



The Bible As A Source of Wisdom and Authority

Eduqas A level R.S. C1A Christianity Theme 1D

Key Concepts:

- The way in which Christians determined which books compose the Bible is called the process of canonisation. The word **'canon'** is Greek for 'measuring rod'.
- There was never any serious doubt that the Hebrew Bible would be a part of the Christian Bible, for Jesus and the disciples were Jews and the earliest Christians used the Hebrew Bible. At the time of Jesus, the Hebrew canon was fluid; the Law (Torah) and the Prophets (Nevi'im) were considered canon, but there were various views as to which of 'the Writings' (Kethuvim) were canonical. (TNK)
- The Greek version of the Hebrew Bible (the **Septuagint**) accepted some books originally written in Greek (i.e. **Tobit**). After the rise of Christianity, Jews accepted as canonical only books originally written in Hebrew. The reason, then, that Catholics have a different 'Old Testament' than Protestants is that they use a larger Hebrew canon containing some of the books written in Greek. **Luther** urged his followers to follow the Jewish canon after the first century.
- To be considered canonical, New Testament books had
 - (i) to have been written by (or have a strong connection to) an apostle
 - (ii) be recognised as helpful in Christian formation by churches and
 - (iii) affirm the central teaching in the resurrected Jesus as lord and saviour.
- Order reflects importance. Near the beginning of the Hebrew Bible is the law of Moses and at the beginning of the New Testament are the Gospels.
- The Hebrew Bible closes with the theme of rebuilding Israel (**Ezra-Nehemiah**); the Christian Old Testament ends with the minor prophets and the prophecy of the return of Elijah.
- The term **'inspire'** means 'to breathe'; **II Timothy 3:16** says that the scriptures have been 'God-breathed'. Thus, Christians view the Bible as the Word of God. Some Christians take an **'objective'** view of inspiration; at the extreme end of this is the view that humans played only a passive role and that God used plenary (absolute), verbal means to inspire the Bible.
- Some Christians take a **'subjective'** view; at the extreme end of this is the view that the Bible is not directly inspired but that human beings were inspired by witnessing meaningful events. Many Christians believe that God worked through the personalities of the authors in conveying her/his message. In this sense, God is a **'producer'**.
- **Accommodation** refers to 'making provision' for a person. John **Calvin** rejoiced in the Bible because he believed that God, who is beyond language, has accommodated our relatively limited minds through the Bible. Calvin's analogy: a nurse making **'baby talk'** to an infant; God is the nurse and the Bible is this 'baby talk'. God adapts his truth - though there is no error.
- Some recent theologians have used this concept to defend the Bible as God's word despite **errors of science and history**. God worked through the incorrect scientific assumptions of the writers to convey morality and spirituality.

Key arguments/debates:

Christians agree that the Bible is the word of God, but there is a wide variety of ways in which this view is expressed.

Especially enlightening are the positions the Church has adopted about Marcion and books such as the Shepherd of Hermas and the Gospel of Thomas - students can look these up on the internet.

Challenges to viewing the Bible as the Word of God include the unscientific views in the Bible including its assumption that we live in a spatial, three-storied universe (Hell-Earth-Heaven).



Key quote:

*"In order to reveal himself to men, in the condescension of his goodness, God speaks to them in human words."
(Catholic Catechism)*

Key words:

canon | TNK | Septuagint | Tobit | Luther | Ezra-Nehemiah | inspire | II Timothy 3:16 | objective | subjective | plenary-verbal | producer | accommodation | Calvin | 'baby talk' | errors in science and history

Key questions:

- Is verbal inspiration defensible? Do flaws in the Bible detract from inspiration?
- Do Christians believe all parts of the Bible are equally inspired?
- Does the existence of different Bibles and non-canonical books challenge inspiration?
- Is the ordering of the Bible haphazard, or does it make sense?