# The Letter Killeth

Hector Avalos

Hector Avalos is Professor of Religious Studies and the founding director of the U.S. Latino/a Studies Program at Iowa State University, where he was named Professor of the Year in 1996 and the 2003-04 Master Teacher. He is the author of seven books, including *Fighting Words: The Origins of Religious Violence* (2005), and *The End of Biblical Studies* (2007). He lives with his wife, Cynthia, in a peaceful slice of paradise in Ames, Iowa.

Unprecedented historical crises often have compelled the rethinking of theological premises. The Roman Empire's oppression of the Jews in Palestine generated the rethinking of major theological tenets of Judaism, which then resulted in what we call Christianity. The socio-economic upheavals of the sixteenth century in Europe helped to spawn Protestantism and the rise of Anabaptist groups that rethought the role of scripture for believers. In modern times, the Holocaust impacted how we view anti-Judaism in the Christian tradition.[1]

After extensive work on religious violence, I do believe we are confronting an unprecedented global crisis. We have had wars before, of course. We have witnessed the nuclear decimation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. However, today we are faced with the potential for the first global religious war fought with nuclear weapons.[2] Not all of the causes of war can be traced to religion. But I think that a significant number can be traced to the use of sacred texts to justify violence. Accordingly, we need to rethink how we view the canonicity of violent biblical passages.

In the past, solutions for the problem of violent biblical texts have ranged from reinterpreting violent texts to *de facto* omitting them from our liturgical or practical life. Michael Coogan, the noted biblical scholar, admits that some biblical practices are so objectionable that churches try to hide them:

Conspicuously absent from lectionaries are most or all of such books as Joshua, with its violent extermination of the inhabitants of the land of Canaan at divine command, or

Judges, with its horrifying narratives of patriarchy and sexual assault in chapters 11 and 19—to say nothing of the Song of Solomon, with its charged eroticism, or of Job, with its radical challenge to the dominant biblical view of a just and caring God.[3]

Given that we already are removing violent texts from various aspects of our lives, then I simply propose the next step: the principled decanonization of violent texts. That is to say, our omission cannot be passive, but rather one based on a resounding affirmation of a theological principle that will not tolerate any endorsement of violence in our scriptures. Briefly, my case will include five intertwined arguments:

1. Reinterpretation of violent texts is inadequate, morally and practically;
2. The current canon is the product of late and imperialistic decisions under Constantine;
3. Canonicity is ultimately a theological decision and its criteria have been repeatedly revised in Christianity.
4. Since the canon relies ultimately on theological criteria, then we can show that Christian theology and tradition provide warrants for decanonizing violent texts.
5. The issue is not only the physical deletion of texts, but also the visible expression of the theological principle of zero-tolerance for violence.

In the interest of self-disclosure, I am a secular humanist who believes our life would be better if ancient religious texts did not have any role in validating or authorizing modern behavior. However, here I will demonstrate that it is possible to make an argument for decanonizing violent scriptures *within a Christian theological tradition*.

## Why Past Approaches Have Failed

Even a cursory glance at the history of biblical interpretation shows that violent biblical passages have been used to justify violence in every significant period of Christian history we can document. Despite her emphasis on the peaceful uses of the Bible, Lydia Harder, the feminist Mennonite theologian, admits the following concerning the Bible: “It has legitimized and justified oppressive institutions and practices.”[4] The reason is simple: violent texts are present in the Bible.

Indeed, the same texts that were being cited to commit violence in pre-modern times are the same texts that are being used to commit violence today. Robert W. Funk, president of the

Society of Biblical Literature in 1975, observed the following concerning the killing of thousands of witches on both sides of the North Atlantic world for hundreds of years:

The justification for this holocaust was the statement in the book of Exodus (22:18; Deut 18:10; cf. Gal 5:20): “You shall not suffer a witch (a female sorcerer) to live.” The execution of witches did not cease until the end of the eighteenth century and then only under the influence of the Enlightenment.[5]

In my own work, *Fighting Words*, I catalogue how sacred texts have been used to justify violence repeatedly in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam from ancient to modern times.[6]

The main technique used by pacifists to explain the presence of violence in the Bible is reinterpretation, whereby they simply argue that a violent biblical text no longer is applicable or can be reinterpreted in a more positive light (e.g., as a metaphor for God’s justice, etc.). It is true that many biblical passages may be interpreted peacefully. Yet, and as even pacifist scholars acknowledge, the main problem is that interpretation ultimately relies on unverifiable theological premises. Ted Grimsrud acknowledges this reality with theology when he remarks:

It appears that we cannot draw evidence from the realm of nature or human experience to prove that God is violent or that God is not violent. ... We do make choices and they are theological choices.[7]

Similarly, Duane Friesen, professor emeritus at Bethel College, asks: “Is the claim of some pacifists that God is nonviolent anything more than another attempt to legitimate one more ideology to give divine sanction to a humanly constructed ethical position?”[8]

Likewise, most claims about “the correct interpretation” are ultimately statements of faith, and not purely the result of historical research. Choosing a violent interpretation is often no less justified than choosing a peaceful interpretation because faith claims about what “God meant” are equal in their unverifiability. Any appeal to a “proper context” is itself a theological construct. Consequently, and as I have argued before, even the most scholarly efforts by pacifist Christians to explain violent biblical texts often end up whitewashing the violence or using techniques that differ very little from how “fundamentalists” justify scriptural violence.[9]

In reality, reinterpretation is but a logical step away from decanonization. In an oft-cited article, Krister Stendahl argued that scholars should distinguish "what it meant and what it means."[10] Stendahl realizes that the Bible is sometimes so different in its ethics and cultural values that only recontextualizing can maintain its relevance:

This understanding leads to the puzzling insight that in the living religious traditions continuity is affirmed and achieved by discontinuity. Authority is affirmed and relevance asserted by reinterpretation.[11]

For Stendahl, disregarding the "original" sense of a text, is an "essential" function of scriptures: "From a historical point of view, Paul did not mean what Augustine heard him say. ... For better or for worse, that is how Scriptures function, and, if so, we had better take note thereof in our treatment of the history of ideas."[12]

Yet, when considering the meaning of a biblical text, two positions can be identified for those who believe there is even such a thing as authorial intent:

A. Authorial intent is the only one that matters.

B. Authorial intent is not the only one that matters.

If one chooses A, then biblical studies has been highly unsuccessful. We often do not possess enough historical and philological information to determine what an author meant or even what the right socio-historical "context" should be. This is also why trying to determine whether an author meant something "literally" or "figuratively" is usually just as futile.

If Jesus is the standard, we cannot determine historically what Jesus said. The earliest New Testament text we actually have is still $p^{52}$, and this is from the second century.[13] Despite our best efforts to reconstruct the "original" or give a historically sound account of Jesus' life and teachings, we still cannot close the gap posed by a century or more between the lifetime of Jesus and the earliest actual manuscripts about him.[14] Thus, we always end up choosing what we think is the best representative of Jesus. Christians often follow this interpretive rationale: "X is immoral, therefore, Jesus could not have meant X."[15] This is circular reasoning, of course.

If one chooses B (authorial intent is not the only thing that matters), then the only result is

chaos and relativism that renders all interpretation subject to a faith community's theology. If B means that we reject the original meaning in favor of some recontextualized meaning, then that is one step away from decanonization. The rejection of an original meaning of a text is nearly equivalent to rejecting the text. For, if we say Text A has original meaning B, and we reject original meaning B, then how is that different from rejecting Text A? When we reject original meaning B, all that is left is the *physical presence* of Text A, even when we are not honoring what it meant anymore.

The moral reprehensibility of reinterpretation can be shown by using Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, another text we find reprehensible for its violence. The simple fact is that any good exegete could reinterpret Mein Kampf and turn it into a text meaningful for today. All we have to do is divest it of the meaning it had in its original context, and—*poof*—the text becomes relevant for us. For example, we could pretend that "family" and "fellow community members," in *Mein Kampf* now means "everybody." We could pretend that "Jews" are a symbol that should not be taken seriously.

So why don't scholars do that? Because it would be absurd and immoral. There are excellent linguistic and contextual markers to determine what the original meaning of "German," as a racist term, meant for Hitler. It now would be absurd to reinterpret Hitler's "German" to mean "everybody." The "original meaning" of whatever Hitler said is sufficient to judge his book on moral grounds. The fact that some "hermeneutic community," rather than an individual, reinterpreted Mein Kampf to mean something more peaceful does not lessen the moral objection.

The same should apply to the Bible. Once we think we have established an original meaning for a biblical passage on historical and philological grounds, then reinterpretation is a morally sordid game just as reinterpretation of Mein Kampf would be nothing more than a game of "let's pretend." My analogies with *Mein Kampf* are deliberate here, for I see very little difference in the techniques used by biblical scholars to maintain the relevance of a text that we otherwise believe meant something violent in its original context.

Reinterpretation, therefore, is a symptom of bibliolatry when it seeks to retain the physical presence of violent texts. That is to say, we are now enslaved to the physical presence of a text rather than to a loftier theological principle. Maintaining the physical presence of a violent text overrides the logical consequence that a theology of nonviolence would demand

—absolute rejection of any text that portrays God as endorsing violence. Equally important is that even a few violent biblical passages that remain in our scriptures pose real threats for violence unlike those we have faced before.[16] The letter killeth.

## Canon: Theology and History

My plea for decanonizing violent passages stems, in part, from the exposure of the myth that our canon represents the consensus of the earliest Christians. Such an early dating for the New Testament canon was championed by Theodor von Zahn, among other mostly conservative scholars. Zahn, in particular, argued that the canon was finalized by the end of the first century and that it was the spontaneous creation of the first generations of Christians.[17] However, as Adolf von Harnack observed, Zahn's entire argument was based on the supposition that the mere quotation of a Christian text constituted proof of canonicity.[18]

By the mid-twentieth century, the mainstream opinion, represented by Hans von Campenhausen and Bruce M. Metzger, argued that the canon we know was formulated in the second century as a response to Marcion and other heretics.[19] Yet, this, too, has been challenged on a number of counts. In particular, the statistical studies of Franz Stuhlhofer, showed that there was very little difference in the frequency with which New Testament books were being cited as authoritative before and after Marcion.[20] Before Marcion, the New Testament was already far more authoritative than the Old Testament, and Marcion's activity did not seem to change that.[21]

If there is a trend, it is to date any authoritative decision about the Christian canon to the fourth century. Consider David Dungan's *Constantine's Bible*, which argues that "[c]anonization, properly speaking, did not occur until official government intervention in the Christian scripture selection process."[22] For Dungan the orthodox "canon" was really the creation of the Constantinian Empire. Rather than a bottom-up phenomenon envisioned by Zahn, Dungan sees the canon as a top-down, government imposition.

A similar scholarly trend is evident with respect to the canonization of the Hebrew Bible. For much of the last century it was assumed that the Hebrew canon was fixed by the end of the first century. In particular, the idea that there had been a council of Rabbis at Jamnia (Palestine) that fixed the Hebrew canon around 100 CE exerted a wide influence. However,

further research exposed the fact that the Council of Jamnia was a myth developed in the late nineteenth century.[23]

The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls dismantled the idea of a fixed canon in early Judaism. As James VanderKam, the prominent Qumran scholar, observes: “As nearly as we can tell there was no canon of scripture in Second Temple Judaism.”[24] Now, many scholars argue that the Hebrew canon probably remained open until at least the fourth century.[25] And since hundreds of texts, many heretofore unknown, seemed to be authoritative for the communities responsible for the Dead Sea Scrolls, then the Bible could have been made out of a number of possible combinations.[26]

Indeed, the word “canon” could have a very specific meaning within Greco-Roman culture.[27] It acquired an official meaning within political bureaucracies, wherein official lists imposed a uniformity needed for efficient administration. And it was not until after Constantine that we find the first definitive list that includes all the books we now hold to be canonical.

In his detailed study of the canon of the New Testament, William Abraham notes: “It is well known that the first reference we have to a list of books currently found in the New Testament is located in the famous Easter Letter of Athanasius in 367.”[28] What did exist prior to Constantine is best termed as “scriptures,” which described a wide range of works regarded as authoritative. The distinction between “canon” and “scripture” is one made by, among others A. C. Sundberg and John Barton.[29]

More importantly, pacifists with a Christocentric theology should recall that nowhere in our present canon is Jesus portrayed as writing scripture. He beckons people to “listen” to his words, not to “read” his words. Any written record of his words and deeds was not restrictive.[30] Even the authors of the Gospel accounts do not claim their works are the only ones that could be authoritative (see John 21:25). The potentially oppressive nature of texts leads to Paul’s exclamation: “But our sufficiency is God; Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit; for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life” (2 Cor. 3:5-6 KJV).

In fact, many early Christians preferred non-textual witnesses for Jesus even when textual records were available. Consider Eusebius’ report about the attitude of Papias, a bishop of

Hierapolis in Phrygia (second century), in determining the teachings of Jesus: “For I did not suppose that information from books would help me so much as the word of a living and surviving voice.”[31] Papias voiced a distrust of textual witnesses that can be traced as far back as Plato’s Phaedrus. In that work, we find the following assessesment of the impact of the invention of writing by the Egyptians as follows:

For this invention will produce forgetfulness in the minds of those who learn to use it because they will not practice their memory. Their trust in writing, produced by external characters, which are no part of themselves, will discourage the use of their own memory within them.[32]

So, the preference for a written witness to God’s message was not universal among early Christians.

## Canonical Redefinition as a Christian Tradition

When we look closely at what early Christians regarded as “scripture,” we find an astounding diversity. Such diversity begins with Jesus himself, at least as he is portrayed in the canonical gospels. It has long been recognized that Jesus quoted no single edition of what Christians today call the Old Testament. When Jesus appealed to the Jewish scriptures, he was not concerned (despite his statements in Matthew 5:18 about the immutability of the text) whether his version had major portions missing. Thus, the Greek edition of Jeremiah is one-sixth shorter than the Hebrew Masoretic edition.[33] Yet, Jesus quoted the Greek version of Jeremiah (e.g., Jer. 5:21 in Mark 8:18).[34]

Sometimes Jesus quotes from sources not regarded as scripture today. Consider the passage where Jesus explains the purpose of parables in Mark 4:12: “So that they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand; lest they should turn again, and be forgiven” (RSV). This is an allusion to Isaiah 6:9-10. If one looks at the Hebrew Bible, one will not find the final words (“and be [they] forgiven”) but rather “and (let there be) healing for him” (*wrp’ lw*). The Septuagint has “I shall heal them” (*kai iasomai autous*). The words “and be they forgiven” (yštbyq lhwn), however, are found in the Aramaic Targum of Isaiah.[35]

After a survey of Jesus’ usage of the Bible, Craig Evans concludes:

Jesus also seems to have quoted scripture freely, partly due to the pluriform nature of scripture in his day and partly because of his paraphrasing, allusive, and conflating style. ... The canon of scripture for Jesus, then, remained open, for God's revealing work was not complete.[36]

If Jesus did not insist on canonical fixity, then why should we? If Jesus quoted the Targum of Isaiah (or something akin to it) for his instruction, then why are we content to live without the Targum of Isaiah in our canon?

Evidence that we have expunged books from our canon also comes from important biblical manuscripts. Many Christians had "Bibles," which included books now missing from Protestant Bibles. For example, the Codex Vaticanus (fourth century) "contained both testaments as well as the books of the Apocrypha, with the exception of Maccabees."[37] The Codex Sinaiticus, "discovered" by Constantin von Tischendorf at St. Catherine's Monastery contained at least two more early Christian works, the Epistle of Barnabas and the Shepherd of Hermas, not found in modern Catholic or Protestant Bibles.[38]

More enduring was the Epistle to the Laodiceans, whose mysterious origins did not prevent it from being part of Christian Bibles for longer than we have had purely Protestant Bibles. Bruce Metzger remarks, "It is mystifying how it could have commanded such respect in the Western Church for a period of more than a thousand years."[39] Indeed, it is found in over one hundred manuscripts of the Latin Vulgate. Its presence was often so uncontroversial that Aelfric, the celebrated Anglo-Saxon biblical translator, was able to say this about Paul: "Fifteen epistles wrote this one apostle, ... one to Philemon, and one to the Laodiceans."[40] Metzger also observes that the epistle "is included in all eighteen German Bibles printed prior to Luther's translation."[41]

Even when early Christians did have the canon we recognize, they still circulated the Bible in the form of extracts, which deleted many portions of scripture. According Eusebius, Melitus of Sardis once fulfilled a request for those who just wanted Old Testament passages that related to Christ. After enumerating almost every book of the Old Testament known to us, Melitus remarked, "From these, I have made extracts [*eklogas*] and compiled them into six books."[42] Clearly, Melitus did not think he was depriving Christians of the whole Bible. Theological need allowed the deletions of scriptures.

It was not until Constantine insisted on uniformity for his empire that the previous pluralistic scriptural world of Christianity was persecuted to near extinction. And violence was used to impose this uniformity. Pope Leo I (440-461) is reported to have done the following with rival scriptures: “And the apocryphal scriptures, which under the names of the Apostles, form a nursery-ground for many falsehoods, are not only to be proscribed, but also taken away altogether and burnt to ashes in the fire.”[43]

Upon further historical reflection, we can see that our canon emerged out of a violent imperialistic agenda. That imperialistic agenda should cast doubt on its legitimacy for modern pacifist Christians. Violent biblical texts served the needs of an empire which could justify the destruction of non-conformity. And just as we have often cited textual “corruption” to delete texts from our modern Bibles (e.g., Mark 16:9-20, 1 John 5:7), we can think of violent texts as corrupting the purity of a theological message of nonviolence from God.[44] The Constantinian corruption of Christianity, after all, is an important theme in early Anabaptist historiography.[45]

But even if we disregard the imperialistic origin of our canon, the fact remains that other criteria for canonicity have dissolved in the face of historical inquiry. Usually, these criteria include 1) apostolic authorship or relationship; 2) prophetic certification; 3) orthodoxy; 4) universality.[46] Yet close historical analysis shows that such criteria cannot explain the origin of our canons or were applied too inconsistently to be valuable.

The criterion of prophetic certification, for instance, should mean that a work written by a recognized prophet of God should be canonical. Yet, that does not seem to apply to Enoch in the western canon. First Enoch certainly was regarded as an authoritative prophetic writing when the Letter of Jude was written: “It was of these also that Enoch in the seventh generation from Adam prophesied, saying, "Behold, the Lord came with his holy myriads” (Jude 14).[47] Yet, we do not hear Christians in America complaining that Enoch has been deleted from earlier canons (the Ethiopic Bible still retains it).

The criterion of universal acceptance, championed by Augustine, evaporates in light of the activities of Marcion, the early Gnostic who represents perhaps the most famous attempt to redefine scripture in early Christianity.[48] Marcion expunged the entire Old Testament from Christian life. He would accept as Christian scripture only an abridged version of Luke and ten Pauline epistles. Yet, it would be wrong to assume automatically that Marcion

represented some minority among Christians. On the contrary, Dungan has argued:

One might think that Marcion's drastic truncation of Christian scripture to one abbreviated version of Luke and ten letters of Paul would deeply offend Christians of his day. Just the opposite was the case; It was incredibly popular. … Scholars estimate that the Marcionites were more numerous than any other Christian faction at the time.[49]

So if the consensus of the Christian community was the key to canonicity, Marcion's canon might have won.

And some of the "orthodox" rationales for canonicity may appear plainly bizarre to us today. After all, one reason that Irenaeus, the influential Church father of the second century, gives for a collection of four gospels is as follows:

It is not possible that the Gospels can be either more or fewer in number than they are. For since there are four zones in the world in which we live, and four principal winds, while the Church is scattered throughout the world, ... it is fitting that we should have four pillars, breathing immortality on every side, and vivifying men afresh.[50]

In other words, Irenaeus' pre-scientific ideas about our planet helped to determine why we have four gospels. It is not just because they are the most authentic or the most reliable historically.

If one looks at medieval church writers, one learns that the most prominent theologians cited many books as scripture that are no longer part of the Protestant canon. For example, in his *Summa Theologica*, St. Thomas discusses whether theology is a unified science. As proof that it is unified, Aquinas says: "Holy Scripture speaks of it as one science: Wisdom gave him knowledge [*scientiam*] of holy things (Wisd[om] x.10)."[51] The Wisdom of Solomon, of course, has been eliminated from modern Protestant Bibles.[52] Yet, we do not see Protestants complaining about its loss (though there are efforts to reintegrate the apocrypha in many modern ecumenical versions).[53]

At the dawn of the Protestant Reformation, there was a vigorous rethinking of the canon. One feature that marked Protestantism as novel is the rejection of church tradition as a criterion for canonicity. Martin Luther, in particular, applied a theological criterion that redefined "scripture" as any text that promoted Christ (*was Christum treibet*). Luther made a

distinction between “scripture” (*Schrift*), which describes the Old Testament, and Message (*Botschaft*), which he saw as essential to the genre of gospel. For Luther, “[T]he gospel should really not be something written, but a spoken word, which brought forth the Scriptures, as Christ and the apostles have done. This is why Christ himself did not write anything but only spoke.”[54] Luther further remarked:

Whatever does not teach Christ [*was Christian nicht leret*] is not yet apostolic, even though St. Peter or St. Paul does the teaching. Again, whatever preaches Christ [*was Christum predigt*] would be apostolic, even if Judas, Annas, Pilate, and Herod were doing it.[55]

Thus, the physical medium is not as important as the content of the message. The human chain that transmits the message is not as important as the message. Apostolicity is redefined altogether. Herod could be just as good a conduit as St. Paul.

Not surprisingly, Luther seriously contemplated the elimination of books based on his Chistocentric criterion. Concerning the Epistle of James, he commented:

We should throw the Epistle of James out of this school [Wittenberg] for it doesn’t amount to much. It contains not a syllable about Christ. Not once does it mention Christ, except at the beginning [Jas. 1:1, 2:1]. I maintain that some Jew wrote it who probably heard about Christian people but never encountered any.[56]

Luther’s willingness to evict James from the canon should at the very least compel us to ask why we cannot evict books from the canon because of their violence.

John Calvin had a more “spiritual” view of canonicity. Like Luther, he rejected the idea that church tradition should dictate the canon. He remarked: “Nothing, therefore, can be more absurd than the fiction, that the power of judging Scripture is in the Church, and that on her nod its certainty depends.”[57] For Calvin, the witness of the Holy Spirit was the ultimate guide to canonicity.

Early Anabaptists also rethought the canon. In his meticulous study of early Anabaptist orders, Werner O. Packull devotes much attention to early Anabaptist views of the canon.[58] He concludes that the early emphasis on the New Testament was due to the fact that between 1525 and 1529, the Old Testament had not been fully translated into the vernacular.[59] In that period, many Anabaptists were operating without a major portion of

today's Bible.

But there was also a conscious decision by some Anabaptists to effectively decanonize the Old Testament. Consider the view of Leonhard Schiemer, whom some credit with authoring the Anabaptist order known as The Church Discipline (1529?). In an epistle dated to 1527, Schiemer says the following about the place of the Old Testament as a witness to brotherly love:

Of this the Old and New Testament testify [and] even though it would be good to read in the Prophets, the books of Kings and Moses [the Pentateuch], that is not absolutely necessary [*so ist es doch nit vast vonnötten*]. One finds everything in the New Testament. What is indicated [angezaigt] in the Old is clearly revealed in the New. And the Psalms are the quintessence [*ausszug*] of all prophets.[60]

Indeed, it was not surprising that the charge of Marcionism was launched against many early Anabaptists.

Again, canonical practices mirrored the theology of early Anabaptists. As Gottfried Gerner, the scholar of Anabaptist biblical interpretation, observed, "The specific doctrine of scriptural interpretation (Hermeneutics) in the Anabaptist movement is an apostolic hermeneutic characterized by a sense of unavoidable sending out to mission."[61] He adds concerning the Anabaptist rejection of the Old Testament, "So long as 'the Old Testament' is understood literally to be the 'the Old Covenant' (specifically the rule of the ancient cult), its rejection in Anabaptism is in fact unanimous."[62]

If we turn to American history, we find Thomas Jefferson applying a more radical and secularized form of Luther's Christocentrism to the canon. As a deist, Jefferson sought to purify the Bible from all superstition, and retain only the purest ethical teachings of Jesus. Thus, The Jefferson Bible was born.[63] Jefferson really meant it for private use, and so he never published it in his lifetime. The point remains, however, that Jefferson had rethought the canon on the basis of principles that are really no less worthy or verifiable than those of Luther.

In the aftermath of the Enlightenment, European theologians struggled with the potential dangers that rationalism posed to Christian theology. One of the most innovative responses to that crisis was deployed by Friedrich Schleiermacher. In his magisterial, *The Christian*

*Faith*, Schleiermacher sought to free Christian theology from rational proof. As an alternative to rational proof, Schleiermacher developed his famous idea that the basis of religion is the feeling of "absolute dependence."[64]

In the process, however, Schleiermacher redefined the role of scripture. Schleiermacher's "second theorem" on the canon states: "As regard their origin, the New Testament Scriptures are authentic, and as a norm for Christian Doctrine they are sufficient."[65] In short, Schleiermacher effectively deleted the Old Testament from Christian life. He believed, however, that "the real meaning of the facts would be clearer if the Old Testament followed the New as an appendix."[66] The Old Testament served as a historical prelude to the New Testament, but it was no longer normative.

Crude economics were important in eliminating some books from the Bible. Early editions of the King James Version included the Apocrypha, a group of seven books that Catholics believe are just as inspired as those in the Protestant canon. But eventually editions of the KJV were published, especially by Protestant missionary societies, without the apocrypha. Alister McGrath provides these reasons in his acclaimed history of the KJV:

There was now a commercial reason for removing the Apocrypha—Bibles without it were both cheaper to produce and smaller (and hence cheaper to transport overseas). Sensitive to the importance of both production and transportation costs, the missionary societies gradually came to view that the Apocrypha would be omitted—primarily, for financial rather than theological reasons.[67]

The fact that my proposal is not unthinkable among contemporary Christians and/or biblical scholars is evidenced by Robert W. Funk, the president of the Society of Biblical Literature in 1975. He says:

We have been betrayed by a biblical faith. We have heeded the Bible because we trust it, and it has often betrayed our better judgments, which have now risen up in holy protest. ... The canon is shedding its canonicity. ... My own solution to the problem is to issue a revised canon, a new New Testament, by both shrinking and expanding the texts to be included.[68]

In fact, Funk proposes three New Testaments. The first is an abridged version that would presumably eliminate, among other items, the book of Revelation. The second is an expanded one, which would include the Gospel of Thomas. And "a third New Testament

might consist of an entire library of early Christian texts."[69] All this is premised on Funk's realization that "in principle the limits of the canonical New Testament are entirely arbitrary."[70]

Likewise, feminist theologians have encouraged us to rethink canonicity in light of the blatant misogyny we find in biblical texts. Pamela Milne remarks, "It is time we began to look much more honestly and directly at what it means to call apparently non-reformable patriarchal texts like the story of Adam and Eve 'sacred.'"[71] Rosemary Ruether phrased it quite starkly: "Feminist theology must create a new textual base, a new canon."[72] She adds that this new canon would emerge after a long period of reflection by women on their experience much like the early Christians formulated their canon after a long period of reflection.

Lest we think that such conclusions derive only from liberal and/or feminist scholars, we turn to the work of C. S. Cowles, a self-described evangelical scholar, who proposes the devaluation of the Old Testament because of its pervasive violence.[73] Although his proposal is ambivalent, Cowles notes:

Yet as offensive and as problematic as these texts are, they are part of the church's received canon of sacred Scripture and cannot simply be dismissed, although in practice that is precisely what the church has done.[74]

In other words, churches have already deleted, in practice, some of these violent texts. It is just that they are not openly admitting it. These churches usually also refuse to acknowledge the shameful endorsement of this violence in the scriptures they call "sacred." Eugene H. Merrill, a prominent evangelical scholar, sees the potential consequences of Cowles' proposals:

Though Cowles admits that the Old Testament is Christian Scripture, he makes the astounding assertion that "its message is not of and by itself a Christian message." ... With this comment he opens the door to what can, in effect, be construed as decanonizing of three-fourths of the Bible.[75]

In any event, Cowles illustrates that decanonizing is not "unthinkable" to modern Christians. What may be lacking is the courage and resolve to do it.

So even this brief survey demonstrates that Christian traditions have added and eliminated books or parts of books from their "canons." *Revising the canon has not only been thinkable; it has been executed repeatedly*. Christians have continually redefined the criteria for canonicity. In fact, canonical additions and subtractions are still occurring, as witnessed by the fact that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints has added more books to the canon on the principle that God did not stop speaking in the first and second centuries. Redefining and reshaping the canon is as much a part of Christian tradition as anything else we can find.

## De Facto Decanonization

Perhaps one of the main psychological impediments to decanonizing violent scriptures is the unwillingness of modern Christian communities to accept the elimination of part of their scriptures. Such an idea reflects an "essentialist" view of the canon that we have shown is historically false or questionable. We can also prove empirically that many Christians already have effectively decanonized much of the Bible because they do not find most of it relevant to their lives.

The idea that much of the Bible is irrelevant, even among those who regard themselves as Christian, can be demonstrated empirically very easily. For decades, the Gallup Organization has conducted surveys on biblical literacy. These surveys show that, despite professed adherence to the Bible, most Christians are either ignorant of the Bible or their appeal to the Bible is very limited. For example, a 2005 Gallup poll shows that "[f]ewer than half of Americans can name the first book of the Bible."[76]

In September 2006, Baylor University's Institute for Studies of Religion published a comprehensive survey on American religion, which showed that 21.9% of mainline Protestants and 33.1% of Catholics "never" read scripture.[77] Michael Coogan observes that, "Although the Bible is acknowledged in theory as an authority, much of it has simply been ignored."[78]

John Bright, one of the most prominent American biblical scholars of the last century, reflected a similar sentiment regarding the Sabbatical and Jubilee years in Leviticus 25. Bright remarked that "the regulations described therein are obviously so little applicable to the modern situation that a preacher might be pardoned if he told himself that the passage

contains no relevant message for his people whatever."[79] In fact, if we went verse by verse, I suspect that 95% of the Bible would not even be missed, as it reflects many practices, injunctions, and ideas not much more applicable than Leviticus 25.[80]

So the idea that Christians will not accept such a breach with canonical tradition is false. They are practicing such breaches with tradition all the time if that means ignoring or never appealing to myriad texts that are present physically in their Bibles. What remains is the bold announcement and development of a clear principle of nonviolence as a new theological criterion of canonicity.

## A Pacifistic Canon

If canonicity has repeatedly conformed to theological criteria, then why can't we affirm that nonviolence is a theological criterion for judging a message from God? Why is nonviolence less worthy a criterion than Ireneaus' "four winds" rationale for the number of gospels? Why isn't nonviolence at least as valid a criterion as Martin Luther's "Christocentric" criterion, which could have included scriptures from Herod? Why isn't nonviolence a more worthy criterion than the Constantinian imposition that generated our canon in the first place? And if crude economics has resulted in the deletion of an entire set of books (the Apocrypha) from some Bibles, then why shouldn't a principle of nonviolence be used to eliminate just the parts of books that are violent?

In fact, some pacifistic biblical scholars already have moved partially in the direction of using nonviolence to judge God's message. Let's begin with the words of the Mennonite biblical scholar Paul Keim:

I want to believe in a God who is nonviolent. ... It may be easier to falsify God's acts in history than it is to deceive ourselves about God's character. I believe in a God who, because of love and a healing strategy for creation, is constrained in the way God acts in the world. Any depictions of God's acts in conflict with these constraints must be understood as false.[81]

If we adapt Keim's premise, and affirm that any violent depiction of God "must be understood as false," then the next step is to use this as a criterion in composing our canon. Any depiction of God as endorsing, promoting, or using violence to accomplish his

purposes in the world *must be understood as false*.

Similarly, Duane Friesen, professor emeritus at Bethel College, attempts to answer the question, Is God nonviolent? For him, "the intent of a violent act is to violate, to harm, and to destroy life."[82] Friesen outlines one of his conclusions as follows: "My claim is that God does not command violence, nor does God legitimate violence, including the necessity of violence by government."[83] Yet, what are we to do with passages where God clearly harms and kills life (the Flood) or where he commands violence against innocent children (1 Sam. 15:1-3)?

Wouldn't a more consistent theology of pacifism simply affirm outright that such commands cannot be part of God's message? Violent passages deserve to be expurgated as much as any other part of our scriptural tradition that we have already omitted for other reasons. What is there to lose by this detoxification? Here we might even paraphrase Barry Goldwater's famous dictum: To decanonize for the sake of peace is no vice, and moderation in our rejection of violent texts is no virtue.

Progressive revelation and innovation also can be viewed as fundamental principles of Christian theology. Indeed, novelty is one thing that impressed many of Jesus' contemporaries, as indicated in Mark 1:27: "And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, 'What is this? A new teaching!" Christ abrogated many laws that centered on violence (Matt. 5:38-44), and he ordained a new commandment concerning love (John 13:34). Thus, Christian pacifists should recognize that *innovation for the sake of peace is a fundamental tenet of Christ's teachings*.

If it is already the case that most Christians are ignoring most of the Bible, then why would there be a problem in announcing boldly that a principle of pacifism demands deletion of any scripture that portrays God as endorsing violence in any form? What would be new is not the de facto omission of violent passages, but rather the announcement of an explicit theological principle for such omissions. Violent portrayals of God never should have been included, and including them can be reassessed as a venomous corruption that we have allowed far too long.

## Which Texts Should be Decanonized?

Although my plea is programmatic rather than an exhaustive analysis of every violent passage, I will sketch a sample of the violent passages that would be eliminated from our canon and offer a few brief comments to justify the deletions:

**Genesis 6-7**: The Story of the Flood, justifying the death of all humanity, except for one privileged family. Genocide does not get bigger than this, and there is no historical evidence for this event.

**Genesis 22**: This is Abraham's near sacrifice of Isaac; the idea that God could even ask us to kill our son should be banished as a false portrait of God.[84]

**Exodus 12:29**: The story of the killing of the Egyptian firstborn portrays God as violent against the innocent.

**Exodus 22:18**: The killing of "witches" does not accord with a nonviolent God.

**Leviticus 20:13**: The death penalty for male homoerotic activity must be understood as a false portrait of God.

**Numbers 31:17**: Enslavement of girls captured in war is intolerable.

**Deuteronomy 7:1-5**: This passage has been used repeatedly to destroy other religions and ethnic groups throughout Christian history.

**Deuteronomy 22:13-30**: The stoning of women found not to be virgins represents human misogyny, and not God's message of love.

**1 Samuel 15:1-3**: God commands killing of Amalekite women and children. If we follow Friesen, God does not command violence, and so this text is part of a theological corruption that we have accepted far too long.

**2 Samuel 12:21**: God killing David's son as punishment for David's adultery contradicts Deuteronomy 24:16, which states that children should not be punished for the sins of their parents.

**1 Kings 18:40**: The biblical author endorses the idea that Elijah should kill those who belong to another religion (Baal worshippers). This text has been used repeatedly to foster violence against other religions.

**2 Kings 23**: The violent destruction of other religions by Josiah cannot reflect God's message of love.

**Matthew 27**: Any suggestion that Christ died or had to die for our sins should be removed. Violence cannot be the instrument by which God achieves human salvation and there is already a movement afoot to rethink the violent premises underlying Christ's atonement.[85]

**Matthew 10:34-37**: Jesus' violent purposes do not accord with a loving God.[86]

**Luke 14:26**: Jesus preaches hate, which is not in accord with a loving God. No need to whitewash what the text says.[87]

**Hebrews 9:22**: We should reject suggestions that the shedding of blood is necessary for the remission of sins.

**Revelation**: Revelation is a Christian revenge novel and has no place in a pacifistic vision of God. Eusebius notes that some early Christians questioned its place in the canon.[88]

Our decanonization has an advantage over previous attempts by Marcion, Cowles, and others. Their decanonization is based on either anti-Judaic premises or Christian supersessionist concepts. Our decanonization applies to both Hebrew and Christian texts. Nonviolence, in fact, is far more consistent than any previous criterion, including apostolicity, prophetic certification, and consensus.

In addition, our decanonization can serve as a signal to Islam and other non-Christian religions that Christians are serious about eliminating violence from our sacred texts. After all, we cannot simply keep criticizing Islam and other religions for their violent interpretations of God if Christians are not willing to confront the violence present in our own sacred texts.

Of course, some may object that deleting violent passages will not rid our world of violence. Other reasons for violence or other violent texts will be found to justify violence. But this is a defeatist position that would invalidate almost any attempt to make a more peaceful world. Why struggle for any peaceful solution if violence will just find another means to justify itself? As Joseph Liechty and Cecelia Clegg have observed in their study of violence in Northern Ireland, "No vision, no change—even though people may rail against their present situation. When captivated by a vision, on the other hand, the changes people

can make are amazing."[89] As pacifists, the fact that other people may find ways to justify violence is not as important as our *refusal to participate in endorsing and sacralizing violent texts any longer*.

## Are We Erasing History?

Understandably, some might ask if we are wantonly erasing history. The answer is that we are no more erasing history than when Protestant Bibles eliminated Maccabees, Enoch, or the Shepherd of Hermas from earlier canons. No one today flinches at the thought that books such as Maccabees helped fill the gap Christians often called the "intertestamental period," which spans hundreds of years. Yet, this period is not well represented, often for crude economic reasons, in some Bibles anymore. I suggest violence is a much better reason for elimination.

The fact is that the Bible is mostly a theologically constructed version of history. The Flood, for example, is not attested historically or geologically. Most of the stories of violence in the Old Testament have no independent historical confirmation. They can be viewed as violent theological constructs that have no place in a pacifistic canon.

Even within the New Testament, we find evidence that previous works were not considered historically inviolable. Gospels were subject to historical revision for theological purposes. As John Barton notes in his discussion of Matthew's redaction of Mark, "Mark, clearly cannot yet have been regarded as a sacrosanct text, or even a completely accurate account of what Jesus did and taught; otherwise, how could it have been changed so extensively?"[90]

Some might say we are being arbitrary. But "nonviolence" should not be thought of as capricious for pacifist theologians. As Duane Friesen phrases it, "Our conviction that God is nonviolent is therefore not arbitrary."[91] Nonviolence can be viewed as a fundamental theological principle that can be applied soberly to texts. It certainly is no less arbitrary than any other criteria that have been applied. None of traditional criteria can withstand historical or scientific scrutiny. Again, how is our proposal more arbitrary than the "four winds" rationale discussed by Irenaeus?

In any case, we would not eliminate any part of the Bible from our scholarly archives. Scholars who still wish to consult biblical sources with these passages, will still be able to

do so. What we affirm is that historical value should not be the main criterion for canonical value. But, it is better to be honest and up-front about our theological principles. We are now free to make an unequivocal statement that nonviolence will be the theological arbiter of whether a text is called sacred. The value of the physical presence of texts will be subordinated to the theological and symbolic meaning of the omission. I call that progress for peace. We should have done this a long time ago.

## Conclusion

Christianity has repeatedly amended its canon to accord with its theology. Christianity was born in the midst of scriptural plurality. Jesus is portrayed as using versions of scripture without much regard to how "complete" they were, relative to other versions. Modern Christians have indeed deleted most scriptural authorities used by many early Christians. The early Anabaptist tradition has examples of where the New Testament was deemed sufficient for Christian life. Pleas for recanonization or decanonization can be found today among Christians, ranging from conservative evangelicals to feminist theologians.

There is no reason why nonviolence cannot be viewed as a primary criterion of canonicity. Mennonites, Church of the Brethren, Quakers, and other pacifist Christian groups have the opportunity to show once again that they can be innovators in the footsteps of Christ. We no longer need to whitewash or interpret biblical violence away. My plea is for Mennonite and other pacifist Christians to follow the logic of a pacifistic theological principle that any depiction of God as violent *must be understood as false*. Violence in our canon can be viewed as a theological corruption we have allowed to exist and poison us long enough. Christian pacifists can once again lead the way for other Christians and non-Christians who thirst for a canon that truly represents the non-violent God in which they believe.

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1. 1. For example, Norman A. Beck, *Mature Christianity in the 21st Century: The Recognition and Repudiation of the Anti-Jewish Polemic in the New Testament* (New York: Crossroad, 1994); Rosemary R. Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide:The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Seabury, 1979).
2. 2. For an example of how the suggestion of a nuclear holocaust is being justified by use of the Quran, see Sultan Bashir-Ud-Din-Mahmood, *Doomsday and Life after Death: The Ultimate Fate of the Universe as Seen Through the Holy Quran* (New Dehli: Idara Isha'at –E-Diniyat, 2005). The former director of the Central Intelligence Agency, George Tenet (*At The Center of the Storm: My Years at the CIA* [New York: HarperCollins, 2007], 263) described this book as "a disturbing tribute to his [Mahmood's] skewed view of the role of science in jihad. The book's basic message —from the leader of the group that had offered WMD capabilities to Al-Qa'ida—was that the world would end one day soon in the fire of a nuclear holocaust that would usher in judgment day and thus fulfill the prophecies of the Qur'an."
3. 3. Michael Coogan, "The Great Gulf Between Scholars and the Pew," in *Biblical Studies Alternatively: An Introductory Reader*, ed. Susanne Scholz (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall 2003), 7.
4. 4. Lydia Harder, "Biblical Interpretation: A Praxis of Discipleship?" *The Conrad Grebel Review* 10:1 (Winter, 1992):17. For examples of how some biblical passages (e.g., Deuteronomy 7:5) was used to justify violence in some of the more radical streams of early Anabaptism, see Werner O. Packull, *Hutterite Beginnings: Communitarian Experiments During the Reformation* (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 172-73.
5. 5. Robert W. Funk, "The Once and Future New Testament," in *The Canon Debate*, ed. Lee Martin McDonald and James A. Sanders (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 549.
6. 6. Hector Avalos, *Fighting Words: The Origins of Religious Violence* (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2005). For my recent comments on deleting violent texts, see Heidi Ledford, "Scriptural Violence can Foster Aggression," *Nature* 446 (8 March 2007):114-15.
7. 7. Ted Grimsrud, "Is God Nonviolent?" *The Conrad Grebel Review* 21:1 (Winter 2003):17.

8. 8. Duane K. Friesen, “Is God Nonviolent?” *The Conrad Grebel Review* 21:1 (Winter 2003):7.
9. 9. See, for example, my critique in *Fighting Words* (164-166 and 216-220) of Millard C. Lind’s discussion of the biblical portrait of Yahweh as a warrior and of the interpretation of Luke 14:26 by John Howard Yoder (*The Politics of Jesus* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1972], 45). Note also that Friesen, himself a pacifist scholar, is not convinced by some of some of the reinterpretations of Yahweh the warrior, by Lind and Yoder. Friesen (“Is God nonviolent?” 9) comments: “However, I do not find Lind’s or Yoder’s position compelling. ... If we deconstruct these texts, do they not simply reflect an idolatrous commitment to one people at the expense of another, a projection of human desire for vengeance unto God?”
10. 10. Krister Stendahl, “Biblical Theology, Contemporary,” in *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. George A. Buttrick, et al., 4 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 1:420. Compare Stendahl’s view with that of E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale, 1967), 8: “Meaning is that which is represented by a text; it is what the author meant by his use of a particular sign sequence. ... Significance, on the other hand, names a relationship between that meaning and a person.”
11. 11. Krister Stendahl, “Biblical Studies,” in *The Study of Religion in Colleges and Universities*, ed. Paul Ramsey and John F. Wilson (Princeton: Princeton University Press,1970), 31. Stendahl’s view of how the meaning of texts are recreated by the reader echoes that of Hans-George Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (2nd revised edition; New York: Crossroad, 1989).
12. 12. Krister Stendahl, “Biblical Studies,” in *The Study of Religion in Colleges and Universities*, 31.
13. 13. Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption and Restoration*, 4th edition (New York: Oxford, 2005), 55-56.
14. 14. For a broader treatment of the failure of historical Jesus studies and of other subdisciplines within biblical studies, see Hector Avalos, *The End of Biblical Studies* (Prometheus Books, 2007).
15. 15. One example is the interpretation by Obery Hendricks (*The Politics of Jesus:*

*Rediscovering the Revolutionary Nature of the Teachings of Jesus and How they Have been Corrupted* [New York: Doubleday, 2006], 137) of the parable of the vineyard workers in Matthew 20. Hendricks denies that God or Jesus is advocating an inequality in wages by citing this rationale: "[W]e should not assume that the householder is God. ... [C]ues such as his large accumulation of land and subsequent inconsistent behavior in not addressing the inequality of his own wealth suggest that that identification would be inappropriate."

16. 16. Hector Avalos, *Fighting Words*.
17. 17. Theodor von Zahn, *Geschichte des Neutestamentliche Kanons* (Erlangen and Leipzig: Georg Böhme, 1890). See also John A. Barton, *Holy Writings, Sacred Texts: The Canon in Early Christianity* (Louisville: WestminsterJohnKnox, 1997), 3.
18. 18. Adolf von Harnack, *The Origin of the New Testament and the Most Important Consequences of the New Creation*, trans. J. R. Wilkinson (New York: Macmillan, 1925).
19. 19. Hans von Campenhausen, *The Formation of the Christian Bible*, trans. J. A. Baker (1972; Reprint, Mifflintown, Penn.: Sigler Press, 1997); Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development and Significance* (1987; reprint, Oxford: Clarendon, 1997).
20. 20. Franz Stuhlhofer, *Der Gebrauch der Bibel von Jesus bis Euseb: Eine statistische Untersuchung zur Kanongeschichte* (Wuppertal: R. Brockhaus, 1988).
21. 21. For this argument, see John A. Barton, "Marcion Revisited," in *The Canon Debate*, 343.
22. 22. David L. Dungan, *Constantine's Bible: Politics and the Making of the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 128.
23. 23. See Jack P. Lewis, "Jamnia Revisited," in *The Canon Debate*, 146-162; David Aune, "On the Origin of the Council of Javneh Myth," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 110 (1991):491-493.
24. 24. James C. VanderKam, "Question of Canon viewed through the Dead Sea Scrolls," in *The Canon Debate*, 91.
25. 25. See Jack N. Lightstone, "The Rabbi's Bible: The Canon of the Hebrew Bible and the Early Rabbinic Guild," in *The Canon Debate*,171-72. Lightstone, in particular, argues that the debates between Augustine and Jerome reflect the fact that at least two Jewish views of the canon were still competing for dominance in the fourth century.

26. 26. See further, Eugene Ulrich, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Origins of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999).
27. 27. There are many treatments of the word, "canon," but we depend on those of David Dungan, *Constantine's Bible*, especially pages 20-53; Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament*, 289-293.
28. 28. William Abraham, *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology* (New York: Oxford, 1998), 31.
29. 29. See A. C. Sundberg, "The Canon of the New Testament," in *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Supplementary Volume*, ed. Keith Crim ( (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976), 609-10; John Barton, *Holy Writings*, Sacred Text, 8-9.
30. 30. For a study of Jesus material quoted in Patristic sources, but which does not derive from the New Testament as we know it, see Richard Glover, "Patristic Quotations and Gospel Sources," *New Testament Studies* 31 (1985): 235-251.
31. 31. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, trans. J. E. L. Oulton (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980), 3.39.4.
32. 32. Plato, *Phaedrus*, 275. We depend on this edition: Plato, Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Phaedrus, trans. H. N. Fowler (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1914).
33. 33. For the statistics on Jeremiah, see Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 320.
34. 34. The quote in Mark actually has a more complicated textual history, on which see Gleason L. Archer and G. C. Chirichigno, *Old Testament Quotations in the New Testament: A Complete Survey* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), 134-35.
35. 35. For the Targum of Isaiah, we depend on the edition of Alexander Sperber, *The Bible in Aramaic: The Latter Prophets according to the Targum Jonathan* (Leiden: Brill, 1992).
36. 36. Craig A. Evans, "The Scriptures of Jesus and His Earliest Followers," in *The Canon Debate*, 195.
37. 37. Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption and Restoration*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford, 2005), 68.
38. 38. James H. Charlesworth, *New Discoveries in St. Catherine's Monastery: A Preliminary Report on the Manuscripts* [ASOR Monograph Series 3: Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1981.

39. 39. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament*, 183.
40. 40. S. J. C. Crawford and N. R. Ker, *The Old English Version of the Heptateuch: Aelfric's Treatise on the Old and New Testament and His Preface to Genesis* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 57. In Anglo-Saxon: "Fiftytne pistolas awrat se an apostol ... to Philemonem anne, to Laodicenses anne."
41. 41. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament*, 239.
42. 42. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 4.26.12.
43. 43. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds. *The Nicene and Post-Nice Fathers (*Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, [Reprint, 1997]),12:25.
44. 44. See further Bart Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).
45. 45. For the theme of Constantinian corruption in the thought of the Silesian Anabaptist, Oswald Glaidt, see Packull, *Hutterite Beginnings*, 105. See further Daniel Liechty, "Oswald Glaidt, Simone Simoni, and Juan de Valdes," in *Bibliotheca Dissidentium*, volume 9, ed. André Séguenny (Baden-Baden:Koerner, 1988).
46. 46. For the theme of Constantinian corruption in the thought of the Silesian Anabaptist, Oswald Glaidt, see Packull, *Hutterite Beginnings*, 105. See further Daniel Liechty, "Oswald Glaidt, Simone Simoni, and Juan de Valdes," in *Bibliotheca Dissidentium*, volume 9, ed. André Séguenny (Baden-Baden:Koerner, 1988).
47. 47. Jude quotes 1 Enoch 1:9. On Enoch's reception among Christians and Jews, see now Annette Yoshiko Reed, *Fallen Angels and the History of Judaism and Christianity: The Reception of Enochic Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). Reed discusses how Tertullian, the influential Church father, championed Enoch's place in the Christian canon (195-97).
48. 48. Augustine, "On Christian Doctrine," 2.11.8 in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (1885-87; reprint, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1994) 2:538: "Now in regard to the canonical Scriptures, he must follow the judgment of the greater number of catholic churches. ... Accordingly, among the canonical Scriptures, he will judge according to the following standard; to prefer those that are received by all the catholic churches to those which some do not receive."
49. 49. Dungan, *Constantine's Bible*, 44.

50. 50. Dungan, *Constantine's Bible*, 44.
51. 51. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Part 1, Q 1, Article 3, Obj. 2/Latin: "Sacra Scriptura de ea loquitur, sicut de una scientia: dicitur enim Sap. 10: 'Didit illi scientiam sanctorum.'" Our citation of the *Summa Theologica* is from the first complete American edition in three volumes translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947). The Latin text follows Divi Thomae Aquinatis, *Summa Theologica* (Editio altera romana; Rome: Forzani, 1923).
52. 52. For a commentary on the Wisdom of Solomon, see David Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon* (New York: Doubleday, 1979).
53. 53. On the return of the apocrypha to Protestant or ecumenical versions (e.g., NRSV), see Daniel J. Harrington, "The Old Testament Apocrypha in the Early Church and Today,"
54. 54. Martin Luther ("Brief Instruction," 1522) as cited in David W. Lotz, "Sola Scriptura: Luther on Biblical Authority," *Interpretation* 35 (1981):264-65.
55. 55. Luther ("Preface to the Epistles of James and St. Jude," 1546) as cited in Lotz, "Sola Scriptura," 273.
56. 56. Luther ("Table Talk," 1542) as cited in Lotz, "Sola Scriptura," 272 n. 42. See also the classic treatment of Luther's theology by Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966).
57. 57. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1972), 1.7.2.
58. 58. Packull, *Hutterite Beginnings*.
59. 59. Packull, *Hutterite Beginnings*, 26-29; See also Gottfried Gerner, "Folgerungen aus dem täuferischen Gebrauch der Heiligen Schrift," *Mennonitische Geschichtsblätter* 31 (1974):25-43.
60. 60. Leonhard Schiemer, as quoted in Packull, *Hutterite Beginnings*, 35.
61. 61. Gerner, "Folgerungen," 29: Die spezifische Lehre von der Schriftauslegung (Hermeneutik) in der Täuferbewegung ist eine Hermeneutik des Apostolischen, des unweigerlich Gesandt-Seins, des Missionarischen." My translation.
62. 62. Gerner, "Folgerungen," 29: "Soweit, 'Altes Testament' ganz wörtlich als 'Alter Bund' (speziell als die alte Kultordnung) verstanden wird, ist diese Ablehnung im Täufertum tatsälich einhellig." My translation. Gerner does grant that the Old

Testament was still used and cited due to custom.

63. 63. For an edition, see Thomas Jefferson, *The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth* (Cleveland, Ohio: The World Publishing Company, 1940). See further, Charles B. Sanford, *The Religious Life of Thomas Jefferson* (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1984), 181-201.
64. 64. For an excellent discussion of how Schleiermacher's definition of religion impacted his thinking on the canon, see Abraham, *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology*, 240-275.
65. 65. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, trans. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1928), 604.
66. 66. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, 611.
67. 67. Alister McGrath, *In the Beginning: The Story of the King James Bible and How it Changed a Nation, a Language, and a Culture* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 227-28.
68. 68. Funk, "The Once and Future New Testament," in *The Canon Debate*, 549.
69. 69. Funk, "The Once and Future New Testament," in *The Canon Debate*, 557.
70. 70. Funk, "The Once and Future New Testament," in The Canon Debate, 556.
71. 71. Pamela J. Milne, "Eve & Adam: Is a Feminist Reading Possible?" *Bible Review* 4:3 (1988):39.
72. 72. Rosemary Ruether, *Womansguides: Readings toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston:Beacon, 1985), ix.
73. 73. C. S. Cowles, "The Case for Radical Discontinuity," in *Show Them No Mercy: 4 Views on God and Canaanite Genocide*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003), 13-44.
74. 74. Cowles, *Show Them No Mercy*, 36.
75. 75. Cowles, *Show Them No Mercy*, 47.
76. 76. Leonard J. Greenspoon, "What Americans Believe about the Bible," *Bible Review* 21:5 (2005):27-29.
77. 77. Christopher Bader, Kevin Dougherty, Paul Froese, et al., *American Piety in the 21st Century: New Insights into the Depth and Complexity of Religion in the U.S.* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Institute for Studies of Religion, 2006), 14.
78. 78. Coogan, "The Great Gulf Between Scholars and the Pew," 7.
79. 79. John Bright, *The Authority of the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1967),

152.

80. 80. For a more thorough illustration of the irrelevance of many biblical passages, see the work of evangelical biblical scholar Daniel J. Estes, “Audience Analysis and Validity in Application,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150 (April-June 1993):219-29.
81. 81. Paul Keim, “Is God Non-Violent?” *The Conrad Grebel Review* 21:1 (Winter 2003): 27.
82. 82. Friesen, “Is God Nonviolent?” *The Conrad Grebel Review* 21:1 (Winter 2003): 8.
83. 83. Friesen, “Is God Nonviolent?” *The Conrad Grebel Review* 21:1 (Winter 2003): 12.
84. 84. On the horrendous consequences of this biblical story in post-biblical interpretation, see Carol Delaney, *Abraham on Trial: The Social Legacy of Biblical Myth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).
85. 85. For new views of a non-violent atonement, see J. Denny Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001); Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement*, trans. A. G. Hebert (New York: Macmillan, 1969).
86. 86. On efforts to reinterpret this passage as a statement of “result” rather than of purpose, see Avalos, *Fighting Words*, 191,
87. 87. For my critiques of pacifistic attempts (e.g. by John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 45) to explain this text, see Avalos, Fighting Words, 216-220.
88. 88. For Eusebius’s inconsistent view of Revelation’s canonical status, see Dungan, *Constantine’s Bible*, 71.
89. 89. Joseph Liechty and Cecelia Clegg, *Moving Beyond Sectarianism: Religion, Conflict, and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland* (Dublin: The Columba Press, 2001), 337.
90. 90. Barton, *Holy Writings/Sacred Texts*, p. 97.
91. 91. Friesen, “Is God Nonviolent?” *The Conrad Grebel Review* 21:1 (Winter 2003): 17.