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Establishing Uniform Headings for the Sacred Scriptures: A Persistent Issue in Hebraica-Judaica Cataloging*

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Abstract: The Library of Congress headings used for the Bible are theologically laden terms showing a clear preference for Christian designations (Old Testament and New Testament). This is so despite the fact that four-fifths of what Christianity calls "Bible" is also scripture for Judaism (called Bible or *Tanakh*). This paper explores the issues in identifying sacred scriptures for catalog access. Several alternatives to the qualifiers O.T. and N.T. are posited, including one proposal to replace the terms altogether with First Testament and Second Testament. Such terminology would account for the canons of the distinct religious communities by replacing the theological terms with terms that are historically objective.

Terms for the Bible

Cutter's principle for selecting subject headings maintains that the terms assigned should serve "the best interest of the user" (Chan, 1986, p. 17). Subject headings should be the words that the user of the library would think to look up in the catalog in order to see what the library has on a particular subject. This principle works well in those instances where the user's terms correspond closely with subject headings, and where there are no synonyms. The purpose of this paper is to explore the extent to which Cutter's principle applies to the Library of Congress headings for the Bible, that is, the sacred literatures of both Judaism and Christianity.

Judaism and Christianity have had, since antiquity, parallel canons of sacred literature—both religions highly value this collection of texts, though each assigns a different name to the corpus. In earliest Christianity, the Bible of the church was the Greek version of the Hebrew Bible, known as the Septuagint. The Septuagint is not exactly parallel to the Hebrew Bible, as it contains additional documents commonly

identified as Deuterocanonical Books or the Apocrypha; differences exist among Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant appropriations of these texts. (For a description of the various canons of the Apocrypha in Jewish and Christian traditions, see Fritsch, 1962, pp. 161–166; for a discussion of the cataloging issues, see Anderson, 1992, pp. 18–19.)

The long process of canonization of the texts of the New Testament extended from the second to the fifth centuries (For a recent discussion see Sanders, 1992, vol. 1, pp. 837–52 and Gamble, 1992, vol. 1, pp. 852–61). Thus, the term "Bible" carries different meanings for each tradition: in Judaism, the Bible is called *Tanakh* (the term is a consonantal construct of the first letters of the main sections that make up the whole Hebrew canon: *Torah* (Pentateuch), *Nevi'im* (Prophets), and *Ketuvim* (Writings); in Christianity, the Bible consists of the Old Testament (variously conceived) and the New Testament. What Judaism identifies as *Tanakh* or the Hebrew Bible, Christianity calls the Old Testament (Boadt, 1984, pp. 19–20 provides a concise discussion and Christian justification for using the term "Old Testament" while cautioning against a latent (and antisemitic) view that "old" is synonymous with obsolete).

The issue here is not simply one of choosing among alternative titles applied to a body of texts—the names themselves represent interpretations of the contents of the corpus. Names in this case are interpretations, and the interpretations advance theologically exclusive positions. Just how exclusive the interpretations are depends upon the degree of strictness in the interpreter; but even those who resist imposing a totalizing view upon someone else *struggle* to find names and labels that are satisfactory to both religious traditions, making it possible to derive cataloging from a central database.

Library of Congress Headings

The uniform heading used by the Library of Congress (LC) to access these materials is **Bible. O.T.** (in accordance with AACR2r, rule 25.18A2), showing a preference for the Christian (O.T. = Old Testament) appellation. The Christian bias inherent in LC occasions no particular surprise. Sanford

Berman sees what he calls a "pervasive and overwhelming 'Christian primacy' among the multitude of headings that deal with religion" (Berman, 1984, p. 178). While Berman has labored at getting LC to change offensive and biased terms in its subject heading list, the headings for the Bible have not been particularly high on his agenda (Berman, 1984 and 1993, pp. 5–13).

The LC bias in favor of Christian terms is acknowledged frequently among Judaica and Hebraica librarians. In Israel, Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) were adopted at Bar-Ilan University because (a) they were already in use in the English cataloging department, and (b) LCSH was an accepted international system (Hoffman et al., 1991–1992, pp. 24–25). But changes were necessary to rid the subject headings of their Christian bias and thus be acceptable to Jewish users: "When we use this subject heading or other subject of a religious nature, we translate the topic and assume it is Jewish" (Hoffman et al., 1991–1992, p. 29; headings related to the Bible, however, are not mentioned in the article).

Elhanan Adler, too, shows a willingness to abandon international practices in cataloging, particularly in the treatment of biblical materials, for libraries in Israel. Adler says, "Israeli libraries could not accept the theological basis of such headings as BIBLE. O.T. and BIBLE N.T., preferring to consider BIBLE (=Tanakh), NEW TESTAMENT, and APOCRYPHA as three separate, independent headings" (Adler, 1992, p. 9). In the prior decade Bella Hass Weinberg cited Hannah Oppenheimer's textbook *Targilim be-Kitlug* (2 volumes, Jerusalem: Hebrew University Graduate Library School, 1973 or 74) as the authority for these headings, representing the "policies of the Jewish National and University Library for Judaica and Hebraica" (Weinberg, 1980, p. 334). In these cases, and in the case of Bar-Ilan mentioned above, the latent totalizing structure inherent in the Christian bias of LC headings is exchanged for a Jewish one. As Weinberg notes, however, "Not all Judaica libraries make an issue of theology in cataloging. Some prefer to keep the Christian view if it will cut down their cataloging costs, but sometimes institutional pressure can be

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considerable" (Weinberg, 1980, p. 334). More recently, she acknowledges that acceptance of the LC heading Bible. O.T. "remains an issue for Judaica libraries" (Weinberg, 1992, p. 15).

Should Majority Rule?

It is tempting to justify the selection of either a Jewish or a Christian bias on the basis of Cutter's principle for synonyms, as stated by Lois Mai Chan: "In choosing between synonymous headings prefer the one that . . . is most familiar to the class of people who consult the library. . . ." (Chan, 1986, p. 24). One could argue that since Christianity is the majority religion in the United States, most people looking up a commentary or study on a book from the Bible, say for example, the Book of Ezra, would look for **Bible. O.T. Ezra**, rather than seeking the work under a Jewish heading, for example, **Bible. Tanakh. Ezra** or **Bible. H. B. Ezra** (H.B. = Hebrew Bible). One need only identify the majority view and select the term on utilitarian grounds (greatest good for the greatest number). This seems to be the practice that has resulted in the current circumstance, and this practice appears to be operative in Israel as well.

Granted, choosing just one subject heading which entails both identities for this body of sacred literature does help keep items about the particular books of the Bible together in the catalog, without regard to whether the works were generated by Jewish or Christian writers. In the United States, however, placing all such works under a heading with a patently Christian identifier does raise some question as to the appropriateness of the heading: Why should Jewish sacred literature be subsumed under the Christian heading? Old Testament may be the term the majority of users will employ, but emanating as it does from the Library of Congress, it borders on violating the First Amendment: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion. . . ." Are there any other terms that could be used which would preserve the integrity of the material being cataloged and be fitting for the users of the catalog? And conversely, why should the majority of users look for texts they know well as "Old Testament" under a name that while technically correct (Hebrew Bible or Tanakh) is not familiar? Let me advance several suggestions to see whether changing the heading for Bible is worth further effort.

Exploring the Options

One possibility is to identify the corpus according to its original language, e.g., **Bible. Hebrew. Ezra**, and for New Testament, **Bible. Greek. Matthew**. But such a heading presumes the users know not only the corpus in which a particular document is found, but also its original language. As a language identifier, Greek applies not only to the New Testament, but to the Septuagint version as well. In addition, the language of portions of Daniel and Ezra are Aramaic, not Hebrew.

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Another option is for LC to adopt headings according to the name of the corpus being described. "Our cataloging," says Norman Anderson, "should respect, reflect, and describe the differences between canons; and it should do so in a context of avoiding cause for offence while speaking to the access needs of catalog users from different traditions" (1992, p. 19). LC could adopt a practice similar to that of Israeli libraries, that is, change the headings to **Tanakh** or **Hebrew Bible (H.B.)**, **New Testament**, and **Apocrypha** (Adler, 1992, p. 9). Christian users would have to acknowledge their debt to Judaism for the foundational documents of their scriptures. Anderson (1992, p. 25) suggests an even more precise scheme using qualifiers for Jewish canon, Roman Catholic canon, Eastern Orthodox canon, and Protestant

canon. But such an approach defeats the purpose of having a uniform heading by highlighting the differences between the canons, differences which are relatively minor when compared with the mass of textual materials shared by these religious traditions. Furthermore, such a practice splinters those contributions made by scholars which transcend the boundaries of any particular tradition.

A third suggestion is to adopt new words altogether; words which distinguish the bodies of literature without bias. In an article which served as the inaugural statement for the editorial policy of the *Biblical Theology Bulletin*, James Sanders suggests that we drop the problematic terms "Old" and "New" and use instead "First Testament" and "Second Testament" (Sanders, 1987, p. 47 ff). He says,

Using the expression First Testament where we have used OT, or Hebrew Bible, or Tanak [sic], not only avoids the problems those intrinsically have, but it also does what some of them do not do, and that is avoid the supersessionism [the notion that the theology of the New Testament is superior to and thus supersedes that of the Old] of old Christendom implicit in the terms Old and New Testament, and one of the major reasons some of us want to avoid using them. It also avoids the possible implication in use of the term Hebrew Bible that it is a Bible complete in itself, which I assume Christians are not quiet willing to do! The term FT can also expunge the implicit Marcionism in the use of the terms Old and New. [Marcion of Sinope, mid-second century, promoted a canon of scripture for early Christians which altogether eliminated Hebrew Bible texts.] It might also help in the struggle against antisemitism still lurking in biblical study in some quarters. . . .

Using the expression Second Testament where we have used NT might in its comparative strangeness ward off some of the supersessionism, Marcionism, and antisemitism associated with the latter term. It ought to help avoid the implication sponsored in some Christian quarters that the NT is really sufficient in itself and is more canonical than the OT, as in the expression NT church or NT Christianity—as though the ST could possibly stand on its own and by itself. It might more clearly, in other words, link the ST to the FT as indeed all the writers of the ST were at pains to do.

(Sanders, 1987, p. 48)

Biblical Theology Bulletin put the policy into place on a three-year trial basis; eight and a half years later, the practice was still apparent in the Spring 1995 issue. In addition, one U.S. theological school adopted these terms in advertising a position for "Professor of First Testament/Hebrew Bible" ("School of Theology at Claremont," *Openings* (Sep/Oct 1993), p. 10). [In recent correspondence with this author, James Sanders (at Claremont) wrote that the position was filled, but the incumbent preferred the title Professor of Hebrew Bible.] Even Sanders admits that the terms First and Second Testament take some getting used to, but the benefit of inclusiveness that these terms afford justify the initial uneasiness in usage.

The uniform heading **Bible** would be followed by these terms, e.g., **Bible. First Testament. Ezra**. Thus, texts of the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical books which are related to the First Testament (e.g., 1 Esdras, Additions to Esther, Song of the Three Jews, Prayer of Manasseh, Psalm 151, etc.) could rightfully be identified as such without confusing their canonical status within a particular community of faith.

With machine-readable cataloging becoming the prevailing trend, collocating the headings may become unnecessary, since direct access can be gained by the subdivision name alone (eliminating the need for Bible, O.T. and N.T. altogether). Meanwhile, librarians and scholars from Jewish and Christian traditions might explore ways to address this and other pressing concerns in cataloging the sacred works of shared traditions.

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