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Introduction

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In the last forty years interest has been growing not only in the origins of the biblical canon but also in its development, continuing viability, and future as a fixed collection of sacred writings. Despite the stability of the various biblical canons over the last four hundred years, the twentieth century brought significantly increased interest in canon formation. Much of this interest began with the earlier works of H. E. Ryle, Alexander Souter, Heinrich Graetz, Moses Stuart, and Edward Reuss. A brief look at the variety as well as volume of recent literature in this field in the Select Bibliography at the end of this volume will illustrate this growing interest. More than a generation ago, Kurt Aland raised the question of reducing the biblical canon by omitting works that some scholars consider to be an embarrassment to the majority of the church, for example, the apocalyptic literature of the New Testament (2 Peter, Revelation, etc.) in order to promote Christian unity.[1] Not long after that Ernst Käsemann also asked whether there should be a "canon within the canon"—in essence, a reduction of the biblical text—in order to alleviate concerns over the diversity within the Bible.[2] James Sanders and Brevard Childs, for quite different reasons, in 1972 introduced "canonical criticism" or "canonical context" as distinct alternatives to the biblical theology movement.[3] More recently, some members of the Jesus Seminar have advocated both reducing the current biblical canon (especially eliminating the apocalyptic literature) and expanding the biblical canon to include such writings as the *Gospel of Thomas,* the *Gospel of Mary,* and the "Unknown Gospel" of the Egerton Papyri.[4] Robert Funk of the Jesus Seminar will address that issue and others below. Bruce

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[1] Kurt Aland, *The Problem of the New Testament Canon* (London: Mowbray, 1962), 28–33.

[2] Ernst Käsemann, "The Canon of the New Testament Church and the Unity of the Church," *Essays on New Testament Themes* (London: SCM, 1968), 95–107. J. D. G. Dunn (*The Living Word* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987], 141–42, 161–74) also discusses the notion of a canon within the canon, albeit in a different sense, and, after describing four levels of canonical activity or four ways to view the canon, he concludes that the most important level of authority for exegesis and faith is the level of "final composition" (ibid., 172). See also his chapter in this volume.

[3] See J. A. Sanders, *Torah and Canon* (1972) and B. Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (1972).

[4] Jeffrey L. Sheler, "Cutting Loose the Holy Canon: A Controversial Re-examination of the Bible," *U.S. News & World Report* 15, no. 18 (Nov. 8, 1993): 75. The Jesus Seminar has recently created a "Canon Seminar" which hopes to create a "Scholar's Canon" that will, among other things, eliminate the book of Revelation and include the *Gospel of Thomas.* See also a new article by Kim Sue Lia Perkes, "Scripture Revision Won't Be a Bible," *Arizona Republic* (Sunday, Oct. 24, 1993, B1 and B4). See Jacob Milgrom, "An Amputated Bible, Peradventure?" *BR* 10, no. 4 (August 1994): 17,

Metzger contends that although in principle the Bible canon may be changed, in all practicality any changes in the present Christian Bible would undoubtedly cause more, not less, division in the church.[5]

1. Major Questions

Much of the recent discussion of canon formation has challenged well-known and widely held views. Some popular positions that are now being challenged include: (1) the view that the Hebrew scriptures achieved canonical acceptance among the Jews in a three-stage development beginning ca. 400 B.C.E. for the Pentateuch, 200 B.C.E. for the Prophets, and 90–100 C.E. for the Writings; (2) that the early Christians received from Jesus a closed Old Testament canon; (3) that most of the New Testament canon was settled by the end of the second century C.E.; and (4) that evidence of the latter is provided by a late second-century canonical list called the Muratorian Fragment.

Other emerging questions also call for a reasoned response. For example:

1. What precisely is a biblical canon and how sure are we that such a notion flourished before, during, or immediately after the time of Jesus? As basic as this is, the reader will see presently that even here there is no universally accepted position. In the next chapter, Eugene Ulrich has made some interesting observations on this matter and his discussion may advance a common understanding of what a biblical canon is. Some of the ensuing papers, however, show disagreement with his effort to seek a universally agreed on definition of the term "canon" as the final product of a canonical process. What complicates any discussion of canonicity in the various Judaisms of the first century of the common era and in early Christianity is the paucity of any clearly stated and universally accepted definitions of what constitutes scripture and canon. Most definitions available can be employed to show that there were more writings acknowledged as scripture in antiquity than those that were eventually included in the current biblical canon. Some ancient literature functioned in scripture-like manner, that is, similar to other long-accepted scriptures that were normative for a believing community, long before it was ever called scripture and placed in a biblical canon. Similarly, some ancient literature functioned this way (normatively) earlier, but never made it into the biblical canon.[6]

55, for a critique of one recently reissued abridgment of the Bible. Milgrom argues for the relevance of those very sections that were eliminated from the Hebrew scriptures as either boring or irrelevant (e.g., the book of Leviticus).

[5] B. M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 275. We should note here that Professor Metzger was invited to participate in this volume but because of other commitments was unable to do so.

[6] Eugene Ulrich (*The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Origins of the Bible* [SDSSRL; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999], 53–61) discusses the problem of definition and precision in current use of the word "canon." He concludes that the term (1) should be used of a reflexive judgment on the scope of the Bible, (2) that it denotes a closed list, and (3) that it pertains to biblical books and not the specific textual form of those books. In this sense, he concludes that Judaism had no biblical canon as such at least until the middle of the second century C.E. and that the church had none until the fourth century. James Sanders, following a different path, suggested the same ("Text and Canon: Old Testament and New," in *Mélanges Dominique Barthélemy* [ed. P. Casseti et al.; Fribourg: Editions

2. Why were discussions about the scope of the Old Testament biblical canon going on in the church well into the fourth through the sixth centuries and even later if the matter was largely settled before the time of Jesus? And further, why did it take the church three to four hundred years to establish its twenty-seven book New Testament canon?

3. Whenever an ancient writer cites a source from an even more ancient text, does that cited text automatically become a part of the ancient writer's biblical canon?[7] More recently, one scholar has questioned whether the rabbinic sages of late antiquity ever discussed the issue of a closed biblical canon.[8]

4. What sources more accurately reflect the earliest strands of Christian faith? Again, some scholars today believe that other ancient sources relate the earliest traditions of Jesus more faithfully than the canonical gospels. In scholarly discussions these days it is not unusual to call for enlarging the traditional data base of knowledge of the historical Jesus to include, for example, the *Gospel of Thomas* and the "Unknown Gospel" discovered in the Egerton Papyri as well as several other noncanonical writings. (See Robert Funk's chapter in this volume.)

5. That issue leads us to the next question, namely, what of the agrapha (or sayings of Jesus not found in the canonical gospels)? Some scholars have suggested that these sayings, at least, can help us understand more clearly who Jesus was. This is not a new proposal,[9] and it continues to surface here and there. The agrapha served as an authoritative resource for the ancient Christians who cited them. If we can with some assurance determine which of the approximately 200 known noncanonical sayings of Jesus are genuine,[10] should they be added to the data base of information that informs us about Jesus?[11] Should they be added to the biblical canon?

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universitaires, 1980], 373–94; and "Stability and Fluidity in Text and Canon," in *Tradition of the Text* [ed. G. Norton and S. Pisano; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991], 201–17).

[7] Roger Beckwith ("Formation of the Hebrew Bible," in *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* [CRINT II/1; ed. M. J. Mulder; Assen/Maastricht: Van Gorcum; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988], 46, 48–49) seems to imply as much when he simply accumulates a writer's references to earlier sources and calls that a biblical canon. (For more detail see L. M. McDonald, *Formation of the Christian Biblical Canon* [rev. and enl. ed.; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1995], 27–28, 99, 101.) Caution is required in discerning what ancient writers concluded about the divine status of earlier literature that they cited. How certain are we that the notion of a fixed biblical canon was already current in the first century? What if we delay the notion of a closed or fixed scriptural canon until we see it discussed or clearly presented, as we do in the fourth to the sixth centuries? Perhaps the notion of an *unclosed* biblical canon is present even though the ancient writers did not yet have a term available to identify it, but see E. Ulrich for arguments against an "open canon" in the next chapter.

[8] Jacob Neusner, *Judaism and Christianity in the Age of Constantine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 128–45. See also his *Midrash in Context: Exegesis in Formative Judaism* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 1–22. He claims that the notion of Torah was expanded in the formative years of Judaism to include the Mishnah, Tosefta, the two Talmuds, and the various midrashim. A canon was constructed by defining Torah in a new way that encompassed all the literature that followed it. It was tied together through exegesis. The notion of a biblical canon, however, is not *prominent* in second-century rabbinic Judaism or even later.

[9] Metzger (*NT Canon,* 272 n. 11) notes that E. Platshoff-Lejeune ("Zur Problematik des biblischen Kanons," *Schweizerische theologische Umschau* 19 [1949]: 108–16) made just such a proposal.

[10] Scholars differ on the matter.

[11] Joachim Jeremias (*Unbekannte Jesuworte* [Zürich: Zwingli, 1947; 2d ed., Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1951; 3d ed., 1961]; ET: *The Unknown Sayings of Jesus* [London: SPCK, 1957; 2d ed., 1964])

6. And what of the biblical *text* itself? With the recent advances in the investigation of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the ancient Greek and Latin translations of the Bible, which text of the Bible is more authoritative for the church and for the Jewish community? Tov, Epp, and Schmidt in their respective chapters in this volume raise some important questions in that regard. It appears that the ancient communities of Christianity and Judaism did not set aside one particular text of the scriptures to be included in their Bible. If that is so, as the available evidence suggests, then how does one determine what the most appropriate scripture text should be? Which text of scripture should be authoritative for the church? Is the text in its original and earliest form the focus of authority and exegesis for the church, or rather the later canonical or "received" form of the biblical text? See a discussion of this in Kraft's, Epp's, and Sanders's papers below. The greater church admittedly has received many textual additions, some of which were intentional and others accidental. For instance, is the original form of Philippians canonical or authoritative, or the one that currently exists in the New Testament canon?[12] Does it make a difference in one's reading if the two parts are separated for study and preaching? Is John best read as it was written, namely, as a single gospel, or as the Fourth Gospel? Is the final form of Isaiah authoritative for preaching and teaching, or do we look for an earlier First, Second, or even Third Isaiah? Should we receive Mark 16:9–20, John 21, and Acts 8:37 as canonical, even though most scholars agree that they were later additions to the text? Further, should we accept as our scriptures only the earliest texts available today, reflecting the original hand of the author? Our choice in this matter may be guided by the early church, which grounded its theology in the witness of the apostolic community.[13]

7. Recent studies of the various surviving biblical manuscripts show that not until very recently did all of the current twenty-seven writings that make up the commonly received New Testament canon emerge in the same manuscript.[14] In other words, if all of

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claims that of the 266 such sayings, some eighteen are genuine. If this is correct, what should be done with such sayings? The agrapha are introduced, listed, and discussed in the following works: W. D. Stroker (*Extracanonical Sayings of Jesus* [SBLRBS 18; Atlanta: Scholars, 1989]) offers the text of 266 of these sayings but does not sufficiently evaluate their contents nor pass judgment on their authenticity. They have been discussed more recently in detail in Otfried Hofius, "Isolated Sayings of Jesus," *New Testament Apocrypha* (2d ed., Wilhelm Schneemelcher, ed.; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1991), 1:88ff. James H. Charlesworth and Craig A. Evans conveniently list and discuss the agrapha in "Jesus in the Agrapha and Apocryphal Gospels," in *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research* (eds. Bruce Chilton and C. A. Evans; NTTS 19; Leiden: Brill, 1994). In this article, Evans contends that there is essentially nothing new in the agrapha that should cause concern or that would alter the understanding of Jesus that is found in the canonical gospels. See also Otfried Hofius, "Unknown Sayings of Jesus," *The Gospel and the Gospels* (ed. Peter Stuhlmacher; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1991), 336–60, and "Isolated Sayings of the Lord," *NT Apo* (2d ed.) 1:90.

[12] It is likely that the letter to the Philippians is a composite of Paul's writings on at least two separate occasions, namely, chapters 1:1–3:1 and chapters 3:2–4:23.

[13] Notice, for example, that Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 3.25.7) emphasizes both "apostolic style" and "orthodoxy" as criteria for genuineness, and even the *MF (Muratorian Fragment)* lines 73–80 excluded a work from consideration (Hermas) because it did not stem from the apostolic community. The rise of New Testament pseudepigraphy also demonstrates a desire to ground theology in the witness of the apostolic community. The early church anchored its life and faith in God's activity in Jesus. Writings that were believed to be closer in time to him and that reflected early tradition about him were passed on and became canon for the church.

[14] The reader should be aware that the common New Testament canon is not the only one that exists. The Ethiopian church, which parallels to some extent the Coptic New Testament canon,

the literature that comprises our current biblical canon was important to the Christians in antiquity, why do we not find many manuscripts containing them? Eldon Epp, Robert Kraft, and Daryl Schmidt, and to some extent Emanuel Tov for the Hebrew Bible, address this problem in this volume.

8. What criteria were employed to determine which writings would make up the Christian biblical canon? There is little doubt among canon scholars that authorship by an apostle was the most important factor considered by the church leaders of the fourth and following centuries. If it was believed that an apostle produced a particular writing, that writing was accepted and treated as scripture. This also helps to explain the large collection of literature pseudonymously attributed to the apostles, the so-called apocryphal New Testament writings. There is no doubt that several books of the New Testament were placed in the canon of scripture because the majority of the church fathers believed that they were written by members of the apostolic community if not by apostles themselves. All of these questions, of course, concern the viability and integrity of the current biblical canon. Most canonical literature is anonymous and a considerable amount of it became pseudepigraphic under hellenistic influence, that is, attributed to great personages of the past. In semitic culture in antiquity the focus was on a text's message, not its author, for its authenticity. This may have been the case for the Gospels and Acts. (See McDonald's discussion of this topic below.)

Kent Clarke makes an important contribution to the question of whether any pseudonymous writings exist in the Bible. What if the one to whom a biblical writing was attributed is not the author of that work? What do we do with it then? Most, but not all, biblical scholars have concluded that such literature does exist in the New Testament. Does it matter? These too are important questions that share in the complexity of canon formation. What has commonly been called the canonization of scripture was, according to some students, in reality a canonical process involving the various parts of the present Bible over a long period of time. The literature that made it into the Jewish and Christian scripture canons had to be multivalent and adaptable to the conditions and needs of numerous communities just to survive and be included in a biblical canon. Once that literature was placed in those canons, it has continued to be multivalent and adaptable for two thousand years. A canon's continuing adaptability or relevance to the lives of communities and of individuals is as salient a characteristic as its stability or "final shape."[15]

Discussion of the limits or scope of the New Testament canon of writings first occurs in the fourth century in the writings of Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 3.3). Many Christians had already made their decisions about the contents of their New Testament scriptures by then, but the churches were never fully agreed. The catalogues and collections listed in Appendix C demonstrate the variety of opinion present in the churches in the fourth century. Here we first see terms used to identify this literature. Although "Old Testament" and "New Testament" began to be used in some churches to designate their sacred writings in the late second century, it is only in the fourth century that they are referred to by Eusebius as

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has a much larger New Testament canon than that commonly received, and may have earlier support for its decision in the matter. Besides the commonly received books, their New Testament canon includes the books of *Sinodos, Clement, The Book of the Covenant,* and *Didascalia.* For a discussion of this canon, see B. M. Metzger, *Canon,* 225–28.

[15] See J. A. Sanders, *Canon and Community* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984).

"encovenanted" and "recognized" writings (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.3.1–6; 3.25.1–7; and 5.8.1). Further it is not until 367 that we first hear them referred to as "canon" (Athanasius, *Festal Letter* 39). Athanasius is the first to list the complete 27 books that most Christians now call the New Testament canon, but he did not settle the issue for many other churches, as we can see from the variety in the subsequent lists of New Testament scriptures in Appendix C. His Old Testament canon was broader than the current Protestant Old Testament canon, which contains the same books found in the Hebrew Bible though not in the same order. Kalin, Balla, Ferguson, and Hahneman have all made significant contributions in this volume to our understanding of this question.

2. The Notions of Scripture and Canon

As we introduce this volume, we offer some preliminary definitions of both "scripture" and "canon" that will enable the reader to follow the debate over these terms in this volume.

A. The Meaning of Scripture

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are the primary world religions that have defined themselves in terms of a sacred written text. The development of a collection of scriptures in these traditions appears to be related to a common belief in the notion of a "heavenly book" which contains both divine knowledge and decrees from God. This heavenly book generally contains wisdom, destinies (or laws), a book of works, and a book of life.[16] W. Graham has argued that this notion goes back to ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt, where the heavenly book indicated the future plans of God and the destinies of human beings. An example can be found in Ps 139:15–16 which says, "My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes beheld my unformed substance. In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed" (NRSV). This notion is also carried on in the New Testament in Rev 5:1, 3 and in the description of the opening of that book in 6:1–17 and 8:1–10:11. Books are opened before the great white throne of God and "another book was opened, the book of life. And the dead were judged according to their works, as recorded in the books . . . and anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire" (Rev 20:12, 15, NRSV). In Exod 32:33 the Lord says that those who have sinned will be blotted out of his book. The same notion occurs in Phil 4:3, where Paul speaks of Clement and the rest of his colleagues in ministry "whose names are in the book of life." Graham claims that this belief gave rise to the notion in both Judaism and early Christianity that the repository of divine knowledge and heavenly decrees are contained in a divine book symbolized in written scriptures.[17] He also cites an example from the Qur'an which speaks of a divine book of destinies. Surah 57.22 reads: "No misfortune strikes on earth or in yourselves without its being [written] in a Book be-

[16] William A. Graham, *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion* (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 49–50.

[17] Ibid., 50–51.

fore we cause it to be. Truly, that is easy for God."[18] Graham goes on to argue that for Judaism, long before the notion of a biblical canon, the Torah was believed to have come directly from God. Moses proclaimed the words and ordinances of God (Exod 24:3) and was commissioned by God to write them (Exod 34:4, 27). It was believed that God was the writer of the Decalogue, or Ten Commandments (Exod 34:1 and Deut 4:13; 10:4) and this, according to Graham, gave rise to the notion that the law of God was written down in the form of scripture and played a significant role in the development of the idea of a revealed and authoritative scripture.[19]

For both Judaism and Christianity the final authority for faith is, of course, God, but especially in the later stages of the Old Testament the belief arose that the revelation and will of God were disclosed not only in mighty acts through which Yahweh invades history, for example, in the exodus, but also in written materials. See the Pentateuch for examples where the writing down of something was an important mark of revelation (Exod 24:12; 31:8; 32:15, 32; 34:1; Deut 4:13; 8:10; etc.). Just as Moses wrote down the commandments of the Lord in Exod 24:4; 34:27, so also does Joshua in Josh 24:26 and Samuel in 1 Sam 10:25. In the book of Deuteronomy, which was probably written toward the end of the Old Testament era, the king is called upon to write down for himself a copy of the law of God for reading all the days of his life to remind him of the statutes of God and to be humble in his dealings with his people (Deut 17:18–20). The people also were called upon to write the words of God on their door posts (Deut 6:9; 11:20). By way of contrast, the Gospels of the New Testament do not indicate that Jesus wrote anything down nor did he command others to write anything down. The only New Testament exception is found in the book of Revelation where Jesus commanded the angels of the churches to put his message in written form (Rev 2:1–3:14).[20]

James Barr has observed that in the Old Testament "the writers do not reckon with a written 'scripture' as a totally dominant, known and acknowledged factor and force in the life of Israel."[21] He goes on to argue that even the prophets who say, "Thus says the Lord," are not speaking on the basis of an already existing text. Almost nothing in the Old Testament suggests that there were sacred scriptures to turn to when guidance was needed.[22] Neither David, Solomon, nor Hezekiah had any focus or emphasis on any sacred books current and normative in the life of Israel. Rather, as Barr has observed, the Old Testament individuals related to God more through persons (priests, prophets) and institutions (tabernacle, temple) than through sacred writings.[23] This is not to suggest that there were no traditions that functioned authoritatively in the life of the ancient Jewish people. No religious community exists without canon (or rule), however it is expressed (scriptures,

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[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid., 51–52.

[20] Gottlob Schrenk, "*Graphē*," *TDNT* 1:744–56. The secondary text of John 7:53–58, even if genuine, would hardly qualify as a written document.

[21] Barr, *Holy Scripture: Canon, Authority, Criticism* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983), 5.

[22] Many of the Psalms, especially 19 and 119, which focus on the meditation on the word, law, precepts, and statutes of God, are almost certainly preexilic in origin, but most of these quite possibly do not date before the time of Josiah's finding of the book of the law (probably Deuteronomy) ca. 622–621 B.C.E. (compare 2 Kgs 18:20a with 22:3–13).

[23] Barr, *Scripture,* 5.

creeds, liturgies, traditions, etc.), and by its nature, that which is canon can be adapted to new circumstances of life or it ceases to be canonical.[24]

The religion of Israel came to be governed by or built upon the law probably not much before the reforms of Josiah (621 B.C.E.), but certainly no later than the reforms of Ezra (Neh 8:1–8; 9:1–3). The Deuteronomic movement in Israel in the eighth to the seventh centuries B.C.E. no doubt had a major role in effecting that change. See for example the admonition to obey the commandments of Yahweh and not to add to them nor take away from them (Deut 4:2). At any rate, when that which was written down in Israel began to be translated and explained to the people as having normative value in the life of their community (Neh 8:8–11), the notion of scriptures was clearly present in Judaism.

The belief that the revelation and will of God had been preserved in written documents was also shared by the earliest Christian community. The early church, by and large, believed that God had acted decisively in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and that this had also been *foretold* in the normative literature of Judaism—the Hebrew scriptures. It also held that the proclamation of and about Jesus was passed on faithfully through the oral tradition of the church, much of which was written down and *later* (ca. 70 C.E.) also became widely recognized as normative literature in many of the churches. Many of the New Testament writings were recognized as authoritative and useful in various churches almost from the time of their production, but it is primarily in the second century that many of them began to function as scripture. Many Christians began to call them "scripture" near the end of the second century. The recognition of the New Testament writings as scripture can only be described as a growing process, which did not meet with unanimous or simultaneous acknowledgment in the ancient churches. The Christian books which eventually received this normative status were not the same for all the churches. Even when there was agreement, not all churches recognized the authority of the literature at the same time. This much can be seen in the differences in the "lists" of early Christian literature recommended or tabulated for church use in the fourth century and later.[25] The *recognition* of the inspiration and authority of the New Testament literature—that is, the recognition of its scriptural status—cannot be dated with any precision, but it seems certain that with one possible exception no part of that body of literature was so recognized in the first century. Only the book of Revelation (ca. 90–95 C.E.) claims for itself something close to the notion of inspiration and scripture (Rev 1:3, 10–11; 22:7–9, 18–19; cf. Deut 4:2). This is the only book in the New Testament that claims to be a revelation from God. The author of 2 Pet 3:15–16 (written ca. 120–150 C.E. and possibly as late as 180 C.E.) apparently recognized Paul's letters as "scripture," however, nowhere does Paul or any other author of the New Testament claim this special recognition for his own writings. Even the Gospels do not make the claim of final authority for their readers, and the many changes in these writings in subsequent centuries suggests that the recognition of their divine authority was not immediate even if they (especially Matthew) were popular within the churches early on. Such divine authority appears to be reserved for Jesus alone (Matt 28:19–20) even though the many Old Testament citations and allusions in the Gospels is

[24] For a further development of this thought, see Sanders, *Torah and Canon.*

[25] See Appendix C, which compares several important lists of Old Testament and New Testament books.

evidence of their authoritative status in the life and ministry of the early Christian communities. Although Paul was mindful that he was communicating the authoritative words of Jesus on occasion (1 Cor 7:10–11; 9:14; 11:23–26), he apparently was unaware of the divinely inspired status of his own advice (1 Cor 7:12, 25). He never wrote as if he himself were setting forth scripture, although he did acknowledge the superior authority of the words of Jesus in settling matters of Christian ethics. He likewise emphasized his own apostolic authority in resolving disputes in the churches he founded (for example, 1 Cor 4:14–5:5; 7:12; 2 Cor 13:10, etc.). Although Paul is the first New Testament writer to make a qualified claim to being inspired by the Spirit in regard to what he said, he still does not write "scripturally," that is, consciously aware that he is writing from a divinely inspired and therefore scripturally authoritative perspective. Even though his counsel to the Christians at Corinth about the marriage status of a woman whose husband has died is joined by the words "And I think that I too have the Spirit of God" (1 Cor 7:40, NRSV), this is a far cry from an acknowledgment by Paul of the scriptural status of his letter to the Corinthian community. This passage certainly suggests Paul's awareness that he is speaking by the power of the Spirit and he is thereby giving what he considers to be the will of God in the matter, but it is not a claim that he is consciously writing scripture.

B. The Meaning of "Canon"

The meaning of "canon" is not exactly equal to that of "scripture" even though there is considerable overlap in definition. Both terms refer to recognition of sacredness and authority within a believing community. Scripture has to do with the divine status of a written document that is authoritative in the life of a community of faith. Canon, while also referring to literature that is normative to a religious community and is employed in establishing its identity and mission, is moreover a fixed standard (or collection of writings) that defines the faith and identity of a particular religious community. In this sense, all scripture is canonical, but a biblical canon is more precisely a fixed collection of scriptures that comprise that authoritative witness for a religious body. The Greek *kanōn* is derived from *kanē,* a loanword from the Semitic *kaneh,* which means "measuring rod" or "measuring stick." By a process which will not be dealt with in detail here, the word canon came to mean among the Greeks and many other ancient residents of the Greco-Roman world, a standard or norm by which all things are judged or evaluated, whether the perfect form to follow in architecture or the infallible criterion *(kritērion)* by which things are to be measured.[26] The term was used in several areas with a similar meaning. In sculpture and architecture it denoted the perfect frame to be copied. In music the monochord was the canon by which all other tonal relationships were controlled. The term was also used in regard to grammar by the Alexandrians, who set forth a canon of writers whose Greek was used as a model. It was even employed in philosophy as the criterion by which one discovers what is true and

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[26] See the helpful descriptions of the use of the term by Hermann Wolfgang Beyer ("*Kanōn,*" *TDNT* 3:596–602) and Robert W. Funk (*Parables and Presence* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982], 151–53). A brief but careful theological and historical description of the use of the term in the church is found in Paul J. Achtemeier, *The Inspiration of Scripture* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980), 118–23. A more recent and excellent treatment of the term is also found in Metzger, *Canon,* 289–93.

false.[27] Beyer has shown that Epicurus himself argued that logic and method in thought stemmed from a canon *(kanōn)* or basis by which one could know what was true or false and was worth investigating or not.[28] This is not unlike the way the Jewish and Christian communities of faith have understood and employed the biblical scriptures.

At the end of the first century C.E., Clement of Rome called the Corinthians away from strife to the "glorious and venerable rule *(kanona)* of our tradition" (*1 Clem.* 7.2).[29] As will be shown later, Irenaeus used the term in reference to the rule of faith that defined orthodox Christianity at the end of the second century in Rome. In the late second century, Clement of Alexandria spoke of the *rule (kanōn)* of faith that was the truth of the church, but did not apply the term specifically to biblical literature.[30] From approximately the middle of the fourth century of the common era onward, *kanōn* was increasingly used of the collection of sacred writings of both the Old Testament and New Testament.[31] Eusebius is sometimes reckoned the first to use the term in reference to a collection of Christian scriptures, in his *Ecclesiastical History* 6.25.3 ca. 325 C.E. However, a careful study of his references to the scriptures of the church indicates that his favorite terms for this literature were "covenanted," or more accurately, "encovenanted" (Greek, *endiathēkē*),[32] and "recognized" (Greek, *homologoumenon*). The preferred term for describing a list of sacred scriptures is "catalogue" (Greek, *katalogos; Hist. eccl.* 3.25.6 and 4.26.13). When Eusebius uses the term *kanōn,* he is generally focusing on the church's traditions or its rule of faith. Of the ten times he used the term, only two are possible candidates for an exclusive list of sacred scriptures (*Hist. eccl.* 5.28.13 and 6.25.3). Although he provides the first datable list of the later recognized canonical books of the church in, *Hist. eccl.* 3.25.1–7, he does not use the term *kanōn* to refer to it, but rather "covenanted" (Greek, *endiathēkē; Hist. eccl.* 3.25.6). Setting forth what he claimed was Origen's canon of scriptures, Eusebius writes: "These things he inserts in the above mentioned treatise. But in the first of his [Commentaries] on the Gospel according to Matthew, defending the canon of the church *(ton ekklēsiastikon phylattōn kanona),* he gives his testimony that he knows only four Gospels" *(Hist. eccl.* 6.25.3). The question here is whether the "canon of the church" refers to the rule of faith or to a body of sacred Christian literature, that is, a list or catalogue. The context suggests that he is talking about a collection or catalogue of writings. See also *Hist. eccl.* 6.25.1 where he cites Origen's "encovenanted books" *(endiathēkous biblous).*

While Eusebius apparently uses *kanōn* (canon) in reference to the list of four gospels in *Hist. eccl.* 6.25.3, his typical term for a collection of sacred books remains not *kanōn* but

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[27] Beyer, "*Kanōn,*" 596–98.

[28] Ibid.

[29] The precise meaning of this phrase is difficult to determine. It could refer to the Christian message and its implications as passed on in the church, *or* to a common code of church ethics, *or* to a reference to the *Christian* use of the Old Testament scriptures. Probably the first of these is intended. If so, this is similar to Paul's use of *kanona* in Gal 6:16.

[30] See Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 6.15.125, where *kanōn* is the harmony between the Law and the Prophets on the one side and the *covenant* instituted by the incarnation of the Lord on the other.

[31] Beyer, "*Kanōn,*" *TDNT* 3:600–601. See also Hennecke, *NT Apo.,* 22–24, and G. W. H. Lampe, "The Early Church," in *Scripture and Tradition* (ed. F. W. Dillistone; London: Lutterworth, 1955), 24ff.

[32] Metzger (*Canon,* 292) translates this term "contained in the covenant" as opposed to "apocryphal literature."

"encovenanted." Athanasius, however, in his *Festal Letter* of 367 C.E., uses a verbal form of *kanōn* (*kanonizomenōn* = "canonized") in reference to a body of sacred literature. The earliest clear use of a form of the term *kanōn* for a collection of scriptures appears around the middle of the fourth century. We should be clear, however, that the current use of the term "canon" to refer to a collection of scripture books was introduced by David Ruhnken in 1768 in his *Historia critica oratorum graecorum* for lists of sacred scriptures. While it is tempting to think that such usage has its origins in antiquity in reference to a closed collection of scriptures, such is not the case.[33]

With such a long delay in the church's use of the term "canon" to describe a closed body of Christian scriptures, one may well ask why there was an emergence of "canon consciousness" in the church of the fourth century C.E. and little evidence of it before? A better understanding of the socio-historical conditions present in the fourth century C.E. may offer part of the answer. Again, we must consider how the Hellenistic understanding of canon influenced the Christian as well as Jewish communities in their establishment of biblical canons. To what extent was the Hellenistic idea of following that which is a perfect guide taken over into the religious thought of Judaism, Christianity, and later Islam? It may well be that interactions with "heretical" teachings and other factors (chs. 18, 20) led the church to propose a standard by which it could define authentic Christianity. This was done at first by the "rule of faith," which appears to have embodied the oral tradition about Jesus, but eventually also the rule of certain writings that were believed to transmit the tradition of Jesus faithfully.

The proposal of a standard "rule" eventually led to the formation of a *closed* canon of authoritative writings (scriptures) which, as A. C. Sundberg has argued, was unique in the Christian church, since it had not received a closed canon of scriptures from Judaism.[34] There appear to have been no rigid guidelines on what could or could not qualify as Christian scripture, though apostolicity and tradition (that is, long term use in the churches) were certainly prominent features. The church, then, inherited from Judaism the notion of sacred scripture, but not a closed canon of scriptures. This was a later development owing to a wide variety of influences.[35] According to Sundberg, there were three stages in the history of the New Testament canon: (1) the rise of the New Testament writings to the status of scripture; (2) the conscious groupings of such literature into closed collections—for example, the four gospels and the epistles of Paul; and (3) the formation of a closed list of authoritative literature.[36] Eusebius employs a threefold classification of the Christian lit-

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[33] For a helpful discussion of the background on the use of the term for a collection of scriptures, see Gregory Allen Robbins, "Eusebius' Lexicon of 'Canonicity,' " *Studia Patristica* 25 (ed. Elizabeth A. Livingstone; Leuven: Peeters, 1993), 134–41. Robbins argues that Eusebius never used the term *kanōn* in the way in which it has been employed in more modern times in reference to the collection of sacred scriptures. He also agrees that the list that Eusebius provides of Origen's Old Testament canon is an invention by Eusebius since, in fact, Origen used the number twenty-two to refer only to the books of the Jewish scriptures, but not his own (ibid., 140).

[34] A. C. Sundberg, "The Making of the New Testament Canon," *The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible* (ed. Charles M. Laymon; New York: Abingdon, 1971), 1216. This will be discussed in chapter 3.

[35] These are discussed in McDonald, *Formation,* 170–90.

[36] Sundberg, "The Making of the New Testament Canon," 1217. A careful description of the canonical process is found in James A. Sanders, *Canon and Community* (Philadelphia: Fortress,

erature that indicated at least a category between authoritative and heretical for literature that was deemed profitable for teaching but not considered normative in the church. These distinctions will be discussed in considerable detail in Kalin's paper, but also to some extent in Balla's, Hahneman's, Ferguson's, and McDonald's papers below.

Another feature of early Christian views of scripture, unlike Judaism, included an eschatological feature. That is, they believed that the scriptures had their primary fulfillment in Jesus (e.g., Matt 2:5, 17, 23: 3:3; 4:14; Mark 14:49; 15:28; Luke 4:21; Acts 1:16; John 17:12; 19:24, 28). Although Paul adds that this fulfillment is also found in the Christian community (see Rom 4:23; 15:4; 16:26; 1 Cor 9:10; 10:11), Jesus the Christ was considered the primary norm for the understanding and use of the Old Testament scriptures by the early church.[37] However, the church still held that the Old Testament scriptures themselves were of unimpeachable authority (John 10:35; Matt 5:18). Schrenk notes that for primitive Christianity scripture is "the authoritative declaration of the divine will," but that it was "not valid apart from the 'I say unto you,' " of Jesus—that is, its christological fulfillment.[38] Childs is correct when he recognizes that "the Christian understanding of canon functions theologically in a very different way from Judaism. Although the church adopted from the synagogue a concept of scripture as an authoritative collection of sacred writings, its basic stance toward its canon was shaped by christology." He adds that "the Old Testament functioned as Christian scripture because it bore witness to Christ. The scriptures of the Old and New Testament were authoritative in so far as they pointed to God's redemptive intervention for the world in Jesus Christ."[39]

As the reader will see in the rest of this volume, there are no agreed upon definitions of canon in contemporary writing. Perhaps what we mean by scripture is covered by the notion of a scripture canon, namely, that which is written down and becomes normative for a religious community is essentially both scripture and canon. Other nuances will be seen later in this volume. There has been a growing awareness that there are two broad ways of understanding canon in the ancient world, namely, as a fluid authority within a religious community and also as a fixed body of literature to which nothing can be added or taken away. James Sanders was the first to identify these distinctions in his discussions of canon (1976, 1981, and more recently in 1992)[40] and subsequently Gerald Sheppard em-

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1984), 21–45. Sanders's more recent work (*From Sacred Story to Sacred Text* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987], 127–47, 175–90) has an excellent discussion of the process of recognition of the authority and the stabilization of the Old Testament biblical text. He makes points which are applicable to both the Old Testament and New Testament canonical inquiry. See also his "Text and Canon: Old Testament and New," in *Mélanges Dominique Barthélemy: Etudes bibliques* (ed. Pierre Casetti, Othmar Keel, and Adrian Scheuber; Orbis biblicus et orientalis 38; Fribourg: Editions universitaires; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981), 373–94.

[37] See especially 2 Cor. 3:12–16.

[38] Schrenk, "*Graphē*," *TDNT* 1:759–61. See also Barr, *Scripture,* 14–15, and Kümmel, *Introduction,* 335.

[39] Brevard Childs, *Biblical Theology of Old and New Testaments* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 64.

[40] See his "Adaptable for Life: The Nature and Function of Canon," in *Magnalia Dei: The Mighty Acts of God: Essays on the Bible and Archaeology in Memory of G. E. Wright* (New York: Doubleday, 1976), 531–60; idem, *Canon and Community: A Guide to Canonical Criticism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984); idem, "Canon. Hebrew Bible," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (ed. D. N. Freedman; New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1:837–52; idem, "Text and Canon: Old Testament and New," in

ployed the terms "canon 1" and "canon 2" to describe this same reality (1987).[41] Both scholars recognize that canons are not always fixed, especially in their early history. Sanders underscores their adaptability to the life circumstances of believing communities. In the next chapter, Eugene Ulrich offers a more detailed discussion of the definitions of scripture and canon, especially in terms of the Hebrew scriptures (First Testament) and the Christian Old Testament, but much of what he says is also true of the New or Second Testament.

3. Summary

All of the contributors in this volume recognize in one way or another the remarkable diversity in the canons of Judaism and Christianity and how the same events and stories are sometimes told from quite different points of view with differing messages. This brings some students of canon to speak of the Bible as a dialogical literature providing its own built-in self-corrective apparatus. James Sanders made these observations early on and they are reflected in his paper in this volume. Efforts to resolve the tension made by such an observation lead some to seek a canon within the canon, and others to resist such a move. Others seek a kind of unity in the Bible's *kerygma* or overall message. Some suggest reliance on an abstracted or even external *regula fidei* ("rule of faith") by which to guide the perplexed, while still others resist that as well. One suggestion has been to view Jewish and Christian canons as paradigms for how dialogue can continue to take place between these ancient texts and the ever-changing communities of faith, as well as for learning how to conjugate the verbs and decline the nouns of ongoing encounters with the divine.

Four papers below (those of Epp, Schmidt, Gamble, and Sanders) note that the plethora of manuscripts for both Testaments now available may be as helpful in canon studies as ancient extracanonical lists. While some have supposed that the acceptance or rejection of certain ancient books from canon lists may have been politically motivated, we are no longer privy to such supposed ancient debates. As a result, examination of the surviving manuscripts of their sacred literature may offer important indicators of the positions of many churches as to the scope of their biblical canons and when they were stabilized. The related issues of how the apocryphal and pseudepigraphal literature factors into to this discussion are carefully discussed in the chapters by Daniel Harrington, William Adler, and Kent Clarke. We should also add that the papers produced by Emanuel Tov, James VanderKam, and Julio Trebolle Barrera offer valuable insights into the often over-looked relevance of the Dead Sea Scrolls for this whole discussion. Pheme Perkins makes an important contribution to our understanding of the influence of the gnostic community on the formation of the biblical canon. Her expertise in this field is widely known and well appreciated.

Before any new advances can be made in our understanding of the formation of the Bible, far more research is needed than has emerged so far. As we observed above, new

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Mélanges Dominique Barthélemy: Etudes bibliques (ed. Pierre Casetti, Othmar Keel, and Adrian Scheuber; Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 38; Fribourg: Editions Universitaires; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981), 373–94.

[41] Gerald T. Sheppard, "Canon," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (ed. Mircea Eliade; New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1987), 3:62–69.

advances in canonical studies will undoubtedly affect our understanding of the long and highly complex canonical process. New advances have already prompted some scholars to reconsider the present scope of the biblical literature; some advocate ways to marginalize those parts of the biblical canon that no longer appear to be relevant to us or that offend us. This is what is known as seeking a "canon within the canon."

These and other questions will be considered in the remainder of this volume. We will begin our study with an examination of the problem of definition and then focus on some of the critical issues related to the formation of the Bible. Those who choose to pursue the topics of discussion in more detail may see important aids in the appendixes, including some of the most important primary, or ancient, sources for the study of canon formation and also a collection of some of the oldest lists of sacred scriptures. The Select Bibliography at the end is rather extensive and includes all of the most important contributions to the discussion of canon debate as well as many important but smaller and lesser known works. The bibliography is the product of the cumulative effort of many contributors to this volume and, though not exhaustive, is one of the most extensive bibliographies on canon available.

We are deeply grateful to the scholars who have contributed to this volume. The long effort to bring their many points together to form this collection has been rewarded many times over by their excellent contributions. In many cases the reader will find these chapters to be foundational for the discussion of the origins of the Bible, probably for some time to come. In most cases, the contributors to this volume are the most significant players in the world of canon research. They have made many significant advances in this volume. This collection of essays is something of a distillation of their previous work, but often it is also an advance over all previous work in canon studies. They have seen the importance of setting forth for student and scholar alike the issues surrounding the origins and development of the Bible. We are all in their debt for doing so. As a result, we can now see more clearly the contours of the significant debate that has emerged over the last 100 years or more in this field of inquiry.

Some of the discussions are quite familiar to canon students and have been pivotal in the investigation at significant junctures. For example, as we noted above, James Sanders, whose work on canon is well known and also foundational for most recent discussions of canon formation, argues that the Jews were able to adapt their authoritative scriptures to new and changing circumstances, and the very adaptability of those scriptures allowed them to continue as authoritative texts within the Jewish community.[42] He has observed that canons by their very nature are adaptable to the changing life of the believing communities that cherish them, and that is undoubtedly the reason why the current biblical canons for Judaism and Christianity continue to function as such in their synagogues and churches. Canons also change, most typically by expansion, though historically also by reduction: the *Shepherd of Hermas* and the *Epistle of Barnabas* eventually dropped out of sacred collections. As the Jewish communities developed, there came a time when they recognized more than the law of Moses as their sacred scriptures. They included the Prophets and eventually the Writings. As the church grew and developed, the early Chris-

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[42] Sanders, *From Sacred Story to Sacred Text,* 9–39, but especially 23–30.

tians accepted the words of and about Jesus as their final norm. Craig Evans has a very useful chapter below on this matter.

As the church developed, however, it became obvious that written gospels and eventually the letters of Paul were also advantageous in the ongoing life of the community. When some writings ceased to be relevant to the religious needs of some Christian communities, they also ceased to be canon to those communities, and that is seen in the neglect of those texts or even the disappearance of complete books (for example, *Hermas, 1 Clement, Eldad and Modat*). Dunn has argued that the New Testament, for example, "decanonizes"[43] much of the Old or First Testament's emphasis on the law, especially its focus on clean and unclean foods or ritualistic cleansings, because such things were no longer deemed relevant to their faith. As you will see in his renewed and expanded discussion below, Dunn makes the point that the Old Testament can never function as canon for Christians in the same way that it does for the Jews. For the Christian, the New Testament always functions to some extent as *the* canon within the biblical canon.[44]

Finally, we want to offer a special word of appreciation to all of those who have helped bring this volume to its completion and to those who graciously contributed to it. We both express our appreciation to Peter Flint, who was significantly involved in the initial stages of the production of this volume and was very helpful in enlisting the participation of several scholars. Because of other important commitments he needed to withdraw from the project, but we recognize his significant labors and valuable contributions to this volume. Several other notable scholars were invited to participate, but for various reasons they were unable to join us in this venture, especially Bruce Metzger, Roger Beckwith, Earle Ellis, Brevard Childs, and Gerald Sheppard. Their works are frequently cited in the chapters that follow. Our goal was to include the most significant scholars in canon research in the world, and we are delighted that most of them have accepted our invitation to contribute to this volume. Their work makes important advances in our understanding of the origins and development of the biblical canons, and for that we are deeply grateful. The first editor of this volume would also like to express his sincere appreciation to James A. Sanders for his willingness to share the responsibilities as a co-editor after Peter Flint had to withdraw. Sanders has made many important suggestions along the way that have significantly improved the quality of this volume and added expertise that would otherwise have been absent. Finally, we both extend our special thanks to the editorial staff at Hendrickson Publishers.

Our goal in this project has been to advance the study of the origins of the biblical canon and to deal forthrightly with the significant issues raised by contemporary research. We have not tried to advocate a particular position, though each contributor has one, as the reader will soon see. We have wanted rather for the reader to see how diverse and complex the issues and positions on canon formation are. The hope, of course, is that the reader will be able to make use of the most current research on this question and further advance our understanding of the canonical process that produced the Bible.

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[43] This is Dunn's expression in his *Living Word* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 156.
[44] Ibid., 156.