

Who Owns the Bible? A Judaeo-Christian Argument

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What is at Stake in the Issue, Who Owns the Bible, Judaism or Christianity?

The question, who owns the Bible, forms a way of framing a theological debate between Judaism and Christianity. They both lay claim on the same Holy Scriptures, and each insists that it reads those Scriptures correctly. Here is a way, then, of conducting an interfaith disputation on the truth of conflicting claims set forth by competing religions.

Which Judaism, whose Christianity? By Judaism and Christianity we do not mean the public opinion of ethnic Jews and culture-Christians. Rather, we mean, the classical religious systems set forth in authoritative documents and practised by those who value those writings as holy. The Judaic claim on the correct meaning of Israelite Scripture conflicts with the Christian one.

Where do we find these claims? In the Judaic system, the Hebrew Scriptures, the Written Torah, (a.k.a., “the Old Testament”) are interpreted by the written record of the Oral Torah produced in the first six centuries C.E. by the Rabbinic sages of the land of Israel and of Babylonia, from the Mishnah through the two Talmuds and encompassing the principal compilations of biblical interpretation called Midrashim. In the Christian system the Old Testament is construed by the New Testament, by the writings of the Church Fathers from the end of the first century through the sixth, as well as by creeds and liturgies that are normative for the faithful of all ages.

The two biblical religions concur that the Hebrew Scriptures set forth knowledge of God. They differ as to the intent and implication of that knowledge. That is why they argue and defines the foundation of their millennial contest.