

## IS SAYING "THE NEW TESTAMENT" UNJUST TO JEWS?

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Some are saying yes, since it implies some testament that is, instead of being new, "old," & thus (in a new-worshipping culture) at least inferior. This is a tongue-in-cheek way of raising the already old (as post-Holocaust) question whether Christians should give up, in the name of justice & love, the expression "The Old Testament."

1 Just how culture-bound this prejudice is can be felt by standing it on its head: in conservative cultures, & in conservative minds in nonconservative cultures, the reverse pejorative obtains. Eg, Jn. Wesley's bromide "If it's new it's bad." Christian neo-prejudice against the expression "The Old Testament" should be put down to self-flagellation, to masochistic sentimentality, to displaced repentance; & knuckling under to the prejudice, lest one be called or at least thought to be racist in the sense of prejudiced against the Jewish "race," should be put down to timidity in the form of pathological scrupulosity (parallel to Sprachausschliessendsschreckhaftigkeit, a German word [I just invented] meaning "the fear of saying something violating somebody's, anybody's, inclusive-language code--in cases of extreme timidity, the fear of saying anything")....In our language, "old" had a positive connotation ("grown up, adult"; cf "elder"); & (says OED) AD/CE 1508 is the earliest written reference to a negative connotation.

2 Why do I consider this Christian prejudice against "The Old Testament" post-WWII (specifically, post-Holocaust)? Because, as I can testify from personal experience, it did not exist even in gatherings of biblical scholars before then. Jewish & Christian scholars used, freely & without embarrassment, each their own language: Jews said "The Hebrew Bible," Christians said "The Old Testament," & both said "The Apocrypha." And both said "The Bible," the scholar's religion determining the term's meaning. After the war, Christians in Shoa-shock consciousness-raising began to examine **the Christian language** for antisemitisms, meaning antijudaisms. (Jews, of course, had antichristianisms in their speech--but to each his/her own repentance.) Sorting out Christian terms offensive to at least some Jews became a game both Christians & Jews played, Jews now feeling free to complain not only of low-culture "Christian" slur-words but also of high-culture Christian words (Jesus as "Christ"-Messiah, "The Old Testament," et al). As for the general-culture "A.D....." ("in the year-of-our-Lord-[Jesus]...."), Jewish (& some Christian) scholars switched to "C.E." ("Common Era," meaning "[Western-]Common Era"). Seeing values in both, I conflated (see above, §1, "AD/CE"). "Before Christ" (B.C.) became "Before the Common Era" (my "BC/BCE")....In this & other matters, academic usage seeps into the churches through their schools & through university denominationally unaligned divinity schools / religion departments.

3 In times of rapid language-shifting, one finds a **variety** of usage. In a seminary I'm familiar with, some teachers say "The Old Testament" & others, "The Hebrew Bible." In our home last night, as we joined hands & sang the Doxology around the dinner table, our guests, unlike our family, used untraditional wording. Why not? To each his (or in untraditional wording, "their") own. And in church yesterday, as we read a Psalm repetitively, I asked the people not to look it up in their Bibles, as it would only confuse them: I was using a rendering other than that in the pew Bibles. Why not? I remember the reign of KJV, the "good old" (note the positive "old" with "good," in the phrase) falsely-humorously or ignorantly called the "St. James Version." How good & gentle & peaceful & confidence-nourishing it was to memorize/remember the exact wording others knew & were sounding in worship, Bible study, conversation, reading, writing! But soon, in my late teens, I was reading the Bible in the original languages & was willing to trade off "Authorized Version" (AV) uniformity for truth-oriented variety--a gain greater than the loss.

4 But is variety always a gain greater than the loss of uniformity? I answer, whose gain? The dilettante's? The truth-seeker's? Humanists concerned about human-scale designing & living? Cultural analysts worried about the moral & spiritual effects

of too much variety, complexity, & speed (Vance Packard & Marshall McLuhan & a host of authors since them)? The Wall came down, & variety-hungry East Germans crawled all over West Germany looking for variety & excitement; while in West Germany the cries are increasing for the simplification of life (in the USA, too: how appealing, this evening, was the MacNeil-Lehrer essay on the Amish, whose simplicity is a sustainable, human-scale lifestyle of "God first, family next, & money a poor third")....It's not necessarily progress for truth, Christianity, & humanity that some Christians have traded "The Old Testament" in for "The Hebrew Bible." I think it's regress vis-a-vis both accuracy & the Christian witness.

5 **Neophilism** is the predisposition to the opposite of J.Wesley's bromide. It says "If it's new it's good" (cf.Ac.17:21, the Athenians' love of "the latest"). In our fast-changing world, it's a temptation (related, among the seven deadly sins, to avarice, gluttony, & lust). In Eastern Europe, this temptation is now a greater threat to Christian spiritual integrity & vitality than was Communist persecution. (Consider these in the flood of Western imports: drugs, pornography, AIDS, the spirit of narcissistic materialism, health-&-wealth prosperity theology, New Age & other Eastern-spirituality-informed cults, & fast-buck junk products [including junk food].) Theological students who want to be "in," not "out of it," are neophilistically saying things (eg, "The Hebrew Bible") which they'd never heard till they got to their liberal seminaries.

6 I love the Hebrew Bible (ie, the Bible's Hebrew-&-Aramaic-language books untranslated), which I taught (as I did also the Greek Bible [OT-Apocrypha-NT], the Bible of most Christians during the Church's first four centuries). It's accurate to call those the Hebrew & Greek Bibles. And it's normal for Jews to mean that Hebrew Bible, even in translation, when they say "The Bible." But it strikes me as inaccurate for nonJews to say "The Hebrew Bible" when referring to translations of the Hebrew-&-Aramaic books unless (like ancient heretics like Marcion, or modern antiJewish polemicists such as Nazi philosopher Alfred Rosenberg) they do so in order to further their program of alienating their followers from everything Jewish--in which case the usage is not only inaccurate but vicious.

7 The irony here is not funny. The traditional nomenclature, OT/NT, kept Christians in literary association with Jews: surrendering "OT" unwittingly associates Christians with antiJews. These avant-garde Christians, wanting to dissociate themselves from antiJudaism, clumsily dissociate themselves from the traditional metaphorical bridge of biblical (OT-NT) **unity** & associate themselves with those for whom everything "Hebrew" is foreign. (The foreign is passively feared, then actively hated: in a Greek-English word, "xenophobia," always a powerful element in antiJudaism).

8 "Metaphorical bridge"? Testament-covenant, God's continuous interpersonal bridging between himself & his people (continuous: OT-Apocrypha-NT). In holy love God throughout Scripture (OT-Apocrypha-NT) continues to reNEW the covenant, which is thus ever new & to be new (Jeremiah's "new covenant" or "new testament," 31:31 [Greek Bible, LXX, 38:31]). The grant theme is taken up in NT, esp. Heb.8:8-10, 10:16, both passages quoting the Jer. passage. You'd guess right if you were to guess that the neo-Judaizers (see my #2428) think Hebrews shouldn't be in the new canon of Christians! They esp. hate 8:7: "If there'd been nothing wrong with the first covenant, there would have been no need for a second one." "The Old Testament" is no Christian antiJewish neologism but a quote from Jer. Each in its own way, Judaism & Christianity are, in various senses, "the new testament-covenant." To surrender "The Old Testament" surrenders this rich heritage interlocking Judaism & Christianity & associating both with Torah-Neviim, the Law & the Prophets, & (underneath & above) with GOD's loving deeds. It's Paul (the darling of the neo-Judaizers, for Ro.9-11!) who associates the two expressions, "the new testament-covenant....the old testament-covenant" (2Cor.3:6-14).

9 How about saying the First & Second Testaments? The Qoran the Third? Then, Christians: "Who needs a Third?"; & Jews "Who needs a Second?";....How about "the Jewish Bible"? About the same pitfalls as "The Hebrew Bible."....Treat the Bible as a unity, "Scripture or the scriptures," & mention just the particular book. Sometimes, the Law, the Prophets, the Writings, the Gospels, the Epistles; & OT, NT.