among the gods who then proceeds to build himself a royal residence.¹⁰⁴ A seat of kingship must be established for the exercise of the victorious god's eternal sovereignty. So, for example, in the Canaanite epic of Baal and in the Babylonian *Enuma Elish*, Marduk being the hero-god in the latter, the theme of divine house-building follows that of victory over draconic chaos.

¹⁰⁴ Similarly, the legitimation of a king's dynasty is attested by his authorization to build a temple for his god. See A. S. Kapelrud, "Temple Building, A Task for Gods and Kings," *Orientalia*, 32, 1 (1963), 56-62.

This mythical literary tradition quite clearly lies behind the mode of representation of Israel's redemptive history as recorded in the Book of Exodus. For the same sequence of themes is found again here in Exodus. First, Yahweh judges Egypt and in so doing humbles Egypt's gods (Exod. 12:12; Num. 33:4). To describe these triumphant acts of Yahweh in effecting Israel's escape from servitude under the alien pseudo-theocracy, and with particular reference to the passage through the sea, Scripture has recourse to the figure of the slaying of the dragon (Ps. 74:12 ff.; Isa. 51:9 f.; *cf.* Ezek. 29:3 ff.; 32:2 ff.). Then, after his victory over the dragon, Yahweh proceeds to build a house for himself. Such, indeed, is the central theme of all the rest of the Book of Exodus beyond the narrative of the deliverance from Egypt.

Yahweh's house-building, as depicted in Exodus, is of two kinds. There is first the structuring of the people Israel themselves into the formally organized house of Israel. The architectural instrument employed was those constitutional covenant words of God spoken at Sinai which in their documentary form were the beginning of canonical Scripture. Translating into reality the design stipulated in this treaty, the divine Artisan erected the kingdom-house of Israel to be his earthly dwelling place.

Having narrated the building of this living house of God's habitation, the Book of Exodus continues with an account of the building of the other, more literal house of Yahweh, the tabernacle.¹⁰⁵ The erection of this tabernacle-house too was arranged through Yahweh's treaty, specifically, in the process of elaborating the treaty stipulations. Though a more literal house than the living house of Israel, the tabernacle-house was designed to function as symbolical of the other; the kingdom-people-house was the true residence of God (a concept more fully explored and spiritualized in the New Testament). The Book of Exodus closes by bringing together these two covenant-built houses in a summary statement concerning

¹⁰⁵ From chapter 25 to the end, except for the episode of the breaking and renewal of the covenant in chapters 32-34, the book is devoted to this subject.

Yahweh's abiding in glory-cloud in his tabernacle-house "in the sight of all the house of Israel" (40:34-38).

It should be at least parenthetically observed that the literary unity of the Book of Exodus is evidenced by the identification of its comprehensive thematic structure with the pattern of divine triumph and house-building. Classical and still current documentary analysis assigns the extended treatment of the cultic theme of the tabernacle in Exodus 25 ff. to the supposed priestly source, while attributing the earlier part of Exodus in the main to the hypothetical narrative sources. This is yet another indication of the unsound methodology of this documentary approach, insufficiently informed by the realities of ancient literature. It arbitrarily puts asunder the sections of Exodus dealing with the themes of divine victory and house-building, which are shown by ancient epics to belong together, and it must then take refuge in the assumption that the authentic ancient pattern in its wholeness emerged quite fortuitously in a late editorial blending of the putative sources into the final form of the book.¹⁰⁶

Victorious kingship followed by palace building is discovered as a thematic pattern within the briefer unity of the Song of Triumph at the sea (Exod. 15:1-18), the antiquity of which is generally acknowledged.¹⁰⁷ The song first celebrates the glorious triumph of redemptive judgment, the demonstration that Yahweh in his majestic holiness and wondrous working was without parallel among the gods (verses 1-12). Then the song moves on prophetically to Yahweh's establish-

¹⁰⁶ The recognition of the ancient pattern discussed above is a further indication of the fallacy of von Rad's separation of the exodus and Sinai-covenant themes (cf. above, *Westminster Theological Journal*, 32, 1 (1969), 63). G. E. Wright plausibly interprets this literary-historical position of von Rad as a reflex of the Lutheran theological separation of law and gospel (*The Old Testament and Theology* (New York, 1969), p. 61).

¹⁰⁷ On the classification of this song in the category of triumphal hymns as attested in the late second millennium B. C., see W. F. Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan* (London, 1968), pp. 10 f. On the complex of themes in Exodus 15, cf. F. M. Cross, "The Divine Warrior in Israel's Early Cult" in *Biblical Motifs* (editor, A. Altmann, Cambridge, 1966), pp. 22 f. and "The Song of the Sea and Canaanite Myth," *Journal for Theology and the Church*, 5 (1968), 1 ff.

ment of his sanctuary on the mountain of his abode and the arrival there of his redeemed people through his irresistible might at the site of his everlasting reign (verses 13–18).

The same perspective on this ancient founding event is echoed back from Psalm 74 with its lament over the contradiction that had come to exist between Yahweh's position as victorious King from of old (verses 12–17) and the absence of the appropriate residence (verses 1–11 and 18–23). The literary treatment is in the Exodus tradition. Central once again is the reassertion of God's original supremacy as Creator by his redemptive triumph at the sea, here described as a vanquishing of the dragon, a breaking of Leviathan's heads (13 f.). United with the exodus salvation again is the covenant (20), by which God had constructed for his dwelling both the congregation of his heritage (2) and his sanctuary house (3 ff.). The Psalmist's dismay over the abnormality of the combination of God's indisputably sovereign kingship with the desecrated and desolate state of the dwelling place of his name is a clear reflex of the normal expectation that decisive royal victory would be naturally followed by the building of a permanent royal house.

The pattern that marked the exodus-Sinai foundations of Israel recurs at a later epochal point in the development of the Old Testament kingdom. Yahweh had through his servant David completed the conquest of the enemies round about his earthly domain; then, fittingly, he arranged by means of the provisions of a covenant for the erection of his temple-house on the holy mount (II Sam. 7). In this covenant, the dynastic house of David was also established and its permanence guaranteed.

By this configuration of themes Nathan's covenant oracle to David is shown to share with the song of Exodus 15 in its use of the victory hymn genre. Of incidental but no little interest are literary parallels found in the Egyptian hymns of victory.¹⁰⁸ The victory hymn of Thutmosis III offers a

¹⁰⁸ Nathan's oracle also has its parallels in the suzerainty treaties which promise prolongation of dynasty to the vassal king, as is argued successfully by P. J. Calderone in *Dynastic Oracle and Suzerainty Treaty* (Manila, 1966). Cf. too *TGK*, pp. 36 ff. These parallels consist in formal similarities in ideology and concept. But as an oracle of God in the context of David's

particularly full parallel to II Samuel 7. It is introduced as the words of Amon-Re and recounts how he promoted the king's career (*cf.* II Sam. 7:8 ff.), giving him victory over all Egypt's inveterate enemies on every side (*cf.* II Sam. 7:1, 11, 23). It then states that the king has erected the god's dwelling place (*cf.* II Sam. 7:2, 13) and affirms that the god has established the king on his throne forever (*cf.* II Sam. 7:11-16).¹⁰⁹ In an adaptation of this hymn of Thutmosis III found in the building inscription of Amenophis III, the words of Amon-Re to the king follow the king's description of the temple monuments which he has made for the god.¹¹⁰ Here then the close interrelationship of the themes of victory and temple building is made particularly apparent.

Channeled through the Davidic Covenant the history of

military triumphs, the structural form of Nathan's words is to be compared with the Egyptian victory hymns. When we consider that this covenant with David was to be consummated in the divine scion, Christ the Lord, we can appreciate the appropriateness of this fusion of treaty tradition with a literary form which gave expression to an ideology of divine kingship.

¹⁰⁹ It is particularly noteworthy that the idea that a temple should be built for Yahweh, if not by the victorious David at least by his son (II Sam. 7:13), would fit as an authentic element in the ancient literary pattern. To that extent the extensive parallel outlined above supports the integrity of verse 13 against the common rejection of it as a harmonizing addition by a later editor. *Cf.* R. de Vaux, "Jerusalem and the Prophets," in *Interpreting the Prophetic Tradition* (editor, H. Orlinsky, New York, 1969), p. 278. Also supportive of the originality of verse 13 is the lyric reflection of the II Samuel 7 episode in Psalm 132. For in this Psalm the king's building of a habitation for Yahweh is a central feature in Yahweh's establishment of David's dynasty by oath. On the integrity of verse 13, *cf.* A. Caquot, "La prophétie de Nathan et ses échos lyriques," in *Supplements to Vetus Testamentum*, 9 (Leiden, 1963), pp. 213 ff.

¹¹⁰ The composition of II Samuel 7 as an oracle of Yahweh joined with the prayer response of David should be compared with the blend of words of god and king addressed to one another in this stele of Amenophis III. Kitchen (*New Perspectives on the Old Testament* (editor, J. B. Payne, Waco, 1970), p. 8 — *cf.* incorrect details in the reference to this volume in the title note of this essay) observes that the most characteristic elements of this triumphal speech pattern continued from the fifteenth to the tenth centuries in Egyptian literary tradition, which is roughly equivalent to the period in which we have traced it in the Old Testament above.

Yahweh's triumphantly royal house-building reached forward to the age of the new covenant. At that time the temple of God in its antitypical form would be raised up and Scripture would again play the same architectural role as of old.

We are following representations in the New Testament itself when we identify the Scripture of the new covenant as the triumphant architectural word of the risen and exalted Saviour. Having vanquished the Satanic dragon (*cf.* Rev. 12:1 ff.), Christ was invested with cosmic authority and proceeded according to the Old Testament paradigm to build his royal residence. In this Messianic son of David the dynastic house firmly established by God's covenant with David culminated; he is the son of David who builds the true and eternal house of God. Surpassing the intimations of the ancient oracle, he not only builds but himself is the true temple of God. In the "body" of Christ, according to the New Testament revelation concerning the incarnation of the Son and the mystery-union of his people with him in the Spirit as God's holy dwelling (*cf.* I Pet. 2:5), there occurs the ultimate transmutation of the temple of God.

Now redemptive eschatology is a complex development and prior to the consummation the Messianic temple exists as an organization with principles of incorporation and with an authority structure and program appropriate to its existence in this world as one historical institution among others. In this respect, there is, in spite of great differences, a similarity between the house of the new covenant community over which Christ is set as Son and the old covenant house over which Moses was set as servant (Heb. 3:2-6). And the words of the New Testament which the enthroned Christ has spoken through his inspired ministers of the new covenant are his architectural directives for the holy task of constructing this new covenant house. The New Testament is the triumphant Lord's house-building word, his architectonic covenant for the new Israel.

In terms of its edificatory purpose, covenantal canon may be thought of as the architectural model for God's sanctuary-residence. The functional essence of biblical canon is thus imaged in that series of divinely revealed sanctuary plans which began with the tabernacle plan delineated by God for

Moses in the mount (Exod. 25 ff.; *cf.* Heb. 8:5).¹¹¹ This was followed by the temple design given to David and by him transmitted to Solomon (I Chron. 28, especially verse 19). A visionary model of the eschatological temple was revealed to Ezekiel on the high mountain (Ezek. 40 ff.), the ordinances pertaining to it being called "the law of the house" (Ezek. 43:12). And finally there was the revelation of the eternal temple-city given to the apostle John, again in a vision beheld from a great, high mountain (Rev. 21:10 ff.).¹¹²

The apocalyptic temple-city seen by John imparts a distinctly architectural cast to the new heaven and new earth of which it is the glory (Rev. 21:1 ff.). The eschatological re-creation event is thus a divine house-building, and the account of it appropriately follows immediately after that of the final judgment-conquest of the dragon and his hosts (Rev. 20:10, *cf.* verse 2), by which the son of David secured rest forever from all the enemies round about. Now since the manifest intent in this depiction of the eternal house of God is to present it as the restored and consummated paradise of God, we are led to recognize that the first creating of heaven and earth was also a process of divine house-building — the original constructing of a dwelling place for God.¹¹³ In this

¹¹¹ The most familiar example of this sort of thing from extra-biblical sources is found on the Gudea cylinders. It is there narrated that Gudea in a dream beheld Nindub, the architect god, draw a plan on a lapis lazuli tablet for the temple-house Eninnu, which this Sumerian ruler was to build for Ningirsu, tutelary deity of Lagash.

¹¹² This temple model stands in close conjunction with John's striking use of the canonical sanction derived from the treaty tradition (Rev. 22:18 ff.).

¹¹³ Genesis 1 is viewed from a house-building perspective in Proverbs 8:22 ff., where wisdom is the architect (so, according to one reasonable interpretation of the *'āmōn* of verse 30) in the day by day triumphs of creation. As this passage continues there is an explicit reference to the house wisdom builds, with possibly an allusion to the seven day structure of the creation history. *Cf.* also Ps. 93, especially verses 2 and 5. Similar creation perspectives can be detected in the prologue of John.

Attention may be called to other instances of the association of wisdom with the building of God's house. In the form of vocational gift, wisdom plays a prominent role in the histories of both the Mosaic tabernacle and the Solomonic temple; *cf.* the wise craftsmen Bezalel (Exod. 31:2 ff.; 35:30 ff.) and the Tyrian Hiram-abi (II Chron. 2:13). (For comparison

original instance the triumph (or at least the display of God's absolute sovereignty) and the house-building were concurrent aspects of the one creation process. The vast deep-and-darkness which God first created he then bounded and structured until the divine design for creation was realized that it should not be a chaos but a habitation (Isa. 45:18). In the midst of the earth stood the holy garden of God, his micro-cosmic royal sanctuary, the dwelling place into which he received the God-like earthling to serve as princely gardener and priestly guardian. Then the Creator enthroned himself in his cosmic house, the heaven his throne, the earth his footstool; on the seventh day he sat as king in the archetypal place of his rest (Isa. 66:1).

Such was the long-historied ideological pattern to which Scripture from its first appearance belonged as an integrally functioning part.¹¹⁴ This portrayal of Scripture according to the architectural image which it suggests for itself highlights that constitutional function of the Bible which comes to the front and center as soon as the Scripture is recognized as covenant document. Thus viewed as treaty documents, the Old and New Testaments have the specific purpose of serving as a building plan for the community structure of God's covenant people. The function of each Testament, as a legal, administrative document, is primarily to define the covenant community as an authority structure or system of government by which the lordship of Yahweh-Christ is actualized among his servant people.

of Solomon's recourse to the Tyrian artisan with Baal's employing of Kothar-and-Hasis of Crete to build his royal house, see C. H. Gordon, *Ugarit and Minoan Crete* (New York, 1966), pp. 22 f.). The themes of Solomon's reception of wisdom and his temple planning are closely related in I Kings 3-5. We may also note the thesis that the wisdom book of Proverbs was so designed that its layout in the columns of the scroll represented "wisdom's house" (Prov. 9:1), this house being in certain respects like Solomon's temple, whose vertical dimensions it followed. So P. W. Skehan, "Wisdom's House," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 29 (1967), 468-486.

¹¹⁴ In connection with the essential role of treaty-canon as instrument for building God's house, we may recall again the ark-enshrinement of the Lord's treaty within his sanctuary-house, and the designation of the Sefireh treaty texts as "bethels" (cf. *TGK*, p. 44).

When it comes to the church's proclamation of the biblical message and to the systematic reformulation of the data of the Scriptures for dogmatic theology, what the Bible reveals about God himself and the salvation he has wrought and now offers to men will, of course, be the central and paramount themes. But, however far-ranging and sublime the contents of the Old and New Testaments, in the formal atomic unity of each Testament as a covenant document everything orbits about this nuclear function, which is architectural-governmental.

The community-structuring identification of canonical Scripture calls for a reassessment of the relationship of community and canon. In this connection it is first necessary to notice that there are two different ways in which Scripture functions as God's house-building instrument. These two ways correspond to the distinction between the Scriptures as authoritative word and as powerful word. As word of power, Scripture finds a prototype in the original, creation house-building of God. The divine creative *fiats* were God's effectual architectural utterances by which he actually produced and actively manipulated ultimate materials—light, life, and spirit, so fashioning his creation house. Similarly, the Scriptural word of God effectually wielded by the Spirit is the fiat of God's new creation.¹¹⁵ It is through the instrumentality of Scripture as powerful word that God constructs his new redemptive temple-house, dynamically molding and incorporating his people as living stones into this holy structure. So employed by the Spirit, Scripture is architectural fiat.

In our study of canon, our concern is with Scripture not as powerful word but as authoritative word, not as architectural fiat but as architectonic model. For canonicity is a matter of authoritative norms. Thus, when we affirm that the Old Testament is the canonical covenant by which

¹¹⁵ The biblical interpretation of God's covenantal dealings with Israel as a new work of creation is evident in the terminology and the choice of literary motifs in the historical narratives describing that relationship and in the hymnic and prophetic treatments of it (as, *e. g.*, in Ps. 74 and Isa. 43).

the Lord built the kingdom-house of Israel, we refer to the fact that God structured the covenant community preceptively by the covenant stipulations¹¹⁶ and definitively delineated the constituent elements of his holy house in its historical and theological, human and divine dimensions. As to its nuclear formal function, canonical covenant is a community rule.

Inasmuch then as canonical Scripture is God's house-building word, the community rule for his covenant people, the Reformation insistence is confirmed that the Scriptures form the church, and not vice versa. Indeed, in respect to the formal identity of Scripture, that position turns out to be true in an even more precise way than Reformed orthodoxy has had in mind. Yet, curiously, we are at the same time compelled by this apprehension of the nature of biblical canon as constitution for the community to acknowledge that our traditional formulations of the canon doctrine have not done full justice to the role of the community.

The community is inextricably bound up in the reality of canonical Scripture. The concept of covenant-canon requires a covenant community. Though the community does not confer canonical authority on the Scriptures, Scripture in the form of constitutional treaty implies the community constituted by it and existing under its authority. Canonical authority is not derived from a community, but covenantal canon connotes covenantal community.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ The precepts may be prophetic (e. g., the Deuteronomic stipulations concerning the future king or the central altar at its permanent site) and, since Scripture cannot be broken, such prophetic laws inevitably prove to be fiat as well as norm. Indeed, since the law of God's house in general is the word of triumphant Yahweh and is accompanied by the sure prophecy that God's house will be built, the authoritative word as a whole must prove to be the powerful word too. Scripture must become architectural fiat; but it is antecedently architectural model.

¹¹⁷ Wright (*op. cit.*, pp. 179 f.) regards it as probable that the idea of canon had its roots in ceremonial renewals of the Mosaic covenant by the Israelite community. To that extent there is a certain formal correspondence between his view of the history of the canon and that of the present study. However, in his reconstruction the force of the new insights is resisted. The traditional critical outlook is still clearly dominant in his judgment that the canon concept did not come to full development until

This correlative status of the community confronts us again as we analyze further the nature of the covenant documents of which the canonical Scriptures are an adaptation. Such a document was in effect the vassal's oath of allegiance recorded. The treaty text was a documentary witness to his covenant oath. The actual oath-malediction sworn by the vassal in the ratification ceremony might be contained in the treaty document,¹¹⁸ but whether or not this ritual response was cited in the text, the legal character of the document was that of sacred witness to the vassal's commitment. Accordingly, a treaty was at one and the same time a declaration of the suzerain's authority and an attestation to the authority of his treaty words by the vassal.

Inherent, therefore, in the covenantal nature of the foundational Old Testament documents was Israel's acknowledgment of their canonical authority. In the extension of the covenantal canon beyond the Mosaic treaties this aspect of community attestation surfaces here and there, especially, as we have noticed, in the Psalter with its confessional responses to God's covenantal law and gospel. Hence, the modern approach that would define canon in terms of the community's acceptance of certain books is seen to be divorced from historical-literary reality when it posits a late "canonization" of the Old Testament, even judging this viewpoint on the basis of its own definition of canon. For the Old Testament as covenantal canon was by nature community-attested canon from the time of its Mosaic beginnings.

A parallel between certain biblical and extra-biblical treaties may be cited in illustration of this community-attested character of covenant documents. The Aramaic treaty text, Sefireh I, was prepared by the vassal, Mati'el.¹¹⁹ Commenting

the post-exilic community accepted the law from Ezra as their constitution. Moreover, Wright's view of the role of the community in relation to the canon is radically different from the one adopted above (see further note 134 below).

¹¹⁸ See *TGK*, p. 29 and my "Abram's Amen," *Westminster Theological Journal*, 31, 1 (1968), 3.

¹¹⁹ The meaning of the text (line 2) is probably that Mati'el had a scribe engrave the inscription on the stele. Cf. J. A. Fitzmyer, *The Aramaic Inscriptions of Sefire* (Rome, 1967), p. 73.

on the purpose of this stele with its treaty inscription, the vassal observes¹²⁰ that it was designed as a memorial for his successors, so that adhering to its demands the dynasty might endure, not suffering the treaty curses. Comparable is the second set of Decalogue treaty tablets, which, in distinction from the divinely originated first copies, was prepared by Moses.¹²¹ In so far as Moses was acting as representative of the vassal people Israel in this covenantal engagement, the tablets thus produced to be inscribed with the treaty might be construed, like the treaty prepared by the vassal Mati'el, as Israel's own memorial witness against itself. This was explicitly so in the case of the Deuteronomic treaty, which was also vassal-produced.¹²² For according to Moses' charge to the Levitical guardians of the covenantal "book of the law," it was to be placed by the ark of the covenant that it might "be there for a witness against you" (Deut. 31:26).¹²³

Within the Deuteronomic treaty the vassal witness aspect of the treaty is given fullest and clearest expression in the Mosaic Song of Witness (Deut. 32). The Lord instructed Moses to teach the people this song that it might be in their mouths and in the mouths of their descendants as their own witness for Yahweh and against themselves (Deut. 31:19 ff.). Like Mati'el's statement concerning the memorial purpose of the copy of the treaty he prepared, the Mosaic Song of Witness appears in context with the Deuteronomic treaty's inscriptional clause (*cf.* Deut. 31:9 ff. and 24 ff.) and is expressly concerned with the ongoing vassal generations (*cf.* Deut. 31:21; 32:46) and their avoidance of the threatened evils.

The oral transmission history of the Song of Witness was thus a process of confession by Israel that the treaty-Scripture to which the Song belonged and whose sanctions it amplified

¹²⁰ The observation is found in conjunction with an inscriptional clause on face C.

¹²¹ Exod. 34:1a. Apparently God himself inscribed these as he had the originals; *cf.* Exod. 34:1b, 28b and, with respect to the originals, Exod. 24:12; 31:18; 32:16.

¹²² See Deut. 31:9, 24 for the preparation of the Deuteronomic treaty text by Moses.

¹²³ *Cf.* the Josh. 24:26 record of Joshua's writing of the words of Israel's renewed covenantal witness against themselves (verse 22) in "the book of the law of God."

was canonically determinative of their destiny. With this Song in their mouths, the continuing servant people Israel constituted generation after generation a living sign of attestation to the divine origin and authority of the covenantal Scriptures. The authenticating force of the wonder-signs wrought by Moses before the eyes of this covenant community at its founding was caught up and perpetuated in that living witness to Yahweh's canonical words, reproduced and echoed on the lips of children's children.

IV. CANONICAL POLITIES, OLD AND NEW

The identification of the Old-New Testament schema with the pattern of treaty-documented covenant renewal attested in ancient international diplomacy¹²⁴ establishes the formal perspective for an approach to the question of the discontinuity between the Old and New Testaments and, more specifically, to the question of the relation of the Old Testament to the canon of the Christian church.

In respect to the permanence of canonicity, an analogue to the biblical situation is found in the administration of the ancient political treaties. These treaties spoke of the alliances they founded and the terms they stipulated as valid down through following generations indefinitely. So, for example, the copies of the Bir-Ga'yah treaty with Mati'el speak in various connections of its arrangements, sanctions, and the suzerain's authority as being "forever."¹²⁵ Nevertheless, these treaties were under the sovereign disposition of the great king and subject to his revision. As has been previously noted, the treaty provisions might be altered because of changing circumstances in the development of the covenant relationship.¹²⁶ Treaty alterations of a more general type would attend the preparation of the new docu-

¹²⁴ See above under II. "All Scripture Covenantal," *Westminster Theological Journal*, 32, 2 (1970), 196 f.

¹²⁵ So also both Egyptian and Hittite versions of the parity treaty between Ramses II and Hattusilis declare repeatedly that that treaty of peace and brotherhood was valid "forever."

¹²⁶ See above, *Westminster Theological Journal*, 32, 2 (1970), 186.

ments in the process of covenant renewal.¹²⁷ Such renewals gave expression at once to the (at least theoretically) eternal character of these treaties and to the fact that the covenant order was not static but correlated to historical movement and change. The legal compatibility of these two aspects, the eternal and the changing, must have resided in a recognition of a distinction between the fundamental tributary allegiance of the vassal to the great king (or the mutual peaceful stance of the partners to a parity treaty), which was theoretically and ideally permanent, and the precise details, such as boundary definitions and tribute specifications, etc., which were subject to alteration.¹²⁸

The canonical covenants in the Bible are similarly "forever" yet subject to change. The relationship established by God with his people and progressively unfolded towards a predestined consummation as portrayed in Scripture is an eternal covenant relationship. This covenant order, however, is subject to the Lord Yahweh, who according to his sovereign purposes directs and forwards redemption's eschatological development by decisive interventions, initiating distinctive new eras and authoritatively redefining the mode of his kingdom. These advances and renewals with their alterations of previous arrangements are certified in the continuing Scriptural documentation of the covenant.

Reluctance to accept the reality of God's sovereignty in history as expressed in this divine structuring of the redemptive process into eschatological epochs underlies the misguided modern analyses that view the discontinuity between Old and New Testaments in simplistically evolutionary fashion

¹²⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 197, note 91.

¹²⁸ Baltzer (*op. cit.*) distinguishes in the treaty structure between a declaration of principle and the specific stipulations that follow it. The variations among the three Sefireh steles, which describe the treaty relationship they record as "forever" valid, show how the concept of covenant permanence was compatible with a degree of difference in detail even in contemporary versions of the same treaty. (For discussion, see McCarthy, *op. cit.*, pp. 62 f. and Fitzmyer, *op. cit.*, pp. 2 f., 79, and 94.) Such variations are of importance too for a study of scribal freedom, of interest to the biblical scholar as a possible explanation of textual variations in parallel passages without recourse to easy assumptions of transmissional mutation.

and judge not a little in the Old Testament to be sub-Christian.¹²⁹ On the other extreme, interpretations of a dispensational brand, while quite insistent on the fact of divinely differentiated eras, misconstrue the discontinuity aspect of the redemptive process, positing such radical disjunctions between the successive eras that a genuine continuity between the Old and New Testaments becomes insolubly problematic. The actual covenantal continuity-discontinuity pattern of the Old and New Testaments does not come into its own in either evolutionary or dispensational historiography, and in the measure that that is so the question of the authority of the Old Testament in the Christian church cannot be properly assessed. The danger of having our position misunderstood as fostering the errors of one or both of these viewpoints ought not deter us from drawing out its implications.

What then does follow from the identification of the canonicity of the Old and New Testaments as covenantal canonicity, and the recognition that these covenants are at once "forever" and yet subject to revision? For one thing, Scripture should not be thought of as a closed canon in some vaguely absolute sense, as though biblical canonicity were something unqualifiedly permanent. In fact, if biblical canon is covenantal canon and there are in the composition of the Bible two covenants, one old and one new, there are also two canons, one old and one new. Instead of speaking of the canon of Scripture, we should then speak of the Old and New Testament canons, or of the canonical covenants which constitute the Scripture.

Each inscripturated covenant is closed to the vassal's alteration, subtraction, or addition (as the proscriptions of the treaty document clauses insist), yet each is open to revision by the Suzerain, revision that does not destroy but fulfills, as the history of God's kingdom proceeds from one epochal stage to the next, particularly in the passage from the old covenant to the new. Each authoritative covenantal corpus is of fixed extent, but the historical order for which

¹²⁹ For a fairly recent popular restatement of this viewpoint in connection with a discussion of the canon question and from an ecclesiastically significant source, see F. V. Filson, *Which Books Belong in the Bible?* (Philadelphia, 1957), pp. 52 ff.

it is the constitution is not a perpetually closed system. Each canon is of divine authority in all its parts, but its norms may not be automatically absolutized in abstraction from the covenantally structured historical process. Together the old and new covenant canons share in redemption's eschatological movement with its pattern of renewal, of promise and Messianic fulfillment, the latter in semi-eschatological and consummate stages. "Closed" as a general description of a canon would be suitable only in the eternal state of the consummation.

The identity of the Old and New Testaments as two distinct canons and the integrity of each Testament in itself as a separate canonical whole are underscored by the conclusion we have previously reached that the function each Testament performs as an architectural model for a particular community structure is its nuclear, identifying function. As polities for two different covenant orders, the Mosaic and the Messianic, the two covenantal canons stand over against one another, each in its own individual literary-legal unity and completeness.

They are of course indissolubly bound to one another in organic spiritual-historical relationship. They both unfold the same principle of redemptive grace, moving forward to a common eternal goal in the city of God. The blessings of old and new orders derive from the very same works of satisfaction accomplished by the Christ of God, and where spiritual life is found in either order it is attributable to the creative action of the one and selfsame Spirit of Christ. According to the divine design the old is provisional and preparatory for the new and by divine pre-disclosure the new is prophetically anticipated in the old. External event and institution in the old order were divinely fashioned to afford a systematic representation of the realities of the coming new order, so producing a type-antitype correlativity between the two covenants in which their unity is instructively articulated.

The continuity between them is evident even in the area of their distinctive formal polities. For when we reckon with the invisible dimension of the New Testament order, specifically with the heavenly kingship of the glorified Christ over his church, we perceive that the governmental structure of the New Testament order like that of the old Israel is a

theocratic monarchy. A dynastic linkage gives further expression to this continuity, for the heavenly throne which Christ occupies is the throne of David in its archetypal pattern and its antitypical perfection.¹³⁰

Nevertheless, at the level of its visible structure there are obvious and important differences between the new covenant community and the old organization of God's people. The full significance of these differences between the cultural-cultic kingdom of Israel and the church of Christ, which is strictly cultic in the present phase of its visible functioning,¹³¹ must be duly appreciated. When full weight is given to these differences, the Old and New Testaments, which respectively define and establish these two structures, will be clearly seen as two separate and distinct architectural models for the house of God in two quite separate and distinct stages of its history. The distinctiveness of the two community organizations brings out the individual integrity of the two Testaments which serve as community rules for the two orders. The Old and New Testaments are two discrete covenant polities, and since biblical canon is covenantal polity-canon, they are two discrete canons in series.

This is to say that the Old Testament is not the canon of the Christian church. Covenant Theology is completely biblical in its insistence on the Christological unity of the Covenant of Redemption as both law and gospel in its old and new administrations.¹³² But the old covenant is not the new covenant. The form of government appointed in the old covenant is not the community polity for the church of the new covenant, its ritual legislation is not a directory for the church's cultic practice, nor can the program of conquest it prescribes be equated with the evangelistic mission of the church in this world.¹³³

¹³⁰ The continuity between the old and new orders in the area of polity extends to various other aspects of their organization as well, such as the policy of incorporation into the membership of the covenant community on the basis of the authority principle (*cf.* *BOC*, pp. 84 ff.).

¹³¹ *Cf.* *BOC*, pp. 99 ff.

¹³² *Cf. ibid.*, chapter two.

¹³³ The broader programmatic and ethical compatibility of the old and new orders will not be discerned apart from an uncritically objective

A distinction thus arises for the Christian church between canon and Scripture. The treaty-canon that governs the church of the new covenant as a formal community is the New Testament alone. Scripture is the broader entity consisting of the canonical oracles of God communicated to his people in both Mosaic and Messianic eras, the Old and New Testaments together.³⁴

In the framework of the thoroughgoing spiritual-eschatological unity of all the redemptive administrations of God's kingdom, the character of all Scripture as equally the word of God commands for the Old Testament Scripture the place it has actually held in the faithful church from the beginning. It is able to make wise unto salvation through faith in Jesus

reading of the biblical revelation concerning the eschatological structuring of the history of God's kingdom with its complex of divinely defined, interrelated epochs. I would still subscribe to the basic thesis of my early effort to analyze this matter in "The Intrusion and the Decalogue," *Westminster Theological Journal*, 16, 1 (1953), 1-22.

³⁴ Wright (*op. cit.*, pp. 180 ff.), along with others, speaks of a canon within the canon, or within Scripture. His distinction, however, has nothing in common with the one drawn above between canon and Scripture. Indeed, against the kind of reverence for Scripture which informs the latter Wright repeats the wearisome charge of bibliolatry. He identifies the canon within the canon with those parts of the Bible regarded as most important and relevant by the theology of a particular historical moment. Wright recognizes the relativism of his position but somehow fails to perceive that this characteristically critical interpretation of the relation of community tradition to canonical Scripture precludes a genuine canonicity of the Bible by effectively muffling the divine voice of authority speaking therein, and thus is itself the real idolatry.

In his *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia, 1970), B. S. Childs tries to get beyond canon-within-the-canon approaches. He is critical of identifying the unity of the Bible in terms of centripetal forces abstracted from the Bible's total diversity. His thesis is that the context for doing Biblical Theology is the Christian church's canon as such. Nevertheless, Childs fails to show how he could avoid being forced to acknowledge a canon within the canon, or a limited unity of the Bible. For no more than those he criticizes does he want to return to an orthodox confession of the infallibility of Scripture. Indeed, his approach cannot in the last analysis provide for objective Scriptural authority at all, since, in his adoption of a Barthian view of the role of the responsive community in the inspiration process, he has made human subjectivity constitutive in canonical authority.

Christ. It is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness. As Scriptural revelation the Old Testament provides norms for faith. Indeed, all that the Old Testament teaches concerning God and the history of his relationship to his creation is normative for Christian faith. Its historiography, preredemptive and redemptive, is altogether truthful. The New Testament revelation of God's saving acts through Christ presupposes and cannot be adequately comprehended apart from the world-view presented in the Old Testament and the Old Testament's disclosures concerning man as a creature living before the face of his Creator, first in the normalcy of the covenant in Eden and since the Fall in the abnormality of a state of exile in the earth, yet with a call to restoration within the fellowship of an elect and redeemed remnant community. Likewise the faith-norms of the Old Testament pertaining to the operation of the principles of law and grace in man's salvation continue to be normative for faith in the New Testament revelation. In the nature of the case, all the faith-norm content of the Old Testament remains authoritative for faith in all ages.

If to be normative for faith were what qualified for canonical status, the Old Testament would belong to the canon of the Christian church. However, the *sine qua non* of biblical canonicity, canonicity of the covenantal type, is not a matter of faith-norms but of life-norms. More specifically, inasmuch as the nuclear function of each canonical Testament is to structure the polity of the covenant people, canonicity precisely and properly defined is a matter of *community* life-norms.

There are, of course, life-norms found in the Old Testament which continue to be authoritative standards of human conduct in New Testament times. Such, for example, are the creation ordinances of marriage and labor, instituted in Eden, re-instituted after the Fall, and covenantally formalized in the postdiluvian covenant which God made with all the earth, explicitly for as long as the earth should endure. Such too are the universally applicable individual life-norms included in the stipulations of the Mosaic covenants, regulative of man's life in relation to his neighbor. The New Testament, though not legislatively codifying these life-norms, does pre-

suppose them and didactically confirm them. But the Old Testament's community life-norms for Israel are replaced in the New Testament by a new polity for the church. The Old Testament laws dealing with the institutional mode of the kingdom of God in relation to the cultural mandate and with the community cultus of Israel, those norms which are the peculiarly canonical norms, were binding only on the community of the old covenant.

In these terms, the Old Testament, though possessing the general authority of all the Scriptures, does not possess for the church the more specific authority of canonicity. Under the new covenant the Old Testament is not the current canon.

When we have thus observed that the Old Testament does not provide the organizational constitution for the church of the new covenant and is not, therefore, canonical for the church, we have made the major distinction that must be made within Scripture in this regard. But the determination of what biblical content is currently normative, even in the canonically significant area of polity, is more involved than that. For within the Old Testament canon itself distinct stages are legislatively delineated for the developing form of community government — and a similar situation obtains in the New Testament. Hence not all that is contained in Old Testament laws concerning Israelite institutions was intended to be normative in all periods of Israel's history.

In prescribing the structure of God's kingdom-house and of his cultic-house, Pentateuchal law had to address itself to three clearly demarcated stages in Israel's development. The first was the foundational but preliminary wilderness phase extending from the covenant-making at Sinai to the Transjordanian conquests under Moses. The second was the transitional stage from the Joshuan penetration of Canaan through the unsettled centuries of settlement under the judges. The third era arrived with the monarchy and particularly with the rise of David when Israel secured rest from the enemies of the kingdom round about. With this development the Old Testament theocratic form attained maturity or permanence, of an Old Testament sort. Of course, when account is taken of the nature of the whole Old Testament age as preparatory for the coming of the Messianic

days, it appears that the "permanence" of even Israel's monarchical stage was only relative.

The laws of the Mosaic covenants were programmed from the outset for this succession of modifications in Israel's polity. So, for example, Moses not only prescribed arrangements for the administration of justice during his own leadership of Israel, but appointed a modified judicial system to meet the new conditions that would presently obtain upon the entry into Canaan (Deut. 16:18 ff.); and for the more distant future, he incorporated into the Deuteronomic treaty the law of the king (Deut. 17:14 ff.).¹³⁵ Precepts dealing with the future, near or remote, were potentially effective, becoming normative when Yahweh had brought to pass the situation which those precepts legislatively anticipated. When a later phase with its modified norms arrived, the prescriptions peculiarly designed for an earlier phase naturally ceased to be normative. The secret of the ability of biblical canon to preordain institutional changes through the coming centuries of the covenant community's development was the Spirit of prophecy.¹³⁶ Modern higher criticism's repudiation of such prophetic precept has certainly been the compelling reason for its later dating of Mosaic legislation, even if other arguments have often been more conspicuously adduced.

In addition to legislating for the three distinct eras that followed the organization of the kingdom of Israel at Sinai (the particular kingdom order for which the Old Testament Scriptures served as covenant canon), the Old Testament narrates the pre-Sinaitic relationships of God and his people. Although part of Israel's canon, this narrative material tracing the pre-history of the covenant community back to the earliest covenantal arrangements between the Creator and man functions within the Old Testament canon not as legislation but as historical prologue.¹³⁷ Not that this prologue

¹³⁵ Cf. *TGK*, pp. 94 ff.

¹³⁶ Besides prescribing prophetically for its own several polity phases, the Old Testament foretells significant New Testament polity developments, such as the universalism of the Messianic community. Such prophecies, however, do not function legislatively in the Old Testament canon but judicially, expounding and enforcing the eschatological sanctions of the old covenant rather than elaborating its stipulations.

¹³⁷ See above, *Westminster Theological Journal*, 32, 2 (1970), 185.

does not contain preceptive material; it prescribes the governmental structure of covenant communities (Adamic, Noahic, Abrahamic) in various degrees of continuity with post-Sinaitic Israel. Nevertheless, these pre-Sinaitic (including even pre-redemptive) covenantal polities found within the prologue's historical survey were in major respects unlike the kingdom form of Israel and there is no question of thinking of them as currently normative for the community which at Sinai began to receive the Old Testament canon.¹³⁸

In brief, the Old Testament canon was given as the covenant constitution for the Israelite community formally established as a kingdom under Moses, the servant of Yahweh. The ground layer of this canon bears witness to the covenant-making events by which that kingdom was established, and it includes besides, as an historical prelude, a record of prior relationships of the parties to the treaty, or their predecessors back to the very beginnings. Then in its legislation for the Mosaic kingdom the Old Testament canon spans a series of pre-appointed stages in community structure down to the final, Davidic phase of Old Testament polity. Consequently, among the regulations relating to the institutional structure of this kingdom there are some which were of temporally limited authority. However, though not all the polity prescriptions for Israel were currently normative at all times even within the Old Testament era, they do all possess an inner coherence as belonging to a single general type, a peculiar institutional integration of culture and cult. The successive Old Testament stages of the kingdom were designed to arrive at a fully matured form of this general type, all the institutional modifications remaining within the limits of this type. Hence, even though canonicity is a matter of community life-norms, or polities, the contents of the Old Testament are

¹³⁸ Or stating a corollary, the Old Testament covenantal canon was not the treaty document for these earlier covenant administrations. That would apply all the more to the postdiluvian covenant of God with the earth (Gen. 9), even though that covenant, intact, continued to be in force into post-Sinaitic times and even into the New Testament age. Hence, also, the mere presence of an account of such a continuing covenant in Old Testament historiography has no relevance for the question of the Old Testament's canonicity in New Testament times.

not to be subdivided into several canons according to their relation to the several stages in Israel's polity. As over against the New Testament structure of the church, the Old Testament kingdom throughout the course of Israel's changing polity exhibits its own peculiar stamp. Correspondingly, the Old Testament canon possesses an integral unity over against the New Testament canon, each of these covenantal literary complexes being a discrete canonical whole.

The same kind of complexity that was found in the Old Testament characterizes the New Testament data on community polity. In the Gospels the New Testament canon testifies to the covenant-making events which were foundational to the building of the house of God over which Jesus was set as a Son. Then beyond the Gospels the New Testament reflects a history of church polity involving distinct stages. As in the Old Testament, following the founding ministry of the covenant mediator there was a transitional era of community extension for the church. In the Old Testament, this period witnessed a movement of the covenant people from outside of Canaan into the land and eventually to a central cultic focus at Jerusalem, Yahweh's selection of which for his permanent residence fully introduced the final Old Testament stage of polity. In the New Testament this era was marked by a reverse movement, from the disengagement of the sanctuary of God from Jerusalem to the expansion of God's people among the nations. A special polity marked this transitional phase, one in which the church was directed by the apostles of the Lord. With the passing of the apostolic generation came the stable, permanent stage of church order — "permanent" once again in a relative sense since this stage also is to be terminated in the consummation of the present course of history at the coming of the covenant Lord.¹³⁹ The introduction of the final New Testament polity did not require

¹³⁹ The consummation order to be established by Christ at his coming is actually the final and truly permanent stage of the new covenant. However, since Scriptural canon is surely a mode of revelation belonging to this world and not to the next, the present era of the new covenant is the last one for which the New Testament canon serves as polity norm, or for that matter, the last one for which the subject of Scriptural canon has direct relevance.

the emergence of some new governmental agency (like the monarchy in the final Old Testament stage), for the ultimate structure already existed within the special apostolic order and after the latter's gradual disappearance simply continued on (from a normative point of view, at least) as the permanent polity of the church.

In the prelude to the Gospels' record of the Messiah's covenant-ratifying sacrifice, the New Testament deals with a pre-church order too. The mission of John the Baptist and, as to its immediate design, the ministry of Jesus narrated there fell within the climactic, closing days of that old covenant order from within which the new covenant community was emerging. Moreover, this old covenant order was actually to be perpetuated for a generation after the inauguration of the new age with its new community — the generation during which the New Testament canon was produced.

Consequently, determining what is currently normative within the New Testament canon for community structure and function involves a process of discrimination analogous to that which faced those living under the Old Testament canon.¹⁴⁰ Although the New Testament canon is the currently normative canon for the church, it contains in the Gospels certain directives for the company of Jesus' disciples which were applicable only within the old covenant order, and elsewhere in the New Testament directives are found which were made temporarily expedient by that overlapping of the old and new orders which was not terminated until the judgment of the former in 70 A. D. So, for example, certain procedural details of the mission of the twelve¹⁴¹ or the mission of the seventy¹⁴² were conditioned by their old order context and

¹⁴⁰ An important difference between the two situations is that Israel's interpreting of current canonical norms was facilitated through most of her history by the provision of continuing special revelation, the growth of the old canon itself covering about a millennium in contrast to the one generation to which the creation of the canon of the New Testament church was confined, with the concomitant temporal limitation of other forms of special revelation.

¹⁴¹ See Matt. 10:1 ff.; Mark 6:7 ff.; Luke 9:1 ff. Cf. the limitation of Jesus' activity to the Israelite tribes (Matt. 15:24).

¹⁴² Luke 10:1 ff.

hence are not normative for the present mission of the church. Examples of transitional features explicable in terms of the temporary overlapping of the covenants but no longer normative are the Jerusalem council's ruling concerning certain Old Testament cultic proscriptions¹⁴³ and the more positive endorsement of the continuing legitimacy of the Jerusalem temple cultus by the practice of the apostles.¹⁴⁴ There is the further necessity to distinguish current from non-current norms which arises from the fact that the New Testament prescribes for more than one phase of church polity as it renders canonical service for apostolic and post-apostolic eras. It is within the framework of the church's distinctive phases, and particularly with due regard for the special historical purposes of the apostolic phase of the new order, that the interpretation of the church's early charismatic functions must be sought.

Conclusion: Only in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments does the church possess infallible norms of faith and conduct. But though all the faith-norms of Scripture are, of course, permanent, not all the norms of conduct, or life-norms, found in Scripture are currently normative. The problem is to distinguish among the life-norms those which have been abrogated from those which are still normative, the core of the problem centering in the relation of the life-norms of the Old Testament to the life of the church. Analysis of the data may be clarified by approaching the matter with an historically and legally more precise concept of canon. When the covenantal concept of canon is utilized, in which the nuclear or definitive aspect of canonicity is discovered in the area of community polity, the basic relevant distinction which emerges is that between individual life-norms and covenant community life-norms. It is the community life-norms, or polities, that are subject to abrogation as the covenant order undergoes major change. In the customary affirmation of a single canon of Scripture which prescribes radically variant community polities for the people of God there is an obvious

¹⁴³ Acts 15:20, 29.

¹⁴⁴ Cf., e. g., Acts 21:24.

formal tension, which lures the theologian into scholastic or dialectical explanations of various sorts. This traditional tension is resolved by the recovery of the historically authentic concept of covenantal canon with its identification of the two treaty-canons, old and new, within the church's Scriptures.

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