



CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: THESIS, PRESUPPOSITIONS AND METHODOLOGY

1.1 Part I: Statement of the Problem and the Thesis

1.1.1 The Background of the Problem

Until the recent generations, too many evangelical Christians were able to keep the questions of inerrancy and hermeneutics separate.¹ The mere affirmation of biblical veracity was often seen as a guarantee for a straightforward interpretation of the text. Inerrancy was a given, isolated enough from exegetical study to stand on its own as a touchstone for truth. That touchstone still stands, but its tendency to be isolated from hermeneutics has been questioned. The issue of inerrancy has become for many “essentially the question of *how* the evangelical is going to *do* theology while holding to Biblical authority.”² To this generation has come the call to rethink hermeneutics.³ Church historian D. Clair Davis states, “Surely the hermeneutical questions are the most pressing of all before the evangelical world. A

¹Harvie M. Conn, “A Historical Prologue: Inerrancy, Hermeneutic, and Westminster,” in *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic*, ed. Harvie M. Conn (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 15-34.

²Robert K. Johnston, *Evangelicals at an Impasse* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1979), 2.

³D. Clair Davis, “Liberalism: The Challenge of Progress,” in *Challenges to Inerrancy: A Theological Response*, ed. Gordon Lewis and Bruce Demarest (Chicago: Moody, 1984), 84-86.



doctrine of inerrancy with no perceptible use, which in practice makes no difference, is hardly worth exerting the energies of the church for.”⁴

A closer link between norm and the interpretation of norm has come as evangelical scholarship has come to the conclusion that it is no longer sufficient to ask simply, 'What does an infallible Bible teach us?' Now the question is, 'How do we decide what an infallible Bible teaches us?' How will we understand the process by which God spoke through Luke in the first century so that we still hear him speak through Luke in the twenty-first? The classical tradition had asked, 'What does *the text* mean?' The new question has become, 'What do we mean by *meaning*?' Thus, the question of authority in hermeneutics becomes also the question of the responsibility of hermeneutics.⁵ Searching the text is said to yield only its *meaning*; the text must also search us as we yield to its *significance*. But how do we cross that line between meaning and significance? Hermeneutics has undergone a shift from a mere search for grammatical and historical rules in understanding the text to the utilization of literary methods to access meaning and significance.⁶

As the literary nature of the Bible has come to the forefront of scholarly attention during the latter decades of the twentieth century, a new approach to the text arose called literary criticism or aesthetic criticism.⁷ Some are claiming that the

⁴Ibid., 88.

⁵Moisés Silva, "Old Princeton, Westminster, and Inerrancy," in *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic*, ed. Harvie M. Conn (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 74: "For inerrancy to function properly in our use of Scripture, an adequate hermeneutics is a prerequisite. But that is a far cry from suggesting that the doctrine of inerrancy automatically provides us with the correct hermeneutics, except in the rather general sense that it precludes any interpretation that suggests that God lies or errs."

⁶In the liberal camp, redaction critic Norman Perrin makes this hermeneutical shift in "The Evangelist as Author: Reflections on Method in the Study and Interpretation of the Synoptic Gospels and Acts," *Bib/Res* 17 (1972): 9: "This means we have to introduce a whole new category into our study . . . the category of general literary criticism. If the evangelists are authors, then they must be studied as other authors are studied."

⁷Anthony C. Thiselton judges that "the turn towards literary theory in biblical studies constitutes one of the three most significant developments for biblical hermeneutics over the last



literary approach is not just another method alongside of form, redaction or tradition history but rather is a whole new approach, replacing all previous approaches.⁸

Of course, secular literary study is not a monolith. As a result many different schools of literary study have been applied to the Bible including structuralism, rhetorical criticism, deconstructionism, and narrative criticism. But apart from all of the variations in literary approaches, the literary approach in general presents a serious challenge to the evangelical.⁹ On the one hand, the literary approach may be perceived to be potentially quite dangerous to the doctrine of Scripture.¹⁰ On the other hand, there is much in the approach that aids in interpretation.¹¹

A critical danger to the evangelical pre-commitment to scriptural authority arises in the question as to whether literary artifice is compatible with accurate

quarter of a century. It is comparable in importance for biblical interpretation with the impact of post-Gadamerian hermeneutics and the emergence of socio-critical theory and related liberation movements. *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 471. Examples of recent works would include: Meir Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press). Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1981). Leland Ryken, *Words of Delight: A Literary Introduction to the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987). J.P. Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative: An Introductory Guide* (Leiderdorp, The Netherlands: Deo Publishing, 1999). Edgar V. McKnight and Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, *The New Literary Criticism and the New Testament* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1994). Tremper Longman, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1987).

⁸A view presented, among others, by D. Robertson, "Literature, the Bible as," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, supp. vol., ed. Keith Crim (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976), 547-51.

⁹ Since this is the tradition in which I carry on my scholarly efforts, the present thesis attempts to evaluate the canonical/literary approach from this perspective, as a canonical reader,—with particularly reference to reader-response or reception theory.

¹⁰C.F.H. Henry, "Narrative Theology: An Evangelical Appraisal," *TrinJ* NS (1987): 3-19.

¹¹For a convincing argument see Tremper Longman III, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987).



historical representation.¹² Can a text be artfully constructed and historically reliable at the same time?¹³ The modern literary approaches to the study of the Bible have a decided tendency to deny or severely limit any referential function in literature.¹⁴ This tendency has had some influence in recent studies on Acts.

In his important book *Literary Criticism and the Gospels*, Stephen D. Moore rightly expresses the concern that more traditionalist biblical scholars should not regard the turn to literary theory as merely “light exercise—‘fluff,’ as one colleague puts it.”¹⁵ Tremper Longman, in his introduction to literary criticism notes that, against the atomizing tendencies of the historical-grammatical method, literary approaches tend to emphasize whole texts, and in the case of reader-response theories needed attention is shifted to the role of the reader in the interpretive process.¹⁶

¹²C.F.H. Henry, “Narrative Theology,” 3,8. Henry decries narrative theology’s “flight from history to the perspectival that enjoins no universal truth-claims.” He worries that it “ignores intellectual analysis to maintain an assured connection of confessional premises with objective reality and valid truth.”

¹³V. Philips Long, *The Art Of Biblical History* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 150-1: “Of more pertinence to our present concern with the issue of why scholars disagree over historical questions is the fact that certain of the ‘literary approaches’ tend in *ahistorical*, or even *anti-historical*, directions.”

¹⁴Robert K. Johnston, *Evangelicals at an Impasse: Biblical Authority in Practice* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1979), 548: “. . . the new literary criticism may be described as inherently ahistorical.”

¹⁵Stephen D. Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels: the Theoretical Challenge* (New Haven and London: York University Press, 1989), xviii.

¹⁶Longman, *Literary Approaches*.



1.1.2 The Canonical Reader and Reader-Response Theory

1.1.2.1 Structuralism, Formalism, and New Criticism

Jonathan Culler suggests that a central reason for the rise of interest in readers and reading is to be attributed to the orientation that was engendered by structuralism and semiotics.¹⁷ Structuralism or the New Criticism stressed that the text or work generated meaning in its own right. In structuralism, the reader is conceived as the product of 'codes,' so that critics came to treat a work as an intertextual construct, rooted in various cultural discourses on which it draws for its intelligibility. The outcome is the foregrounding of the reader as central determiner of meaning.¹⁸ Roland Barthes says, "the reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing [cultural codes] are inscribed....A text's unity lies not in its origin [author] but in its destination [reader]."¹⁹ He further suggests that if "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author," many have been willing to pay that price.²⁰ With its attention to close reading and its taking seriously the subjective and creative element in interpretation, structuralism and formalism became the precursor to reader response criticism and reception theory, with its recognition of interpretive communities.

This movement away from author-focused theories of meaning to texts as linguistic systems transfers the focus away from the hermeneutical *Sitz im Leben* of

¹⁷Jonathan D. Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism After Structuralism* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1983), 32.

¹⁸Structuralists themselves seldom pursued a focus on the reader but concentrated on the codes and conventions responsible for a work's intelligibility.

¹⁹Roland Barthes and Stephen Heath, eds. *Image, Music, Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 146,148.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 148. Postmodernist, reader-response critic A.K.M. Adam agrees: "Postmodern interpreters may operate freely without fear of ghostly authors looking over their shoulders, coercing them to obey 'original intentions.'" *What Is Postmodern Biblical Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1995), 20.



the author and original hearers. It is arguable, then, that for literary theory 'history' tends to become a category that is difficult to fully accommodate. Stanley Porter expresses deep concern in reference to the neglect of history in much of literary approaches:

The historical preoccupations which lie at the heart of Biblical studies appear strange to most secular literary critics, since the one thread that seems to run through secular reader-response criticism is the importance of the contemporary reader in defining and establishing the text and consequently, meaning. The reader grounds interpretation in the present, especially as it is characteristic of an interpretive community. This centre of authority is different from the avowed centre of authority in Biblical studies, however. And the two do not seem readily compatible, or at least compatible in any form which I have found convincing.²¹

An additional concern with formalism, new criticism and structuralism is that hermeneutical tradition is exchanged for that of the semiotic system.²² For these literary theorists a text is often regarded to be 'literary' if it seemed to carry with it layers and levels of meaning that very often transcended the immediate conscious thought of the writer. Meaning in effect is an autonomous system of signs and meanings in their own right, apart from the writer or author who had produced them.²³

²¹Stanley Porter, "Why Hasn't Reader-Response Criticism Caught On In New Testament Studies?" *Journal of Literature & Theology* 4 No. 3 (1990): 284.

²²For an excellent and convincing presentation of the philosophical and logical fallacies underlying postmodernism and reader-response theory see John C. Poirier, "Some Detracting Considerations for Reader-Response Theory," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 65 no 2 (Ap 2000): 250-263.

²³*Ibid.*, 260. Poirier maintains that "the fact that human experience is thoroughly linguistic does not mean that 'brute-factual' reality does not impinge upon it. There is no such thing as a thoroughgoing semiosis. Even the purest semiosis contains an element of mimesis—the ultimate *interpretatum* is still away a brute fact; otherwise, the semiosis could never make sense finally. Fish has shown just how deeply semiotic language is, but he has argued too much. Every semiosis must ultimately yield to an authorial (pre-linguistic) event."



1.1.2.2 Reader-Response and Reception Theory

In the late sixties and early seventies formalism, new criticism and structuralism give way to post-structuralism, reader-response or reception theory and postmodernism. The outcome is a shift to variable context-relative perceptions and constructions of socially-conditioned reading communities, whose expectations and norms were internal to their own social and semiotic conventions. Reader-response or reception theory places emphasis on the active role of the reader rather than on the role of author or text.²⁴ As understood and practiced by its more moderate proponents (i.e., Wolfgang Iser and Hans Robert Jaus), the reader 'completes' the meaning of a text, filling in the 'gaps.'²⁵ An underlying assumption for reader-response theory is that even if one may legitimately speak of an author's intention, it is not fulfilled until a reader appropriates the text. Until the reader actualizes it, the text, as 'sender' of a message has only potential meaning. Until it is interpreted and understood by its reader the text remains an abstraction. The reader's active engagement with the text is seen as a necessary component in any text having genuine meaning.

Reader-oriented literary theory that is influenced by post-modernism thinking declares that meaning arises from an interplay of forces within a text and from the social contexts of the readers and not from the intent of the author. Stanley Fish has become the most well-known, radical (he would argue 'consistent') advocate of the theory. He maintains that there is nothing 'in' the text to interpret, because he believes the only thing that exists is interpretation. He writes: "There is no single way of reading that is correct or natural, only 'ways of reading' that are

²⁴Anthony C. Thiselton notes that "If post-structuralism shifts attention to the reader, this is not to the consciousness of the *individual* reader of formalist theory, but to the *conventions, cultural codes, and historically-conditioned expectations which constitute the reading-community as a socio-cultural phenomenon.*" *New Horizons*, 496.

²⁵Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Read: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974) and *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978, 1980).



extensions of community perspectives...Interpretation is the source of texts, facts, authors, and intention...all...*products* of interpretation.”²⁶

Patrick Grant in his book, *Reading the New Testament*, acknowledges both the positive resources and perils offered by literary approaches.²⁷ He is concerned that socio-literary philosophical theories such as reader-response or reception theory move away from an author-focused theory of meaning and reading resulting in the deflation of any normative meaning of the biblical texts. Thus, the Bible loses its prophetic voice in challenging the worldview and lifestyle of the reader. Ernst Fuchs held that “the texts must translate us before we can translate them” or that “the truth has us ourselves as its object.”²⁸ The biblical writer’s direct confrontation of the Christian community is in stark contrast to reading strategies that stress the self-referring and unstable nature of texts and textual meanings derived from rhetorical interaction between context-relative, socio-narrative communities.²⁹ The danger in the ‘method,’ whether in the self-reflection by the

²⁶Stanley Fish, “Going Down the Anti-Formalist Road” in *Doing What Comes Naturally: Change, Rhetoric, and the Practice of Theory in Literary and Legal Studies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 29.

²⁷Patrick Grant, *Reading the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989).

²⁸Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description with Special Reference to Heidegger, Bultmann, Gadamer and Wittgenstein* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 73. Thiselton speaks persuasively of the importance of the transforming quality of the text, so that it is not just what the reader brings to the text, but what the text brings to the reader that is determinative. When a reader is transformed by a text, one will come to the text with changed presuppositions compared to when one first approached it. This is often referred to as the hermeneutical spiral. This is a process of change in understanding in front of the text, between text and reader, rather than a diachronic pre-literary process behind the text. Grant Osborne argues that “the historical-critical method has produced a vacuum in actually understanding Scripture,” for the historical-critical method does not allow the text to speak for itself. It is only interested in how the text came to be in the form it is. It does not give proper emphasis to the meaning of the text as it is. *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1991), 139.

²⁹“A growing number of scholars worldwide are placing culture above Scripture, so that authority resides in culture rather than within the Bible. These scholars do not bring their culture to be critiqued and interpreted by Scripture. They bring Scripture to be critiqued and interpreted by their culture. An international conference on biblical interpretation convened at the Divinity School,



individual or by extension the corporate community, is that it can take the form of “a distorting mirror.”³⁰

1.1.2.3 Canonically Defined Reader-Response and Reception Theory

In reaction, Paul Ricoeur insists that interaction with “the other” is important for the ethical discussion of avoiding “narcissism.”³¹ Distancing itself from naïve overconfidence in human reason, a primary presupposition of biblical hermeneutics accounts for the distorting noetic effects of human sinfulness (Jer 17:9; 1 Cor 4:4-5). Socio-critical theorists like Jürgen Habermas acknowledge the significant part played by ‘interests’ of power, desire, self-affirmation, self-

Vanderbilt University October 21-24, 1993 would be a prime example. An example from the conference was the feminist reading of the Matt 15:21-28 pericope about the Canaanite woman who asks Jesus for healing for her demon-possessed daughter. Jesus did not respond. It was claimed that Christ marginalized the woman while focusing on something else. Christ then says He was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel and thereby shows racism. This is compounded by Christ’s comment: “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to their dogs” (v. 26). None of this dialogue is perceived from the standpoint of Christ testing her faith, even though Jesus concluded that she had “great faith” (v. 28). This option is ignored in a quest to picture Christ as irrelevant to female readers, as either a Christ presented in a male-dominated social location or a Christ who was the product of His male-dominated culture.” Norman R. Gulley, “Reader-Response Theories in Postmodern Hermeneutics: A Challenge to Evangelical Theology” in *The Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement*, ed. David S. Dockery (Wheaton, Ill.: Bridgepoint/Victor, 1995), 222.

Robert M. Fowler summarizes Fish’s response to critics that his position grants too much authority to the reader: “The reader is not ‘too powerful,’ he says, and the critical enterprise is not doomed to subjectivism or solipsism, because the reader and his reading experience are defined and controlled by the critical community of which he is a part. The critical presuppositions employed by the reader to objectify and analyze the text are deprived from the ‘interpretive community’ in which the reading takes place. Readers may control texts, but that does not lead to anarchy, because interpretive communities control readers.”⁹ “Who is ‘the Reader’ in Reader Response Criticism?” *Semeia*, no 31 [1985]: 14.0 I would suggest that this is canonically naïve. Not merely individuals, but every unregenerate community of readers is blinded by ‘the god of this world’ because “the whole world lies in the power of the evil one” (1 John 5:19).

³⁰Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd English ed. (London: Sheed and Ward, 1989), 276.

³¹Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. K. Blamey (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 113-297. Ricoeur is concerned about the strong element of human self-deception and ‘resistance to truth’ on the part of individual consciousness or the ‘heart.’ He holds that this resistance stems from “a primitive and persistent narcissism...a narcissistic humiliation” that involves “suspicion [and] guile” and is trapped within attempts to shelter the self from disclosures that come from beyond the self. *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, trans. D. Ihde (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 151-53.



aggrandizement, and forces of oppression.³² In recognition of these distorting forces, a biblically defined reader-response theory espouses a canonically derived and central presupposition of hermeneutics: the essential and necessary role of the Holy Spirit who convicts and convinces readers of individual and corporate sin (John 16:8). The concomitant biblical reader-response is repentance, as the truth of the text addresses the reader's life (cf. James 1:23).³³ Orthodox Christianity and the second century reader believed that the Holy Spirit calls the reader to properly respond to the text and enables conformity to its truth.

After an extended examination in an effort to define the term 'response' in the phrase reader-response theory, Donald G. Marshall concludes: "If we are to take the word seriously, 'response' suggests that something [author-text] lays us under an obligation, makes a claim on us which we must answer, perhaps repeatedly, in an appropriate way, a way whose mirroring or—better—echoing makes what we are responsible to or responsive to resound."³⁴ Without this hearing and yielding to the 'other voice' (author) by a liberating work of the Holy Spirit, the reader is left with a narcissistic, distorted meaning of the text. Norman Holland plainly states that "we use the literary work to symbolize and finally to replicate ourselves."³⁵ Ricoeur cogently argues that a secularly defined reception theory reading of the text can

³²Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interest*, 2nd ed. (London: Heinemann, 1978).

³³In the discourse containing Peter's Pentecost speech, the crowd inquires of the author of the speech as to what the proper hearer-response should be if they have accurately understood the author's intended meaning. Peter replies: "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). Any application of a reader-response theory to the biblical text that is not based upon the presupposition, among others, of the canonical doctrine of the total depravity of man, ends in self-delusion.

³⁴Donald G. Marshall, "Reading as Understanding: Hermeneutics and Reader-Response Criticism" in *Christianity and Literature*, 33 no 1 (Fall 1983), 38.

³⁵Norman Holland, "Transactive Criticism: Re-Creation Through Identity" in *Criticism* 18 (1976): 342.



result in idolatry.³⁶ The orthodox Christian reader holds that the reader can project his or her own interests, desires, and selfhood onto that which the biblical text states and thereby re-create and ‘construct’ God in our own image through the reading process (Rom 6:6; Eph 4:22; Col 3:9). The Spirit’s work is to convict the reader concerning the self-absorbed, self-deceptive readings and resistance to the truth (John 16:7-11). From the perspective of the canonical reader, the task of the inspired text, in conjunction with the activity of the Spirit, is to reconstruct/restore the reader to the image of God as presented in Christ (Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18; Col 3:10; 1 John 3:1-2).

Gadamer recognized the key importance of the fusion of the two horizons of author and the reader for understanding the text. His fusion of the two horizons respects authorial and challenges the subjectivism of secular reader-response theories. As Thiselton rightly says:

The hermeneutical goal is that of a steady progress towards a fusion of horizons. But this is to be achieved in such a way that the particularity of each horizon is fully taken into account and respected. This means *both* respecting the rights of the text *and* allowing it to speak.³⁷

For reader-response theory, understanding is enabled by the life-world that the reader brings with him or her to the text, including the function of language as used in that life-world. Thus, for a non-canonically defined reader-response theory the reader functions as a second author, or as Bernard C. Lategan states it, the reader is “co-responsible for the creation of the text as a meaningful communication.”³⁸ It is

³⁶Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1974).

³⁷Thiselton, *Two Horizons*, 445.

³⁸Bernard C. Lategan, “Reader-Response Theory,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 5:627.



not the meaning of the text that is determinative, but the meaning that the reader brings to the text that is decisive.³⁹

In contrast, a canonical reader adopts the worldview of the canon as the hermeneutical starting point.⁴⁰ An objective hermeneutic must pursue a method that is appropriate to the object of its study.⁴¹ A canonically defined reader-response theory begins with a God who is there (the ultimate author—Gen 1:1).⁴² This, then, becomes the central, organizing and unifying principle of the canonical reader's hermeneutic and theology.⁴³ The claim of the canon is that God has uniquely

³⁹“‘Reading’ as a term without semantic opposition seems neutral and innocent; but as a contrastive term to ‘interpretation’ or ‘understanding’ the newer paradigm shifts the focus from epistemological communication and interpretative judgment to semiotic effect, with some considerable loss for biblical scholarship and for the status of the Bible itself.” Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 503.

⁴⁰John Barton notes: “the canonical approach is conceived as a *theological* mode of study. It is an attempt to heal the breach between biblical criticism and theology, and it assumes (at least for the purpose of method) that the interpreter is not a detached, neutral critic free from religious commitment, but a believer, trying to apply the biblical text to the contemporary life of the Church.” *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), 90.

⁴¹“Theological science and natural science are both at work in the same world seeking understanding within the rational connections and regularities of space and time where they pursue their respective inquiries and let their thinking serve the reality into which they seek to inquire. This does not mean that theology can allow its own subject-matter to be determined by the results of scientific work in other fields or that it can extrapolate their particular procedures into its own field of operation, but that it must pursue its own distinctive ends *in a scientifically rigorous way on its own ground and in accordance with the nature of its own proper object*. Yet because it operates in the same world as natural science it cannot pursue its activity in a sealed-off enclave of its own, but it must take up the relevant problems and question posed by the other sciences in clarifying knowledge of its own subject-matter. Hence it can make legitimate use of analogies taken from the other sciences where similar problems arise in order to help it penetrate into the inherent intelligibility of its own object, and under its control bring it to such precise articulation in its understanding that there is no confusion between knowing and what is known, and no unwarranted intrusion of subjective factors into the transcendental content of its knowledge.” Thomas F. Torrance, *Space, Time, and Incarnation* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), viii.

⁴²Francis A. Schaeffer, *The God Who is There* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998).

⁴³Contra James Barr. Barr suggests, approvingly, that Child's major departure from the earlier failed biblical theology movement was that he proposed a *formal* rather than a *material* ('inspiration') principle, namely, the canon. Barr comments that “by its own nature it [canon as formal



revealed himself through the history of Israel and the person of Jesus.⁴⁴ The God described in the canon has further addressed humans through prophets and finally through his Son (Heb 1:1-2). The final *genre* is not just a compendium of types of literature generated by the human authors, but the unified divine *genre* that they convey—the Word of God. As Calvin states: “Scripture exhibits clear evidence of its

principle] coincides exactly with the boundary of scripture....By taking the canon as principle one was no longer forced to argue that there was an absolute difference in content, in ideas, in thought patterns, between the Bible and the rest of the world....The biblical material was normative, not because it was necessarily different in content, but because the canon separated it off and gave it its distinctive shape.” *Holy Scripture: Canon, Authority, Criticism* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983), 135.

⁴⁴It is clear that the biblical writers thought of the Scriptures as unique when compared to other writings. They spoke of them as “sacred writings” (2 Tim 3:15), “oracles of God” (Rom 3:2; Heb 5:12, ESV) and therefore as “holy Scriptures” (Rom 1:2). Biblical writers never claim to have originated their writings. Rather they speak of seeing in vision (Isa 1:1; Jer 38:21; Amos 1:1; Micah 1:1; Hab 1:1). Nehemiah said to God, “warned them by your Spirit through your prophets” (Neh 9:30; cf. Zech 7:12). David said, “The Spirit of the LORD speaks by me; his word is on my tongue. The God of Israel has spoken; the Rock of Israel has said to me” (2 Sam 23:2-3). Prophets spoke of being filled or moved by the Holy Spirit. Thus Ezekiel exclaimed, “the Spirit entered into me and set me on my feet, and I heard him speaking to me” (Ezek 2:2). He continues, “And the Spirit of the LORD fell upon me, and he said to me, “Say, Thus says the LORD” (Ezek 11:5). In his work of speaking God’s messages, Micah testified, “I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the LORD” (Micah 3:8).

The New Testament gives insight into the function of the Holy Spirit in the writing of the Old Testament. Jesus said that David spoke by the Holy Spirit (Mark 12:36). Paul said in Rome, “the Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers” and quotes Isaiah 6:9-10 which speaks of those who listen but never understand for they have closed their eyes (Acts 28:25-27). The Old Testament people of Israel were often that way. They did not perceive that the prophets really had a divine message from God. They only listened to them as human messengers. This is a recurring problem through human history, and is evidenced so remarkably since the Enlightenment in the way people come to Scripture not as a divine message from God but merely as a human message.

Peter said about the ancient prophets: “the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories” (1 Peter 1:11). “For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21). The origin of Scripture is clearly not human according to its self-testimony, but rather, the Spirit of God. It is appropriate then that biblical writers refer to their writing as written by the Holy Spirit. Thus the author of Hebrews says, “Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says” (Heb 3:7) and “By this the Holy Spirit indicates” (Heb 9:8).

The New Testament writers not only testified that the Holy Spirit spoke through the Old Testament prophets, but that He was the same divine person speaking through their writings. Thus Christ gave “commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen” (Acts 1:2), many of whom became writers of New Testament books. John could speak of being “in the Spirit” (Rev 1:10) when he was given a vision and commissioned to “write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches” (Rev 1:11).



being spoken by God, and, consequently, of its containing his heavenly doctrine.”⁴⁵ Daniel B. Clendenin commends the Reformers because “they came to the text to listen and not to question. Instead of coming to the texts as subjects who lord it over an objective datum they saw themselves as objects and the text as the subject.”⁴⁶

1.1.2.4 The Canonically Defined Interpretive Community

Stanley Porter maintains that “Fish’s concept of ‘interpretive communities’ appears to be one of the strategic concepts which will have to be utilized if reader-response criticism is going to emerge fully in New Testament studies.” As an interpretive community, the Reformers spoke of Scripture as *sola scriptura*, *tota scriptura*, and *prima scriptura*. As *sola scriptura*, Scripture is allowed to interpret Scripture. As *prima scriptura*, Scripture is viewed as the primary source for interpreting God’s word. As *tota scriptura*, all of Scripture can be used in this process. Since God is held to be the author of Scripture (though the inspired human authors are essential co-authors), the Word of God is viewed as transcultural with its social location ultimately grounded in the Trinity, centered upon Christ⁴⁷ and inspired by the person of the Holy Spirit. And only secondarily, yet importantly, is it located within the social location of the human writers who under Spirit inspiration presented God’s life-world in and through Christ (John 1:14,18), and subsequently in the social location of the readers in the original and subsequent generations. This indicates significant warrant for a canonically defined reader-response theory. Scripture has one and the same Holy Spirit author working through all the human authors in different locations in different times so that the divine authorship is in one

⁴⁵John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (London: Clarke, 1962), 1:64.

⁴⁶D.B. Clendenin, “Learning to Listen: Thomas C. Oden on Postcritical Orthodoxy,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 34 (March 1991): 99.

⁴⁷Christ himself interpreted the Hebrew Bible in such a way that his work as Messiah shed light on it (Luke 24:27) and it also shed light on his work as Messiah (Luke 24:45-46).



spiritual location. That one spiritual location has a far more determinative, shaping influence on Scripture than do the various social-cultural contexts in which the story of Scripture and its human authors and readers are located (though important). According to the canon of Scripture, God stands in prophetic critique of human culture (John 3:19; 12:31; 16:8; Jude 15), and calls humanity to the proper reader-response of repentance and faith in Christ. These suppositions have important implications for the cross-cultural relevance of the canon that is beyond the scope of the present work.

Revelation in Scripture is the result of the Holy Spirit inspiring prophets and apostles, guiding in the formation of the canon and giving to the interpreters the guidance in understanding (2 Pet 1:21). David Dockery correctly analyzes that in the post-Enlightenment, postmodern world there needs to be a restoration of the Holy Spirit's function in the interpretation of the Scripture to its proper place.

The idea of illumination as enablement for understanding the text in this manner (see 1 Cor 2:10-16) has at times disappeared from the contemporary discussion. We need to realize that we search not only for the external meaning of the text but for its inner meaning as well. We are suggesting that discovering Scripture's meaning involves not only examining the author's result in the written text, but also the Holy Spirit's work of illuminating the reader's mind to interpret the text. With the enablement of the Spirit, discerning a text's meaning and significance is not only possible but plausible.⁴⁸

Without the successful convicting and illuminating work of the Holy Spirit the reader's inclination is to transform the text rather than to be transformed by the text. Thiselton warns that if textual meaning is the product of readers, then "texts cannot reform these readers 'from outside.'"⁴⁹ Thus, every person in every social location is

⁴⁸David S. Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation: Then and Now, Contemporary Hermeneutics in the Light of the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 158.

⁴⁹Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 549. Thiselton offers five significant reasons why radical reader-response hermeneutics is detrimental. He cautions that "the challenge *to understand* may necessitate *self-reorientation* of an individual or corporate nature. It may not be easy; and the reader,



free to read Scripture from his or her own personal social and cultural perspective. In principle, therefore, there can be as many readings of Scripture as there are readers.

In contrast, a canonical reader comes to Scripture with a worldview that believes in a God who reveals Himself in space and time, where the biblical accounts are not myths but the record of God in His salvific work for humankind. Under such a view of Scripture a canonically defined reader-response theory is possible—a faithful listening to the Word of God in and through Scripture. The reader-response challenge to the hearers/readers in the seven churches in Revelation chapters two and three is: “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” A canonically defined reader-response or reception-theory places the person and work of the Holy Spirit at the center of the interaction of the reader and the text. Mere human socio-linguistic, semiotic competence in reading the canon, devoid of the convicting, illuminating and guiding work of the Spirit leads to idolatry. Fish writes in retrospect about when he used to look for authorial intention: “I did what critics always do. I ‘saw’ what my interpretive principles permitted or directed me to see, and then I turned round and attributed what I had ‘seen’ to the text.”⁵⁰ Ironically, I would agree with Fish, except that he describes the reader unaffected by the work of the Holy Spirit. It is a sufficient truth, but not a necessary one. It frequently leads to an idolatrous ‘reading’ of the author’s intention, but does not necessarily need to be so. Norman Holland approaches reader-response theory from a psychological perspective. He maintains that “every reader” transforms a narrative into a wish-fulfillment fantasy, in effect, about himself

as Bonhoeffer comments on the context of a theology of the cross, may not be able to understand ‘on his or her own terms.’ The key issue, we shall argue in the next chapter, which arises from the work of Stanley Fish is whether a community of readers can be shaped and judged by texts, as it were, ‘from outside,’ or whether they must remain trapped in their own contextual relativism, hearing no prophetic summons from outside and beyond.” *New Horizons*, 503.

⁵⁰Stanley Fish, “Introduction, or How I Stopped Worrying and Learned to Love Interpretation,” in *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 12.



or herself.⁵¹ He argues that the ego's defenses perform like a doorstep, to keep at bay invitations to interpret the text in disappointing or challenging ways. I would again make the same response I just made in reference to Fish—it is a sufficient explanation, but not a necessary one—for which I shall now make a case.

Thiselton observes that if Paul regards prayers, as human address to God, as Holy Spirit initiated communication through persons to God (Rom 8:15,16), “how much more in the case of address *from* God” should we understand it as initiated and facilitated by the Holy Spirit. He continues: “In a co-operative shared work, the Spirit, the text, and the reader engage in a *transforming process*, which enlarges horizons and creates *new horizons*.”⁵² A primary new horizon for a Spirit regenerated believer is that he or she reads the canon first and foremost as an adopted member (‘sonship’) in fellowship with the Trinity (John 1:12; Rom 8:14; Gal 4:5; 1 John 1:3) and secondarily with the body of Christ, the church ([‘brotherhood,’ ‘body members’] Mark 3:35; Rom 12:4-8; 1 Peter 2:17; 1 Cor 12:12-25; Eph 5:30; 1 John 3:10). These, then, become for the canonical reader the dominant communities that influence ones reading, interpretation, and understanding.

A canonical reader who is ‘crucified with Christ’ (Gal 2:20) experiences a de-centering of the self as well as a radical social transformation that profoundly affects reading of Scripture (Matt 10:32-38; Mark 10:29-30; Luke 12:51-53; 14:26-27). I believe this was the experience of Paul on the road to Damascus (Acts 9). Post-conversion, Paul’s reader-response to the reading of Scripture is radically transformed. Charles Winquist describes this as “a transformation of consciousness...a re-ordering of values and a new perception of meanings.”⁵³ The theology of the cross, central to the New Testament (1 Cor 1:23; 2:2; Gal 6:14),

⁵¹Norman Holland, *Five Readers Reading* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), 117; especially 113-21.

⁵²Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 619.

⁵³Charles Winquist, *Practical Hermeneutics: A Revised Agenda for the Ministry* (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1980), 17 and 36.



performs its trans-cultural function, challenging the corporate constructs, expectations, and wish-fulfillments of every community and individual as a scandalous reversal of human expectations and values.

1.1.2.5 The Cross, Reader-Response and Interpretive Community

For a canonical reader, the cross is a trans-contextual liberating critique of all interpretive communities. If there is no 'meta-critique' of sinful human communities and individuals trans-culturally from 'outside,' hermeneutics serves only to sustain the unregenerate corporate and individual self, structures, and values. Interpretation is consequently ethno-centric by nature and endlessly polyvalent. This trans-cultural application of the cross is central to Jesus' appeal that "if *anyone* would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" and "*whoever* does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple" (Luke 9:23 // Mark 8:34; 14:27). The early church understood Jesus' command to make disciples of all nations (Matt 28:19-20; Acts 1:8) as transcultural as evidenced by the programmatic narrative of Acts which moves from Jerusalem to Rome and to the Jews first and then the Gentiles. Paul broadens the 'meta-critique' of the cross work of Christ to be trans-universal when he says, "and through him to reconcile to himself *all things*, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross" (Col 1:20). All interpretive communities, whether angelic or human, stand under the 'meta-critique' of the cross.⁵⁴

The cross and resurrection give rise to the possibility of an interpretive community where there is true liberation, where grace is available to all, for "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ (Gal 3:28). One experiences a new identity within a new

⁵⁴Contra Fish and Rorty who insist, almost by definition that a trans-cultural critique cannot exist because all criteria remain relative to what is held to count as criteria within a given social community. But I am arguing that this is self-deception under the blinding power of sin according to the biblically defined doctrine of the sinful human nature (Rom 1:21; 3:23; 5:12; 7:23).



community.⁵⁵ In anticipation of the eschaton, this transformation is an ongoing experience for the regenerated canonical reader as Paul notes in 2 Cor 3:18—“And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed (μεταμορφούμεθα) into the same image (εἰκόνα) from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.” In anticipation of the eschaton, a canonical community should acknowledge that it is still continuing to undergo transformation by the Word of God and the work of the Spirit. It reads, with appropriate humility, in pursuit of an accurate understanding and meaning of the text that will match with the reality when it no longer sees in a mirror dimly, but then face to face (1 Cor 13:12). The following section will unpack in further detail the presuppositions under which I, as a ‘real reader’ within the canonical community, interpret Scripture. It is my attempt to discern and clarify the presuppositions the ‘implied reader’ of the canon would embrace. Robert Fowler defines the ‘implied reader’ as “the reader the text invites us to be....the reader we must be willing to become in order to experience the narrative in the fullest measure.”⁵⁶

⁵⁵ See Gert J. Steyn, “Driven By Conviction and Attitude! Ethics in the Acts of the Apostles” in *Identity, Ethics, and Ethos in the New Testament* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2006), 135-63.

⁵⁶Fowler, “Who is ‘the Reader’ in Reader Response Criticism?,” 10, 12. As I have previously argued, whether that invitation is accepted and actualized so that there is a ‘merging’ of the ‘implied reader’ with the ‘real reader’ is dependent upon the successful work of the Holy Spirit. Fowler continues: “Granted the usefulness of Chatman’s terminology, he glosses over one problem spot that requires attention: the nature of the implied reader (and *mutatis mutandis* the implied author). He places both of these entities within the box labeled ‘narrative text,’ claiming them to be ‘immanent’ to the text. A clean break is therefore made between the reader in the text and the reader outside of the text, a division that is problematic, to say the least. In fact, one of the recurring debates among reader-oriented critics concerns the relationship between the text and the reader. Stated in its most extreme form, the question here is: *does the text control the reader or does the reader control the text?*” Ibid., 13. Fish’s response is that the text cannot really control reading in any objective sense, because the text is invented in the process of being read. The text and all its features are only defined and therefore brought into existence by the reader’s interpretive strategies. It is the reader who objectifies the text and its characteristics in the first place, and thus controls it. Again, I have argued that this would be true, absent the work of the Holy Spirit, who acts to liberate the reader from self-interested lording over the text.



1.1.3 Statement of the Problem and the Resultant Thesis

For those biblical interpreters who take their cue from trends in secular literary criticism that are essentially ahistorical in orientation, historical questions can easily be seen as uninteresting and even unwelcome interruptions to the enjoyment and meaning of a good story such as the book of Acts presents.⁵⁷ A number of evangelical scholars have expressed significant concern about literary and narrative approaches. Tremper Longman points to a number of dissertations on the book of Acts written from a literary perspective that examine the structure of Acts and conclude that it is highly structured, but that it “does not convey true historical information.”⁵⁸ V. Philips Long notes that with the rise of studies on biblical narrative “the *nature* and *extent* of the historian’s contribution” has become greatly debated.⁵⁹ That debate is particularly focused on whether “*narrative form* as such is an aspect of reality itself or is a product solely of the historian’s imagination.”⁶⁰ Carl Henry observes that there has been extensive debate “underway in some evangelical circles over whether narrative hermeneutics should be welcomed as an ally that is

⁵⁷“Narrative hermeneutics embraces uncertainty over historicity. The primary interest of Christian interpretation need not be and is not historiography. But a narrative-dramatic approach involving kerygmatic creativity is so open to realistic theological fiction that it readily obscures historical fact and clouds the foundations of a stable faith. The Christian Gospel is inseparably dependent upon God’s self-revelation and soteric sacrifice within the historical space-time continuum, and it is incumbent on those who claim that narrative story and history are not incompatible to clarify which historical specifics are nonnegotiable.” C.H.F. Henry, “Narrative Theology: An Evangelical Appraisal,” *Trinity Journal* 8, no. 1 (1987): 13.

⁵⁸Tremper Longman III, “Storytellers and Poets in the Bible: Can Literary Artifice Be True?” in *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 145. The dissertations are as follows: Susan M. Praeder, “The Narrative Voyage: An Analysis and Interpretation of Acts 27-28” (Ph.D. diss., Graduate Theological Union, 1980); Charles B. Puskas, Jr., “The Conclusion of Luke-Acts 28:16-31” (Ph.D. diss., St. Louis University, 1980); William R. Long, “The Trial of Paul in the Book of Acts: Historical, Literary, and Theological Considerations” (Ph.D. diss., Brown University, 1982); Edwin S. Nelson, “Paul’s First Missionary Journey as Paradigm: Literary-Critical Assessment of Acts 13-14” (Ph.D. diss., Brown University, 1982).

⁵⁹V. Philips Long, *The Art Of Biblical History*, 69.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*



essentially orthodox.”⁶¹ Scot McKnight expresses his concern that “until more careful analyses of reference and historical intention are completed, literary criticism will remain a ‘trend’ and will not become ‘standard method’ for generations to come.”⁶² But that a historical truth claim is being made by Luke in Acts – from a canonical reader’s perspective - is unmistakable, e.g., the Prologue.⁶³ One may choose to deny the truth-value of Luke’s account, but one is simply not free to read Luke as if no historical truth claim has been made.⁶⁴

This leads directly to my thesis: *From a canonical reader’s perspective, a literary analysis of the historical book of Acts is not a priori incompatible with a high view of the historicity of the text, even one which affirms the inerrancy and infallibility of Scripture in the area of history.* Literary artistry and reliable historiography should not be set in opposition.⁶⁵ It is my contention that the biblical narrator, Luke, is not only concerned to tell us facts but also to guide our perspective and responses to those events through literary artifice.⁶⁶ Michael J. Toolan observes, “Narrators

⁶¹C.H.F. Henry, “Narrative Theology,” 7.

⁶²Scot McKnight, “Literary Criticism of the Synoptic Gospels,” *TrinJ* NS (1987): 57-68.

⁶³Terrance Callan, “The Preface of Luke-Acts and Historiography,” *New Testament Studies* 31 (1985), 580: “The stated purpose of Luke-Acts seems to mark it as a history . . . written to provide a true account of something.” Ben Witherington III concludes, after a lengthy discussion of background and text matters: “Luke’s reference to a careful investigation of ‘everything’ from the beginning, coupled with his reliance on the sacred tradition passed down to those who were both eyewitness and minister of the word, amounts to his profession to being a serious religious historian.” *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 51. Darrell L. Bock concludes, “Luke is a credible historian.” *Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 6. Cf. F.F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 34.

⁶⁴Colin Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1989). I. Howard Marshall, *Luke*, 13-76; *idem*, *I Believe in the Historical Jesus* (London, 1977).

⁶⁵D. Carr, “Narrative and the Real World: An Argument for Continuity,” *HTh* 25 (1986), 118: “. . . narrative is not merely a possibly successful way of describing events; its structure inheres in the events themselves.”

⁶⁶Longman, *Literary Approaches*, 58: “The question of historical truth boils down to the question of who ultimately is guiding us in our interpretation of these events. If we look ultimately to



assert their authority to tell, to take up the role of knower or entertainer... in relation to the addressees' adopted role of learner or consumer. To narrate is to make a bid for a kind of power."⁶⁷

The Scriptures cannot be reduced to one function, whether aesthetic, historical or theological.⁶⁸ Each literary genre of Scripture has its own literary strategy in expressing historical and theological reality. The book of Acts is theologically directed, literarily shaped and historically reliable.⁶⁹ F.F. Bruce argues that by the exacting standards of some who wrote about the requirements of good historiography in the Greco-Roman world, Luke's work measures up quite well.⁷⁰ I. Howard Marshall concurs, stating that Luke

is a theologian in his own right and must be treated as such. For the moment enough has been said to show that a blanket condemnation of Luke as a historian of the early church is uncalled for. We do not wish to make exaggerated claims for his reliability, nor to suggest that his views of the historian's task were identical with those of the modern historian. But it is unfair to suggest that he is a thoroughly tendentious and unreliable writer, freely rewriting the history of the early church in the interests of his own theology.⁷¹

human authors, then literary art may be deceptive. If we look to God, then we cannot have deception."

⁶⁷Michael J. Toolan, *Narrative: A Critical Linguistic Introduction* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), 3.

⁶⁸T. Long, *The Art of Biblical History*, 57: "Above all, false dichotomies such as 'the Bible is theology not history' or 'the Bible is literature not history' must be avoided. The Bible evinces an interest in all three."

⁶⁹For an understanding of history adopted in the present work see Bruce Marshall, "Meaning and Truth in Narrative Interpretation: A Reply to George Schner," *Modern Theology* 8 (1992).

⁷⁰F.F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 29-31.

⁷¹I. Howard Marshall examines and evaluates three issues that are raised in reference to history in Luke-Acts. The first issue is whether Luke's narratives reflect accuracy in relation to "the background, which he describes." He notes that W.M. Ramsay, "who began his research with the assumption that Acts was a tendentious production dating from the middle of the second century,



Comparing Luke's writing with the practices of ancient historians and their views about the historian's task, Hemer observes "the existence of a distinctive and rigorous theory of historiography."⁷² I will argue that Luke intends not only to inform historically, but also is concerned to guide our perspective and responses to events through the use of various literary devices.⁷³ As author/narrator of Acts, he controls the way we view the events he writes by selectivity, artful structuring and crafted emphasis.⁷⁴ But these literary choices in historiography are theologically directed.⁷⁵ The biblical storyteller as well as the biblical poet attributes the great events that happen in Israel or in the Church to God. The author's intention is to interpret that history in the light of the reality of God and His interaction with the world.

convinced him that Luke was a first century historian with an accurate knowledge of Asia Minor and the Aegean area." He concludes that E. Haenchen's and H. Conzelmann's challenges to this conclusion are insufficient. Marshall himself concludes that "compared with other ancient historians Luke acquits himself very creditably. In matters of detail his historical stature is high." The second issue pertains to whether the speeches in Acts are historically 'tainted' by Luke to reflect his own theology, rather than that of the original speaker. Marshall's conclusion is that "Luke incorporated speeches not primarily to express his own theological viewpoint but rather because preaching was an integral part of the activity of the early church, as he saw it....In short, it is one-sided to look at the speeches in Acts merely as evidence for Luke's theology, they have a claim to be based on the practice of the early church." A third area Marshall examines is that of "Luke's general picture of the early church"—that "his history is selective and consequently open to misapprehension." His response is recorded above.

⁷²C. Hemer, *The Book of Acts*, 100, in conclusion in his chapter on ancient historiography.

⁷³Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 12: "By literary analysis I mean the manifold varieties of minutely discriminating attention to the artful use of language, to the shifting play of ideas, conventions, tone, sound, imagery, syntax, narrative view point, compositional units, and much else . . ."

⁷⁴T. Longman, *Literary Approaches*, 57: "The point is that we do not have so-called objective, neutral, or unshaped reporting of events. (As many have pointed out, there is no such thing as a brute fact; an uninterpreted historical report is inconceivable.) Genesis is clearly not attempting to report events dispassionately. Rather it contains proclamation, which shapes the history to differing degrees. The biblical narrators are concerned not only to tell us facts but also to guide our perspective and responses to those events."

⁷⁵Moisés Silva, *Has the Church Misread the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 18: "Every *description* of data necessarily involves a measure of interpretation, that is, a theoretical framework that makes the description meaningful."



While acknowledging what Vanhoozer calls the dark side to aesthetic hermeneutics that makes the author and history irrelevant for interpretive purpose, or turns them into mere inventions of the text, I agree with him that there is much to be appreciated in the literary approach when he states:

In directing our attention to formal features of the text, the aesthetic approach helps us better to grasp the structure and patterns in literary works. And as many of the “literary” studies of the Bible attest, such a reading does dig up new treasures.⁷⁶

It is my intention to examine in Acts 1:1-2:4 how the theological, historiographic and aesthetic aspects of Luke’s writing function cooperatively to communicate the intention of the author. I will attempt to show how Luke’s theological perspective of the events determined his selectivity of possible events to include in his narrative, and in turn influenced the compositional, stylistic decisions. I believe that – from a canonical reader’s perspective - divine revelation should be located in both historical events and the interpretative word, and that the false assumption by some interpreters of Acts that literature and history constitute mutually exclusive categories is a distinctly modern one to be rejected. I agree with Robert Alter when he speaks of “a complete interfusion of literary art with theological, moral, or historiographical vision, the fullest perception of the latter dependent on the fullest grasp of the former.”⁷⁷ I shall attempt to demonstrate in my examination of Acts 1:1-2:4 that “an increased appreciation of the literary mechanisms of a text—*how* a story is told—often becomes the avenue of greater insight into the theological and historical significance of the text—*what* the story

⁷⁶Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “A Lamp in the Labyrinth: The Hermeneutics of ‘Aesthetic’ Theology,” *TrinJ NS* (1987), 25-56.

⁷⁷*Art of Biblical Narrative*, 19; cf. 179.



means.”⁷⁸ In order to access Luke’s theology in Acts I will pay attention to two primary matters. First, noting the important advances made by narrative critics, I will pay close attention to the rhetorical strategies and literary conventions Luke employs.⁷⁹ Secondly, as an effort toward a biblical theology of the opening discourses of Acts, I will keep in mind the historical impulses that contribute to Luke’s second volume—in particular, biblical history.⁸⁰ It is the thesis of this work that keeping both aspects in view simultaneously may lead to an increased understanding of the theology conveyed by Luke to his intended audience.

1.2 Part II: Epistemological Presuppositions and Methodology

1.2.1 Preliminary Hermeneutical Matters

1.2.1.1 On Reading the Bible for Theology

A canonical reader reads the Bible as literature with the aim of an ever-increasing discernment of the divine intention.⁸¹ Texts are ideological insofar as they reflect certain attitudes, values, and assumptions (understanding ideology as a

⁷⁸V. Philips Long, *The Reign and Rejection of King Saul: A Case for Literary and Theological Coherence*, SBLDS 118 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 14.

⁷⁹Mikeal C. Parsons, *Acts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 19.

⁸⁰Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “Exegesis and Hermeneutics,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 59: “The discipline of biblical theology thus involves not only linguistic and historical but also *literary* competence....If the literary form of the Bible is essential to its theological and historical content, then biblical theology ignores the diverse literary genres of the Bible at its peril.”

⁸¹It is important to approach Scripture with hermeneutical humility, acknowledging the ‘hermeneutical spiral’ as Bernard Lategan aptly states: “The ongoing cyclic process of pre-understanding—challenge—rejection or acceptance—adjustment—new self-understanding—new pre-understanding is what is understood as the ‘hermeneutical circle.’ However, the image of a circle is misleading. We never return to the point where we started...We therefore prefer to use the term ‘hermeneutical spiral’ rather than ‘hermeneutical circle.’” *Focusing On the Message: New Testament Hermeneutics, Exegesis and Methods*, ed. Andrie du Toit (Pretoria: Protea Book House, 2009), 81. Cf. Grant Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2006).



synonym for ‘worldview’). The Bible is ideological literature insofar as it seeks, through its rhetoric, to shape readers’ minds and hearts in order to bring their attitude into alignment with its own.⁸² According to Sternberg, the worldview of the Bible is unique: “If the Bible is ideologically singular—and I believe so—then its singularity lies in the worldview projected, together with the rhetoric devised to bring it home.” I seek to discover and to submit to the worldview written into the fabric of the narrative discourse in Acts—to grasp its theological ideology, conveyed by its primary author and the primary protagonist of the Bible story.

In order to accomplish this I will attempt to pay close attention to the Bible’s literary conventions. But to focus on a text’s formal literary features runs the risk of missing the main point. C.S. Lewis emphasizes this when he states: “Those who talk of reading the Bible ‘as literature’ sometimes mean, I think, reading it without attending to the main thing it is about; like reading Burke with no interest in politics, or reading the Aeneid with no interest in Rome.”⁸³ My main goal in this study is to discern, understand and submit to the theology (ideology) conveyed through the literature penned by Luke in Acts – and to do so from a canonical reader’s perspective.

1.2.1.2 Epistemological Presuppositions and Hermeneutical Humility

One aspect of the Bible’s worldview is that God and humans are distinct with regard to knowledge. God created humans with a finite capacity to know Him truly, and that finite capacity does not guarantee infallible interpretation of the inspired text. I believe in ‘hermeneutical realism’—that exhaustive knowledge of God

⁸²“We are to fit our own life into its world, feel ourselves to be elements in its structure of universal history.” Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1953), 15. Cf. Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 482.

⁸³C.S. Lewis, *Reflection on the Psalms* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1958), 2-3.



is beyond our grasp.⁸⁴ But our limitations do not prevent us from knowing truly many things about God on the basis of God's self-communication in Scripture and general revelation.⁸⁵ I wish to avoid the trap of the sterile dichotomy of either absolute, exhaustive knowledge (hermeneutical dogmatism) or absolute skepticism (hermeneutical atheism). While I believe in the possibility of "right" interpretations, I acknowledge the rightful place of criticism, realizing that no one perspective or set of descriptive categories can capture the complexity of theological interpretation and meaning other than with relative adequacy.⁸⁶ *Sola Scriptura* should be a reminder that textual meaning is independent of our interpretive schemes and therefore, that our interpretations remain secondary commentaries that never acquire the status of the text itself.

Story is a vital mode of communication in Scripture.⁸⁷ Narrative discourse cannot be distilled into a few theological propositions that exhaustively, completely capture the entirety of meaning *and* effect a story intends to communicate.⁸⁸ But this

⁸⁴Sternberg argues that this cognitive antithesis is built into the very structure of biblical narrative and so shapes the experience of reading. Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1985) 37ff.

⁸⁵"Hermeneutically sophisticated biblical theologians will happily concede the exhaustive knowledge of the meaning of a text is impossible, but they will nevertheless insist that true knowledge of the meaning of a text is not impossible." D.A. Carson, "Current Issues in Biblical Theology" in the *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 5 (1995), 34.

⁸⁶Longman expresses this well: "Such a loss of faith is unnecessary if we realize that our interpretations of any text, and biblical literature in particular are partial, hypothetical, probable, and contextualized. Said positively, our interpretations may never be dogmatic, because the texts are rich in meaning, the mind of God (the final author) is ultimately unfathomable, and, recognizing that interpretation necessarily includes application, the situations that readers confront are various." *Literary Approaches*, 64.

⁸⁷See Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth: A Guide to Understanding the Bible*. 2nd Ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 265 pp.

⁸⁸"Goldingay points out that the translation of the biblical material into a system (or new structure) has leaned towards the unequivocal, replacing stories with concepts and categories and eclipsing the mysterious and the equivocal. This is unfortunate, for narrative's ability to embrace complexity, ambiguity and mystery is an expedient skill, given the nature of the Christian faith which,



should not lead one to hermeneutical paralysis. We have an obligation as canonical readers of the Word of God to hear and understand to the best of our abilities what the author is communicating. In the following chapters I make no claim to a 'totalizing' interpretation that asserts to be both exhaustive and comprehensive.⁸⁹

T.F. Torrance rightly anchors the proper humility a Christian should have, epistemologically and hermeneutically in the biblical doctrine of justification.

"The fact that, through the free grace of God, Jesus Christ is made our Righteousness means that we have no righteousness of our own. To be put freely in the right with God means that we and all our vaunted right are utterly called in question before God. Epistemologically, this means that to be put in the truth with God reveals that in ourselves we are in the wrong. Or, as Paul bluntly expressed it, "Let God be true and every man a liar." No one may boast of his own orthodoxy any more than he may boast of his own righteousness. Justification thus turns out to be the strongest statement of the objectivity of faith and knowledge. That is to say, the very beliefs which we profess and formulate as obediently and carefully as we can in fidelity to God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ are themselves called into question by that revelation, for they have their truth not in themselves but in him to whom they refer, and are therefore constantly to be revised in the light of the Truth that Jesus Christ is in himself in God."⁹⁰

1.2.1.3 The Goal of Interpretation: Repentance and Transformation

Meir Sternberg begins his work, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* by pondering the 'bottom line' question concerning the goal of narrative communication,

as the apostle Paul says, obliges us to 'see in a mirror, dimly,' and to 'know only in part' (1 Cor 14:12)." Karl Möller, "The Nature and Genre of Biblical Theology," in *Out of Egypt: Biblical Theology and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Craig Bartholomew, Mary Healy, Karl Möller, and Robin Parry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 58.

⁸⁹"The success of any interpretation depends on its explanatory power, on its ability to make more complex, coherent, and natural sense of textual data than other interpretations do." Robert H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 4.

⁹⁰T.F. Torrance, *Reality*, 18. The second to the last line would more reflect my thinking if it read, "whom they refer, and therefore *should always be open* to be revised."



with all its rhetoric and poetics. Why does narrative discourse exist? What is its goal?

What goals does the biblical narrator set himself? What is it that he wants to communicate in this or that story, cycle, book? What kind of text is the Bible, and what role does it perform in context?" These are all variations on a fundamental question that students of the Bible would do well to pose loudly and sharply: the question of the narrative as functional structure, a means to a communicative end, a transaction between the narrator and the audience on whom he wishes to produce a certain effect by way of certain strategies. Like all social discourse, biblical narrative is oriented to an addressee and regulated by a purpose or set of purposes involving the addressee. Hence our primary business as reader is to make purposive sense of it, so as to explain the *what's* and the *how's* in terms of the *why's* of communication.⁹¹

The goal or drive to faithfully interpret the Word of God as a canonical reader is not merely to understand meaning, but to embody it, to allow it to transform a person into the image of the Son (Rom 8:29).⁹²

Jesus Christ is the preeminent interpreter of God's self-communication, the unique and definitive embodiment of God's self-communicative act or "Word." The church, as Christ's body, is a secondary and derivative embodiment. The Word seeks, by the Spirit, to be taken to heart, to be embodied in the life of the people of God. Scripture's warnings call for attention, its commands call for obedience, its promises call for faith. *The vocation of the biblical interpreter is not simply to point to a biblical meaning, but to embody it—to walk the way the Word goes.*⁹³

For me, the motivation for faithful interpretation and analysis of the discourses of Acts is discipleship—to be a living commentary of the text, to make me 'wise for

⁹¹Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

⁹²This is the third aspect of linguistic acts that J.L. Austin identifies. He labels it the 'perlocutionary' act: what we bring about by saying something (e.g., persuading, surprising). The first two are: (1) the locutionary act: uttering word (e.g., say the words "good morning"); (2) the illocutionary act: what we do in saying something (e.g., greeting, promising, commanding, etc). J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 2d ed. (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1975).

⁹³*Ibid.*, 440.



salvation,' and to be 'trained in righteousness' (2 Tim 3:15f). "The reader is challenged to enter the world of the text by becoming a disciple, a hearer of the word, a follower of Jesus."⁹⁴ In short, the ideal reader of Scripture must be a disciple.⁹⁵ "As Scripture...Luke and Acts have implied readers who are [actually or potentially] Christian."⁹⁶ Thus, it is not merely a matter of understanding, but 'being'—that which Paul desired for the Colossian Christians when he penned the words: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly" (Col 3:16). If, as Catherine Belsey maintains, it is "the role of ideology *to construct people as subjects*,"⁹⁷ then one may say that one purpose of *biblical* narrative is to constitute people as covenantal *subjects* under the Kingdom of God. If the Bible represents the *divine* ideology, and if one believes its description of the chief character of the storyline from Genesis to Revelation as a loving, righteous and just God, then that ideology need not be

⁹⁴Sandra M. Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), 168. "Scripture is canonical precisely because believers recognize its power to convey *God's* intended meaning and transforming grace to all its faithful readers. If the meaning of Scripture is divinely intended and mediated by the inspired text itself, then it is the task of every faithful interpreter to see after it. The act of reinterpreting Scripture as the vehicle of God's truth and grace, however provisional and seemingly tentative, is the courageous act of finding God's intended meaning for a community who in faith seek after a more mature life with Christ in the realm of his Spirit." R.W. Wall, "Canonical Context and Canonical Conversations," in *Between Two Horizons: Spanning New Testament Studies and Systematic Theology*, ed. Joel B. Green and Max Turner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 169.

⁹⁵With regard to the Bible, the implication is that "a reader unable or unwilling to postulate the articles of faith will forfeit competence as a hopeless counterreader...Either we reconstruct the whole as best we can in the light of the writer's presumed intention...or we fashion—in effect reinvent—everything as we please....Even to judge against the text's grain, you must first judge with it: receptivity before resistance, competent reading before liberated counterreading, poetics before politics." 469, 473. Meir Sternberg, "Biblical Poetics and Sexual Politics: From Reading to Counterreading," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 111 (1992): 463-88.

⁹⁶William S. Kurz, "Luke and Acts As Canonical," *Reading Luke-Acts: Dynamics of Biblical Narrative* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox, 1993), 105.

⁹⁷Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice* (London and New York: Routledge, 1980), 58.



considered oppressive and unethical, as the postmodernist might claim.⁹⁸ To such a God one may humbly and gladly submit.

1.2.2 Foundational Presuppositions and the Methodological Correlates

1.2.2.1 Biblical-Theological Presuppositions

The title of this study proposes an exploration of the interrelationship between the triad of theology, history and literary artistry in Acts from the perspective of a canonical reader.⁹⁹ As with any interpreter, my fundamental presuppositions will certainly influence my analysis of all three categories. Therefore, I think it best to state my pre-commitments from the start. The following pages outline my presuppositions, which are the watershed beliefs that permeate my work. Paul Ricoeur states at the conclusion of his book on hermeneutical reflection: “The illusion is not in looking for a point of departure, but in looking for it without

⁹⁸An example of this postmodern conclusion is Erich Auerbach. According to him the Bible’s claim to truth is “tyrannical”: “The world of the Scripture stories is not satisfied with claiming to be a historically true reality—it insists that it is the only real world, and is destined for autocracy... The Scripture stories... seek to subject us.” Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1953), 14-15. Ironically, Auerbach is correct in saying that they “seek to subject us,” but is one hundred eighty degrees mistaken that it is tyrannical, leading to oppression. Jesus’ commission to the apostle is to *testify* of him, to present “*witness*.” *Testimony* or *witness* is open to believe or disbelieve, uncoerced. The Bible’s witness to the saving acts of God is salvific in nature, and the perlocutionary act of the metanarrative (the gospel story) is to *persuade* the reader that the biblical ideology or worldview is one that brings the ultimate of freedom: “Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:32); “So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:36). It appears to me that those of Auerbach’s opinion ‘disbelieve in order to resist’ (John 3:19). I believe in order to obey. He will serve his god(s) (Luke 16:9,13), and I will serve my God. I willingly become a servant of Christ. Time will tell which faith commitment will yield liberty and which will bring tyranny (Deut 30:15-20; Ps 1).

⁹⁹Albert C. Outler notes that “Canon-criticism is, of course, no panacea for any of these tendencies [the fragmentation and fragment atomization of Wesley’s holistic vision a fourfold criterion for doctrine] nor a sufficient substitute in itself for any of the existing biblical and historical disciplines. But it might help turn our inquiries in new directions, with a fresh set of queries and nuances that could affect both the substance and spirit of the ‘introductions’ and ‘surveys’ that upcoming generations could use for orientation.”⁹ “The ‘Logic’ of Canon-making and the Tasks of Canon-criticism,” in *Texts and Testaments: Critical Essays on the Bible and Early Church Fathers*, ed. W. Eugene March [San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1980].0



presuppositions. There is no philosophy without presuppositions.”¹⁰⁰ I would argue that it is equally true that there is no production or interpretation of history or theology or art without presuppositions or perspective.¹⁰¹ Ricoeur describes the epistemological, hermeneutical circle as follows: “You must understand in order to believe, but you must believe in order to understand.”¹⁰² I agree with his recognition that criticism has an important function in understanding, but that the initial movement must be one of faith.¹⁰³ Acknowledging this reality, I will proceed to clarify the primary axioms or faith commitments underlying the present work, which will, in turn, have significant bearing upon the methodology employed and the resultant interpretation.¹⁰⁴ Against the postmodern myth that all of life is simply interpretation, it is asserted that interpretations have implication both in life and in

¹⁰⁰Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan (Boston: Beacon, 1967), 348.

¹⁰¹“The point is that we do not have so-called objective, neutral, or unshaped reporting of events. (As many have pointed out, there is no such thing as a brute fact: an uninterpreted historical report is inconceivable.)...The biblical narrators are concerned not only to tell us facts but also to guide our perspective and responses to those events.” Tremper Longman III, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1987), 57.

¹⁰²Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1990), 298.

¹⁰³Ultimate beliefs “are by their nature unprovable and irrefutable, because they have to be assumed in any attempt at proof or disproof and because they involve a relation of thought to being which cannot be put into logical or demonstrable form. Far from being irrational or non-rational, however, ultimate beliefs express the responsible commitment of the mind to reality in which it falls under the power of its intelligible nature and through which it gains the normative insights which prompt and guide our inquiries. As such, ultimate beliefs enable us to interpret our experiences and weigh the evidences of our observations and direct the reasoning operations of our inquiries to their true ends. These ultimate beliefs constitute the basic framework on which we rely in all rational and scientific activity.” T.F. Torrance, *Reality and Evangelical Theology* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1982). I understand ‘faith’ according to Reformed epistemology, as a gift of God.

¹⁰⁴Given the blinding effects of sin, both Luther and Calvin believed that the things of God could be understood only by those illumined by the Spirit of God, that is, by those who have the right presuppositions, brought about by the work of the Spirit. “It is true that for many people much remains abstruse; but this is not due to the obscurity of Scripture, but to the blindness or indolence of those who will not take the trouble to look at the very clearest truth.” Luther, “On the Bondage of the Will,” 111.



the critical enterprise of dealing with text. Hermeneutical convictions behind interpretive strategies do matter.

1.2.2.2 The Macro-Genre¹⁰⁵ of the Bible and the Divine Authorship of Scripture

For those Christians who would take their cue from the Bible's own self-understanding, the Bible is not simply a religious book or even *the* religious book of a given community, but, rather, *the* religious book that is above all others and quite distinct from all others—its very words being “God-breathed” (2Tim 3:16).¹⁰⁶

There is a sense in which “the Bible by its very nature as divine revelation transcends all actual genres, since divine revelation could not be generic in a logical sense of the word.”¹⁰⁷ What other book could be described as “God breathed” if approached from a canonical reader's perspective? Is there a generic category inclusive of other writings within which the Bible is one member among others?¹⁰⁸ I believe the Bible is unique in that it is the Word of God,¹⁰⁹ and that God

¹⁰⁵This term is borrowed from V. Philips Long, *The Art of Biblical History* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 29. He uses this term ‘loosely’ to refer to the essential character of the Bible as a whole.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁰⁷E.D. Hirsch further observes: “Anything that is unique cannot, with respect to those aspects which are unique, be a type.” *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1967), 64.

¹⁰⁸“The simplest definition of *genre* in literature is ‘a group of texts that bear one or more traits in common with each other.’” Tremper Longman, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 76. This is not to deny that its subparts share generic traits with other literature, so that one, through common grace works with literary conventions to access the author's intent and perspective.

¹⁰⁹Tremper Longman believes that this basic presupposition is the direct, underlying foundation to the historicity of Scripture: “The question of historical truth boils down to the question of who ultimately is guiding us in our interpretation of these events. If we look ultimately to human authors, then literary art may be deceptive. If we look to God, then we cannot have deception.” *Literary Approaches*, 58.



is the chief author of the Bible in its totality.¹¹⁰ Because Scripture is revelation from God it is received as wholly an authoritative and trustworthy guide to faith and practice (1Tim 3:16; Heb 1:1-2). While it is acknowledged that each book of the Bible has a human author or authors, the primary author of the canonical collection of documents is God.¹¹¹ The Scripture itself argues that a proper fear of God, of the *author*, is the beginning of true literary knowledge, (Ps 111:10; Pr 1:7; 9:10; 15:33; Eccl 12:13)—that one might not merely know things about the text, but that he or she may know the one of whom the text is about, i.e., both the author and central protagonist of the narrative.

Postmodernist thought denies the role of the author in interpreting a narrative. Seán Burke accurately comments that “the great crises of postmodernism are the crises of authorship.”¹¹² Deconstruction is Nietzsche’s announcement of the “the death of God”¹¹³ (author of Scripture) put into hermeneutics. Without the

¹¹⁰It is not the intention of this work to argue the warrant for the acceptance of divine inspiration of Scripture (however exactly one understands this claim) and the logical correlates, nor the extent of the canon. The issue of warrant is deftly explored by Alvin Plantinga in “Two (or More) Kinds of Scripture Scholarship” in *Behind the Text: History and Biblical Interpretation*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003). The Belgic confession offers warrant for such belief: “And we believe without a doubt all things contained in them [following the Protestant list of books]—not so much because the church receives them and approves them as such, but above all because the Holy Spirit testifies in our hearts that they are from God, and also because they prove themselves to be from God.” See also D.A. Carson and J.D. Woodbridge, eds., *Scripture and Truth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983); *idem*, *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*; also, G. Fackre, “Evangelical Hermeneutics: Commonality and Diversity,” *Interpretation* 43 (1989), 117-29.

¹¹¹A firm insistence on the divine authorship of Scripture does not entail the rejection of human authorship of the various books of the Old and New Testaments. Just as I reject the various Christological heresies that hope to elevate the divinity of Jesus Christ by denying his real humanity, so also I refuse to abandon the human element in the authorship of Scripture. The authors were real figures, addressing real situations, and receiving revelation from God for their times; I reject any docetizing view of Scripture.

¹¹²Seán Burke, *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 1992), xxxix.

¹¹³Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 183. “The so-called ‘death of God’ theologians of the 1960’s viewed the demise of God as the passing away of an idol, the deconstruction of a philosophical construct—the supreme being of classical theism. In announcing the two deaths—of God, of the author—deconstruction also declares



author, biblical authority is undone. Without affirmation of the author, one falls prey to what Kevin VanHoozer describes as ‘interpretive idolatry,’ under which a reader treats “the text as a mirror onto which they project their own devices and desires” and thus “fail to distinguish author from reader.”¹¹⁴ He identifies this as the cardinal sin of postmodern hermeneutics. For example, Nietzsche affirmed the freeplay of the world “without truth, without origin, offered to an active interpretation.”¹¹⁵ Under the postmodern worldview the nihilistic denial of meaning, authority and truth must not only be accepted, but also affirmed. The affirmation of the death of the author frees one to explore his or her own creativity as a reader.¹¹⁶ I reject the postmodern hermeneutical temptation ‘to be like God’—to determine my own meaning, or else to know nothing at all, definitively. If in the end, non-exhaustive, yet true meaning cannot be read from a text—that the author has communicated nothing concrete, determinate or specific, then it may legitimately be questioned as to why the postmodernists bother to write? Without the inherent authority of the author and text, a postmodern reader drifts into the marsh of hermeneutical anarchy, analogous to the Israelites in the time of the Judges when there was no king and “everyone did as he saw fit” (Judg 21:25). Countering this view, Longman states: “The view that the author is the locus of the meaning of a text provides theoretical stability to

the death of meaning (viz., determinate textual sense) and interpretation (viz., correct understanding). The death of God also marks the birth of the reader and of what Plantinga calls ‘creative anti-realism’: the celebration of humanity’s power to structure and differentiate the world. The ‘death of God put into writing’ gives rise to a state of permanent interpretive jubilee; once one acknowledges the artificial nature of the world and of interpretation one is free to read endlessly. The new morality of literary knowledge, insofar as it concerns the refusal of understanding, has one overriding maxim: ‘You shall not believe in absolutes.’”

¹¹⁴Ibid., 32.

¹¹⁵Jacques Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” in Richard Macksey and Dugene Donato, ed., *The Language of Criticism and the Sciences of Man* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1970), 247-65.

¹¹⁶“From this perspective, the death of the author is the Magna Carta of creative interpretation. Dostoyevsky’s adage on the death of God is easily adapted to the current situation in literary theory: ‘If there is no Author, everything is permitted.’” VanHoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 89.



interpretation.¹¹⁷ Our interpretation is correct insofar as it conforms to the meaning intended by the author.”¹¹⁸ If there is no author speaking there is no determined meaning.¹¹⁹ I merely hear the echo of my own voice. As Ricoeur emphasizes, adequate use of suspicion and self-criticism on the part of a canonical reader is essential if one is not to worship idols, by projecting ones own wishes and images onto revelation.¹²⁰ The difficulty that arises from the work of Stanley Fish and company is whether a community of readers can be shaped and judged by texts, as it were, ‘from the outside’ (author), or whether they must remain trapped in their own

¹¹⁷“The individual writings, to be sure, may gain full relevance and meaning only in the context of the complete canon. But authorial intention nonetheless remains fundamentally important for the constituent parts as well as for the whole.” Carl F.H. Henry, “Canonical Theology: An Evangelical Appraisal,” *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 8 (Aut 1990): 84.

¹¹⁸Tremper Longman, *Literary Approaches*, 65.

¹¹⁹Jared M. Compton correctly stresses the importance of ascertaining the human author’s intention as essential in discovering the meaning in a text when he states that “most admit that completely severing the intentions of Scripture’s authors introduces the potentiality of massive amounts of subjectivity, effectively undermining the grammatical-historical approach. In other words, not only is the human author necessary to underwrite Scripture’s perspicuity, but also he is similarly necessary to validate our interpretations. How can the interpreter identify, for instance, verbal definitions if not by an appeal to a semantic domain available to the text’s human author? Moreover, what else may prevent arbitrary (not to mention anachronistic) readings if not the human author and his context?”⁹“Shared Intentions? Reflections on Inspiration and Interpretation in Light of Scripture’s Dual Authorship,” *Themelios*, 33.3 [2008]: 81.0 Douglas Moo further clarifies that “appeal is made not to a meaning of the divine author that somehow is deliberately concealed from the human author in the process of inspiration—a ‘sensus occultus’—but to the meaning of the text itself that takes on deeper significance as God’s plan unfolds—a ‘sensus praegnans.’ To be sure, God knows, as He inspires the human authors to write, what the ultimate meaning of their words will be; but it is not as if he has deliberately created a double entendre or hidden a meaning in the words that can only be uncovered through a special revelation. The “added meaning” that the text takes on is the product of the ultimate canonical shape—though, to be sure, often clearly perceived only on a revelatory basis.”⁹“The Problem of Sensus Plenior,” in *Hermeneutics, Authority and Canon*, ed. D.A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986], 188.) While interpretation depends on the existence of overlap between the divine and human authors, its stability does not demand complete overlap.

¹²⁰Ricoeur expresses his central thesis when he writes: “Hermeneutics seems to me to be animated by this double motivation: willingness to suspect, willingness to listen; vow of rigor, vow of obedience. In our time we have not finished doing away with *idols* and we have barely begun to listen to *symbols*.” Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretations* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1970), 27. Freud’s account of the capacity of the self to deceive itself is akin to theological assertions about the deceitfulness of the human heart (Jer 17:9; Hos 10:2).



contextual relativism, hearing no prophetic summons from outside and beyond. It is proposed that the canonical reader is hearing the prophetic voice of God, the ultimate author of the canon (Heb 1:1) and is being challenged to repent and obey.¹²¹

1.2.2.3 The Unity of Scripture: A Biblical-Theological Correlate of Divine Authorship

A logical correlate of the presupposition of the divine authorship is that Scripture exhibits an overarching unity, emanating from a unified, single coherent mind—the mind of God. It follows that a biblical-theological and literary method must treat the whole Biblical text as a unified, coherent corpus, rather than a compendium of assorted ancient writings. The present work, as an effort in biblical theology and literary analysis, views the Scripture not so much as a library of disparate books, but as a book with a variety of subdivisions and genres, with a central plot line: the story of the gospel—the redemptive work of God through Christ.

Furthermore, I will argue that reading the text in the light of key, thematically related portions of the whole canon aids the interpreter in grasping the divine author's meaning. While not neglecting the history recorded in Luke's first volume, the present study acknowledges the church's shaping of the New Testament canon in separating the first volume of Luke from his second work by inserting the Gospel of John between the two.¹²² I will attempt to demonstrate the

¹²¹I shall discuss the place of the 'reader' in interpretation in a later section of the present work.

¹²²Albert C. Outler observes that "canon-criticism raises such prior questions (for example) as why the Gospels are styled as 'according to' whomever (*kata*) instead of 'by' (*dia*)? What does this imply as to the early Christian understanding of the genre and function of 'the gospel'? Or again, why does 'The Gospel According to Matthew' stand at the head of *all* the listings of 'the holy quarterion' (as Eusebius calls it)?...Again, it turns to the prior question: what was the 'logic' in the canon-makers' minds in their placement of Mark directly after Matthew (with some interesting exceptions)...A rather different aspect of the 'logic' of canon-making appears in the otherwise inexplicable sundering of Acts away from Luke's *proton logon* (Acts 1:1) by the addition of a *fourth* gospel—from a later date and with a different perspective....'The Acts of the Apostles,' once



historical, theological unity of the opening chapters of Acts with the immediate, preceding canonical context of the Gospel of John—in particular, the second half of the Gospel of John – from the perspective of a canonical reader. The opening and closing statements in Greg Goswell’s recent article addressing the order of books in the canon is worth quoting in full in this regard:

Readerly habit views enjambment as a clue that significant relations are to be discerned between a particular book and its neighbors in the library of canonical books. The reader presumes that material that is juxtaposed is related in some way in meaning, and this habit of readers forms the basis of the following analysis. The assumption is that a book is more closely related to books next to it or nearby, and less closely related to books placed far from it.¹²³

In almost every case, the positioning of a biblical book relative to other books in the canonical collection, whether in terms of the grouping in which it is placed, or the book(s) that follow or precede it, has hermeneutical significance for the reader who seeks meaning in the text. Consciously or unconsciously the reader’s evaluation of a book is affected by the company it keeps, hence the importance of a deliberate examination of this aspect of the para-text of Scripture.¹²⁴

Goswell argues that it has “hermeneutical significance” that a believer reading systematically through the New Testament in its present canonical order will begin their reading of Acts, having just finished the reading of the Fourth Gospel. There is a clear theological/historical continuity between John’s Gospel and the opening discourses of Acts, especially in the area of pneumatology. **The Church Fathers may have been providentially guided in the final ordering of the Gospels by the Fourth Gospel’s particular emphasis and development of pneumatology, which is especially theologically informative and preparatory for the**

separated from its *proton logon*, seems to have found its place with the ‘catholic epistles’ in some of the proto-canonical lists. But its ‘logical’ function as a bridge between ‘the stories’ of Jesus and the Pauline interpretations of that story gradually prevailed and became stabilized.” (“The ‘Logic’ of Canon-making,” 266-67.)

¹²³Greg Goswell, “The Order of the Books of the New Testament,” JETS 53/2 (June 2010): 225.

¹²⁴Ibid., 241.



pneumatology of Acts. This is no small matter as Luke Timothy Johnson writes, “Acts can appropriately be called the ‘Book of the Holy Spirit.’”¹²⁵ F.F. Bruce concurs saying, “Luke makes it plain that it is by the power of the same Spirit that all the apostolic acts which he goes on to narrate were performed, so much so that some have suggested, as a theologically more appropriate title for his second volume, *The Acts of the Holy Spirit*.”¹²⁶ I will attend to this particular issue in chapter two.

In addition, from the perspective of a canonical reader, the acceptance of the divine authorship of Scripture and its correlate, the unity of Scripture, gives warrant for an attempt to explore and demonstrate continuity between the history of Jesus recorded in the Gospel of John and the historical narrative in the book of Acts. Commenting on the task of canon-criticism Albert C. Outler states: “But it is rather less our business—in canon-criticism, at least—to pass judgment on the canon-makers’ judgments and rather more to understand their ‘logic’ and the functions of the process. In any case, it is required of us that we try to see the whole Canon in its functional terms and its units in those same terms. And this would make for new perspectives (and, one might hope, new interest!) in NT ‘introductions’ and early church history ‘surveys.’”¹²⁷ The following chapters attempt to show that the theology revealed in the latter half of the Fourth Gospel is artfully incorporated in Luke’s historiography in the opening sections of Acts. Hermeneutically exploring the two works in juxtaposition may bear fruit in understanding Lukan theological history.¹²⁸

¹²⁵Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1991), 17.

¹²⁶F.F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 31.

¹²⁷Outler, “The ‘Logic’ of Canon-making,” 269.

¹²⁸Ben Witherington, ed. *History, Literature, and Society in the Book of Acts* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 346.



At issue is whether working with two different human authors of Scripture may or may not yield evidence that demonstrates unity within diversity; whether it may yield evidence of a superintending divine author over the diverse human authors. It may be one thing to attempt to demonstrate Luke's consistency or inconsistency with himself between his Gospel and Acts (the parameters within which many works comment), but it is another thing to attempt to show the cohesion and coherence¹²⁹ of the divine author with himself between two different human authors.¹³⁰ If this may be accomplished, it would seem to provide one layer of

¹²⁹A.B. du Toit defines cohesion as referring "to the lexico-grammatically well-bonded unity of the surface text, whereas coherence is used for its underlying semantic bonding." ("New Testament Exegesis in Theory and Practice," 134.) I assume that du Toit would agree with me that these qualities not only apply to individual works of Scripture, but also to the whole canon as a single authored work, although I could not find a definitive statement of his in that respect.

¹³⁰This seems to me to be a watershed issue for the field of 'biblical theology.' Scott J. Hafemann in the book he edited, *Central Themes in Biblical Theology: Mapping Unity In Diversity*, comments about the authors whose writings were chosen to be included in the book: "We chose people we believed shared our commitment to 'whole-Bible biblical theology,' a term we coined for the sort of biblical theology that tries not only to examine the theology of biblical books, which we also applaud. Rather, we wanted to bring together people who saw the need to trace themes and overarching structural ideas through the whole Bible." (Grand Rapids: Baker Book, 2007), 15. If the grounding principle of this type of biblical theology is the presupposition that the Bible is a unified work because it is the Word of God, who is a unified and coherent being, then unity in diversity must be demonstrable. On a small scale this describes the attempt of the present monograph. To use the worn out analogy, there seems to be a chicken and egg dilemma. The painful risk to be taken is to be open to criticism as to whether ones presuppositions have skewed ones results from observation and analysis. But on the other hand, a shift in paradigms in science as well as in theology may open understanding and knowledge to the inquirer heretofore unavailable, offering a better, more comprehensive, compelling theory. Ian G. Barbour in his work titled, *Myths, Models, and Paradigms: A Comparative Study in Science and Religion* quotes Thomas Kuhn: "Though each may hope to convert the other to his way of seeing his science and its problems, neither may hope to prove his case. The competition between paradigms is not the sort of battle that can be resolved by proofs...Before they can hope to communicate fully, one group or the other must experience the conversion that we have been calling a paradigm shift. Just because it is a transition between incommensurables, the transition between competing paradigms cannot be made a step at a time, forced by logic and neutral experience like a gestalt switch it must occur all at once or not at all." Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1962), 10. Barbour later says, "One cannot prove one's most fundamental beliefs, but one can try to show how they function in the interpretation of experience" (124). And I would add in the last phrase: "try to show how they function in the interpretation of Scripture." I am fairly certain Barbour would agree with that extension of application. I trust that it is obvious that the presupposition of divine authorship is a crux matter in this monograph. The adequacy of any interpretation offered based upon this presupposition must be judged "by applying the same criteria that science uses to appraise



evidence of a divine, single mind authorship of Scripture – based on a canonical reading. In this regard, John Barton concludes his study on the canon in early Christianity with the observation that there are important resemblances between the early Church, the Second Temple and the early rabbinic Judaism in how they read Scripture in the ancient world. He argues that they not only were concerned to interpret the sacred books as internally consistent, but also as consistent with each other—which is a concern of present day canonical criticism.¹³¹

1.2.2.4 Scripture Interprets Scripture

1.2.2.4.1 Literal Sense and Canon

Logically following from the belief in the unity of Scripture is the hermeneutical principle that *Scripture* interprets Scripture. In others words, the *canon* is the ultimate arbiter of meaning for any and all texts of Scripture.¹³² Brevard

theories—correspondence, comprehensiveness, coherence, and compellingness.” Kevin J. VanHoozer, *Is There a Meaning In This Text* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 334.

¹³¹John Barton, *Holy Writings, Sacred Text: The Canon in Early Christianity* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 161. In a section later in the chapter I shall embrace canonical criticism as understood and practiced by scholars such as Eugene Lemcio and Robert Wall, rather than Brevard Childs and James Sanders.

¹³²In the present study, “canon” is defined as a norm or standard of faith. Canon is held to be a historical-theological concept that views the process of divine revelation as complete (Heb 1:1; John 1:14; Col 1:19). Christ alone and His appointed witnesses constitute the canon. Thus, the term comes to refer to a closed collection of documents that witness to Christ, regarded as Holy Scripture. Herman Ridderbos notes that priority must be given to the action of Christ and not to the decision of the church: “...the canon in its redemptive historical sense is not the product of the church; rather the church itself is the product of the canon.” (*The Authority of the New Testament Scriptures*, trans. by H. De Jongste [Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1963], 27). That Christ himself as witnessed to by the apostles forms the ground of the canon is an *a priori* that must be received by faith. There is no claim here to ecclesiastical infallibility in the strict sense, yet there is great assurance to be drawn from the widespread judgment of the early Christians that this group of writings comprises the authoritative teachings of the apostles. Oscar Cullmann speaks of the “astonishing historical and theological assurance with which the Church proceeded when it settled on the fourfold canon.” (“The Plurality of the Gospels as a Theological Problem in Antiquity,” *The Early Church: Studies in Early Christian History and Theology*, ed. A.J.B. Higgins [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956], 52. Translated from the original German article in *TZ* I [1945]: 23-42.)



Childs argues that historical criticism's inability to read the Bible as Scripture is derived from a faulty view of the literal sense: "For the Reformers, the literal sense was a *literary* sense; but for critical scholars it became 'literalistic.'"¹³³ Taking the Bible literally for Childs means reading it in the context of the Christian canon.¹³⁴ He argues that the literal sense of the Bible is a function neither of its historical nor of its storied context, but rather of its *canonical* context.¹³⁵ Hans Frei adeptly argues that

As witness to Christ, the canon is defined as "the church's Rule of Faith." It is the collection of writings in which the church acknowledges hearing the voice of God. The present work understands the canon to be that collection of works "God breathed" and through which the Spirit of Christ rules to constitute, instruct, correct and train the people of God in righteousness in covenant relationship with God. The canon is a received authority by the church to mediate God's covenant grace and to rule or delineate the theological boundaries of the one holy catholic and apostolic church. Thus, the terms the church employs to describe Scripture's authority (divine inspiration, revelatory word, apostolic witness, Christological confession, etc.) are primarily to be understood in functional and formative rather than epistemic and dogmatic terms. In this regard, see the study by William J. Abraham, *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology: From the Fathers to Feminism* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998). "As early as the 2d century, Christians could speak of the Bible as 'canonical' as well as divinely 'inspired.' Only later did Athanasius (ca. 350 C.E.) identify *ta biblia* ('the books' of scripture) with the noun *kanon* (a list of normative books)." (*The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 862.) Eugene Ulrich prefers the definition of canon as "a closed list of books that have been considered, debated, sifted, and accepted," and so concludes that "talk of an open canon is confusing and counterproductive." ("The Notion and Definition of Canon," in Lee Martin McDonald and James A. Sanders, eds., *The Canon Debate* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002], 34). See also the helpful by Lee Martin McDonald's discussion of canon in chapter four, "The Notion and Use of Canon" where he defines the terms 'Scripture' and 'Canon' and sketches briefly the history of the development of the concept canon in the the early church, in *The Biblical Canon: Its Origin, Transmission, and Authority* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2007), 38-69.

¹³³Brevard Childs, "The *Sensus Literalis* of Scripture: An Ancient and Modern Problem," in H. Donner et al., ed., *Beiträge zur alttestamentlichen Theologie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1977), 80-93.

¹³⁴Cf. Bernard Ramm, who contends that the systematic reading of Scripture "is in its final intention," that is the *canon*. *Protestant Biblical Interpretation: A Textbook of Hermeneutics*. 3d ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 175.

¹³⁵ After review the history of the development of the New Testament canon David G. Dunbar draws the following conclusion: "It is appropriate then to speak of the canon as having achieved its present form throughout most of the church during the fifth century. The consensus, to be sure, was not perfect. The native (as distinct from the Greek-speaking) Syrian church recognizes only the more limited canon of the Peshitta to the present day. The Ethiopian church, on the other hand, acknowledges the canonical books of the larger Christian church plus eight additional works dealing primarily with church order. Yet is is fair to say that wherever Christians in particular localities have been concerned to know the extent of the New Testament and have searched for this knowledge in a spirit of open communication with the larger church, unanimity of opinion has



the meaning and truth of the Gospels are eclipsed whenever one seeks to interpret them in terms of an independent description of their subject matter.¹³⁶ “I am persuaded that...theological reading is the reading of the *text*, and not the reading of a source, which is how historians read it.”¹³⁷ I would contend that this is what occurs when interpreters such as Robert Funk, a follower of Bultmann and founder and chair of The Jesus Seminar, read the Gospel as not a story about Jesus, but a story about something else: existential possibilities, social liberation, the rights of women, etc. Bruce Marshall maintains that this occurs in Gnosticism and demythologizing alike when biblical narratives are interpreted “without ascribing primacy or centrality to those narratives in deciding about truth.”¹³⁸ He makes the connection between literal meaning and Christology explicit: “If the moderns made a mistake in biblical interpretation with regard to the narratives, it was ultimately because they made a Christological mistake: they failed to see the narratively identified Jesus as epistemologically primary and in that sense as logically basic to and decisive for all our talk about God and ourselves.”¹³⁹ Frei adds: “It was largely by reason of this centrality of the story of Jesus that the Christian interpretative tradition in the West

generally been the result. So it is significant that the reopening of the questions of canon by the leaders of the Protestant Reformation led to a narrowing of the Old Testament canon over against Roman Catholic usage by effected no similar change in the extent of the New Testament canon.” (David G. Dunbar, “The Biblical Canon,” in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon* ed. D.A Carson and John D. Woodbridge [Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995], 317-18.)

¹³⁶Hans Frei, “The ‘Literal Reading’ of Biblical Narrative in the Christian Tradition: Does It Stretch or Will It Break?” in Frank McConnell, ed. *The Bible and the Narrative Tradition* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1986), 36-77.

¹³⁷Frei’s conclusion is clear: “It cannot be said often and emphatically enough that liberals and fundamentalists are siblings under the skin in identifying or rather confusing ascriptive as well as descriptive literalism about Jesus at the level of understanding the text, with ascriptive and descriptive literalism as the level of knowing historical reality.” (*Types of Christian Theology* [New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1992], 84.)

¹³⁸Bruce Marshall, “Meaning and Truth in Narrative Interpretation: A Reply to George Schner,” *Modern Theology* 8 (1992): 176.

¹³⁹*Ibid.*, 178-79.



gradually assigned clear primacy to the literal sense in the reading of Scripture.”¹⁴⁰ Instead of interpreting the text with our categories and conceptual schemes, Frei proposes that we let the text itself interpret everything else, including its readers. To interpret the Bible literally means letting the biblical text “swallow up the world” rather than the world the text.¹⁴¹ The literal sense is textually determined. The “control” for interpretation is not only the immediate work of the human author in its historical, cultural and theological context which is limited to the accumulated theological revelation at the time of the writer (*Sitz im Leben*),¹⁴² but also includes the larger encompassing text of the final form of the canon (*Sitz im Kanon*).¹⁴³ The literal sense not only is constricted by the interpreter’s common sense and critical attention

¹⁴⁰Op. Cit., 39.

¹⁴¹Frei, following George Lindbeck, terms this “intratextuality,” and he opposes it to “extratextuality.” See Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*.

¹⁴²John Piper makes this point poignantly: “The point is this: Hearing the Word of God in the oral or written proclamation of the Scriptures is absolutely dependent on hearing the Scriptures in an understandable language. Hearing the Word of God is thus dependent on a faithful translation of the Greek and Hebrew. But translation is only possible and successful when the specific meanings of the ancient documents are understood. Most of those meanings can be determined only by an analysis of the grammatical and historical context that displays the author’s intention. Therefore, it is wrong to say that theology and devotion do not depend on the recovery of the historically-verified intention of the Biblical writer/redactor. There would be no intelligible or faithful canon at all if thousands of scholars and translators had not labored in this grammatical and historical effort. And there is no reason to think that their work is finished, because the ongoing task of theological exegesis is simply an extension of the task of translation.” (“The Authority and Meaning of the Christian Canon,” 96.)

¹⁴³Brevard Childs, in his *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (1970) suggested that exegesis should not stop with relating a pericope to its original historical context but should explore the dialectic between individual text and full canonical context. He worked on parts of the Old Testament seen by others as intrusions into the text, such as Psalm superscriptions and asked how these ‘late’ additions functioned, and what they could tell readers about the ways in which the earliest communities unified their diverse authoritative traditions. “Psalm and Midrashic Exegesis,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 16 (1971): 137-50.

A clear example would be the 2 Sam 7 passage where God promises Solomon that he is going to build a house for Solomon (7:11,12, 27). The human author would certainly have an understanding of meaning determined by his *sitz im leben*, but the divine author that inspired the text certainly had in mind the fuller meaning that would not violate the human author’s understanding of his own writing, but would encompass and supersede it in the greater context of the canon (John 2:20; 1 Cor 3:16).



to the words of the text and their multiplex grammatical relations and by its rhetorical role within a particular composition, but also by the composition's role within the wider biblical canon. This vital literary or canonical-critical aspect of meaning presumes that there is one voice and one mind inspiring all Scripture (2 Tim 3:16).¹⁴⁴ The individual writings gain full relevance and meaning only in the context of the complete canon, but authorial intention nonetheless remains fundamentally important for the constituent parts as well as for the whole.¹⁴⁵ All the true and necessary implications of an author's intentions do not have to be a part of his consciousness in order to be a part of his meaning. This helps to account for the fact that according to 1 Pet 1:10-12 the prophets were not fully aware of all that they

¹⁴⁴While acknowledging that ultimately God is the author of Scripture, I reject any implication that this divine authorship lessens the importance of finding the writer/redactor's intention and the importance of defining the meaning of a text as the intention of its human author. It contradicts the historical particularity of divine revelation. This cuts squarely across canon critic G. Sheppard's position: "Biblical theology in the context of the canon does not depend first upon...an attempt by 'historical-grammatical' means to recover a writer's 'intention' in all of its full historically conditioned particularity." ("Canon Criticism," 12).

¹⁴⁵I define 'authorial intention' as an objective, structural speech-act that creates a text as public discourse. Meir Sternberg has labeled this the "embodied" or "objectified intention" which is something we have access to historically. *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Pr., 1985), 8-9. It is fixed by the linguistic conventions of that time and community, and can be recovered by literary and historical research with some reasonable degree of probability. See further the philosophical work of Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Pr., 1995), and Ben Olleberger's discussion of it in "Pursuing the Truth of Scripture," in Alan G. Padgett and Patrick R. Keifert, eds., *But is it all True? The Bible and the Question of Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 44-65.

No biblical author is likely to have sat down to write with the intent or awareness that he or she was contributing to what would later be a final, comprehensive canon. But in the church's receiving a composite canon and reading it as a unity it already is going beyond anything that could have been in the mind and intention of any individual author or redactor. Thus, the canonical sense must be taken into account. If what the Gospels proclaim about Jesus is true, then the entire history and testimony of Israel in the OT needs to be re-interpreted. But this is exactly what the apostles do, following the practice of their Lord (e.g., Luke 4:16-22). They were practicing canonical hermeneutics—expounding a "spiritual" or fuller sense of the Scriptures that went beyond the plain, historical, or literal sense, discovered through historical and linguistic research. The identification of the God of Israel with the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ lies at the heart of the claim that Jesus is the Messiah of Israel. For Jesus to interpret the OT in this manner and for the community of believers to read and understand the Gospels in this way goes beyond the original intention of the inspired author/editor of the OT. But the conventional, or literal sense of Scripture must remain the basis and guide for any further, spiritual or canonical sense.



were implying when they wrote of “the sufferings of Christ and his subsequent glories.”¹⁴⁶

This model of the literal meaning can be supported because it accounts for test cases in which the biblical writers interpreted the Bible. The divine and human authors shared the textually expressed meanings. How many additional unstated submeanings the human author consciously knew is unnecessary to determine. At the same time God, since He is omniscient, intended all the submeanings necessary to this expressed type of meaning. The interpreter may not know or recognize all these submeanings until the divinely intended reference appears in history. But such recognition of submeanings is not a “consequent” sense. Nor are they “separate” in the sense of *unrelated*. They are separate only in the sense of being *unstated*. Nor are they “different” in the sense of being *conflicting*. They are different only in the sense of being *unexpressed*....Marshall exhibits the same

¹⁴⁶For a full treatment of the relation between meaning and implications see E.D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 24-67; especially 61-67.

G.K. Beale gives a helpful analogy: “The notion of ‘extended meaning’ is instructive for understanding and analyzing the New Testament’s use of the Old....Old Testament authors appear to have only dimly, implicitly or partly comprehended the things of which they were speaking. We may say that authorial intentions of Old Testament writers were not as comprehensive as the simultaneous divine intentions, which become progressively unpacked as the history of revelation progresses until they reach climax in Christ. The Old Testament writers prophesied events to occur not only distant in time from them but in another world, a new world, which Jesus inaugurated. These writers are comparable in a sense to people in a spaceship above the earth. They can see only the earth and its different shading, representing clouds, seas and landmasses. When, however, they see magnified pictures of the earth from satellite cameras, they are able to make out mountains, rivers, forests, cities, buildings, houses and people. Both the distant and close-up views are ‘literal.’ The close-up picture reveals details that someone with a distant view could never have guessed were there. The close-up even ‘looks’ like a different reality from the distant. Nevertheless, both are ‘literal’ depictions of what is actually there. Similarly, the literal picture of Old Testament prophecy is magnified by the lens of New Testament progressive revelation, which enlarges the details of fulfillment in the beginning new world that will be completed at Christ’s last advent.” (*The Temple and the Church’s Mission* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004], 379).

C.J.H. Wright makes the point in telling fashion by means of another analogy emphasizing the eschatological perspective of progressive revelation provided by the genre of the final form of the canon (the Word of God) and its hermeneutical bearing on any one sub-genre of Scripture: “Imagine in the last century a father promises his young son a horse of his own when he comes of age! In the meantime cars are invented. On his twenty-first birthday, his father therefore gives him a car instead. The promise is fulfilled, because the substantive meaning of the promise was a personally owned means of transport. It would be pointless to say that it would only be fulfilled if the son gets a horse as well, or later. That would be to take the original promise as a mere prediction which will have ‘failed’ unless it is literally honored.” (*Knowing Jesus Through the Old Testament: Rediscovering the Roots of Our Faith* [London: Marshall Pickering, 1992], 5).



concept. He imagines the Apostle John responding. “I hadn’t consciously thought of the story like that, but now that you suggest it to me, I would agree that you could also understand it in that way.”¹⁴⁷

1.2.2.4.2 Testimony or Witness as Epistemologically Basic

Closely related to this issue is the topic of *eyewitness* and *testimony*. The Bible is the corporate testimony of the Jewish and Christian communities to God’s self-revelation in history and in Jesus Christ. Taken as a whole and as a divine communicative act, the Bible is God’s self-attesting Word to humanity. The subject matter of the Bible is not discovered by treating the Bible only as evidence for reconstruction of the history found *behind* the text, but by treating it as divine testimony that gives the true perspective (defining true and truth as denoting ‘that which accords with reality’) and significance of the history it records. I, then, maintain that the main source of literary knowledge of Scripture is *testimony* of the text. Only by reading the Bible as divine testimony will one gain not merely knowledge about the text, but knowledge of what the text is about: the gospel of Jesus Christ—God’s reconciliation with humanity and, as Paul says, “all things on earth and in heaven” through Jesus Christ (Col 1:19).

The topic of testimony and witness is raised at the outset in Acts and is of seminal importance for reading and interpreting Acts.

1:8 καὶ ἔσεσθέ μου μάρτυρες

1:21f δεῖ οὖν τῶν συνελθόντων ἡμῖν ἀνδρῶν ἐν παντὶ χρόνῳ ᾧ εἰσῆλθεν καὶ ἐξῆλθεν ἐφ’ ἡμᾶς ὁ κύριος Ἰησοῦς, 22 ἀρξάμενος ἀπὸ τοῦ βαπτίσματος Ἰωάννου ἕως τῆς ἡμέρας ἧς ἀνελήμφθη ἀφ’ ἡμῶν, μάρτυρα τῆς ἀναστάσεως αὐτοῦ σὺν ἡμῖν γενέσθαι ἓνα τούτων.

The philosopher C.A. Coady has recently argued that testimony is an important source of knowledge, as are memory and perception.¹⁴⁸ To restrict belief to that

¹⁴⁷Elliott E. Johnson, “Dual Authorship and the Single Intended Meaning of Scripture” in Roy B. Zuck, ed., *Rightly Divided: Readings in Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1996), 175-176.



which we see for ourselves would eliminate most of what we know: “It is testimony and learning from others that makes possible intellectual achievement and culture; testimony is the very foundation of civilization.”¹⁴⁹ Eyewitness testimony is a properly basic form of knowledge.¹⁵⁰ The Gospels and Acts are historically reliable records of the eyewitness testimony that the Church recognizes in a properly basic way through the Holy Spirit. In this light, the historical critic’s attempt at reconstruction of the text appears conspicuously thin. To attempt to get behind the eyewitness testimony of the Apostles is not to gain literary knowledge of Scripture, but to lose it. For the knowledge we gain from their eyewitness testimony is not inferential but properly basic.¹⁵¹ In the case of the Gospels and Acts, the texts are the only access we have to the events in question. “The attempt to get behind these testimonies does not enable us to say more but to say less than they do.”¹⁵² Testimony, then, is the linchpin that connects what the biblical authors are doing (testifying) and what the text is about (Old and New Testaments--from Latin

¹⁴⁸C.A. Coady, *Testimony: A Philosophical Study* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992).

¹⁴⁹Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York: and Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993), 77. See also Paul Ricoeur, “The Hermeneutics of Testimony,” in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Lewis S. Mudge (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 123.

¹⁵⁰See Kevin J. VanHoozer, “The Hermeneutics of I-Witness Testimony: John 21:20-24 and the ‘Death of the Author,’” in A. Graeme Auld, ed., *Understanding Poets and Prophets* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 366-78.

¹⁵¹For Nineham and other biblical critics, however, the only eyewitness testimony that is wholly reliable is one’s own. Coady perceptively observes that the tendency to privilege perception over testimony is really “a hankering after a primacy for my perception.” Coady, *Testimony*, 148. This is precisely what interpreters who create rather than attempt to discover textual meaning do; they prefer their own observations to the testimony of authors.

¹⁵²Francis Fiorenza, *Foundational Theology: Jesus and the Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 41. Coady speaks of the futility of attempting to get ‘behind’ testimony: “Hence, I suspect that the problem of justifying testimony, conceived in anything like Hume’s reductive terms, is a pseudo-problem and that the evidence of testimony constitutes a fundamental category of evidence which is not reducible to, or wholly justifiable in term of, such other basic categories as observation or deductive inference. This opinion I have not proved but if my argument so far is correct then there is no sense to the idea of justifying testimony by the path of individual observation, at least where this involves anything like a search for Humean correlations.” *Testimony*, 96.



testamentum, 'a will' [from *testari* 'testify']).¹⁵³ Testimony or witness is at the heart of the intention of the divine and human author(s) of Scripture.

1.2.2.4.3 Point of View and Interpretation

How do we know what aspect of the divine intention a narrative discourse is testifying about? I would suggest that it is primarily through the literary convention of an author's 'point of view,'¹⁵⁴ how the author 'displays the world as' (fill in the blank). According to Mary Louise Pratt, the author of a literary work is not merely mimicking but making a real illocutionary act:¹⁵⁵ not the act of asserting but rather the act of *displaying* a state of affairs. Pratt's point is that the author is "verbally *displaying* a state of affairs, inviting his addressee(s) to join him in contemplating it, evaluating it, and responding to it."¹⁵⁶ In the narrative act the author projects a world towards the reader as an illocutionary act. Consequently, the methodology of reading and understanding story is significantly distinguished from reading propositional, logical communication, such as presented in Paul's letters. Narrative and literary critics like Leland Ryken suggest that a story's illocutionary act is primarily communicated via *plot*. There are a number of other complimentary literary

¹⁵³Trust rather than postmodern suspicion is more fruitful when it comes to interpreting testimony. Our interpretive faculties are designed to produce belief in the words of witnesses in the absence of compelling reasons to the contrary.

¹⁵⁴"The terms 'point of view' is used rather broadly in literary criticism to designate the position or perspective from which a story is told." Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1983), 46.

¹⁵⁵Speech act theory (Austin and Searle) proposes three aspects of action in speech communication: (1) locution—action has structure, it has verbal, propositional content, it is the *form* and means of the communication; (2) illocution—speech has *energy*, it involves action; and (3) perlocution—speech is teleologic or has final purpose, it brings about certain results, speech effects readers.

¹⁵⁶Mary Louise Pratt, *Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1977), 136.



conventions that are at play in conveying the story that I will utilize in analyzing the narrative discourses in Acts from a canonical reader's perspective.

Susan Snaider Lanser says that in addition to displaying a world, authors of narrative take up a *stance* toward it.¹⁵⁷ Lanser says that by the 'narrative act' the *perspective* is established by the author by means of which the world of the text is presented to the reader.¹⁵⁸ The author's voice and vision is communicated indirectly by the 'point of view'—by his or her display of the world.¹⁵⁹ In choosing to communicate in one genre rather than another, authors choose to establish a stance toward their displayed worlds, and thus to communicate an ideology, a 'worldview.' Meir Sternberg agrees saying: "The Bible teaches more than one general lesson about narration. Far from a technical choice, point of view has emerged as an ideological crux and force, nonetheless artful for being thus engaged."¹⁶⁰ Lanser is particularly interested in the ideological function of point of view—in particular how values and evaluations are communicated. In the narrative discourse the narrator is not only 'displaying' a world, but making an 'evaluative' act—commending, condemning, snubbing, mocking, questioning, satirizing, warning, etc. Lanser contends that the purpose of literary acts is not primarily to communicate information

¹⁵⁷Susan Snaider Lanser, *The Narrative Act: Point of View in Prose Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1981), 7-8.

¹⁵⁸Cf. M.H. Abrams, "Point of View," in *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 142-45. The aspect of point of view means that storytelling is also testifying. See also the classic work by Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1974).

¹⁵⁹It must be acknowledged that the real author's views may not coincide with those of the implied author. Nevertheless, the real author does communicate with readers, thanks to the textually mediated voice of the implied author. In other words, the real author may pen a fiction depicting a worldview he or she may not personally ascribe to, for some larger purpose that must be discerned from a larger context, but this does not inhibit the reader from perceiving and understanding the worldview encapsulated in the immediate narrative.

¹⁶⁰Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 129. Teaching primarily through OT biblical examples, his three chapters, "Ideology of Narration and Narration of Ideology," "Viewpoints and Interpretations," and "The Play of Perspectives" are very helpful guides concerning the central importance of 'point of view' and its application to interpretation.



about the story's immediate context, but rather to provide 'cultural communication,' i.e., information and knowledge vital to understanding the human condition and to knowing how to contribute to its flourishing or its decaying. Lanser's summary, drawing from speech act theory, is worth noting: "Much like the biblical parable, the novel's basic illocutionary activity is ideological instruction; its basic plea: hear my word, believe and: to guide future generations. The present discussion of 'point of view' bears greatly on the methodology employed to read the narratives of Acts. If what is witnessed to by the Apostles and the New Testament writers who communicate via narrative is encapsulated in the 'point of view' of the narrative discourses, then we must become close readers of the narrative, looking to discern the author's 'perspective' or 'intention.'¹⁶¹

E.D. Hirsch states that "languages are human institutions and thus are intentionalistic through and through."¹⁶² I concur that the author's intended meaning

¹⁶¹This entails a 'both/and' intention of human and divine authorship, but not in an absolute coextensive relationship. Darrell Bock puts it this way: "Progressive hermeneutics argues for stability of meaning while also honoring the dimensions that dual authorship brings to the gradual unfolding of promise. The literary-theological argument is that God reveals the outworking of His promise gradually as Scripture unfolds its meaning and introduces new promises and connections." He says later: "Often promises by their nature show their outworking by how God responds and directs as time passes. Intention becomes revealed through subsequent action and disclosure." ("Hermeneutics of Progressive Dispensationalism," in *Three Central Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism: A Comparison of Traditional and Progressive Views*, ed. Herbert W. Bateman [Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999], 94-95). Moo concludes similarly, noting that in this approach "appeal is made not to a meaning of the divine author that somehow is deliberately concealed from the human author in the process of inspiration—a 'sensus occultus'—but to the meaning of the text itself that takes on deeper significance as God's plan unfolds—a 'sensus praegnans.' To be sure, God knows, as He inspires the human authors to write, what the ultimate meaning of their words will be; but it is not as if he has deliberately created a double entendre or hidden a meaning in the words that can only be uncovered through a special revelation. The 'added meaning' that the text takes on is the product of the ultimate canonical shape—though, to be sure, often clearly perceived only on a revelatory basis." ("The Problem of Sensus Plenior," in *Hermeneutics, Authority and Canon*, ed. D.A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986], 206). The divine intention does not contravene the intention of the human author but rather supervenes on it (e.g., *the canon* does not change or contradict the meaning of Isaiah 53, but supervenes on it and specifies its referent). The canon, as in cellular biology, is a higher order phenomenon that displays new properties and requires new categories (e.g., divine intention) adequately to describe it.

¹⁶²John R. Searle, "Structure and Intention in Language: A Reply to Knapp and Michaels," *New Literary History* 25 (1994): 680.



should remain the regulative principle for interpretation, despite challenges that have been mounted against it.¹⁶³ But I agree with VanHoozer's clarification of the concept of 'authorial intention' by defining it in terms of 'communicative agency.'¹⁶⁴ He does this in order to escape the postmodern deconstructive undoing of the subject and the concomitant death of the author. I believe the intention of the author is infused and embodied in the text in his or her 'point of view'; so consequently, one must go to the text in order to determine what an author has done in 'tending' to his or her words in communicating his or her ideology or 'point of view.'

Because authors are literary strategists, aesthetic agents who control word choices, rhetorical strategies and a host of literary conventions in order to engage and guide the reader, the reader must learn to be a 'close reader,' attending to things that the author was attending to in communicating. It is through these various textual strategies that an author reveals the subject matter and mode of the author's 'intention' or 'point of view' to the reader. Leland Ryken¹⁶⁵ has written extensively on reading and understanding biblical narrative and points out the literary conventions that the reader should be attending to when reading narrative.¹⁶⁶ As I read and interpret the literary conventions employed by Luke in

¹⁶³See W.K. Wimsatt, Jr., and Monroe C. Beardsley, *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1954). "The design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art." Roland Barthes made a similar dismissal of authorial intention in "The Death of the Author," *Image-Music-Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 142-154.

¹⁶⁴VanHoozer, *Is There A Meaning*, 230, 232: "...the author is the one whose action determines the meaning of the text—its subject matter, its literary form, and its communicative energy....My point is simply that authors are communicative agents who mean things by participating publicly in rule-governed behavior....The author, lost as Cartesian thinking subject, thus returns a communicative agent—one who means, one who puts a language system and literary form to work in a particular way for a particular purpose."

¹⁶⁵Professor of English at Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL.

¹⁶⁶His major works in this regard are: Leland Ryken, *Words of Life: A Literary Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987); *Words of Delight: A Literary Introduction to the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987); *How to Read the Bible as*



Acts from a canonical reader's perspective, I will attempt to pay attention to both poetics¹⁶⁷ (the study of the various forms of text acts) and rhetoric (the study of the functions of text acts).

1.2.3 Canonical Criticism¹⁶⁸ and the Hermeneutical Implications For the Present Study¹⁶⁹

1.2.3.1 Introduction

The development of canonical criticism over the past thirty years represents the next logical step in the move from source and form criticism to redaction criticism. The canon critic recognizes the profound but previously underrecognized fact that the history of the text did not end with the work of the redactor. Rather, that history continued as the text was canonized and interpreted by the early

Literature (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985); *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998); *The Word of God in English: Criteria for Excellence in Bible Translation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2002); *A Complete Literary Guide to the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993); *Window to the World: Literature in Christian Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2000).

¹⁶⁷“Poetics, the science of literature, is not an interpretive effort—it does not aim to elicit meaning from a text. Rather it aims to find the building blocks of literature and the rules by which they are assembled. In order to explain poetics as a discipline, a linguistic model is frequently offered: poetics is to literature as linguistics is to language. That is, poetics describes the basic components of literature and the rules governing their use. Poetics strives to write a grammar, as it were, of literature.... In simpler words, poetics makes us aware of how texts achieve their meaning.” Berlin, *Poetics*, 15, 17.

¹⁶⁸The phrase was coined by James Sanders of Claremont Graduate School in 1972 in *Torah and Canon*, in which he raised the question of why the Torah ends with Deuteronomy rather than Joshua (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972). Cf. *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch* ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 629; *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 1 ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 862.

¹⁶⁹The following section prepares the important presuppositional and hermeneutical ground-work for the exploration in the following chapters of the historical, theological, and consequent canonical/literary connections between the Fourth Gospel and Acts and those between the four Gospels and Acts. Thus, it works toward providing the background and foundation for the methodology for my thesis. It is acknowledged that the focus of the present work does not allow for an exhaustive examination of the full spectrum of issues related to the canon and canonical criticism.



Church, and it continues to this day in the communities that value and use the text.¹⁷⁰

The post-critical program of canonical criticism emphasizes the hermeneutical importance of the selection and collection of the individual literary compositions of the New Testament in understanding the New Testament itself.¹⁷¹ Canonical criticism argues that the New Testament documents will not be fully understood apart from their canonical context.¹⁷² Harry Gamble notes that historical criticism has traditionally neglected the canon as “irrelevant for the interpretation of individual documents.”¹⁷³ It led to an ever-increasing atomization of the biblical text.

¹⁷⁰David E. Smith, *The Canonical Function of Acts* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2002), 35f.

¹⁷¹The best popular introductions to the ‘canonical’ dimension of New Testament interpretation are H.Y. Gamble, *The New Testament Canon: Its Making and Meaning* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985) and L.M. McDonald, *The Formation of the Christian Biblical Canon* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988). A more technical discussion from a historical perspective is B.M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988). Perhaps the most influential has been H. von Campenhausen, *The Formation of the Christian Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972). Also see C.S.C. Williams, “The History of the Text and Canon of the New Testament,” in *Cambridge History of the Bible*, ed. G.W.H. Lampe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969). For the theological and hermeneutical importance of the New Testament’s final ‘canonical shape’ see B.S. Childs, *The New Testament as Canon: An Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985); and for the theological and hermeneutical importance of the process of canonization see J.A. Sanders, *Canon and Community* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985); *idem*, *Sacred Story to Sacred Text* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987).

¹⁷²For example, Sanders, in his work on the canonical-critical method, proposes a system of interpretation that he identifies as “canonical hermeneutics.” He proposes this after he describes the process of canonization. He attempts to identify and apply principles of interpretation that are directly based upon his understanding of the development of the canon, especially the observation that within the canon itself traditions are “adapted, represented, and resignified.” Sanders, *Canon and Community*, 47. Building on the work of Sanders and Childs are scholars like Outler, Levering, Brenneman, Wall, and Lemcio. See Albert C. Outler, “The ‘Logic’ of Canon-Making and the Tasks of Canon-criticism,” *Texts and Testaments: Critical Essays on the Bible and Early Church Fathers*, ed. W.E. March (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1980) 263-76; Miriam Levering, “Introduction: Rethinking Scripture,” *Rethinking Scripture: Essays from a Comparative Perspective*, ed. M. Levering (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989); From a conservative point of view see R.W. Wall and E.E. Lemcio, *The New Testament as Canon: A Reader in Canonical Criticism* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992).

¹⁷³*The New Testament Canon: Its Making and Meaning* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 80.



In reaction there has been a growing interest in recent years in the importance of the canon for biblical exegesis and the articulation of a biblical theology for the church.¹⁷⁴ Broadly described, 'canonical critics' would be identified as paying attention to the present form of the canon in determining the meaning of a text for the believing community. To a lesser or greater degree, depending upon a particular canonical critic, the history of the text prior to its recognition in final canonical form is not the major issue.¹⁷⁵ Thus, the stages in the process are not important, but rather, it is the final product that has authority for the Church. There has been no consensus among its practitioners as to the exact ways in which canonical criticism should function.

1.2.3.2 The Canonical Criticism of James Sanders

James Sanders and Brevard S. Childs¹⁷⁶ have been widely recognized as being at the forefront of canon criticism, though their approaches differ in

¹⁷⁴Historical criticism is driven "by the necessary requirement to uncover the novel, the different, the complex. That is, historical criticism is *obliged* by its own character to make sure no plain sense consensus, binding Old and New Testament witnesses, emerges, because to do so would be to admit that the plain sense had a certain priority..." Christopher R. Seitz, "Sexuality and Scripture's Plain Sense," in *Word Without End* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 322. Brueggemann and his co-authors, in an introduction to the Old Testament, express their intention to go beyond historical criticism in order to interpret the Old Testament theologically, while building on its results and remaining engaged in its perspective; Bruce C. Birch, Walter Brueggemann, Terence E. Fretheim and David L. Petersen, *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abington Press, 2005), 20-21.

¹⁷⁵There has been no consensus among its practitioners as to the exact ways in which canonical criticism should function. On the one hand, Brevard Childs would tend to say that it is the final form that has authority for the Church and that whatever the earlier forms may have been is of relatively little importance for contemporary believers. ("The Canonical Shape of the Prophetic Literature," *Int* 32 [1978]: 53-55). On the other hand, Sanders believes that an understanding of the process whereby the final canonical form was reached is critical to our understanding of the meaning of that form for us (James Sanders, *Torah and Canon* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972], xx *et passim*).

¹⁷⁶James Sanders, *Torah and Canon* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972) and *Canon and Community: A Guide to Canonical Criticism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984) *idem.*, *From Sacred Story to Sacred Text* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987); Brevard S. Childs, *The New Testament as Canon: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Valley Forge, Pa. Trinity Press International, 1994).



significant ways.¹⁷⁷ Though he does not state it so bluntly, Sanders concludes that the net effect of two hundred years of higher critical work on the Bible was to render its theology null and void.¹⁷⁸ He then proceeds to describe a way of dealing with the biblical text that he thinks preserves the Bible as a theologically valid document. He labels this approach ‘canonical criticism.’

The impetus for Sanders’ new direction was his puzzlement as to why the Torah ended with Deuteronomy rather than Joshua. Moving beyond redaction criticism, which task is to investigate the editorial processes leading up to the final form of the text, Sanders sought to understand the effect of redaction on the final form of the text and its consequent theological implications. He was bewildered that the ancient pattern of the promise of God to the fathers and its climactic fulfillment in the conquest of Canaan was not reflected in the Torah’s ending with the narrative of Deuteronomy. The authoritative version ends with Israel encamped in enemy territory and leaderless. His conclusion was that the Torah’s omission of Joshua in its final, canonical shape in effect reinterpreted Israel’s story. Working from and pushing beyond a redaction critical conclusion that the final editing of the Torah was accomplished by priestly editors in sixth-century Babylon, Sanders made the canonical critical observation that the Torah appeared to shift the focus from the land to the law. He concluded that the final shape of the Torah resignified the tradition embedded within it most likely because the exiles in Babylon had lost the land and by ending with Deuteronomy the final form elevated the law as something it could never lose. Building on tradition history, comparative Midrash and redaction

¹⁷⁷For an interchange between Childs and Sanders see *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 2 (1980), 113-211.

¹⁷⁸Sanders concludes that the historical-critical methods “locked the Bible into the past...to protest that it did not intend to do so is of little value. It has happened, and it has been largely responsible for the gulf that now obtains between the pulpit and pew, between the critically trained pastor and the lay parish. For some the Bible has become a sort of archaeological tell which only experts can dig.” J. Sanders, *Canon and Community*, 4-6. See also James D. Smart *The Strange Silence of the Bible in the Church: A Study in Hermeneutics* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970).



criticism, Sanders argued for canonical criticism as a critical pursuit, the goal of which was to explore the hermeneutics of those who shaped older traditions into what became the authoritative version.

Sanders' focus is upon the *process* of canonization, not on the final form and fixed canonical context of the documents. His concern is for the hermeneutical dynamics by which authoritative traditions were not only stabilized but were repeatedly revised and adapted in order to make them freshly relevant to the ever-changing circumstance of the religious community. What is important to Sanders is the identification of the underlying hermeneutic discerned within and behind the canon and its subsequent usefulness as paradigms for further appropriation for future generations of believers.

1.2.3.3 The Canonical Approach of Brevard Childs

Brevard Childs dislikes the term "canonical criticism," worrying that it will be misunderstood as just another technique which takes its place alongside source, form, and redaction criticism.¹⁷⁹ He prefers the ascription "canonical approach."¹⁸⁰ His view is that the canonical approach is "a stance from which the Bible is to be

¹⁷⁹Rolf Rendtorff is right to observe that Childs has brought few followers into his fold. See *Canon and Theology: Overtures to an Old Testament Theology*, translated and edited by Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 47-51.

¹⁸⁰Response to Childs' method have varied greatly. H. Cazelles labeled it an "anthological style," praising it as profound and successful, contrasting it to the fragmenting approach of historical criticism. "The Canonical Approach to Torah and the Prophets," *JSOT* 16 (1980): 28. James Barr satirically responded: "It is like the Book of Kings: for failure to remove the high places, read now failure to read in canonical context. Only very occasionally does one discern an element of cautious hesitation in this monolithic principle (e.g., p. 476). If only Childs had recognized the value of the word *sometimes!*...He leaves it in no doubt that the canon is a good thing. The expression 'the curse of the canon' is not a part of his vocabulary. The book is an utterance of entire approval of the idea of canon: everything about canons, canonicity, and canonical form is good. No one in the history of theology or of biblical interpretation has accorded so much centrality to the canon." (J. Barr, "Childs' *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*," *JSOT* 16 [1980]: 13.)



read as sacred Scripture.”¹⁸¹ Childs uses the term ‘canon’ as “that process of religious interpretation by which a historical faith community left its mark on the literary texts which did not continue to evolve and which became the normative interpretation of those events to which it bore witness.”¹⁸² He tends to downplay the process by which the text supposedly evolved and to emphasize the final product. In this respect I agree with Childs as opposed to Sanders, for whom it is not the final form of the text but the process by which the community arrived at that form that is canonically significant. Sanders argues for a fluid text rather than for a decisive final text that the early Christian community accredited (Childs). He uses the analogy of inflected languages to describe the canon as paradigmatic, by which the believing community can ‘conjugate’ the traditions of a fixed set of traditions reflected in the canon to be adaptable to new contexts by successive communities of believers.

Canonical criticism might be seen in metaphor as the beadle (*bedelos*) who now carries the critically studied Bible in procession back to the church lectern from the scholar's study. And canonical criticism may permit the believing communities to see themselves more clearly as heirs of a very long line of shapers and reshapers of tradition and instruct the faithful as to how they may faithfully perceive the Bible even yet as adaptable for life.¹⁸³

Contra Sanders, Childs argues that theological interpretation of the Bible ought to proceed on the assumption of the “final (canonical) form” of a document and with persistent attention to its “full canonical context,” i.e., the way that text is related to all other texts in the canon. He then makes the *literary* context of the

¹⁸¹Brevard Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 82.

¹⁸²Brevard Childs, *Interpretation* 38 (1984): 68.

¹⁸³Sanders, *Canon* 20.



canon the foundation and standard of interpretation, rather than the original historical context of the canonical documents.¹⁸⁴ Here is where I sharply disagree with Childs.

Childs essentially removes theology from its historical context.¹⁸⁵ For example, for Childs Deuteronomy is not a revelation of God to Moses in the desert of Moab, but rather it is a product of a believing community's reflection upon the issues of law and grace many hundreds of years later. Childs distances himself from the goals of any of the historical-critical methods:

Because the shapers of the material usually hid their identity, ascribing it no theological value, I do not feel that the main focus of critical research should lie in pursuing the redactors' motivations and biases. Rather, the emphasis should fall on the effect which the layering of the tradition has had on the reworded text because of its objective status.¹⁸⁶

I would argue that the historical cannot be separated from the literary aspect,¹⁸⁷ and thus, also the theological (my thesis)—that we know God both because of his acts in history and because he caused an interpretation of those actions to be written down

¹⁸⁴Childs sketches his position in his *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970) and develops it more fully in his *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979). A series of critical appraisals, together with responses by Childs, may be found in *JSOT* 16 (1980) and in *HBT* 2 (1980).

¹⁸⁵In response to his critics Childs says that it is possible that some texts of the Bible may have been included without any hermeneutical reflection, having no meaning or making no sense. He responds: "In its final form the literature evoked its own dynamic which was only indirectly related to the history of its composition." B.S. Childs, "Response to Reviewers of *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*," *JSOT* 16 (1980): 5. John Barton expressed great concern about this type of canon criticism and thought that a more radical literary approach like structuralism would be needed to recover authorial intention or historical meaning, which was being abandoned by canon critics. J. Barton, *Reading the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), 179.

¹⁸⁶Childs, "Response," 54.

¹⁸⁷Francis Watson rightly warns against the 'eclipse of history' in the work of some post-liberal and/or narrative theologians. *Text and Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 33-63. Cf. J.G. McConville, "Biblical Theology: Canon and Plain Sense," *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology*, 19.2 (Autumn 2001): 134-157.



that is both faithful and authoritative.¹⁸⁸ Childs' hermeneutical triad is canonical, literary, theological; not historical, literary, theological. While welcoming the re-emphasis upon the overall literary context, I reject the separation of fact and meaning, literary context from historical context—typical of canonical critics.¹⁸⁹ The Reformers taught that there are two parameters for determining the meaning of any biblical text: the grammatical and literary on the one hand, and the historical on the other.¹⁹⁰ For Childs, the canon represents a judgment by the community of faith on the basis of an historical process that issued in a normative corpus of writings. For him the community really constitutes an authority just as ultimate, and even more so, than the canon.¹⁹¹ I would argue that an ecclesiastically commended authoritative text is hardly the same as an authoritative divinely inspired text.¹⁹² Bruce Metzger is

¹⁸⁸Interestingly and ironically, the commitment to historical validation is shared both by fundamentalists or evangelicals and higher critics. Childs unambiguously repudiates propositional revelation, that is, divine disclosure of a fixed deposit of objective truths or doctrines. Childs states that "the heart of my canonical proposal has been missed when this conservative theory seeks to ground biblical truth on objective propositions apart from the reception by a community of Christian faith and practice." (*The New Testament as Canon: An Introduction* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985], 544.)

¹⁸⁹For two perceptive responses to Sanders and Childs from a conservative point of view see Dale A. Brueggemann, "Brevard Childs' Canon Criticism: An Example of Post-Critical Naiveté," *JETS* 32/3 (September 1989): 311-326; John N. Oswalt, "Canonical Criticism: A Review From a Conservative Viewpoint," *JETS* 30/3 (September 1987): 317-325.

¹⁹⁰Cf. A.B. Mickelsen, *Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), 38-40.

¹⁹¹"If ultimate authority for canonization rested with the Church, its interpretive legitimation for that canonization should have the same authority as the canonical product: the canon. To put it another way, if the early Church's interpretation was of only relative value, their canonical decisions could have only relative value—and the present Church might well move the canonical process along to another stage." D.A. Brueggemann, "Brevard Childs' Canon Criticism," 315.

¹⁹²"Childs has absolutized canonical shape, process and context rather than inspiration. Through a text-immanent canonical process, traditions assume the 'trans-historical identity of normative Scripture' in the paradoxical tension of canonical context. The special prerogatives as "Scripture" are not conferred by inspiration apart from a canonical context; rather, 'inspiration is a way of claiming a special prerogative for this one context.' So the canon becomes more a heuristic model for opening up truth than an actual vehicle of truth. The Bible is no longer the Word of God and does not contain the words of God. Rather, it speaks with the authority of God when



correct when he states: “[Neither] individuals nor councils created the canon; instead they came to recognize and acknowledge the self-authenticating quality of these writings, which imposed themselves as canonical upon the church.”¹⁹³ This is an extension of John 10:14, 26—Jesus’ sheep hear his voice.

1.2.3.4 Canon and Authority

1.2.3.4.1 Childs and Sanders on Canon and Authority

If, as Sanders and Childs propose, the meaning of a text resides in divine authority experienced dynamically in the life of the believing community and not in an objective inscripturated divine revelation given to the community of faith,¹⁹⁴ then it begs questions. Were the Christians wrong in applying the ancient prophetic promises to Jesus of Nazareth? If the community and the canon reciprocally gave each other life and meaning, on what basis could one distinguish transcendent authority from subjective experience? For example, in rejecting Jesus the Jews appealed to their revered tradition to reject his messianic claims. How would one

we read it as if it were the Word of God.” (Ibid., 326. Quoting B.S. Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970], 104).

¹⁹³Bruce M. Metzger, *The New Testament, Its Background, Growth and Content*, 3d rev. and enl. ed., (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003), 318.

¹⁹⁴Childs expressly repudiates propositional revelation, that is, divine disclosure of a fixed deposit of objective truths or doctrines. “The heart of my canonical proposal has been missed,” he writes, “when this conservative theory seeks to ground biblical truth on objective propositions apart from the reception by a community of Christian faith and practice.” *The New Testament as Canon*, 544. If, as Scripture attests, God reveals himself intelligibly and verbally, then it is credible that the writers of Scripture give us a God-breathed textual content that tells the truth about God and his purposes and actions. Behind the redemptive acts implicit in canonical interpretation stands the rational disclosure and communication of God who authoritatively inscripturates his revealed truths and goals. The inherited Reformed view of divine inspiration and authority holds that among the canonically-attested acts of God is the divine inspiration of prophetic-apostolic proclamation. What lends credence to the comprehensive authority and reliability of the scriptural history and teaching is textual inspiration. When the production of the canon is inked essentially not to inspired prophets and apostles, but is connected instead to fallible supplementers, editors, redactors and interpreters, divine inspiration becomes so insubstantial as to be powerless. The reformers insisted that Scripture is self-authenticating; it does not stand indissolubly dependent upon the primitive church. The canon witnesses, in the apostle Paul’s words, that Scripture functions profitably for the church’s thought and conduct because it is antecedently ‘God-breathed’ (2 Tim 3:16).



adjudicate the authority claims of each community? Would not the dynamic experiential ‘acceptance’ of their tradition as other Jews interpreted—or reinterpreted—yield an equally valid creative meaning and revelatory truth? The postmodern pluralist would answer yes. Working from Childs’ premises the canonical text gains its sense not through an interpretation of original events in relation to which the text first arose, but through its meaning for the Christian community. One could ask, ‘Why did the Christian community arise in the first place if not in response to the objective fact of the resurrection of Christ?’ Elmer B. Smick rightly concludes that for Childs “the final (canonical) form of the text has relativized past historical events.”¹⁹⁵

Though Sanders and Childs understand the canon in divergent perspectives they both view it in the end as being a human accomplishment.¹⁹⁶ Calvin attacked vehemently “the pernicious error...that Scripture is of importance only in so far as conceded to it by the suffrage of the Church; as if the eternal inviolable truth of God could depend on the will of men.”¹⁹⁷ In contrast to their

¹⁹⁵“Old Testament Theology: The Historico-Genetic Method,” *JETS* 26 (1983): 145-155. When Barr probes Childs’ reason for overthrowing the historical-critical approach Childs responds: accept it by faith. “In my judgment, the acceptance of the canon as normative does not function initially as a derivative of reasoned argument. The canon is the deposit of the religious community’s sacred tradition which one receives as a member of that body. The acknowledgment of a normative rule functions confessionally as a testimony to one’s beliefs. Earlier attempts to ascribe to the Hebrew canon special qualities of excellence, as if it had the best text, or reflected a superior form of literature, or possessed a unique claim to historicity, seem to have been misplaced. Does this mean that the relation to the canon is irrational and beyond the scope of all reasoned argument? Certainly not. The issue at stake is the classic theological problem of the proper relation of faith to reason. The testimony of faith and not reason establishes the canon. Yet there is an internal logic of faith within the framework of confession.” Childs, “Response,” 56. But I would argue that faith must have a proper object, or it is only delusion.

¹⁹⁶“This is the key issue. If authority is in the process and the process is human, then the methodology of the process has the same authority as its product. If the canon that resulted from hermeneutical moves in the early Church has authority, then the hermeneutical moves have authority.” (D.A. Brueggemann, “Brevard Childs’ Canon Criticism,” 321).

¹⁹⁷*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, tr. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), Vol. I.7.1 as quoted in John Piper, “The Authority and Meaning of the Christian Canon: A Response to Gerald Sheppard on Canon Criticism,” *JETS* 19/2 (1976): 89.



understanding and presuppositions, I would argue that the principle of canonicity is not the approval of a post-apostolic church, but apostolicity—the connection of the writing to the apostles or their close associates.¹⁹⁸ If textual normativity is the achievement of a final canonizing community, then the meaning of the biblical text is dissolved into what the early church decided, and the decisive role of the prophets and apostles is effaced (Eph 2:20). The apostles were the divinely authorized interpreters of the crucified and risen Christ's ministry and mission (Matt 19:28; Luke 22:27-30; John 14:25f; Rev 21:14). The fact that Jesus promised that the Spirit of Truth would assist their memories regarding his deeds and words during his earthly ministry implies that he addressed contemporaries who would build on direct experience in their exposition of his life and message. Paul claims to be a belated witness to the resurrected Jesus (Acts 9:4; 22:7,14; 26:14; 1 Cor 9:1). In this light it

¹⁹⁸“The primary criterion by which the ancient church established its canon of authoritative Scriptures was clearly a modified form of apostolicity, but the task of determining what was apostolic was not easy since even the heretical Christians claimed to have an apostolic heritage. Eventually the view that carried the day was that the apostolic deposit—genuine witness to and from Jesus Christ (the church's true *canon*)—was transmitted faithfully from the apostles to the church through its succession of.” (L.M. McDonald, *The Formation of the Christian Biblical Canon* [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988], 424.)

The difficulty with this view that apostolic commendation is the criterion of canonicity lies not merely in unpersuasive critical theories that a fourth-century church council sanctioned the New Testament as a specific collection of writings; or that theological diversity in the early Christian writings obscured their normativity until heresy necessitated a literary tradition to distinguish orthodoxy from heresy; or some other speculative variation on the critical theme that the canon is but a human achievement. The early church kept the principle of apostolic authority alive, and shared the conviction that normative Christian literature is not indefinitely open-ended (*cf.* Luke 1:1-4). But it remains the case that the apostles conveyed no direct revelation of the express limits of the canon, and that the local churches did not universally share a complete collection of inspired writings. The Apostolic Fathers quote the apostles authoritatively on par with the OT. They also indicate that the apostles are authoritative even if no longer living on earth. The earliest fathers appeal to 'living memory' of apostolic teaching and later fathers to what 'is written.' I think the inescapable implication is that apostolic teaching is authoritative even before a complete canon is accessible. With Irenaeus, who claimed contact with the apostolic generation through Polycarp and scarcely escapes inclusion with the Apostolic Fathers, a definitive literature is stipulated—four Gospels (no more, no less) and well-defined additional writings including Paul's letters (see the tables in the chapter addendum). Nowhere do the church fathers give any indication that they are acting creatively to constitute the canon. The Muratorian canon (about A.D. 200) seems simply to acknowledge the books that the churches used and considered integral to the Christian heritage.



appears a distinctive apostolic authority inheres in the New Testament.¹⁹⁹ This authority is grounded in the risen Christ and mediated through the Spirit who superintended the apostles' oral and written proclamation.²⁰⁰ Just as the apostles were themselves earlier bound to the Spirit-given prophetic Word, the early church was responsible to the apostolic message. In one sense the canon did come 'through the church' but it did not come 'from the church.' The relationship between the written text and the primitive Christian community did not constitute the canon's authority but rather reflected that authority. Though not in a perfectly straight historical line, nor in perfect unanimity,²⁰¹ the church came to recognize the divine inspiration of certain writings, but it did not confer or directly share in that inspiration. The reality of variations in lists in the development toward a final canon reflects the normal historical process of recognizing the divinely inspired documents given to the church, not to the deficiency of the work of the Spirit to inspire and to guide the church into truth (John 16:13).²⁰²

Childs concedes an "almost total lack of information regarding the history of canonization."²⁰³ He adds that the complex process of canonical development largely eludes critical reconstruction because one "cannot decipher all the layers of

¹⁹⁹If writing was believed to have been produced by an apostle, it was eventually accepted as sacred Scripture and included in the New Testament canon. Eusebius' argument against the apostolic authorship of the pseudepigraphal literature reflects the universally acknowledged authority of apostolic writings and the rejection of writings believed to have not come from an apostle.

²⁰⁰There is a major difference between believing in the canonical process (Sanders and Childs) and believing in the One who inspired the original documents and providentially gave an authoritative canon to his church.

²⁰¹See the charts mapping the early history of the canon in the chapter addendum.

²⁰²The canon does not treat scriptural components as if they acquire finality and authority only if and when they are included in the canon, or as if their authority is in any way, even in part, suspended upon a creative contribution or reconstruction by the community of faith. The divine authority of apostolic letters was not contingent upon their inclusion in the canon, although it attests to their authority.

²⁰³*Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, 60.



tradition and redaction.”²⁰⁴ Historical criticism predicated on diverse assumptions has reached conflicting conclusions about canonical sources, revisionary additions and dating of various strands of the canon. Canon-criticism, of the type that continues to cling to historical-critical presuppositions²⁰⁵ and which elevates the textual authority of post-apostolic editors above that of the apostles, must deal with the fact that while the canon puts forth the names of the apostles Peter, John, Paul and other evangelists, the supposed canonical editors are nameless phantoms reminiscent of P, D, and Q.²⁰⁶

1.2.3.4.2 Lee Martin McDonald and Canon

In his work titled *The Biblical Canon*, McDonald structures several of his chapters around Sundberg’s observation that there were three stages in the history of the NT canon:²⁰⁷ “(1) the rise of the NT writings to the status of Scripture; (2) the conscious groupings of such literature into closed collections (e.g., the four Gospels and the Epistles of Paul); and (3) the formation of a closed list of authoritative

²⁰⁴Ibid., L.M. McDonald concurs in the conclusion to his lengthy work on the canon: “historical circumstances that led to the canonization of the New Testament literature are not completely clear today, since no surviving literature identifies the canonical process.” *The Biblical Canon: Its Origin, Transmission, and Authority* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Pub., 2007), 421.

²⁰⁵Childs appears to be schizophrenic in his view of historical-critical methods—one moment showing respect, but the next denying their benefits.

²⁰⁶Later in the present work I engage James Dunn on this very foundational issue in reference to Acts. He believes later editors produced writings attributed to Luke in Acts. This underlies the importance of the elaboration of my presuppositions and thinking in reference to the issues of canon at the outset.

²⁰⁷Lee Martin McDonald holds that the word *canon* “primarily refers to a fixed standard or collection of Scriptures that defines the faith and identity of a particular religious community.” *The Biblical Canon: Its Origin, Transmission, and Authority* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 2007), 44.



literature.”²⁰⁸ The present work will argue that in stage 2 identified by Sundberg, the early church’s decisions concerning the ordering of the four Gospels, with the majority of early groupings juxtaposing John’s Gospel with Acts, may have been guided by theological insight and therefore indicated hermeneutical guidance to the canonical reader.²⁰⁹ Exegesis will be offered in the following chapters from the second half of the Fourth Gospel and from the opening discourses of Acts as evidence for the theological fruitfulness of such an hypothesis.

McDonald suggests that the earliest ‘*regula*’ (canon) for the Christian community was Jesus himself.²¹⁰ It is Jesus who reignites the prophetic voice in Israel, which some Jews believed had ceased in Israel (Heb 1:2). OT prophets had expected the age of the Spirit and prophet to be manifested at the end of the age (Mal 4:5-6; cf. Joel 2:28-29; Ezek 36:27; 37:14). The apostle John’s statement that “the word became flesh” (John 1:14) and his record of Jesus’ own words declaring that he spoke his Father’s words (John 8:28; 12:49) indicate that the early church believed that the fulfillment of the expectation of Israel was inaugurated in Jesus and then continued in the church’s witness to the risen Lord (Acts 1:8).

The ascension of Jesus presents an historical/rhetorical problem for the continuation of the prophetic ministry he inaugurates. It is suggested in the present work that among the four Gospels, the solution to this apparent dilemma is most anticipated and addressed by Jesus in the latter half of the Gospel of John and actuated in the opening events recorded by Luke in Acts. I will propose that the authority of the joint prophetic witness of the Apostles and the Holy Spirit is established by Jesus in John’s Gospel (John 16:7, 13; 14:13; 17:18; 20:21;

²⁰⁸*Ibid.*, 244; citing Sundberg, “Making of the New Testament Canon,” in *The Interpreter’s One-Volume Commentary on the Bible*. ed. Charles M. Lymon (New York: Abingdon, 1971), 1216-24.

²⁰⁹See the addendum to the present chapter to view the variety of early church groupings of NT writings.

²¹⁰*The Biblical Canon*, 44.



15:26,27) and effectuated in Acts (Acts 1:12-26; 2:1-4; 5:32). The NT canon is rooted first in Jesus and then the authorized witnesses he established.²¹¹

1.2.3.4.3 Canon and the Presupposition of Divine Providence

The presupposition of special divine providence best explains the compilation and preservation of the canon.²¹² The same Spirit of God that inspired the Word of God is the same Spirit of Truth (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13; 1 John 4:6) that supervised the preservation and collection of the New Testament documents through which Christians through the ages have come to hear the authoritative voice of the Spirit of God.

In response to Jesus' missionary mandate, the apostles were ever on the move planting new churches in various countries and regions. Sometimes they pastored these house churches, sometimes they handed them over to others and some churches arose through the missionary outreach of converts. Without the modern means of communication and travel, it is not surprising that the apostolic writings would have limited circulation. Considering these factors, whatever treasured autographs or copies certain geographical sectors of the church might have had would certainly have resulted in somewhat differing 'lists,' and that for some time uncertainty might preside over the composition of a growing canon. The serial reception of these documents by local churches, to which many of the letters were addressed, and their subsequent distribution and dispersion to more distant churches, seems a more natural explanation of why no indication exists of formal finalization of the canon as one might expect in the case of a single climactic event.

²¹¹The presence of charismatic preachers called prophets in the early church (e.g., 1 Cor 12:28; Eph 2:20; 4:11) is evidence of the widespread belief that the presence of the Spirit and the age of fulfillment had begun in the event of Jesus.

²¹²For Gerald Sheppard the canonical context is a "theological *a priori*...What holds the Scripture together in its dialectical tension...is the affirmation of the believing community for the normative status of a given tradition shaped and contained in a set of books." ("Canon Criticism: The Proposal of Brevard Childs and an Assessment for Evangelical Hermeneutics," in *Studia Biblica et Theologica* 4/2 [1974]: 9, 7.)



The importance of the apostolic eyewitness account of the words and works of Jesus was established quite soon after the death of Jesus (1 Cor 15:3-8; Acts 1:21-22) and after the death of the apostles. It was taken up into the church's witness both for the church itself (1 Clem. 42.1; 2 Pet 3:2) and for polemical argument against heresy (Justin, 1 Apol. 42.4; 50.12; Irenaeus, Haer. 3.1-3; Tertullian, Praescr. 6). In the examples from Irenaeus and Tertullian the guarantee of accuracy of the church's canon of faith was secured by apostolic succession wherein the truthfulness of their understanding of the gospel was passed on through the church's bishops from the apostles. The apostolicity principle best explains why the canon in its historical development has a history of fuzziness around the edges—that the early generations wrestled to discern the voice of the Spirit as to which document's authority were consistent with and ultimately rooted in the chief canon (Jesus) and those witnesses directly authorized and appointed by Jesus.

1.2.3.4.4 The Usefulness of the Canonical Approach Based Upon Supernaturalistic Presuppositions

Despite the critical shortcomings exhibited by many of its post-critical practitioners as regards the *locus* of authority, the focus on how a document functions as canon in the believing community is a welcome insight. Canonical criticism commendably challenges the tyranny over biblical studies that historical criticism imposes through unwarranted assumptions.²¹³ It refocuses scholarly interest on a normative canonical text as being the authoritative content and context

²¹³John Van Seters' recent monograph is one particularly strong example of the voice of late modernity crying in the wilderness of postmodernity. Anyone who believes there is a theological force at work in the Bible or a canonical intentionality, or the Holy Spirit, is immediately written off as "confessional." But that critic fails to see that his complete confidence in the historical-critical method—a method that shuts out any theological force from working in an avowedly theological book—is equally "confessional." *The Edited Bible: The Curious History of the "Editor" in Biblical Criticism* (Warsaw, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2006).



for Christian theology.²¹⁴ If God is held to be the divine author of all Scripture, then it is the canon as a whole that becomes the communicative act that ultimately needs to be described.²¹⁵

Kevin VanHoozer suggests that the Acts 8 narrative of Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian presents a hermeneutical paradigm for the early church's canonical approach to the reading of Scripture that "**represents a special kind of external aid, namely, the strategy of reading the Scriptures in their broader apostolic and canonical context.**"²¹⁶ He further proposes that Philip serves as a "stand-in" for the New Testament authors' approach to understanding the interrelationship of the documents of the canon—a "*canonical consciousness.*"²¹⁷ Philip's interpreting Isaiah 53 in the light of the person and work of Jesus Christ is viewed as a "proto-canonical practice."²¹⁸ Philip's practice places Jesus at the center of the 'hermeneutical spiral,' portraying Jesus as the one around whom the whole drama of Scripture revolves and that such canonical practice lies at the heart

²¹⁴"In this way, biblical fundamentalists find that some subjects neglected by older historical critics are taken up once again, though expressed in the light of critical historical conclusions alien to fundamentalist views regarding the history of the Bible." *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 861.

²¹⁵Mary C. Callaway notes that canonical criticism "does not address the history of these lists or the councils that may have formalized them; those concerns properly belong to the history of canon. Canonical criticism begins instead with the assumption that biblical texts were generated, transmitted, reworked, and preserved in communities for which they were authoritative and the biblical criticism should include study of how these texts functioned in the believing communities. Source, form, and redaction criticism focus on stages in the development of the biblical text prior to its final form, whereas canonical criticism analyzes the text as it was received in its final form. The emphasis may be on the function of the fixed text in the first communities to receive it, or on the process of adaption by which the community resignified earlier traditions to function authoritatively in a new situation and thereby produced the final text." ("Canonical Criticism," in *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Application*, ed. Stephen L. McKenzie and Stephen R. Haynes [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999], 242-43.)

²¹⁶Kevin VanHoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 119. Emphasis mine.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Ibid.



of the relationship between the New and the Old Testaments and their subparts. In this respect Philip is following Jesus' own hermeneutic (Luke 24:27- "Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets..."). The intertextual hermeneutic of Jesus is continued in the church post-ascension, aided by the Spirit and emulated by the rest of the New Testament authors.

A canonical approach rooted in supernaturalistic presuppositions espoused in the present work argues that the "fuller meaning" of Scripture—the meaning associated with divine authorship—emerges only at the level of the canon.²¹⁹ For it is in relation to its intentional context that a text yields its maximal sense—its fullest meaning. If one reads the Bible as the Word of God, it is suggested that the context that yields this maximal sense is the canon taken as a unified communicative act. The divine intention does not negate the intention of the human author but rather undergirds and transcends it. Thus, the canon as a whole becomes the unified act for which the divine intention serves as the unifying principle.²²⁰ The unifying rhetorical goal of the canon is the formation both of Christian theological understanding and a covenant life with God through Christ in the realm of his Spirit. Each one of the diverse canonical voices functions as an aspect of the 'rule' or 'canon' that both create the covenant community (Rom 10:17) and measures the integrity and veracity of its covenant life (John 12:47; 2 Tim 3:16). VanHoozer highlights the covenantal nature of the canon in that it "serves as the

²¹⁹This is directly contra canonical critics as represented by Harry Gamble: "Among these various levels of meaning, it is not obvious that the canonical sense has, or ought to be granted, any special preeminence, let alone exclusive validity. So far as it is distinctive, the canonical sense does not spring from the intention of any biblical writer. Rather, it arises through the collocation of diverse texts, and what it reflects above all are *the hermeneutical perspectives of the church* [my italics] which brought these texts together, drew a boundary around them, and provided structural relationships among them." *The New Testament Canon*, 82. His presuppositions clearly do not include divine authorship or providence, but rather, authority and inspiration rests in the church.

²²⁰Inspiration is then an essential element of the Old and New Testaments. To view the divine intention as an 'essential element' of the diverse human communicative acts that comprise Scripture avoids the incoherent position that the divine intention contradicts that of the human author.



'building plan,' as it were, for the people of God.²²¹ The Spirit uses the Scripture precisely to 'edify' the church (cf. 2 Tim 3:16). The canon literally constitutes the covenant community: 'canonicity precisely and properly defined is a matter of *community* life norms.'²²²

On the basis of the assumption that the canon is a unified literary act, canonical criticism so defined argues that while both are inseparable and important, the text's ultimate meaning is derived from its canonical meaning²²³ and penultimately from the reconstruction of the author's original conversation with his audience.²²⁴ The initial move in exegesis is to focus on discovering the full voice of each biblical writer without regard for the integral wholeness of Scripture.²²⁵ But the

²²¹This is to understand canon primarily in functional and formative rather than in epistemic and dogmatic terms. This is well-argued by William J. Abraham, *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology: From the Fathers to Feminism* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998). Cf. Robert Wall, *The New Testament as Canon: A Reader in Canonical Criticism* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 15-16.

²²²VanHoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 140, quotes Meredith G. Kline *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Pub., 1997), 102. VanHoozer later continues in the same vein: "The canon is a *sapiential criterion*, a means of making judgments about how to speak and act in ways that best conform to Jesus Christ, the wisdom of God." *Ibid.*, 146.

²²³Understood as each part of the canon contributes to and integrates coherently into the metanarrative of Scripture, and thus, the fullest meaning of each part is best understood in the light of the whole and with each of the other parts. This forms the basis of the legitimacy of the discipline of biblical theology.

²²⁴Robert Wall argues that "this 'critical' approach to Acts [Acts criticism that attempts to reconstruct the narrative's 'original meaning' in order to understand what the anonymous narrator had in mind when telling his story to its first reader, Theophilus] seems mistaken to me, not because it is unprofitable or impractical but because it misplaces Scripture's timeless referent—that is, God—for the particular historic moment of a text's composition." Anthony B. Robinson and Robert Wall, *Called to Be Church: The Book of Acts for a New Day* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 261. In an earlier work Wall argued that "it is a mistake of critical scholarship to assume that a biblical text's authority and meaning are qualified only by its original life-setting, by the author's original intent in addressing it, and by the literary genre he used in recasting the various sources at hand. On the basis of this assumption, it is supposed that the text's primary meaning is derived from the reconstruction of the author's original conversation with his audience, thereby making its canonical meaning secondary to its original meaning." ("The Acts of the Apostles in Canonical Context," *BTB* 18 [1988]: 17).

²²⁵In the nineteenth century Friedrich Schliermacher argued that meaning and interpretation began with the intention of the author of a biblical text, with due regard also to the historical context and situation out of which the author wrote. "Only historical interpretation can do



final goal, and thus the primary objective, is to integrate the chorus of the variety of voices into the whole sense of Scripture. To presume simultaneity of subject matter, i.e., theology, (conveying the one and same God working out his covenant relationship with his people through a variety of voices that express a diversity of integrated, coherent aspects of the two-part, unified covenant) between the various parts of the whole of the canon, without also sufficiently ascertaining the literal sense of each part, undermines the cohesive nature of Scripture and truncates the full witness to God. **Thus, the present study embraces a canonical approach that has nothing to do with an ahistorical methodology that views the Bible as a free-floating ‘text,’ as in much of the literary approaches, nor on the other hand with a historicist approach that focuses on the events behind the text.** The canonical approach advocated here incorporates the whole canon as the interpretative framework for understanding God, the world, oneself, and others. Such a canonical understanding is one that reads individual passages and books in the light of their interrelationships within the larger divine drama of redemption.

James Brenneman argues that the value of the canon lies in the paradigmatic nature of the intracanonical voices that it contains.²²⁶ Like Brenneman, Robert Wall, Eugene Lemcio and Anthony Robinson, canonical critics who also embrace supernaturalistic presuppositions similar to the author, perceive that the diverse voices of the Bible are engaged in a sort of “conversation” that provides a model for contemporary interpretation.²²⁷ They understand the intertextual nature of

justice to the the rootedness of the New Testament authors in their time and place.” *Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscripts*, ed. Heinz Kimmerle, trans. James Duke and Jack Fortsman (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1977), 104. By this he did not merely have in mind some shadowy ‘mental state’ or inner psychological process of ‘intending,’ but rather the goal and purpose behind and within a text that signal an author’s desire, will, and action as evidenced in and by the text and its surroundings. Meaning and interpretation include more than these, but these remain his starting point.

²²⁶James E. Brenneman, *Canons in Conflict: Negotiating Texts in True and False Prophecy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). I do not agree with the further development of his canonical hermeneutics in that he views canonical criticism functioning as a communal variant of reader-response interpretation, speaking from his own pacifist Mennonite tradition.

²²⁷Wall and Lemcio, *New Testament as Canon*, 16-19.



Scripture—the consistent occurrence of citations or allusions to earlier texts, to be rooted in the “simultaneity of its subject”—theology.²²⁸ In their view the current focus on intertextuality²²⁹ is magnified by canon criticism.

1.2.3.5 The Canonical Approach and Its Application in the Present Study

Founded upon the presupposition of the superintendence of the Holy Spirit unifying the diversity of human voices in the canon,²³⁰ it is argued that a valuable perspective may be gained by a fresh hearing of the voice of Luke in Acts in concert with the voice of the apostle John in his gospel (explored in the following two chapters) and in concert with the four gospels as a unit (the final chapter). Based upon the preceding understanding of the canonical approach, the following chapters are an exercise in applying the insights of a canonical approach in order to discover whether it may bear fruit for interpretation and understanding. We will begin with the macro-perspective of viewing the opening discourses of Acts in the light of the immediate preceding canonical context of the Fourth Gospel in order to explore whether such study may bear fruit for discovering possible coherent, consistent

²²⁸R.W. Wall, “Canonical Context and Canonical Conversations,” 169.

²²⁹Du Toit, “New Testament Exegesis in Theory and Practice,” 145. “It has nevertheless become axiomatic that all texts, whether literary or non-literary, form part of a socially and culturally determined network of traditions and textual relations, and that meaning is generated by moving between a specific text and all the others to which it relates. Although the notion of intertextuality and its critical refinement is of recent date, biblical scholars have traditionally realized the importance of reading New Testament texts with the broader context of the Old Testament and of other New Testament books, as well as Jewish and Graeco-Roman texts and tradition. Especially Old Testament quotations have received much attention. However, modern developments must make the exegete even more aware of the critical importance of intertextuality.”

²³⁰The role of the Holy Spirit in creating the scriptural text is an idea of Jewish origin. In Acts, the praying community quotes Psalm 2 as the work of the Holy Spirit: “You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David” (Acts 4:25). Also in Acts, when quoting Isaiah, Paul considers the Holy Spirit to be the speaker: “The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your forefathers when he said through Isaiah the prophet” (Acts 28:25). The Epistle to the Hebrews repeatedly quotes Scripture with the formula “The Holy Spirit says” (Heb 3:7; 10:15). According to Mark’s Gospel, Jesus himself quotes Psalm 110 as composed by David through the Holy Spirit. Two texts, 2 Tim 3:16 and 2 Pet 1:21, stand out as especially important. Their impact is due to their generality: both envisage neither this nor that quotation but the entirety of Scriptures as such.



historical and theological connections presupposed in a canonical approach. Secondly, the macro-perspective will widen to view the narratives of Acts in the light of the fourfold Gospels as to whether there is a core historical, literary and theological coherence and consistency intrinsic to the narratives of the life and ministry of the church in Acts and the life and ministry of Jesus in the Gospels. It will be argued that in both cases it is an intrinsic theology²³¹ that is embedded within the recorded history and which also drives the literary artistry employed in narrating the history in Acts (my thesis). In taking the following macro or canonical approach I have expanded A.B. du Toit's understanding of discourse analysis to its logical ends—the ever-increasing canonical contexts, and ultimately the whole canon:

It is a well-known axiom that, in studying texts one should work from the larger units downwards as well as from the smaller units upwards. This reciprocal movement is necessary to open up the text. Naturally, this is also true of discourse analysis. However, the critical issue in this process is that of vantage point. Should one's vantage point be the individual sentences that constitute a unit, or the larger unit in its totality? If the first component of the term '*discourse analysis*' is taken seriously, the answer should be self-evident.²³²

The ultimate discourse is the canon, viewed as God's metanarrative—the story of his establishing a faithful covenant people/partner, with all its inter-connected subplots and literary expressions. That love story ends with a glorious wedding of the protagonist and his bride (Rev 19:7-9; 21:3). That is the gospel—the good news—that God will accomplish the goal of the metanarrative in and through Christ.

The canon not only describes God's metanarrative but its arrangement provides hermeneutical insight into specific biblical texts. D.M. Smith argues cogently that the character of the final canon, including its final order, "projects a

²³¹Meaning that though they are expressed in a diversity of genre, there are unified, coherent biblical theological themes woven throughout the canon, centering on the chief protagonist of the metanarrative--God.

²³²"Exploring Textual Structure: Discourse Analysis," in *Focusing on the Message: New Testament Hermeneutics, Exegesis and Methods*, ed. A.B. du Toit (Pretoria: Protea Book House, 2009), 221.



kind of intention that can scarcely be ignored.”²³³ Pertaining more narrowly to the present work he explains that the Fourth Gospel stands last in the gospel canon as if it were to be read after the Synoptics.²³⁴ A.C. Outler proposes that there is a “canon-logic” organizing the final form of the New Testament into four units (gospel, acts, letter, apocalypse) that envisages an intentional rhetorical pattern.²³⁵ He argues that that logic effectively orients the reader to the canonical or divine intention.²³⁶ Each unit in the final form of the New Testament canon is assigned a specific role and function within the whole. Both the placement of the documents and their titles are properties of their canonization and may provide an initial hermeneutical set of clues to the readers.²³⁷

²³³D.Moody Smith, “John, the Synoptics, and the Canonical Approach to Exegesis,” in *Tradition and Interpretation in the New Testament*, eds. Gerald F. Hawthorne with Otto Betz (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 171.

²³⁴*Ibid.*, 176.

²³⁵Albert C. Outler, “The ‘Logic’ of Canon-Making and the Tasks of Canon-Criticism,” in *Texts and Testaments: Critical Essays on the Bible and Early Church Fathers*, ed. W. Eugene March (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1980), 263-76.

²³⁶The interest of the interpreter in Scripture’s final literary form—in the text *qua* text—is presumed.

²³⁷The titles assigned in the canonizing process provide hermeneutical guidance as to what particular contribution each unit makes in forming a comprehensive Christian theology. It is doubtful that anyone would say that the order of the New Testament documents exhibits no theological order. For example, although there may be intramural squabbles as to the individual order, the fourfold Gospel is placed at the beginning of the New Testament in order to establish the foundation of the story of Jesus’ earthly ministry as the subtext for all that follows in the New Testament. It has been argued that Matthew’s Gospel is the most appropriate opening document of the New Testament for providing the best historical and theological bridge between the testaments. In the same vein I will be arguing in the next two chapters that the Fourth Gospel provides the best historical and theological bridge from the fourfold gospel to the book of Acts. By titling Luke’s second volume *The Acts of the Apostles* the early church signals a canonical intention, while not violating Luke’s original intention, that orients the reader to view it as the New Testament’s introduction to the apostolic letters that follow in the final literary form of the canon.

John Barton suggests that there is important hermeneutical significance to the titles of the four Gospels: “The titles of the Gospels provide a clear hermeneutical direction for the reader. They do not use the term ‘Gospel’ as the name of a literary genre, but instead speak of each ‘Gospel’ as ‘[the gospel] according to X.’ Thus, the reader is invited to think of there being one ‘gospel’ attested by four witnesses. Titles are in general a very strong way of constraining the interpretation of



Canonical criticism proposes that the final canonical order of the biblical texts constitutes a specific rather than an arbitrary decision about how these diverse, authoritative texts should be read by Christians in every generation. It further suggests that the divine author intends that the reader be aware not only of a specific text, but of the whole canonical context.²³⁸ *Sitz im Kanon* superintends over and in conjunction with each and every *Sitz im Leben*, hermeneutically.²³⁹

Texts.... Certainly the hermeneutical point here, that each of the four Gospels is to be read as *the* Gospel (in one version) is conveyed much more by the titles than by the text itself. If we suppose that one of the evangelists—say Luke—intended to eliminate all other Gospels by his work, then the title appended to his book by some unknown editor thwarted his purpose more effectively in two words than any number of alterations to his text could have done.” *Holy Writings, Sacred Text*, 193, note 45.

²³⁸In an otherwise fine work on New Testament hermeneutics, edited by A.B. du Toit and titled *Focusing on the Message: New Testament Hermeneutics, Exegesis and Methods*, a significant absence is a chapter addressing canonical criticism (Pretoria: Protea Book House, 2009). In reading through the work I am struck by the failure to address the hermeneutical implications of acknowledging the divine authorship. In the second chapter, Bernard Lategan briefly acknowledges the importance of the canon context for reading, but this important insight is not further developed in the book: “For J. Severion Croatto the extension of the semantic axis of the text poses the essence of the canonical process and therefore he insists on a ‘canonical reading.’ Both the canon and the interpretative community provide valuable guidelines for reading the text and for respecting its theological trust.” (Ibid., 102). A.B. du Toit, in his chapter titled “New Testament Exegesis in Theory and Practice,” also acknowledges the importance of the concerns of canonical criticism, but the following chapters of the volume do not pursue the full import of the latter part of his astute observation that “It has nevertheless become axiomatic that all text, whether literary or non-literary, form part of a socially and culturally determined network of traditions and textual relations, and that meaning is generated by moving between a specific text and all the others to which it relates. Although the notion of intertextuality and its critical refinement is of recent date, biblical scholars have traditionally realized *the importance of reading New Testament text with the broader context of the Old Testament and of other New Testament books* [my italics], as well as Jewish and Graeco-Roman texts and traditions. Especially Old Testament quotations have received much attention. However, modern developments must make the exegete even more aware of the critical importance of intertextuality.” (Ibid., 145.) I would argue that the neglect of the broadening of the concept and practice of intertextuality by canonical criticism and its underlying presupposition of divine authorship is a general and far reaching mistake on the part of much critical scholarship when it assumes that a biblical text’s authority and meaning are qualified *only* by its original life setting, by the author’s original intent in addressing it, and by the literary genre he used in recasting the various sources at hand. The apostles in Acts both acknowledge the inspiration of the OT text and exploit the consequent intertextuality principle. The divine author’s inspiration of a closed list of works that sufficiently, coherently and *cohesively* communicates his Word to humanity suggests that the *Sitz im Kanon* is an important hermeneutical principle.

²³⁹Canonical critic Robert Wall emphasizes that “the fundamental continuity between the original and canonical *Sitz im Leben*, and between historical/literary criticisms and canonical criticism is especially important....” *The New Testament As Canon*, 17.



Childs points out that the history of the church's interpretation of Acts has always appreciated Acts as a 'canonical bridge' between the fourfold Gospel and the multiple letters of the New Testament.²⁴⁰ Such a concern shifts the focus away from Luke's intention to that of the canonizing church, yielding hermeneutical implications. Albert Outler expresses his hope that canon criticism "might help turn our inquiries in new directions, with a fresh set of queries and nuances."²⁴¹ Following Outler's suggestion and working from a canonical approach based upon supernaturalistic presuppositions, **it is the intention of the present work to explore a 'new direction' or 'fresh query' as to the potential historical, literary and theological connections between the Gospel of John and the book of Acts** – read from a canonical reader's perspective.

Along this line, Childs has been interested in discovering clues that might help the church to interpret the text for the present age. He is less concerned with reconstructing the historical process by which Acts was brought into the New Testament (Sanders) than with its relationship to other books and collections that also found their way into the New Testament canon.²⁴² He argues that the theological interpretation of Scripture ought to proceed on the basis of the "final (canonical) form" of a given text and with persistent attention to its "full canonical context"—that is, the way that text is related to all other texts in the canon.²⁴³ Thus,

²⁴⁰Childs, *Canon*, 219-25.

²⁴¹Outler, "The 'Logic' of Canon-Making," 271.

²⁴²See also Gamble, *Canon*, 78-80.

²⁴³J.A. Sanders' attention has not been on the final form and fixed canonical context of the documents but upon the process of canonization—that is, the hermeneutical dynamics by which authoritative traditions were not only stabilized but were, over and over, revised and adapted, reformulated and re-written, in order to make them freshly relevant to the ever-changing circumstances of the religious community. His goal in canonical criticism is to discern the hermeneutical processes producing and embedded within the canon in order to use them as paradigms for modern appropriation. "Adaptable for Life: The Nature and Function of the Canon," in *Magnalia Dei, The Mighty Acts of God: Essays on the Bible and Archaeology in Memory of G.E. Wright*, ed. F.M. Cross, W.E. Lemke and P. Miller (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1976), 531-



the literary context of the canon is made the basis and touchstone of interpretation, yielding a fuller meaning than the original historical context of the canonical documents. When certain books were collected and formed into Scripture they served additional purposes beyond their immediate *Sitz im Leben*—they served to meet later crises. Von Campenhausen is correct when he argues that in the final stages of its activity, the canonizing community sought to view Acts as standing in continuity with the fourfold Gospel rather than with Luke’s Gospel, and as a bridge to the letters that follow.²⁴⁴ The interpretation of Acts in the following chapters will be informed by the text’s canonical purpose and meaning as holding decisive clues for how the text should be interpreted today by the believing community. Chapter two and three will explicate the historical, theological connection of the Fourth Gospel to the opening discourses of Acts. Chapter four will seek to broaden the canonical, theological connection of Acts to the fourfold Gospel by translating the verb ἤρξατο in Luke’s preface as “*began* to do and teach.” It will be argued that the messianic mission of Jesus, the activity and teaching as prophet, priest and king inaugurated in the four Gospels (Mark 1:1,14) will continue with the apostles. What God accomplished through Christ continues to be done through the apostles he commissions and consequently through the communities that their mission founded (the letters that follow Acts).

60. Though Childs’ and Sanders’ approaches are different, what unites them is their appreciation of the canon for the task of theological interpretation.

²⁴⁴H. von Campenhausen, *The Formation of the Christian Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), 37-45, 201-203. Violating his own argument for the authority of the final form of the canon, Childs maintains that the canonical significance of Acts is not assigned by its placement with the New Testament canon. *Canon*, 239. This is a conclusion made possible only by dismissing the later stages of the canonizing process as unimportant—as the work of mere publishers and editors.



1.2.3.6 Acts as Canonical Bridge²⁴⁵

The scholarly consensus is that Luke's Gospel and Acts were written in close proximity in time and for a similar life-setting and thus share a common authorial intent and historical, theological and literary continuities.²⁴⁶ Robert Wall argues that this only "intensifies the canonical concern: why were these two halves of a single narrative divided during the canonizing process, only to follow different canonizing paths and to play different canonical roles with the Second Testament?"²⁴⁷ He proceeds to rightly observe that the separation of the Gospel and Acts was made by the church in order to differentiate their canonical functions.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁵Paul Achtemeier, acknowledging an old insight whose time has come, rightly perceives the relationship between the New Testament Gospels with that of the letters to be analogous to the relationship between the Lord and his disciples. As the disciples follow Jesus' lead, so also the letters follow the Gospels, recording the church's following of their Lord as portrayed in the Gospels. Paul J. Achtemeier, "Epilogue: The New Testament Becomes Normative," in H.C. Kee (ed.), *Understanding the New Testament* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 4th ed., 1983), 368-69.

²⁴⁶W.C. van Unnik, "The Book of Acts, the Confirmation of the Gospel," *NovT* 4 (1962): 26-59.

²⁴⁷R.W. Wall, "The Acts of the Apostles in Canonical Context," (*BTB* 18 [1988]: 16-24.) "When the Bible is read sequentially, as it should be, the strategic role of Acts within the biblical canon becomes more apparent. Not only will its many references to Israel's Scripture supply interpretative guidelines for reading the Old Testament as Christian Scripture; its placement between the four Gospels and the following two collections of Epistles implies that it has a bridge-building role in relating the gospel story of Jesus with the biblical writings of his apostolic successors." Anthony B. Robinson and Robert W. Wall, *Called to Be Church: The Book of Acts for a New Day* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 25-26.

²⁴⁸In his survey of the evidence E. Haenchen demonstrates that the Gospel of Luke had a separate history from Luke and did not find broad circulation until later. *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), 3-14. Justin Martyr, near mid-second century, is the first writer to show any knowledge of Acts (*Apol.* 2.50.12), but it was later still that any real importance was attached to Acts, possibly as a consequence of the conflicts with Marcion and gnostic groups. This apologetic motivation of the early church may be suggested by the manner in which Irenaeus appeals to Acts as proof of the unity of the apostles and their preaching. He urged that Luke and Acts belonged together, but Christian practice from the second century separated them. "The Acts of the Apostles, although composed as a companion piece to the Gospel of Luke, had a separate history from Luke and did not come into any broad currency until later. Something of the sort is suggested by the manner in which Irenaeus appeals to Acts as a proof of the



Stating the obvious, the superscriptions of the canonical texts were titled by the canonizing community and not by their authors. In his two-part work Luke did not write an 'acts' (πράξεις) but wrote a complete and full 'narrative' (διήγησις)²⁴⁹ (Luke 1:1,3), detailing what God had done through Jesus and continued to do through the missions of the apostles. Though the two descriptions of Luke's writing are compatible in general, it appears that the early church may have viewed Luke's second volume to be literarily in continuity with a fourfold Gospel rather than exclusively in relation to his first volume for theological and apologetic reasons.²⁵⁰ Early on the church included the first part of Luke's two-part work in another collection of works, bound together under the title *Gospel* (see the tables in the chapter addendum).²⁵¹ The church in effect resignified Luke's first volume as one of four renditions of a singular story that testifies to the arrival of God's salvation through God's promised Messiah. Luke's second volume, orphaned in the second

unity of the apostles and their preaching. The authority of Acts for Irenaeus rests on the belief that its author was an inseparable companion of Paul and a disciple of the other apostles. The esteem acquired by Acts at the end of the second century is confirmed by the Muratorian list (lines 34-39), Tertullian, and Clement of Alexandria." Gamble, *The New Testament Canon*, 47.

²⁴⁹I would stress the general compatibility of the two genre and that a significant factor in what motivated the early church in the separation of the two works was the apologetic importance of Acts for the church's own ongoing apostolic identity and ministry. The canonical community's titling of Luke's second work as *πραξεις* calls the hermeneutist to take a particular, aretological stance when reading Acts. Acts provides the epistolary literature and its ethical principle 'imitate the apostles' with a narrative framework suitable for finding and shaping the meaning of the ethical principle for life.

²⁵⁰"It was the achievement of these editors to put into the hands of the late second-century church a key to the interpretation of many of the most difficult problems it faced. The book of Acts tied 'Gospel' and 'Apostle' together. Against Marcion, it placed Paul within a wider apostolic fellowship. Against the claims of the Gnostics, it bound the church to the earthly ministry of Jesus, calling into question the possibility or the necessity of a secret tradition. The polemical work of Irenaeus demonstrated how effectively the publication of Acts could serve the needs of the church in the last quarter of the century." W.A. Strange, *The Problem of the Text of Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 181.

²⁵¹Arthur G. Patzia, *The Making of the New Testament: Origin, Collection, Text & Canon* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1995), 90.



century,²⁵² was later added by the church as canonical and subsequently titled ‘Acts of the Apostles.’²⁵³ Harry Gamble makes the following observation concerning the early church’s theological positioning of Acts in the New Testament canon:

But soon enough the same logic [the church’s viewing Acts as a vehicle of substantiating whether the claims of early movements or documents were apostolic and therefore orthodox] led to the placement of Acts as a frontispiece to the entire range of apostolic letters, including Paul’s, for there it gave a perspective from which all of them might be read as expressions of a unitary teaching of the primitive apostles and Paul. In its standard position within the canon, however, Acts plays another and equally important role: it provides the bridgework between Gospels and apostolic letters. By its content it is very well suited to this purpose because it explicitly correlates the teaching and authority of the apostles with Jesus himself and emphasizes their foundational importance for the church.²⁵⁴

Gamble then proceeds to argue that the purveyance of the dominant “formal features” of the canon and its subsections evidences that **the canon is a “hermeneutical construct”²⁵⁵ produced not only by the early church’s circumstances but also by theological intention.** And that intention suggests the “coherence of the several collections within themselves and with each other and so promotes the interpretation of each text with a view to other texts.”²⁵⁶ While, in my opinion, he rightly argues that the significance of each document is qualified by the larger whole and gives rise to new meanings (*sensus plenior*), I have argued that his opinion concerning the separation of Luke and Acts in the canon violates the human

²⁵²W.A. Strange, *The Problem of the Text of Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 182.

²⁵³Patzia, *op. cit.*, 90.

²⁵⁴Gamble, *The New Testament Canon*, 78f.

²⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 79.

²⁵⁶*Ibid.*



author's intention and counters his own proposal that the early church's formation of the canon is a "hermeneutical construction." I shall argue in the following two chapters that the separation is perhaps a reflection of the early church's discernment of the divine author's canonical intention. I agree, however, with his conclusion that the canon itself is a "locus of meaning."²⁵⁷ In the final stages of the church's canonizing activity the hermeneutical positioning of Acts appears to emphasize its bridge relationship to the fourfold Gospel as well as to the collection of canonical letters.²⁵⁸ Thus, the canonizing community appears to have sought to expand or extend the theological and narrative continuity envisioned originally by Luke for his two-part work.²⁵⁹ Rather than violate Luke's intention, this would appear to be in keeping with the spirit of his intention as expressed in the preface of Acts and to reflect the broader, encompassing intention of the author of the entire canon.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁷Ibid.

²⁵⁸"The usual position of Acts in the early canon lists was before or after the non-Pauline corpus. This perhaps reflected the early church's desire to insure the acceptance of non-Pauline apostolicity and works within an essentially Pauline church. In the later stages of the canonizing process the church attached the non-Pauline corpus along with Acts to the Pauline corpus assigning a strategic canonical central role to Acts in authorizing both Paul and the Jewish apostolate. The continuities narrated in Acts between Paul's Gentile mission and the Jewish mission of James, Cephas and John insured not only the authority of their shared apostolic witness, but also the essential unity of the church universal." J. Moffatt, *An Introduction to the Literature of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 3rd ed., 1918), 13. See the charts in the appendix to the present chapter.

²⁵⁹H. von Campenhausen, *The Formation of the Christian Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), 37-45, 201-203.

²⁶⁰ Speaking for many postmodern biblical scholars Walter Brueggemann counters such an understanding of the function of the canon and of hermeneutics when he urges that the proper subject of biblical studies "is the specific text, without any necessary relation to other texts or any coherent pattern read out of or into the text." *The Bible and Postmodern Imagination: Texts Under Negotiation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1993), 58. This approach is congenial to postmoderns because it focuses on 'little' stories rather than the 'great story' or metanarrative.



Addendum

Table C.1 Three Early New Testament Lists Based on Eusebius²⁶¹

<i>Irenaeus</i>	<i>Clement of Alexandria</i>	<i>Origen</i>
Matt	Jude	Matt
Mark	<i>Barn.</i>	Mark
Luke	<i>Apoc. Pet.</i>	Luke
John	Heb	John
Rev	Acts	1 Pet
1 John	Paul (nothing listed)	2 Pet (?)
1 Pet		Rev
<i>Herm.</i>	<i>Gospels:</i>	1 John
Wis	Matt	2-3 John (?)
Paul (mentioned but epistles not listed)	Luke	Heb
	Mark	Paul (mentioned but epistles not listed)
	John	

²⁶¹The following tables are listed in “Appendix C” in *The Biblical Canon: Its Origin, Transmission, and Authority* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 2007), 445-451.



Table C-2 New Testament Lists from the Fourth Century

Eusebius²⁶²	Cyril of Jerusalem²⁶³	Athanasius²⁶⁴	Cheltenham²⁶⁵
Recognized:	Gospels (4)	Gospels:	Gospels:
Gospels (4)	Acts	Matt	Matt
Acts		Mark	Mark
Paul's epistles (14)	<i>Catholic Epistles (7)</i>	Luke	Luke
1 John	Jas	John	John
1 Pet	1-2 Pet		
Rev (?)	1-3 John	Acts	Paul's epistles (13)
	Jude (?)		Acts
Doubtful:		Catholic Epistles:	Rev
Jas	Paul's epistles (14)	Jas	1-3 John
Jude		1-2 Pet	1-2 Pet
2 Pet	<i>Pseudepigrapha</i>	1-3 John	(no Heb)
2, 3 John	Gos. Thom.	Jude	
Rejected:		Paul's Epistles (14)	
Acts Paul		Rom	
Herm.		1-2 Cor	
Apoc. Pet.		Gal	
Barn.		Eph	
Did.		Phil	
Rev (?)		Col	
Gos. Heb. (?)		1-2 Thess	
		Heb	
Cited by Heretics:		1-2 Tim	
Gos. Pet		Titus	
Gos. Thom.		Phlm	
Gos. Matt.			
Acts Andr		Rev	
Acts John		Catechetical:	
		<i>Did.</i>	
		<i>Herm.</i>	

²⁶²Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.25.1-7 (ca. 320-330, Caesarea, Palestine).

²⁶³Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 4.33 (ca. 35, Jerusalem).

²⁶⁴Athanasius, *Ep. Fest.* 39 (ca. 367, Alexandria, Egypt).

²⁶⁵The Cheltenham Canon is also known as the Mommsen Catalogue (ca. 360-370, Northern Africa).



(Table C-2, continued)

<i>Epiphanius</i> ²⁶⁶	<i>Apostolic Canons</i> ²⁶⁷	<i>Gregory of Nazian.</i> ²⁶⁸	<i>African Canons</i> ²⁶⁹	<i>Jerome</i> ²⁷⁰
Gospels (4)	Gospels (4)	Matt	Gospels (4)	" <i>Lord's Four</i> ":
Paul's epistles (13)	Matt	Mark	Acts	Matt
Acts	Mark	Luke	Paul's epistles (13)	Mark
	Luke	John	Heb	Luke
Catholic Epistles:	John	Acts	1-2 Pet	John
Jas		Paul's epistles (14)	1-3 John	
Pet	Paul's epistles (14) ²⁷¹		Jas	Paul's epistles (14)
1-3 John	Peter's epistles (2)	Catholic Epistles:	Jude	Rom
Jude	1-3 John	Jas	Rev	1-2 Cor
	Jas	1-2 Pet		Gal
Rev	Jude	1-3 John	<i>OK to Read:</i>	Eph
Wis	<i>1-2 Clem.</i>	Jude	Acts of martyrs	Phil
Sir	Acts			1-2 Thess
				Col
				1-2 Tim
				Titus
				Phlm
				Heb
				1-2 Pet
				1-3 John
				Jude
				Jas
				Acts
				Rev

²⁶⁶Epiphanius, *Pan.* 76.5 (ca. 374-377, Salamis, Western Syria).

²⁶⁷*Apostolic Canons* 85 in *Apostolic Canons and Constitutions* 8.47 (ca. 380, Western Syria)

²⁶⁸Gregory of Naianzus. *Carm.* 12.31 (ca. 390, Cappadocia, Asia Minor) and later ratified by the Trullan Synod in 692.

²⁶⁹African Canons (ca. 393-419, Northern Africa).

²⁷⁰Jerome, *Epistle* 53, (ca. 394 Bethlehem, Palestine).

²⁷¹The number 14 indicates that Hebrews was included as one of Paul's letters.



(Table C-2, continued)

<i>Augustine</i> ²⁷²	<i>Amphilochius</i> ²⁷³	<i>Rufinus</i> ²⁷⁴	<i>Innocent</i> ²⁷⁵	<i>Syrian Catalog</i> ²⁷⁶
Gospels (4)	Gospels (4)	Matt	Gospels (4)	"Lord's Four":
Paul's epistles (13)	Matt	Mark	Acts	Matt
Acts	Mark	Luke	Paul's epistles (13) ²⁷⁷	Mark
	Luke	John	Heb	Luke
Catholic Epistles:	John	Acts	1-2 Pet	John
Jas		Paul's epistles (14)	1-3 John	
Pet	Paul's epistles (14) ²⁷⁸		Jas	Paul's epistles(14)
1-3 John	Peter's epistles (2)	Catholic Epistles:	Jude	Rom
Jude	1-3 John	Jas	Rev	1-2 Cor
	Jas	1-2 Pet		Gal
Rev	Jude	1-3 John	<i>OK to Read:</i>	Eph
Wis	<i>1-2 Clem.</i>	Jude	Acts of martyrs	Phil
Sir	Acts			1-2 Thess
				Col
				1-2 Tim
				Titus
				Phlm
				Heb
				1-2 Pet
				1-3 John
				Jude
				Jas
				Acts
				Rev

²⁷²Augustine, *Christian Instruction* 2.8-9.12-14 (ca. 395-400, Hippo Regius, North Africa).

²⁷³Amphilochius, *lambi ad Seleucum*, 289-319 (ca. 396, Iconium, Asia Minor). The list concludes by acknowledging that some have questions about 2 Pet, 2-3 John, Heb, Jude and Rev.

²⁷⁴Rufinus, *Commentarius in symbolum apostolorum* 36 (ca. 394, Rome, Italy).

²⁷⁵Pope Innocent I, *Ad Exsuperius Toulouse* 2.1-2 (ca. 405, Rome, Italy).

²⁷⁶Syrian catalogue of St. Catherine's (ca. 400, Eastern Syria).

²⁷⁷Some add Hebrews to this and make it 14. It is uncertain.

²⁷⁸The number 14 indicates that Hebrews was included as one of Paul's letters.



(Table C-2, continued)

<i>Augustine</i> ²⁷⁹	<i>Amphilochius</i> ²⁸⁰	<i>Rufinus</i> ²⁸¹	<i>Innocent</i> ²⁸²	<i>Syrian Catalog</i> ²⁸³
Gospels (4)	Gospels (4)	Gospels (4)	Gospels (4)	Gospels (4)
Matt	Matt	Matt	Paul's epistles (13) ²⁸⁴	Matt
Mark	Mark	Mark	1-3 John	Mark
Luke	Luke	Luke	1-2 Pet	Luke
John	John	John	Jude	John
			Jas	
Paul's epistles (14)	Acts	Acts	Acts	Acts
Rom		Paul's epistles (14)	Rev	Gal
1-2 Cor	Paul's epistles (14)	1-2 Pet		Rom
Gal	Rom	Jas	<i>Repudiated:</i>	Heb
Eph	1-2 Cor	Jude	Matthias/	Col
Phil	Gal	1,2,3 John	James the less	Eph
1-2 Thess	Eph	Rev	Peter + John =	Phil
Col.	Phil		Leucian	1-2 Thess
1-2 Tim	Col	<i>Ecclesiastical:</i>	(Andrew =	1-2 Tim
Titus	1-2 Thess	<i>Herm.</i>	Xenocharides	Titus
Phlm	1-2 Tim	<i>Two Ways</i>	& Leonida)	Phlm
Heb	Titus	<i>Pre. Pet.</i>	<i>Gos. Thom.</i>	
1-2 Pet	Phlm			
1-3 John	Heb (?)			
Jude				
Jas	<i>Catholic Epistles (7)</i>			
Acts	Jas			
Rev	Pet			
	John			
	Jude (?)			
	Rev (?)			

²⁷⁹Augustine, *Christian Instruction* 2.8-9.12-14 (ca. 395-400, Hippo Regius, North Africa).

²⁸⁰Amphilochius, *Iambi ad Seleucum*, 289-319 (ca. 396, Iconium, Asia Minor). The list concludes by acknowledging that some have questions about 2 Pet, 2-3 John, Heb, Jude and Rev.

²⁸¹Rufinus, *Commentarius in symbolum apostolorum* 36 (ca. 394, Rome, Italy).

²⁸²Pope Innocent I, *Ad Exsuperius Toulouse* 2.1-2 (ca. 405, Rome, Italy).

²⁸³Syrian catalogue of St. Catherine's (ca. 400, Eastern Syria).

²⁸⁴Some add Hebrews to this and make it 14. It is uncertain.



Table C-2, continued

<i>Muratorian Fragment</i> ²⁸⁵	<i>Laodicea Synod</i> ²⁸⁶	<i>Carthage Synod</i> ²⁸⁷
Gospels:	<i>Gospels (4):</i>	<i>Gospels (4):</i>
...	Matt	Acts
...	Mark	Paul (13)
Luke ("third book")	Luke	Heb
John ("fourth book")	John	1-2 Pet
		1-3 John
John's epistles	Acts	Jas
Acts		Jude
	<i>Catholic Epistles (7)</i>	Rev (later added)
Paul's Epistles to Churches	Jas	
Cor	1-2 Pet	
Eph	1,2,3 John	
Phil	Jude	
Col		
Gal	<i>Paul's Epistles (14)</i>	
Thess	Rom	
Rom	1-2 Cor	
	Gal	
Epistles to Individuals:	Eph	
Phlm	Phil	
Titus	Col	
1-2 Tim	1-2 Thess	
	Heb	
Jude	1-2 Tim	
1, 2 or 3 Jn (2 Eps.)	Titus	
Wis	Phil	
Rev		
Apoc. Pet	(Rev missing)	

²⁸⁵The Muratorian Fragment. While many scholars contend that this was a late second-century C.E. fragment originating in or around Rome, a growing number hold that it was produced around the middle of the fourth century (ca. 350-375) and that it originated somewhere in the eastern part of the Roman Empire, possibly in Syria.

²⁸⁶Synod of Laodicea, Canon 60 (ca. 363, Asia Minor).

²⁸⁷Synod of Carthage, Canon 39 (397, North Africa). Revelation was added later in 419 at the subsequent synod at Carthage. *Forged (rejected): Ep. Lao.; Ep. Alex.; Others (?rejected): Herm.; Works of Arsinous; Valentinus; Miltiades; Basilides.*



Table C-3 New Testament Lists from the Fifth and Sixth Centuries

<i>Eucherius</i> ²⁸⁸	<i>Gelasius</i> ²⁸⁹	<i>Junilius</i> ²⁹⁰	<i>Cassiodorus</i> ²⁹¹	<i>Isidore</i> ²⁹²
Matt	<i>Gospels:</i>	<i>Gospels:</i>	<i>Gospels:</i>	<i>Gospels:</i>
Mark	Matt	Matt	Matt	Matt
Luke	Mark	Mark	Mark	Mark
John	Luke	Luke	Luke	Luke
Rom	John	John	John	John
1 Cor				
2 Cor	Acts	Acts	Acts	Paul's epistles (14)
(Gal missing)		Rev	1 Pet	Rom
Eph	Paul's epistles (14)		Jas	1-2 Cor
1 Thess	Rom	Paul's epistles (14)	1 John	Gal
(2 Thess missing)	1-2 Cor	Rom		Eph
Col	Eph	1-2 Cor	<i>Paul's Epistles (13)</i>	Phil
1 Tim	1-2 Thess	Gal	Rom	1-2 Thess
2 Tim	Gal	Eph	1 Cor	Col
(Titus missing)	Phil	Phil	2 Cor	1-2 Tim
(Phil missing)	Col	1-2 Thess	Gal	
Heb	1-2Tim	Col	Phil	Heb
Acts	Titus	1-2 Tim	Col	Titus
Jas	Phlm	Titus	Eph	Phlm
1 John	Heb	Phlm	1-2 Thess	Heb
(2-3 John missing)		Heb	1-2 Tim	
(Jude missing)	Rev		Titus	1-3 John
Rev	1-2 Pet	Jas	Phlm	1-2 Pet
	1 John	1-2 Peter	Rev	Jude
	2-3 John	Jude		Jas
	Jude	1-2 John	<i>Omitted:</i>	Acts
			(2 Pet)	Rev
			(2-3 John)	
			(Jude)	
			(Heb)	

²⁸⁸Eucherius, *Instructines* (ca. 424-55, Lyons)

²⁸⁹*Decretum gelasianum de libris recipiendis et non recipiendis* (ca. sixth cent.).

²⁹⁰Junilius, *Instituta regularia divinae legis*, book I (ca. 551, North Africa).

²⁹¹Cassiodorus, *Institutiones divinarum et saecularium litterarum* (ca. 551-562, Rome).

²⁹²Isidore, bishop of Seville, *In libros Veteris ac novi Testamenti prooemia* (ca. 600).



Table C-4 New Testament Lists from Biblical Manuscripts of the Fourth and Fifth Centuries

<i>Vaticans (B)</i>	<i>Sinaiticu (S)</i>	<i>Peshitta (Syr^P)</i>	<i>Alexandrinus (A)</i>	<i>Claromantanus (D)</i>
Matt	Matt	Matt	Matt	Matt
Mark	Mark	Mark	Mark	John
Luke	Luke	Luke	Luke	Mark
John	John	John	John	Luke
Acts	Rom	Acts	Acts	Rom
Jas	1 Cor	Jas	Jas	1-2 Cor
1 Pet	2 Cor	1 Pet	1 Pet	Gal
2 Pet	Gal	1 John	2Pet	Eph
1 John	Eph	Rom	1 John	1-2 Tim
2 John	Phil	1 Cor	2 John	Titus
3 John	Col	2 Cor	3 John	Col
Jude	1 Thess	Gal	Jude	Phlm
Rom	2 Thess	Eph	Rom	1-2 Pet
1 Cor	Heb	Phil	1 Cor	Jas
2 Cor	1 Tim	Col	2 Cor	1-3 John
Gal	2 Tim	1 Thess	Gal	Jude
Eph	Titus	1 Thess	Eph	<i>Barn.</i>
Phil	Phlm	Heb	Phil	Rev
Col	Acts	1 Tim	Col	Acts
1 Thess	Jas	2 Tim	1 Thess	
2 Thess	1 Pet	Titus	2 Thess	<i>Others:</i>
Heb	2 Pet	Phlm	Heb	<i>Herm.</i>
	1 John	Heb	1 Tim	<i>Acts Paul</i>
<i>Omitted:</i>	2 John		2 Tim	<i>Apoc. Pet.</i>
(1 Tim)	3 John		Titus	
(2 Tim)	Jude		Phlm	<i>Omitted:</i>
(Titus)	Rev		Rev	(Phil)
(Phlm)	<i>Barn.</i>		<i>1 Clem.</i>	(1-2 Thess)
(Rev)	<i>Herm.</i>		<i>2 Clem.</i>	(Heb)
	...		<i>Pss. Sol.</i>	