

## BOTH "OLD TESTAMENT" AND "TANAKH"

Jew-honoring, Jews-honoring, & Judaism-honoring Christians, of whom I'm one, will go to the bother of finding out how Jews refer to Jewish realities. While this rule of good manners applies to Christians' relations with all nonChristians, it's especially important vis-a-vis our primary origin-religion & its contemporary devotees. And this honoring, in the Jewish/Christian case, provides hermeneutic clues one of which this Thinksheet treats of.

1. Some avant-garde Christians, wanting to be "on the cutting edge" of being kinder to Jews, have become, of late, curiously embarrassed by, & even rejective of, the Christian phrase "the Old Testament." Eg, David & Denise Hopkins, "for years" have "opened our Introduction to HS ["Hebrew Scripture"]" course by putting this question: "What has the church meant and what does it mean by 'Old Testament'?"\* Especially curious, as for ½ century "HS" has meant for me & many other scholars "Holy Scripture." Curious also because of the singular: some universities, including Chicago, often use "Hebrew Scriptures [and New Testament]." Most curious because it fails to honor the good manners of referring to this Jewish reality as Jews do. \* P.62, PRISM (a UCC periodical), Fall '88.

2. Well, how do Jews? Here's "Old Testament," p.290, THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF THE JEWISH RELIGION (Adama/86): Name given by Christians to the Jewish Bible, based upon their belief that the messianic prophecies had been fulfilled by the advent of Jesus, as recounted in their supplementary scriptures, the "New Testament". The Hebrew name for the O.T. is Tanakh. Thus the new Englishing of the Hebrew sacred writings: TANAKH: A NEW TRANSLATION OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES According to the Traditional Hebrew Text (JPS/85). If the ref. is to its first five books (Greek Word, "Pentateuch"), the Jews say (to refer to a 1981 UAHC publication) THE TORAH: A MODERN COMMENTARY (& use the same word for [EJR, p.87] "Scripture as a whole" & even more widely, for Written Law & Oral Law together)...A difficulty in Jewish/Christian dialog: Jews believe that while God scatters "Wisdom" among all peoples, "Torah" (revelation & guidance) is a gift peculiar & exclusive to Jews; & that the Christian claim that Torah, God's "teaching," includes the NT, is false.

3. Religion on the left & on the right develops **trendy taboos**. On the right, American evangelicalism has recently been swept by a perfectionistic storm in the form of inerrantism (the errorless Book). On the left, current currents in my own church (UCC) proscibe saying "Father" (the inclusive-language movement) & "Old Testament" (the be-kind-to-Jews movement, which at the 1987 Synod managed to push through an ill-considered resolution, "The Relationship Between the UCC and the Jewish Community"). Hear the Hopkinses, same p.: "The use of Hebrew Scriptures [sic] rather than 'Old Testament' is one of the natural consequences of the General Synod resolution." Naturally. Is this couple antisemitic? Quite the opposite, they claim! But "the German Christians" subservient to Hitler rejected "the Old Testament" (the phrase & the literature it signals), as did 18 centuries earlier Marcion. I fear we have here, developing right under my nose, **a new Marcionism**. Notice the sad opening for a further neglect by Christians: The Jews have their Bible (erstwhile, "OT") & we have ours (which shouldn't any longer be called "NT," as there's no longer "OT").

4. I must rail against the naivete of these anti-"OT"-ers. As an old teacher of Hebrew, I must put this to them: Do you really think that you can surrender the Christian name for TANAKH without increasing the already appalling chasm, among Christians, separating OT & NT? You are giving hostages both to alienism ("It's their book") & antiquarianism ("It's an old book [I need not give much attention to]"). You fail at both: you want to be kind to Jews (& remove their Book further from Christians, without intending to), & you want to be accurate to history (but the effect of your anti-"OT" taboo is to make history, "their" history, less interesting to us).

5. A distinction: I'm railing against those neoMarcionites who'd drop our Christian designation, "OT." In scholarly meetings of Christians & Jews, such as the Society of Biblical Literature, the American Academy of Religion, and the American Schools of Oriental Research, I favor the current practice, which is "Hebrew Scriptures/Old Testament." As this Thinksheet's title indicates, I'm for using "both 'OT' and 'TANAKH.'" And when I say "the Bible," I mean the Christian canon--as RHD2: "the collection of sacred writings of the Christian religion" (the second meaning being Jewish sacred writings, "also called 'Hebrew Scriptures'"). The basic beginning textbook at Jewish Theological Seminary, NYC, is THE HEBREW BIBLE: A SOCIOLITERARY INTRODUCTION (by a Christian, Norman Gottwald of NYTheol.Sem.).

6. Hopkins, p.63, quotes Froehlich: "The tighter the grip of Christians on the Jewish Scriptures, the deeper the estrangement from the community of living Jews." But who now denies the Jewish grip on the Jewish Scriptures? Today, the greater danger is a loose Christian grip, indeed a lost grip. A recent work of Christian theology is based on an OT idea he doesn't credit the OT for, but only the NT. When I pointed out this glaring deficiency to him, he said, "I wish somebody had caught that in time!" My conviction: TANAKH/OT is **shared scripture**, & its titling should represent this sharedness--the Christians using Jewish terms but only in special circumstances, as now the Jews use "OT" but only in special circumstances....Learning each others' languages is one way of overcoming estrangement--Christians learning Hebrew (as we began to do in the late 3rd century) & Jews learning Greek, the language of the original Christian Bible (which included LXX, the Septuagint, the OT in Greek). Roman Catholics began to overcome their estrangement from Protestants & Jews in 1943, when the Pope declared the displacement of Latin by Hebrew & Greek in Biblical studies. A wonderful experience for me, for I was present when for the first time ever Catholic scholars presented themselves for SBL study with nonCatholic Biblical scholars--December that year. The Vatican II openings toward Protestants & Jews would not have been possible without a Biblical-languages-based community of Jewish, Protestant, & Catholic scholars over the intervening score of years.

7. Only a high view of Scripture can motivate a Christian, under today's pressures, to learn to read "the Bible" (instead of only versions & translations). Most now so doing are (to use Gabriel Fackre's terms, pp.62ff, THE CHRISTIAN STORY, vol.2: Authority: Scripture in the Church for the World [Eerdmans/87]) ocularists or transmissive-or-trajectory-or-intentional inerrantists, all of them convinced the Book is (one way of another) errorless, its very wording so to be taken with utmost seriousness. The (Hebrew-Aramaic-Greek) words are sacred, even (acc. to a Jewish mystical image) the letters are holy (& fly to heaven when the time comes for a wornout scroll to be burned). Infallibilists (conservative-unitive, moderate-essentialist, liberal-Christocentric) emphasize language-study, but not with the scribal intensity of the prior two groups. All other views--conceptual, historical, Christological, and combinationist--have less reverence for the original wording....Having a high view both of Scripture & of the Spirit in the heart, I call myself (as in this Thinksheet's first line) an **interrogative infallibilist**. I believe the Bible will infallibly give the right answers to anybody who asks the right questions. So what are the right questions? For that, I'm a situational existentialist (or I'd be a conceptualist). Say the Amerinds, "The Great Spirit puts the medicine near the disease." The Spirit behind-within-beyond the Text is the same Spirit moving the heart *in situ* to discover Scripture as the intersection of question & answer (the intersection having many names: revelation, inspiration, illumination, conversion).

8. While the OT is part of the Christian Bible, TANAKH is not: a Christian studying TANAKH, as Christian scholars should, is not studying part of the Christian Bible. The OT is a targum of TANAKH in that it is TANAKH seen through Christian eyes, ie, through NT. This seeing is (1) possible within the Jewish hermeneutics of the time, (2) impossible within modern hermeneutics [you can't get there from here], & (3) essential to Christian self-understanding (both in antithesis to & solidarity with Judaism) & thus to Christian existence. Judaism could exist without Christianity, but Christianity cannot exist without the OT: it would become merely a gnosticism.