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18. Reading the New Testament in Canonical Context

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1. Current Interest in the Canon

The dramatic rise of scholarly interest in the canon of the NT in recent years has two focal points, historical and hermeneutical. Historians of the biblical canon are primarily interested in its formation in early Christianity, whether as a theological notion or as a literary collection. Although the questions addressed often imply substantial theological problems, which are sometimes recognized and considered, most of these studies specialize in the historical features of the Bible's formation or the ideology that guided the canonizing process. Thus, for example, the relationship between a book's authorship and its canonization, while theologically interesting, is typically discussed in terms of how attribution of authorship influenced the reception of a particular book both within the earliest church and then into the biblical canon.

Some interpreters of the biblical canon are especially interested in the *idea* of a biblical canon, which then provides the conceptual basis for various interpretive strategies that are typically articulated under the rubric "canonical criticism." Not only are practitioners of canonical criticism joined by a common orientation toward Scripture that provides a touchstone for their interpretation, but they also share a common criticism of the historical-critical enterprise, though to different degrees and with different concerns. Generally, however, it is felt that the methodological interests of historical criticism demote the church's more theological intentions for the Christian Bible. Thus, historical-critical analysis is primarily con-

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cerned with the circumstances that shaped particular biblical writings at their diverse points of origin, rather than with those circumstances that subsequently shaped these same writings into a biblical canon or with the canonical hermeneutics that enable and empower the rendering of biblical writings as the word of God for today.

Actually the idea of a biblical canon includes two integral ingredients: The Christian Bible is both a canonical collection of writings and a collection of canonical writings. In the first case, emphasis is placed on the Bible's final literary form (*norma normata*), and in the second case, emphasis is placed on its ongoing religious function (*norma normans*).¹ The methodological interests of canonical criticism follow the lines of these two emphases, introduced by the work of two OT scholars, Brevard S. Childs and James A. Sanders. Their disagreements over hermeneutical essentials have charted the territory of canonical criticism for the guild of biblical scholars.

In brief, the "canonical approach" of Childs posits hermeneutical value in the Bible's final literary form (*norma normata*), which supplies the normative written witness to Jesus Christ.² The Bible's role as Christianity's "rule of faith" presumes its trustworthy (or "apostolic") witness to him whose incarnation ultimately "norms" the community's "rule of faith." Only in this christological sense can one say that Scripture supplies both the subject matter for the church's theological reflection as well as the theological boundaries or context within which Christian theology and ethics take shape. An interpretive emphasis on the Bible as a specific and limited body of sacred writings not only values its subject matter for theological reflection and confession, but also envisages the very ordering of the Bible's subunits as the privileged, permanent expression of an intentioned, dynamic interaction between the faithful and their written rule of faith.

The canonical approach to biblical interpretation is less interested in lining up behind the reconstructed historical or linguistic intentions of a precanonical stage in the formation of a particular composition or collection. The "synchronic" interest of Childs is rather posited in a subsequent period during which the Christian Scriptures took their final literary shape

1. Cf. James A. Sanders, "The Integrity of Biblical Pluralism," in *Not in Heaven: Coherence and Complexity in Biblical Narrative*, ed. Jason P. Rosenblatt and Joseph C. Sitterson, Jr. (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1991) 154-57, here 154-69.

2. Without question Childs's most influential work is his *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979); in my opinion, he has not advanced his discussion of the "canonical approach" since its publication. See, however, Gerald Sheppard's fine essay on "Canonical Criticism," *ABD* 1:861-66.

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and at the same time stabilized certain theological convictions as true in a more universal or catholic sense.³

No one is entirely clear why these various writings and collections, so different in theological conception and sociological origination and so fluid during their early history, eventually stabilized into the Christian Bible. Certainly, one probable reason is aesthetic: Over time, different communions of believers came to recognize one particular arrangement of books as more useful for a variety of religious services, even as the number of alternative arrangements (or "canon lists") eventually was narrowed by

3. I recognize the contested nature of what "synchronic" interpretation intends to accomplish in biblical and literary analysis; see Mark G. Brett, *Biblical Criticism in Crisis: The Impact of the Canonical Approach on Old Testament Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1991) 104-15.

Further, there are multiple definitions of the "canonical process" in the field of canonical criticism. For Childs, the idea of a canonical process is vaguely historical and refers to the final stage in the formation of the biblical canon when the believing community "recognized" its "rule of faith" in the shape and content of a discrete form (i.e., the "final form") of its Scripture. I agree with Childs that this recognition of a biblical canon took place in history and resulted in the "fixing" of a particular shape of biblical literature. But this final stage in the formation of a discrete Scripture was largely guided by impressions of its truthfulness or intuitions of its ongoing religious utility rather than the outcome of some positivistic or rational judgment. Nor did some final redactor (or God, according to fundamentalists) wave an "editorial wand over all the disparate literature," to use Sanders's phrase, to create the church's Bible. In fact, the primacy Childs grants to the final stage of the canonical process is really an appeal to a useful metaphor for the primacy he grants to the final form of the canon.

Although Brett successfully provides Childs with the necessary epistemology to anchor his methodological interests, Sanders's notion of canonical process complements Childs's approach in a different way. Sanders's point is to describe the hermeneutics of the canonical process by which we understand more adequately *how and why* Jewish ("prophetic") and Christian ("apostolic") writings were preserved, collected, and canonized into biblical form. First, the canonizing process was a "monotheizing process" by which biblical writings became the "Word of God" brought near to God's people in relevant response to their ever-changing needs; cf. Sanders's superb summary of his account of canonical criticism in "Integrity of Biblical Pluralism." Second, however, biblical writings became God's Word by the act of biblical (i.e., rabbinic or midrashic) interpretation so that "what got picked up and read again and again, and was recommended to the children and to other communities nearby, and continued to give value and to give life, was what made it into the canon" (Sanders, "Integrity of Biblical Pluralism," 168). For Sanders, the biblical canon "norms" the community's hermeneutics, by which biblical texts are resignified into theologically relevant teachings, which help to form the community's particular identity amid the ambiguities and vicissitudes of human life and history.

disuse. In other words, a specific form of biblical literature triumphed because it facilitates or better serves its intended role within the faith community.⁴ Thus, according to Childs, the final shape of the Christian Scriptures best combines and relates its subject matter to serve the church as the literary location where theological understanding is well founded and soundly framed.

The "canonical criticism" of Sanders posits value in the act of interpretation that enables the Bible to function canonically in shaping the theology and guiding the praxis of the church (*norma normans*). The methodological interests of Sanders are more intuitive than those of Childs, emphasizing rather the interpretive calculus found at the composition's point of origin, during the canonical process, and throughout the history of interpreting the biblical canon. For Sanders, "canonical process" is not concentrated by a specific historical moment or literary product as it is for Childs; hermeneutics is not synchronic in this sense. Rather, the canonical approach of Sanders is more "diachronic" and involves the entire history of the Bible's interpretation, whenever the faith community draws on its Scriptures to "norm" its faith and life. Beginning even before biblical texts were written and continuing today, faithful interpreters contemporize the meaning of their Scriptures so that the faith community might better understand what it means to be and do what God's people ought to be and do.

For Sanders, canonical function antedates and explains canonical form even as final form facilitates those functions that the faith community intended for its canon. In my view, Childs has offered no compelling response to the objection that his interest in the Bible's final literary form is too parochial, elevating the final form of the Protestant Bible over the various other biblical canons within the Christian church. On the other hand, by shifting his attention from the Bible as *norma normata* to the Bible as *norma normans*, from its literary form to its ecclesial function, Sanders relativizes the hermeneutical importance of the Bible's final form. Since for him canonical function takes precedence over canonical form, the literary shape (or translation!) of a particular community's Bible is subsumed under the interpreter's more important vocation of adapting Scripture's meaning to the community's ever-changing life situation.

Canonical criticism, then, concentrates on how a biblical text becomes

4. This point draws upon Hans-Georg Gadamer's idea of "classical" literature; cf. *Truth and Method* (2d ed., New York: Crossroad, 1989) esp. 285-90.

canonical in the act of interpretation, when different interpreters pick up the same text again and again to “comfort the afflicted or afflict the comfortable.” In the hands of faithful interpreters, past and present, Scripture acquires multiple meanings. Of course the aim of relating the canon to the faith community is to form a people who worship and bear witness to the one true God.⁵ Thus, the Christian Bible is more than a canonical collection of sacred writings, shaped by religious intentions and insights into a discrete literary anthology that itself envisions patterns of hermeneutical engagement. The Bible is canonical primarily in a functional sense, with an authorized role to norm all the various norms for worship and witness of those who belong to the “one holy, catholic, and apostolic church.” Under the light of this perspective toward the Bible, interpreters are led to ask additional questions about the meaning of every biblical text that attend first of all to the *theological shape* of the church’s faith (in both confession and conflict) rather than to the literary shape of its biblical canon.⁶

In this sense Sanders reminds Childs that the history of the Bible’s formation did more than settle on the shape of a canonical collection of sacred writings to delimit the church’s “official” theology and ethics; it also evinced a species of hermeneutics that contemporizes the theological quotient of biblical teaching to give it an authoritative voice for today’s community, whose worship and witness is again undermined by similar theological crises. What got picked up again and again and reread over and over were those same writings that could interpret the present crisis of faith and resolve it in a way that maintained faith and empowered life.

In fact, biblical writings were first preserved because they were sufficiently ambiguous in intent for different interpreters to mediate truth to their different audiences. At the same time, other writings were filtered out as being too narrow in sociological context or semantic intent to have a life beyond their first readers. According to Sanders, the elevation of a scriptural writing to canonical status required an inherent capacity to be reinterpreted

5. See James A. Sanders, *Canon and Community* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984).

6. While Sanders contends that the biblical canon is characterized by its textual “stability” and contextual “adaptability,” his principal methodological interest has always been the Bible’s adaptability (even as Childs’s methodological interest has always been the Bible’s stability). For Sanders, the fluidity of the biblical canon is a matter of the historical record; yet, it is also the constant experience of faithful interpreters, whose task it is to find new meanings in the same biblical texts for their new situations. It is this *experience* of interpretation that justifies this interest in Scripture’s ability to adapt itself to new hearers and readers.

over and again in spiritually profitable ways by different interpreters for different situations. This sort of unrecorded hermeneutics envisages the same canonical function found in the Bible’s final literary form: The Bible is formed to inform the community’s understanding of God.

My own work has sought to combine and extend these insights of Sanders and Childs.⁷ In doing so, I recognize the contested nature of canonical criticism within the guild of biblical scholarship. Nevertheless, the present chapter does not seek to defend the methodological interests of canonical criticism against its main competitors. Nor does it intend to provide critics with the proper epistemological credentials to lend support to my exegetical conclusions. This important work has already been undertaken by others, so that the methodological interests of canonical criticism can now be more fully exploited for fresh insight into the meaning of Scripture for today.⁸

2. The Methodological Interests of Canonical Criticism

2.1 *Biblical Exegesis*

Theological reflection on the Bible integrates two discrete tasks: biblical exegesis and theological interpretation. The foundational task of the hermeneutical enterprise is exegetical and is aimed at a coherent exposition of Scripture’s “plain meaning.” “Plain meaning” here is metaphorical and indicates that my primary interest is in the final form of the biblical canon rather than in the literary or sociological environs at its point of origin, its author, or any of its subtexts or pre-texts, however important these con-

7. See Robert W. Wall and Eugene E. Lemcio, *The New Testament as Canon: A Reader in Canonical Criticism*, JSNTSS 76 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1992).

8. See especially Brett, *Biblical Criticism in Crisis*. Brett’s work requires supplementation in two ways: (1) to distinguish between a canonical approach specifically to NT studies, where some of the methodological problems Brett raises and responds to are not quite as important as with the OT (e.g., the duration of the canonical process) but other problems are important (e.g., the relationship between the two testaments); and (2) to show more carefully and critically how the “canonical approach” of Childs is different from and is complemented by the “canonical criticism” of Sanders. This latter point has been recently taken up in a helpful essay by Mikeal C. Parsons, “Canonical Criticism,” in *New Testament Criticism and Interpretation*, ed. David A. Black and David S. Dockery (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991) 253-94.

structions might be to achieve a holistic meaning.⁹ Neither do I view the exegetical task as interested in privileging one particular meaning as “canonical” for all believers for all time.¹⁰

Moreover, I view the exegetical task as collaborative, as the shared task of a community of interpreters, whose different interests in the biblical text expose its multiple contours in pursuit of a “thickened” or holistic description of meaning. However, a methodological interest in the plain meaning of a particular text is constricted by compositional and canonical contexts within which specific texts acquire their distinctive literary and theological meaning. Plain meaning exegesis aspires to a “standard” meaning, since texts do not gather together an inclusive community of infinite meanings. Common sense and critical attention to words and patterns of words point the exegete to specific meanings. Exegetical strategies are prioritized, then, that are concerned with the meaning and arrangement of words and pericopes as well as the theological content that they convey.

Of course, Scripture has a profoundly intertextual texture, which is exploited in canonical criticism. The careful interpreter is naturally sensitive

9. My use of the controversial term “plain meaning” is neither naive nor courageous. It seeks rather to exploit two discussions, one medieval and another modern, the first Jewish and the second Christian. Scripture commentaries by the medieval rabbinate typically distinguished between *peshat* (“straightforward”) and *derash* (“investigative”) as two integral exegetical modes. If the aim of hermeneutical inquiry is *peshat*, the interpreter is concerned with a closely reasoned description of what the text actually says. In this first mode, the interpreter responds to the hermeneutical crisis of the text’s incomprehensibility within a congregation of believers for whom that text is canonical. If the aim is *derash*, the interpreter is concerned with an imaginative interpretation of what the text means for its current audience. This second task, while rooted in the first, responds to a different and more important hermeneutical crisis, which is the perception of the text’s theological irrelevance for its current readers. If the biblical canon intends to facilitate theological reflection, then the ultimate aim of exegesis is not *peshat* but *derash*.

My second source is the work of Raymond E. Brown, who reintroduced the idea of Scripture’s *sensus plenior* into the scholarly debate over biblical hermeneutics (“The History and Development of the Theory of a *Sensus Plenior*,” *CBQ* 15 [1953] 141-62; *The Sensus Plenior of Sacred Scripture* [New York: Paulist, 1960]). According to Brown’s more modern (and positive) definition, the *sensus plenior* or “plenary sense” of a biblical text agrees with the theological aspect of the entire biblical canon. My use of “plain meaning” includes this sense, so that the single meaning of any text bears witness to the Bible’s witness to God.

10. I attempted to introduce this point in “The Relevance of the Book of Revelation for the Wesleyan Tradition,” presented to the annual meeting of the Wesleyan Theological Society, Oklahoma City, November, 1993.

to the citations, allusions, and even echoes of other “subtexts” heard when reading a biblical text. And the canonical critic is inclined to value these, especially biblical, subtexts hermeneutically because they provide an implied yet normative context for the writer’s own theological reflection on the events being narrated or the spiritual crisis being resolved. There is a sense in which NT writers are viewed as interpreters of their Scripture and their compositions as commentaries on Scripture. More importantly, this exegetical sensitivity to the author’s intended meaning, in turn, enhances the exegete’s understanding of the text’s plain meaning.¹¹

The scholar’s search for the plain meaning of a biblical text or tradition does not mark a return to a fundamentalistic literalism that denies both the historical process that formed the Christian Scriptures and the theological diversity found in them. Rather, a concern for plain meaning guards against hermeneutical supersession. Thus, the community at work on biblical texts pursues meaning with ideological blinders on, without immediate regard for the integral wholeness of Scripture, but critical exegesis seeks to restore to full volume the voice of every biblical writer so that the whole meaning of Scripture can then be vocalized as a chorus of its various parts. To presume the simultaneity of every part of the whole without also adequately discerning the plain meaning of each in turn undermines the integral nature of Scripture and even distorts its full witness to God. Finally, however, the aim of critical exegesis, which has successfully exposed the pluriformity of Scripture, is “to put the text back together in a way that makes it available in the present and in its (biblical) entirety — not merely in the past and in the form of historically contextualized fragments.”¹² In this sense, then, the plain meaning of individual writings or biblical traditions, although foundational for scriptural interpretation, has value only in relationship to a more holistic end.¹³

Even though the search for the plain meaning of Scripture concerns itself with stable texts and standard meanings, the exegetical history of every biblical text is actually quite fluid. This limitation is deepened by recognition of the inherent multivalence and intertextuality of texts. Further

11. In canonical criticism this exegetical sensitivity takes on a theological cast in speculation on the relationship between the two testaments of the Christian Bible: The NT is a midrash on the OT because it bears witness that the salvation promised in the first is fulfilled by the Jesus of the second.

12. Jon D. Levenson, *The Hebrew Bible, The Old Testament, and Historical Criticism* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993) 79.

13. So esp. Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of Old and New Testaments* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) 719-27.

changes in the text's "plain meaning" result from new evidence and different exegetical strategies and from interpreters shaped by diverse social and theological locations. In fact, the sort of neutrality toward biblical texts that critical exegesis envisages actually requires that such changes be made. Our experience with texts tells us that the ideal of a "standard" meaning cannot be absolutized, whether as the assured conclusion of the scholarly guild or as some meaning ordained by (and known only to) God. Thus, the fluid nature of exegesis resists the old dichotomies between past and present meanings and between authorial and textual intentions.

As a practical discipline, plain meaning exegesis clarifies the subject matter of Scripture, which supplies the conceptual freight of those theological norms and ethical principles that form Christian faith. Simply put, the straightforward meanings of the variety of biblical writings, considered holistically, help to delimit the range and determine the substance of the church's current understanding of what it means to believe and behave as it must. Yet, whenever biblical theology is still attempted, it remains (with a few notable exceptions) exclusively an exegetical enterprise, as though a careful description of the Bible's theology is sufficient to perform its canonical roles. It is in response to this misconception that I claim exegesis is the means but not the end of the hermeneutical enterprise: The plain meaning of Scripture must come to have contemporary meaning for its current readers before it can function as their Scripture.

2.2 Theological Interpretation

The interpreter's second task is *interpretation*, which in my definition aims to give the subject matter of Scripture its canonical significance for today. That is, if exegesis locates canonical authority in biblical texts, then interpretation relocates religious authority in the social contexts of the faith community where the Word of God is ultimately heard and embodied. Biblical interpretation, as I understand it, is fully contextual and aims at an imaginative (i.e., analogical) reflection on the subject matter of biblical teaching. The purpose of such reflection is to "recanonicalize" biblical teaching so that the faith community might know who it is as God's people and how it is to act as God's people within a new situation. While critical exegesis aims to restrict the plain meaning of a biblical text to a single standard (at least in theory), the interpretive task seeks an application of that meaning for a people whose faith and life are in constant flux. Of course, the problem to which the act of interpretation responds is the recognition that biblical

writings are all occasional literature, written by particular authors for particular audiences in response to crises of a particular time and place. No biblical writing was composed for the biblical canon or for the universal readership it now enjoys.

In fact, the interpretive presupposition is that current readers will not draw out the very same meaning from a composition that might have been intended by its author or understood by its first readers. Times and places change the significance of texts for new readerships. Rather than decanonizing certain Scripture as "irrelevant" or imposing a biblical worldview on a contemporary readership, an interpretive strategy must be engaged that seeks to relate the whole witness of the biblical canon and the whole life of the faith community in fresh and meaningful ways.

In this sense, the crisis of biblical authority concerns the propriety of prior interpretations of Scripture — including those of the biblical writers — for a "new" situation. This is ultimately a theological crisis, since the subject matter of biblical revelation fails to convey God's Word to a particular people with clarity and conviction, either because they cannot understand what Scripture says or because they cannot understand its immediate relevance for life and faith.¹⁴ In this case, then, imagination is required by the interpreter to exploit more easily the inherent polyvalency of biblical teaching in order to find new meanings for new worlds.

Thus the interpreter assumes that the agreed plain meaning of a biblical text embodies a community of analogical meanings, while at the same time recognizing that not all of these meanings hold equal significance either for a particular interpreter or for the interpreter's faith community. The interpreter's interpretations of Scripture seek to clarify and contemporize the Bible's subject matter for those who struggle to remain faithful at a particular moment in time and place. In this regard, then, the act of interpretation imagines an analogue from a range of possible meanings that renders the text's subject matter meaningfully for a people who desire to remain faithful to God in an inhospitable world.

2.3 The Role of the Interpreter

All of what has been said to this point about the exegetical and interpretive tasks implies something about the interpreter's "authority." Perhaps because

14. For this point, see Michael Fishbane, *The Garments of Torah* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1989) 16-18.

its pioneers are located theologically in Reformed Protestantism, canonical criticism has always emphasized the authority of the Christian Bible. However, whether an interpretation satisfies the church's intentions for its Bible depends to a significant degree on the interpreter's "individual talent." The talented interpreter has the capacity to make coherent and contemporary meaning of diverse biblical traditions, each individually and together within the whole, and then to relate the canon to the faith community in ways that facilitate the hearing of God's word.

To be sure, the interpreter's talent to facilitate a meaningful conversation between canon and community is determined in part by one's vocation, whether "prophetic" or "priestly." On this basis, creative and compelling interpretations of biblical texts are made that relate the plain meaning of the biblical text to the current social context in ways that actually produce theological understanding (and so a more vital faith in God) and moral clarity (and so more faithful obedience to God's Word). In this sense, the talented interpreter renders Scripture in ways that empower the community's worship of God and witness to God in the world. Thus, the interpreter imagines what "analogical meaning" can be made of the text's "plain meaning" for the community's formation as God's people, whether to "correct and rebuke" a distorted faith (prophetic hermeneutic) or to "teach and train" a developing faith (priestly hermeneutic).

Further, the interpreter's talent is shaped by time and place. Not only does the interpreter bring a particularized perspective to the biblical text; the interpreter also brings his or her own "special" texts to the text, to participate in a conversation already under way.

2.4 A Model for Canonical Interpretation

Under the light of these methodological interests, the framework for an interpretive model can now be constructed as a sequence of three discrete though integral parts: "Canonical Context," "Canonical Content," and "Canonical Conversations." What follows is a brief description of the task apropos to each part.

1. *Canonical Context.* An interest in the final literary form of the NT leads the interpreter to an initial set of hermeneutical clues derived from consideration of both the placement and titles of NT writings, which are properties of their canonization. Quite apart from authorial intentions, the literary design of the biblical canon suggests that particular units of the NT canon (Gospel, Acts, Letter, Apocalypse) have particular roles to perform

within the whole. This consideration of the structure of the NT orients the interpreter to the subject matter found within each of those canonical units. Often the title provided each unit by the canonizing community brings to clearer focus what particular contribution each unit makes to a fully Christian faith.

In this regard, the sequence of these four units within the NT envisages an intentional rhetorical pattern — or "canon-logic" to use Albert Outler's apt phrase¹⁵ — that more effectively orients the readership to the NT's pluriform witness to God and to God's Christ. By the logic of the final literary form of the NT canon, each unit is assigned a specific role to perform within the whole, which in turn offers another explanation for the rich diversity of theology, literature, and language that casts Scripture's subject matter. Thus, the Gospel is placed first within the NT because its narrative of the person and work of the Messiah, when taken as a fourfold whole, is theologically and morally foundational for all that follows.

Along with the final placement of writings and collections within the biblical canon, new titles were provided for individual compositions, sometimes including the naming of anonymous authors. These properties of the canonizing stage shed additional light on how these compositions and collections, written centuries earlier for congregational crises long since settled, may continue to bear witness to God and God's Christ for a nameless and future readership. The importance of any one biblical voice for theological understanding or ethical praxis is focused or qualified by its relationship to the other voices that constitute the whole canonical chorus. Extending this metaphor, one may even suppose that these various voices, before heard only individually or in smaller groups, became more impressive, invigorating, and even "canonical" for faith only when combined with other voices to sing their contrapuntal harmonies as the full chorus.

2. *Canonical Content.* A biblical text, once placed within its distinctive canonical context, acquires a potential for enhanced meaning that should help to guide the exegetical task. A canonical approach to exegesis is never solely concerned with an "objective" description of the biblical text in isolation from other biblical texts; rather, the analysis of a writer's literary artistry or theological tendencies serves the overall canonical project. The description of the text's plain meaning results from a close and critical

15. Albert 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, 1980) 263-76.

analysis of its compositional and theological aspects (see under "Biblical Exegesis" above). In many ways, this part of the canonical critical enterprise is the most traditional. *Canonical criticism does not sponsor any new exegetical strategy; rather, it sponsors a particular orientation toward the biblical text whose principle methodological interests are the text's final literary form and canonical functions.* Naturally, the canonical interpreter is first of all drawn to those exegetical strategies that seek to make meaning out of the biblical text itself rather than its prehistory or the historical circumstances that occasioned its writing.

3. *Canonical Conversations.* The intended role of the biblical canon is to adapt its ancient teaching to contemporary life; this is also the primary objective of biblical interpretation. Under this final rubric, the results of the first two tasks are now gathered together as the subject matter of two formative and integral "conversations" about the community's life of faith. The first conversation is *intercanonical* (i.e., conversations between different biblical traditions or writers) and the second is *intercatholic* (i.e., conversations between the Bible and different faith traditions); the first "norms" and guides the second.

While a number of metaphors work well to express the Bible's theological plurality coherently and constructively, my preference for the interpreter's practical task is *conversation*. Naturally, there are different kinds of conversations. A canonical approach to the NT's pluriform subject matter envisages a conversation that is more complementary than adversarial. In one sense, the *intercanonical* conversation is very much like an intramural debate over the precise meaning of things generally agreed to be true and substantial. The purpose or outcome of debate is not to resolve firmly fixed disagreements among members of the same community or panel as though a normative synthesis were possible; rather, more often it is the sort of debate that clarifies the contested content of their common ground. Likewise, the biblical canon stabilizes and bears continuing witness to the historic disagreements between the traditions of the church's first apostles, which were often creative and instructive (cf. Acts 15:1-21; Gal 2:1-15). Not only do these controversies acquire a permanent value within Scripture, but Scripture in turn commends these same controversies to its current readers, who are invited to engage in a similar act of what Karl Popper calls "mutual criticism"¹⁶ in order to provide

more balance to parochial interests or supply instruction to clarify the theological confession of a particular faith tradition.

In fact, the point and counterpoint of this sort of conversation sometimes works better than those that seek agreement, in that they more readily expose the potential weakness of any point made *to the exclusion* of its counterpoint. In this sense, I presume that a more objective and functional meaning emerges that is neither the conception of any one biblical writer — a "canon *within* the Canon" — nor the presumption of any one expositor — a "canon *outside* of the Canon." Rather the canonical interpreter seeks to relate the different ideas of particular biblical writers and canonical units together in contrapuntal yet complementary ways, to expose the self-correcting (or "prophetic") and mutually-informing (or "priestly") whole of NT theology. In this way, the diversity of biblical theologies within the NT fashions a canon of "mutual criticism," resulting in a more objective interpretation of scriptural teaching. A NT theology thus envisaged underscores what is at stake in relating together the individual parts, whose total significance is now extended beyond their compiled meaning: The NT's diverse theologies, reconsidered holistically as complementary witnesses within the whole, actually "thicken" the meaning of each part in turn.

The midrashic character of biblical interpretation compels the contemporizing of texts, so that "new" meanings are not the result of textual synthesis but arise from contextual significance. Thus, by reconstituting these intercanonical disagreements into a hermeneutical apparatus of checks and balances, the interpreter may actually imagine a comparable dialogue that aids the church's awareness of how each part of the NT canon is important in delimiting and shaping a truly biblical religion. In fashioning a second conversation under the light of the first, therefore, the checks and balances are reimaged as *intercatholic* conversations that continue to guide the whole church in its various ecumenical conversations.

How the intercanonical conversations are arranged and then adapted to a particular faith tradition is largely intuitive and depends a great deal upon the interpreter's talent and location (see above). It should go without saying that my particular adaptation of Jas 4:13-5:6 owes a great deal to who and where I am when I come to this text and its current socioecclesial context. So I must try to listen to other interpreters, believing that true objectivity emerges out of a community of subjectivities. Thus informed, a close reading of biblical texts and ecclesial contexts can be more easily linked together, particular communions with particular NT writers, in order to define the normative checks and balances of a complementary

16. I learned of Popper's helpful categories for determining textual objectivity as good reason for both receiving and preserving literary texts from Brett, *Biblical Criticism*, 124-27.

conversation that maintains and legitimizes traditional distinctives on the one hand with the prospect of correcting a tendency toward triumphal sectarianism on the other.

3. A Canonical Interpretation of James 4:13–5:6

3.1 *The Canonical Context of James*

The placement of James in the multiple “letter” canon is suggestive of its significant role within the NT and therefore properly orients (or reorients) the interpreter to its subject matter.¹⁷ According to the NT’s own “canon-logic,” Letter follows Gospel even as disciples follow after Jesus as their exemplar and Savior.

The fourfold narrative of Jesus’ messianic career is foundational to an interpretation of the letters that follow for two reasons. First, the NT’s “canon-logic” suggests that the letter articulates the holistic meaning of Christian discipleship. Even the title “letter” commends this more pastoral orientation toward these writings¹⁸ since the role of biblical letters is comparable to the function of literary letters: to provide pastoral solutions for everyday problems that threaten Christian discipleship. Indeed, the prospect of all canonical literature is that the spiritual crisis that occasioned a particular writing is roughly comparable to the spiritual crisis that faces its future readership. It is this sensibility that orients the contemporary reader to Jas 4:13–5:6 as a normative response to a spiritual crisis that continues to undermine Christian discipleship.

17. This point is developed fully in “The Problem of the Multiple Letter Canon of the New Testament,” in Wall and Lemcio, *The New Testament as Canon*, 161–83.

18. This observation is made more keen for James by its lack of epistolary form. Despite the objections of some scholars who claim that James is a letter of some sort, there remains audiovisual incongruence between James and Pauline letters: James neither “sounds” nor “looks” like Paul’s compositions! The general lack of literary uniformity between the Pauline letters and some non-Pauline letters (Hebrews, James, 1 John) only underscores the value of titles as properties of canonical function rather than of literary form: James is expected to nurture the faith of the Bible’s readers in a manner similar to the Pauline letters. Of course, the literary differences between the Pauline and non-Pauline members of the community of biblical letters envisage other kinds of differences as well. Thus their common canonical designation, “letter,” invites the interpreter to find coherence between diverse biblical voices that nevertheless aspire to a common end.

Second, the Gospel supplies the letter with its narrative substructure: The biblical story of Jesus is the foundational presupposition for the practical advice given and the theological claim made in every NT letter.¹⁹ Therefore, James not only shares its canonical role with other NT letters, including Pauline, but it shares with them a common story of God’s salvation through Jesus Christ.²⁰

Yet the shape of the letter canon is also tensive; after all, James is placed in a *second* collection of NT letters. While the multiplicity of Gospels has long been a topic of scholarly investigation and comment, few have considered the relationship between the NT’s two groups of letters a matter of hermeneutical value. What possible relationship does the non-Pauline collection have to the Pauline collection? How might this consideration aid the interpreter in discerning what special role James has within the NT? Historically, especially in Protestantism, primary attention has been directed toward the compositions within the Pauline collection, to investigate not only the meaning of individual letters but also the relationships among them. Partial justification for this keen interest in Paul’s witness to the gospel is provided by the NT’s ordering of the letters, since the Pauline corpus comes first. Yet, this very Pauline priority has also led to a Pauline reductionism in study of the second, non-Pauline, collection of letters. For example, James is typically viewed as envisaging either a Pauline faith, although in other words, or an anti-Pauline faith. In either case, the more complementary character of intercanonical relationships is seriously distorted.

In my view, the canonical role of the second collection of letters, where we find James, is to provide an enhanced context for a reading of the Pauline letters. These writings, which bear witness to the faith of the “pillars” of the Jewish mission (Gal 2:7–9), provide an authorized apparatus of various

19. Richard B. Hays contends that the substructure of Paul’s thought and argument consists of a “particular paradigmatic story about Jesus Christ” in *The Faith of Jesus: An Investigation of the Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1–4:11*, SBLDS 56 (Chico: Scholars, 1983) 5. Hays makes his point about the historical Paul; however, I would argue that the “particular paradigmatic story about Jesus Christ” is the one narrated by the fourfold Gospel, which supplies the substructure for every NT letter.

20. I would argue that this is true even though Paul’s narrative of Jesus is reduced to his death and resurrection and James (with other non-Paulinists) is more interested in the exemplary and prophetic character of Jesus’ life (cf. Jas 2:1–8). Others have found numerous echoes of Gospel tradition (esp. the teaching of Matthew’s [or Q’s] Jesus) in James. In this regard see Dean B. Deppe, *The Sayings of Jesus in the Epistle of James* (Chelsea: Bookcrafters, 1989).

checks and balances that prevents distortion of Paul and finally “thickens” the church’s understanding of Paul and indeed of the full gospel.²¹ In this sense, the interpreter is prepared to listen to Jas 4:13–5:6 for a different voice than is heard in reading from the Pauline corpus. But it is the voice of neither a ventriloquist nor an adversary but of a colleague, whose new perspective adds to what has already been read and owned as Christian.

3.2 *The Canonical Content of James 4:13–5:6*

The placement of James in the “letter” canon of the NT forms a particular orientation toward its exegesis. The interpreter of James expects to hear a distinctive voice that not only adds to the NT’s witness to God and to God’s Christ but also provides balance to a more Pauline understanding of Christian life. In the following comments, I am mostly interested in how Jas 4:13–5:6 understands God’s relations with the pious poor, which is of special interest to James. Given its canonical context, I already anticipate that my exposition of this passage will become more meaningful when related to similar concerns in both Paul and a contemporary readership.

The main body of James (1:22–5:6) is a *halakhic* (practical) commentary on divine Wisdom, which is summarized in 1:19: “Be quick to listen” (1:22–2:26), “slow to speak” (3:1–18), and “slow to anger” (4:1–5:6).²² In its introduction (1:2–21), James calls the faith community, besieged by “various trials” (1:2), to become wise (1:5–8) in order to pass the testing of its faith in God (1:3, 13–18) and receive God’s promised blessing at the end of time (1:4, 12). The letter concludes as it began, with an exhortation to respond favorably to God’s “word of truth” (5:19; cf. 1:18–19), patiently (5:10–12; cf. 1:3) and prayerfully (5:13–18; cf. 1:5) waiting for the Lord’s parousia (5:7–9; cf. 1:9–11), when the promise of life will be fulfilled (5:19–20; cf. 1:4, 12, 21).

Within this compositional context, then, 4:13–5:6 concludes an extended commentary on anger (4:1; cf. 1:19c–20), which begins with an inward passion for material pleasures that one does not have (4:2–3; cf. 1:13–15) and stems from an inability to be content with one’s “humble

conditions,” coveting rather the material goods of others (4:4–5). The resulting spiritual crisis threatens the community’s participation in God’s coming triumph.

This passion for material things tests the community’s dependence upon God, who resists the arrogant and “gives grace” to those of humble means (4:6; cf. 2:5). Thus, the wise community humbles itself before God (4:7–10), who alone establishes the criterion for judgment and salvation (4:11–12; cf. 2:8–13). On the other hand, the foolish indulge their self-centered passion for material profit without consideration of God’s will (4:13–17); indeed, in accord with Jesus’ teaching, the one who chooses Mammon over God will also choose Mammon over God’s people, with the eschatological result of divine judgment rather than blessing (5:1–6; cf. Matt 6:19–33). Sharply put, the source of anger is a desire for wealth; in this sense, wealth is a spiritual problem because it tests one’s faith in God.

James’s interpretation of anger is actually a commentary (midrash) on Prov 3:34 (LXX), cited in Jas 4:6, which sets in opposition two classes of people, “the humble” (or pious poor) and “the arrogant” (or secular rich). “The humble” do not get angry, since they prefer God (4:7–10) to riches (4:4–6). God gives saving grace to “the humble” (4:6, 10). “The arrogant,” on the other hand, are those like the merchant (4:13–17) and rich farmer (5:1–6) whose passion for pleasure first disregards God (4:13–17), who cares for the poor and powerless (2:5), and leads them to violent treatment of the pious poor (5:4, 6). Their acts against others articulate their friendship with the world order (4:4) rather than with God (cf. 2:23); and their end is divine curse (4:6; 5:5).

In my view the contrast between the proverbial poor and arrogant is concentrated where the subject shifts from “we” (4:13) to “you” (4:14): The reader (“you”) is drawn to the essence of Wisdom’s advice for those of “humble circumstance,” who enjoy a preferential spiritual status yet aspire to the middle class: “What is the meaning of your life? It is this: You are but *mist* that appears for a little while and then vanishes.” In this setting “mist” is a metaphor for a proper orientation toward God’s will, which orders human life and destiny (4:15; cf. 4:7–10). The “arrogant” class make their plans as though God does not exist (4:13).

The texture of James’s midrash on Prov 3:34 is “thickened” by the interpreter who recognizes that the “mist” of Jas 4:14 may well be an allusion to the “vanity” of Ecclesiastes, which defines the meaning of life by the motto “All is vanity” (1:2; 12:8, etc.). The root meaning of the Hebrew word for “vanity,” *הֶבֶל* (*hebel*), is also “mist.” Such allusions, whether intended

21. See Wall and Lemcio, *The New Testament as Canon*, esp. 208–49.

22. Because of space limitations, I am unable to provide a robust exegesis of Jas 4:13–5:6 complete with a close reading of the passage, supporting argument for most observations made, and a commentary on alternative interpretations, which are many. I hope to provide these critical details in my forthcoming commentary on James from Trinity Press International.

by the author or not, link texts together. In this sense, a common definition of life as “mist” links Ecclesiastes and James together, mobilizing Ecclesiastes as a biblical source that interprets this portion of James (even as James also interprets Ecclesiastes!).

Two brief observations about the importance of the “life is mist” motto in Ecclesiastes must suffice. First, Ecclesiastes claims that worldly pleasures and wealth are “vanity” or mist-like (cf. Eccl 2:1-11; 5:8-6:12); only the fool attaches much value to brief and transitory things such as wealth and power. By comparison, the wise recognize the durability of God’s purposes; this then becomes the meaning of life. Second, Ecclesiastes calls those who accumulate wealth “sinners” who subvert “good” and displease God (9:18), which will lead to a future reversal of fortunes (cf. Jas 1:9-11; 2:13), when their wealth will be given to those “wise and joyful” persons (cf. Jas 1:2-5) who please God (Eccl 2:24-26).

Against this biblical backdrop, then, the foolishness of the merchant (or any middle class aspirant) in Jas 4:13-17 is better understood. His accumulated “profit” (4:13) cannot outlive him (5:1-2). He is also foolish for living life for *his* moment, without due consideration of God’s law (4:11-12, 15) and the pious poor, whom God protects and will reward at the Lord’s parousia.

Appropriately, in the liturgical tradition of the Judaism of James, the biblical Ecclesiastes was read during the celebration of *sukkot* (the Feast of Tabernacles). *Sukkot*’s central symbol was the “tents” used by those who had received the promise but who had not yet entered the promised land. Since the tents provided God’s people with both shelter and sanctuary, they came to symbolize God’s continuing faithfulness before the restored Israel enters into its eternal Jubilee. In fact, the yearly festival corresponded with harvest and so retained this same tension between the present and the future: The good harvest of any year testified to God’s present faithfulness, even though next year might bring feast or famine. Given the fragility of this life, people find meaning only when depending on the faithfulness of God rather than on their own efforts.

In my view, this further connection between Ecclesiastes and *sukkot* deepens our understanding of the harvest images of Jas 5:1-6 and therefore of the relationship between 4:13-17 and 5:1-6. The point of James’s warning to the rich farmers is surely the warning implicit in *sukkot*: The next harvest may be a “day of slaughter” when the Lord judges harshly those whose wealth has been gained at the expense of the pious poor. This, too, is the verdict of Ecclesiastes, which names the “sinners” as those who gather fame

and fortune at the expense of the poor (2:12-23; 8:10-17). Ironically, the fame and fortune of the rich will be taken from them by God and given to those who please God (Eccl 2:26). This eschatological reversal of fortune from rich to poor, already echoed in Jas 1:9-11, is the warning James has in mind in 5:1. Conversely, the future blessing of the pious poor at the Lord’s parousia, already echoed in 2:5 and again in 4:6, is the implied promise of this passage.

3.3 James 4:13–5:6 in Canonical Conversations

1. *James 4:13–5:6 and the Pauline Voice of the NT.* In order for Jas 4:13–5:6 to function canonically, the interpreter must reflect on its meaning within the contexts of the biblical canon (“intercanonicity”) and its contemporary readership (“intercatholicity”). Within the biblical canon, James’s most appropriate conversation partner is Paul, an observation confirmed by the history of interpretation. Interpreters, ancient and modern, have tended to view James as Paul’s adversary, resulting in the decanonizing of James in favor of a Pauline canon or in the muting of James’s distinctive theological voice by emphasizing its “practical” value. In particular, the more conservative tradents of the magisterial Reformation even sought to retain James in their “inspired Scripture” by reworking it to sound a Pauline note. Most critical scholars recognize the profound and pervasive differences between Paul and James, but they seek to explain these differences by their social settings. In this way, James retains its place within the biblical canon but only as a somewhat marginal member. My contention is that the biblical canon itself envisages a more constructive conversation in which James engages Paul in “mutual criticism,” forming a whole greater than the sum of its parts.

The theological differences between James and Paul over common themes are substantial and canonically important.²³ For instance, Paul conceives of the poor and powerless in theological and religious rather than in social and economic terms: The Pauline poor are all those who are outside Christ, and the powerless are all those who are without God’s empowering grace. The issues at stake for Paul are covenantal and have more to do with a community’s relationship with God than its relationship

23. A fuller discussion of the following conclusions will be found in my *A New Testament Theology of the Poor: A Canonical Critical Study*, in preparation for Abingdon Press.

with society (even though the two are fully integral in an eschatological sense for Paul). Moreover, the crisis of the Gentile mission (i.e., how Paul understands divine election and Gentile conversion) provokes a missionary response rather than a sociopolitical response from the faith community. Thus Paul defines the marginal of the world primarily in terms of their spiritual status, whether or not they are "in Christ," rather than in terms of their social status. God's preferential option is for the spiritual poor, who were alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and estranged from the covenants of promise (cf. Eph 2:12). These are evangelical and not socio-economic concerns: God calls the lost, whether rich or poor, out of the world for salvation (Rom 9:30–10:13; cf. Eph 2:11–13).

Paul's missionary preaching resists a forensic, individualistic, and ahistorical model of divine grace. Certainly for him, spiritual transformation yields the robust transformation of individuals and their relations with each other; yet this sort of human and humane transformation results from a spiritual conversion: Love for one another is the proper work of faith in Christ (Galatians 5). Accordingly, God gives grace to those who respond favorably to "the word of faith that we proclaim: If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, then you will be saved" (Rom 10:8b–9).

Given the derivative nature of social transformation in Paul's missionary thought, it should come as no surprise that nowhere does he renounce wealth or define God's election in terms of the socioeconomically marginal (cf. Col 3:11–12; 1 Cor 1:18–31). Nor is there any primary commitment to or identification with the poor as those especially favored by God (*contra* Jas 2:5). As a practical matter of missionary work believers must take the gospel into the mainstream of the social order and the market squares of the urban centers, where the lost are found. And the lost comprise all classes, rich and poor, male and female, Jew and non-Jew, master and slave, who are all equal in their need for God's salvation, which is offered in the proclamation of the gospel to all and received by the faith of any.

The outline of a genuine conversation between the canonical Paul and James concerning God's relations with the poor is now established. For Paul, hostility among people and between people and God is spiritually discerned and is the result of suppression of God's truth, which has been disclosed in the messianic death and resurrection of Jesus. "The arrogant" are those who seek a relationship with God on the basis of their piety rather than on the basis of Christ's. "The wise" are those who embrace the foolishness of God, which is Christ crucified. The hostilities found in the world

and between God and sinful humanity are resolved by the preaching of "the word of faith," which calls everyone out of the world and into the risen Christ, where God's enriching grace is given.

According to Jas 4:13–5:6, hostility among people and between people and God is economically discerned and is the result of seeking after wealth rather than God's will. "The arrogant" are those who accumulate riches by exploiting the pious poor, as though God, who favors the poor, does not exist. "The wise" are those who are content with their humble circumstances and who practice God's law in preparation for their vindication at the Lord's parousia. The hostilities in the world and between God and sinful humanity are resolved by "the word of truth" (1:18), which is articulated by biblical wisdom (1:19), which is exemplified by Jesus' love for his poor neighbors (2:1–8), and which advises that the pious poor slow down their passion for pleasure, both to prevent hostility toward others and to ensure that God's grace is given to them. Whereas for Paul spiritual reconciliation issues in the end of social strife among believers, for James class conflict is the constant trial of the pious poor, whose relationship with God is tested by their inward desire for wealth.

One possible Pauline distortion was warned against by the second-century Ebionites, who were among the first champions of the biblical James.²⁴ Because of the Jewishness of their own Christianity, they more easily recognized the tendency of Pauline thought toward fideism and antinomianism. The result of this tendency is to define "rich" and "poor" as spiritual categories, so that the poor and powerless are those without faith in Christ. This view not only neglects the social aspect of salvation but too easily and uncritically adopts a middle-class ethos in place of a christological ethos.

Further, this same Pauline bias if unchecked by James could lead to a paternalism that views class conflict as a missionary problem that must be overcome if the gospel is to be heard and received. When the church understands itself only as a missionary community, when it understands its mission only in terms of spiritual renewal, and when it understands its missionary praxis only in terms of the principle of accommodation, the social effect tends to be the *embourgeoisement* of the church and the loss of a distinctive witness to Christ within the world order.

At the very least, Jas 4:13–5:6 reminds the Pauline interpreter that a desire for wealth is a spiritual problem and will inevitably lead to debili-

24. See "James and Paul in Pre-Canonical Context," in Wall and Lemcio, *The New Testament as Canon*, 250–71.

tating strife between people. Further balance is provided by James's emphasis on obedience to God's will, especially in the midst of trying circumstances, which measures the believer's devotion to God rather than *sola fide* (cf. Jas 2:24). The deeper logic of James is that submission to God and repudiation of worldly passion will result in a socially marginalized but eschatologically prepared community of believers. At the very least, a holistic appraisal of the biblical teaching concerning the poor includes a more robust idea of God's grace, which is given to both the spiritually (Pauline) and socially (James) impoverished in order to enable right relations with God and with one another. The mistake often made by the interpreter is to exclude one in favor of another, resulting in a distortion of the Bible's own theology of the poor.

2. *Jas 4:13–5:6 and the Church*. One need only survey the history of the magisterial Reformation to recognize its theological dependence on a Pauline "canon within the Canon." The resulting tendency is a theological understanding of the sort that James condemns: a confession of orthodoxy without orthopraxy (cf. 2:14–26). At the very least, the theology of James helps to maintain a creative tension between faith and faithfulness and perhaps a greater ambivalence toward the economic values and political perspectives of middle-class existence. If James's celebration of the pious poor were taken seriously without Paulinizing or platonizing it, the First World (and especially Protestant) church would become quite uncomfortable with the ease by which it has accommodated the upward economic mobility of liberal democracy while trying to follow after its downwardly mobile Lord.

Furthermore, in those faith traditions whose theological calculus is centered in sanctification (believing humanity's response to God) instead of in justification (God's response to sinful humanity), the church catholic may find a Jamesian form of Christianity that checks and balances its Pauline variety. When preaching and praxis emphasize the partnership between community and Lord, so that humanity's response to God in good works complements God's response to humanity apart from good works, only then will there be a theological basis for a complement of spiritual and social transformation. The church's solidarity with the poor is neither an option nor a means to a greater spiritual end; rather, it is a social condition that is met by the church that is blessed by God. Perhaps a recovery of Wesley's teaching of scriptural holiness, authorized by and understood by James (and other non-Pauline letters, including Revelation), is an ecumenical project. In my view, a gospel for the poor cannot be proclaimed, certainly not embodied, without it.

4. Suggestions for Further Reading

The canonical approach to biblical interpretation is a recent development and few books have been written that explain or demonstrate its merits. Brevard Childs introduced the methodological interests of canonical criticism in *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), which was written in response to objections over the "biblical theology movement." These interests are then worked out in *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979); *The New Testament as Canon* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985); and *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993). During this same period, James Sanders introduced his version of canonical criticism in *Torah and Canon* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972); *Canon and Community* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984); and a series of influential essays collected together in *From Sacred Story to Sacred Text* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987). The latter concludes with a complete bibliography of the discipline through 1987.

Since then Mark Brett has published his *Biblical Criticism in Crisis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1991), which has supplied the canonical approach of Childs with a compelling justification. Moreover, Rolf Rendtorff outlines a theology of the OT that is largely influenced by Childs in his *Canon and Theology*, OBT (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993). The approaches of Sanders and Childs have been compared and integrated, with innovation and insight, by Gerald Sheppard in "Canonical Criticism," *ABD* 1:861–86.

A more synthetic application of canonical criticism to the NT has been introduced by Robert Wall and Eugene Lemcio in their *The New Testament as Canon: A Reader in Canonical Criticism*, JSNTSS 76 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1992). Among several efforts to employ a canonical approach to specific NT writings are those by Robert Wall, *Commentary on Revelation*, NIBC (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991); D. Moody Smith, *John among the Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992); and William Kurz, *Reading Luke-Acts* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993).