

How, if at all, is the Old Testament, as well as the New, to be used as a normative authority for determining the appropriateness of Christian witness and theology?

Because the real canon of the church is "the canon *before* the canon" (i.e., [1] the earliest instances of the Jesus-kerygma; and [2] the earliest instances of the Christ-kerygma as somehow making explicit the claim that the Jesus-kerygma implies), it is solely under the primary authority of these earliest instances of Christian kerygma, and hence under the meaning to be discerned in them, that the OT, like the NT, may be used as a normative authority for determining the appropriateness of Christian witness and theology.

But what sense does it make to say this in the case of the OT, considering that its writings do not expressly have to do with Jesus or Jesus Christ in the way in which the NT writings all do? Clearly, the OT writings do not bear witness to Christ *prophetically*, in the sense in which the early church understood them to do in canonizing them, any more than the NT writings bear witness to Christ *apostolically* in the formal meaning of the term that the early church clearly had in mind in canonizing them, as distinct from the merely substantial meaning of the term. But how, then, is the OT to be used as a normative authority at all, even in the highly qualified way allowed for by what has just been said?

The key to an answer is that the writings of the OT contain the most fundamental assumptions, and thus provide all the main terms, of the earliest instances of both the Jesus-kerygma and the Christ-kerygma. Put differently, the OT writings document the particular linguistic form of the existential question—the question as to the ultimate meaning of human existence—to which the earliest instances of both the Jesus-kerygma and the Christ-kerygma represent themselves as the true and decisive answer.

True, the linguistic form of both types of kerygma is derived most immediately, not from the OT, but from late Jewish apocalypticism, which is now widely recognized to have provided the main terms of the earliest instances of both types of Christian witness and theology. But, without a doubt, the most fundamental assumptions of apocalypticism, i.e., its existential and its existential-historical assumptions, and so also those of both types of Christian kerygma, have their source in the distinctive religious tradition documented by

the OT writings. Consequently, if theology asks, as it must, for the meaning of the earliest instances of Christian witness, Christ-kerygma as well as Jesus-kerygma, and thus asks for the understanding of human existence—of ourselves, the world, and God—that these instances of witness assume, the answer, clearly, is that it is a later form or development of the understanding of existence already expressed more or less adequately by the various writings of the OT.

Logically speaking, then, one may say that the relation of the OT to the earliest instances of Christian witness is like that of the most fundamental assumptions of a certain formulation to the formulation itself; or, alternatively, it is like the relation of an explicit question to an explicit answer to that question. But if this analysis is sound, there is no doubt that the OT, in its way, is also a normative authority, nor does using it as such pose any particular difficulty. For in the nature of the case, the most fundamental assumptions of a formulation must be just as authoritative as the formulation itself, even as the explicit answer to an explicit question must endow the question itself with an authority equivalent to its own.

It is in this way, then, that the OT, as well as the NT, is to be used as a normative authority for Christian witness and theology. Even though the OT writings, unlike those of the NT, do not have Jesus as their express subject, they do document the particular linguistic form of the existential question to which the earliest instances of Christian witness represent Jesus as the answer and, in this way, or to this extent, are also normative for determining the appropriateness of Christian witness and theology.

Because this is so, however, there is a further reason to hold that, even in my view, the traditional scriptural canon of the OT as well as the NT retains a unique place with respect to the tasks of bearing Christian witness and doing Christian theology. For if the NT is the sole primary source in which the primary authority for Christian witness and theology is to be found, the OT is the sole primary source of the most fundamental assumptions of that same primary authority.