

John W. Miller, *How the Bible Came to Be: Exploring the Narrative and the Message*. (New York / Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2004). Pp. xvi + 188. Paper 18.95.

The central thesis of this book is that our misunderstanding of both the canon-shaping process and the shape of the canon itself have seriously misconstrued an essential perspective of how Christianity should relate to Judaism. In support of this central thesis, Miller develops a number of controversial themes, most of which have at least significant points that run contrary to current research on the canon.

First, Miller argues that the canon of Hebrew Scriptures (he would I think reject the term “Old Testament” on theoretical grounds, although he uses the term) was closed quite early. The essential components were in place in the second century BCE, and Hillel was a major force in closing the canon in the first century CE. Substantial weight is given to both Sirach’s account of an emerging canon, and to Josephus’ list of 22 accredited books.

Secondly, the canon of scriptures was formed primarily in two great “gathering” stages, the first in the period around Hezekiah and Josiah’s reigns, and the second in the period of Ezra and Nehemiah. While this is not unusual, Miller argues that in the second period the original canon of Deuteronomistic History was supplemented with additional books that were deliberately meant (written?) to interpret the earlier collection. Thus Genesis-Numbers was added at the beginning of the Torah to “frame” the earlier history of Israel with a broad universal scope, and then the Deuteronomistic History was supplemented by the prophets, Chronicles, and Ezra-Nehemiah and some writings (e.g. Daniel and Esther) to broaden the frame of Israel’s narrative to anticipate a broader engagement with the world.

Thirdly, the collection of New Testament scriptures found its original shape and scope as a reaction to Marcion's truncated canon. Again, this argument is not entirely new, but Miller suggests that the earliest canon shaping effort included the Old Testament in the same volume as the New Testament books, and that the order of the New Testament books was deliberately arranged to counter Marcion's bias. So M. sees great significance in Athanasius' arrangement that lists the catholic epistles before the Pauline epistles as a frame that emphasizes continuity with the Old Testament. And he emphasizes that Luke is preceded by Matthew and followed by John since these two gospels emphasize continuity with Israel.

The final collection thus achieved, and listed in the proper order (the Tanak order for the Hebrew Scriptures and Athanasius' order for the New Testament) suggests a continuity between Israel and the church. This is the ultimate payoff for Miller; a structural approach to the canon would suggest a theological way of conceiving of Jewish-Christian relations that sees a continuous narrative thread of God's working with His people.

The arguments put forward by Miller in support of his theses tend to be weak and often produced by overlooking competing data. Often M.'s approach consists of a series of assertions that are repeated numerous times. He places extraordinary weight on the statements by Josephus and the Talmud tractate *Baba Bathra*, yet evidence of an open canon in the first century (i.e. Qumran) is generally dismissed. Harnack's arguments about the importance of Marcion's role in canon formation loom large, and Barton's contrary arguments about Marcion's role are dismissed with little argumentation. Little

is made of the fact that the early fathers, Eusebius especially, seem to view canon formation as a steady process that emphasized broad usage rather than a clear design.

I found very curious his assertion that at a very early stage the New Testament as a collection was bound in codices that contained the Old Testament. This is crucial to his view of the developing canon. His argument is based heavily on a reference to Tertullian that Jewish and Christian books are part of one volume. While some of our best codices do have Old and New Testament bound together (Sinaiticus, Vaticanus), these are quite late. I know of no evidence that such large composite “Bibles” were produced early on and were part of the canon-shaping process.

Miller has made a number of very provocative arguments about the role the shape of the canon should play in theological reading of the Bible. Unfortunately his arguments are not carefully argued; this is ultimately not a scholarly argument but a popular book with a theological program.

Mark A. Matson, Milligan College, Milligan College, TN 37682