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THE NEW TESTAMENT AS CANON

A Reader in Canonical Criticism

ROBERT W. WALL AND
EUGENE E. LEMCIO



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Robert W. Wall
and
Eugene E. Lemcio

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To our colleagues in the School of Religion,
Seattle Pacific University

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FOREWORD

The following collection of essays composed by Professor Robert Wall and Professor Eugene Lemcio constitutes a sustained effort over the past decade to apply some of the concepts and methods of canonical criticism to the Second Testament.

The struggles of early Christians to express in various ways their belief that the God of Israel and of all the world was addressing that world through Christ and through the early church do not on the face of them form a coherent whole. Honesty demands recognition of the (limited) level of pluralism that is expressed in those struggles. The authors of the New Testament all evince enthusiasm and the conviction that God had not become so transcendent and distant by the first century CE as to leave the world to muddle through on its own. The God who had made pastoral calls on Abraham and Sarah, Moses and the prophets, was doing so once more, in a most decisive way.

The modes of expressing and proclaiming the new intersection of the transcendent in an increasingly cynical Hellenistic world were similar to and different from those evident in the then extant Scripture, whether in Hebrew or in Greek translation; but the belief that it was the same God who had created heaven and earth that now addressed the world anew in Jesus the Jew, a first-century member of the Abraham/Sarah family, was of the same intensity as was shown in the First Testament.

Canonical criticism entered the scene of biblical study about 25 years ago, after it had become clear that two forces were alienating the Bible from the churches—historical-critical study of its formation and transmission, and rampantly increasing ignorance of biblical literature in Western culture, even in the churches themselves. Attempts since the seventeenth century to write a history of formation of biblical literature had become by this century the focus of courses in Bible in most seminaries in the Western world. University and seminary courses in the history of formation of biblical literature presupposed

knowledge of the literary content of the Bible, but that knowledge had almost completely vanished among students entering seminary. Even 'conservative' students who knew some Bible content clearly knew only what their Christian identity group had urged was important to know, with the implication that the rest was harmonious with their denominational canon within the canon.

These two forces converged to marginalize the Bible in the lives of most Western churches, leaving fundamentalists to fill the authority vacuum created by this ignorance. Courses in the history of formation of biblical literature were designed to explain the anomalies, discrepancies and contradictions which honest knowledge of Bible content recognized. But without knowledge of that content, those courses became the Bible curriculum, indeed the Bible itself, of the future pastors and priests who were to lead the churches. Knowledge of how J, E, D and P, and Mark, Q and proto-L emerged and then were merged into the Pentateuch and the Gospels displaced what was actually going on in the text itself. The excitement and the power were gone, and with them the authority. Topical preaching displaced expositional, and process theology, which largely by-passes the Bible, as well as liberation theologies displaced classical modes of doing theology. So much for the mainline churches; fundamentalists and the Bible-inerrancy folk were thus given a great chasm to fill for those who needed to hear a word of hope through all the ambiguity of modern reality—no contradictions or complications to muddy the waters of what was purveyed as 'Bible teaching'. Mainline churches began to wane and lose out to those who came to rescue the Bible as the harmonious word of God. That situation continues in large part today.

Critical (honest) study of the Bible is not solely or even mainly history of its formation. Critical study of the Bible includes the tools necessary to recover points originally scored in the first historical context. It shines light on the contributions of non-Jews and non-Christians to the Bible itself. It demonstrates how much in the Bible stems from the wisdom of Canaanites, Babylonians, Egyptians, Persians, Greeks, Romans, and others. Not only is the Bible a 'light to the nations' (Isa. 49.6), it contains much light from the nations—others of God's children than insiders. It is full of international wisdom as well as home-grown traditions.

Furthermore, critical study of the Bible illumines a precious tradi-

tioning process. It reveals as can nothing else the power of tradition to score points in more than one time/space frame. And in so doing it offers insight into the hermeneutics by which the later tradent (biblical author or speaker) re-applied the older tradition. That is perhaps one of the most exciting aspects of canonical criticism, the discernment of the canonical process and the range of ancient hermeneutics by which the traditioning process evolved from the earliest First Testament passages to the latest in the Second, and on beyond in both Judaism and Christianity.

Critical study of the Bible demonstrates its internal dialogues, the ways in which seemingly contradictory understandings of what was going on in the theological history the Bible describes can be contained in the same canon, and thus offers clues as to how dialogues between different understandings today can take place.

Without mentioning the 'tool of the triangle',¹ Wall and Lemcio fully realize the importance of the three major factors in pursuit of meanings of texts—the text or tradition itself, the needs of the community addressed, and the hermeneutics by which the ancient tradent caused the tradition to address those needs. Each is equally important at each stage of application, down to today. By dynamic analogy the text or tradition cited mirrors and illumines the later situation in the process.

The limited pluralism in the Bible is best understood not as debilitating contradictions but as intrabiblical dialogue which is both self-correcting and mutually informing. No one passage nor even book can bear the weight of the whole gospel. False conceptions of consistency or harmony permit the reader to take a 'favorite' passage as dominant with the assumption that all the rest of the Bible supports that particular reading of the passage. In this manner a canon within the canon is developed, setting aside whatever disagrees with it in the assurance that someday the contradictory passage will be more fully understood and found to be in harmony with what is already decided. Such a posture subjects the Bible to the intellectual ability and judgment of the reader or reading group. Understanding canon as containing its own self-correcting and mutually informing apparatus requires considerable humility on the part of the reader. Recognition of biblical

1. For explanation of 'the tool of the triangle', see J.A. Sanders, *Canon and Community: A Guide to Canonical Criticism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), esp. pp. 77-78.

pluralism provides in the canon a kind of paradigm for ecumenical dialogue and for how conflicting denominations today can in dialogue learn from each other. Again, human humility becomes the basis for the dialogue and recognition of the need of it. To recognize the legitimacy of the witness of others than one's own identity group is to take a giant step in the on-going monotheizing process itself—the process which the Bible as canon launched and inspires.

The present ethos in the guild of literary criticism of holistic readings of the Bible (where biblical scholarship had simply divided a text into different literary sources and levels of formation of texts) is an effort parallel to and supportive of canonical readings of biblical texts. But canonical criticism goes beyond such holistic readings, in terms of narrative analysis of biblical intertextuality, to recognition and affirmation of the monotheizing process the Bible describes and mandates. When all the still valid tools and methods of the various biblical 'criticisms' developed and honed over the past three centuries have been applied and have yielded their fruits, the monotheizing process requires all those who find their identity in these texts to realize that the Bible is not canonically or ultimately about Jews and non-Jews; it is about God and human beings in human conflicts of protagonists and antagonists of every sort, and God's transcending intersection and involvement in them.

Biblical texts, no matter how tribalizing they may have been and may still appear, have the power, if read canonically by the Bible's own monotheizing hermeneutic, to transform tribalism and denominationalism into a vibrant ecumenism of mutual respect and learning. It may possibly be that the increasing ignorance of the Bible in our century is in effect erasing our modern forms of tribalism and arrogant claims of divine sanction of singularist perceptions of biblical reality. All of us being human, none of us has the capacity to get it right by ourselves; we need each other. No one, no group need or should abandon its own traditioning process, or deny the truth it feels compelled to witness to, in order to learn from others what is right about what they had thought was wrong, and what is wrong about what they had thought was right.

Wall and Lemcio show some of the excitement of reading the Second Testament as an integral part of the Christian canon, and the power of the continuing canonical process when doing so.

James A. Sanders
Claremont

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ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|----------------|---|
| AB | Anchor Bible |
| ACNT | Augsburg Commentary of the New Testament |
| APOT | R.H. Charles (ed.), <i>Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament</i> |
| BGBE | Beiträge zur Geschichte der biblischen Exegese |
| <i>Bib</i> | <i>Biblica</i> |
| <i>BJRL</i> | <i>Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester</i> |
| BNTC | Black's New Testament Commentary |
| <i>BTB</i> | <i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i> |
| <i>CBQ</i> | <i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i> |
| <i>CSR</i> | <i>Christian Scholars' Review</i> |
| <i>DBSup</i> | <i>Dictionnaire de la Bible, Supplément</i> |
| <i>ExpTim</i> | <i>Expository Times</i> |
| GBS | Guides to Biblical Studies |
| <i>GorR</i> | <i>Gordon Review</i> |
| <i>HBT</i> | <i>Horizons in Biblical Theology</i> |
| HNTC | Harper's New Testament Commentary |
| HTKNT | Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament |
| <i>HTR</i> | <i>Harvard Theological Review</i> |
| ICC | International Critical Commentary |
| <i>IDBSup</i> | G.A. Buttrick (ed.), <i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i> , Supplementary Volume |
| <i>Int</i> | <i>Interpretation</i> |
| <i>JAAR</i> | <i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i> |
| <i>JBL</i> | <i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i> |
| <i>JBR</i> | <i>Journal of Bible and Religion</i> |
| <i>JSJ</i> | <i>Journal for the Study of Judaism</i> |
| <i>JSNT</i> | <i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i> |
| <i>JSNTSup</i> | <i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i> , Supplement series |
| <i>JSOT</i> | <i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i> |
| <i>JSS</i> | <i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i> |
| <i>JTS</i> | <i>Journal of Theological Studies</i> |
| KPG | Knox Preaching Guides |
| LD | Lectio divina |
| <i>LingBib</i> | <i>Linguistica biblica</i> |

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| MeyerK | H.A.W. Meyer (ed.), <i>Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neues Testament</i> |
| NCB | New Century Bible |
| <i>NewLitHist</i> | <i>New Literary History</i> |
| NIBC | New International Biblical Commentary |
| NICNT | New International Commentary on the New Testament |
| NICGT | New International Commentary on the Greek Testament |
| <i>NovT</i> | <i>Novum Testamentum</i> |
| NovTSup | <i>Novum Testamentum</i> , Supplements |
| <i>NTS</i> | <i>New Testament Studies</i> |
| OBT | Overtures in Biblical Theology |
| <i>PAAJR</i> | <i>Proceedings of the American Academy of Jewish Research</i> |
| PC | Proclamation Commentaries |
| <i>PSTJ</i> | <i>Perkins School of Theology Journal</i> |
| <i>RevExp</i> | <i>Review and Expositor</i> |
| <i>ResQ</i> | <i>Restoration Quarterly</i> |
| <i>RSR</i> | <i>Recherches de science religieuse</i> |
| SBLDS | Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series |
| SBLSP | Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers |
| SBT | Studies in Biblical Theology |
| SD | Studies and Documents |
| SJLA | Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity |
| SNTSMS | Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series |
| <i>TC</i> | <i>Traditio Christiana</i> |
| <i>TDNT</i> | G. Kittel and G. Friedrich (eds.), <i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> |
| <i>USQR</i> | <i>Union Seminary Quarterly Review</i> |
| WBC | Word Biblical Commentary |
| <i>ZNW</i> | <i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</i> |

INTRODUCTION

I

This collection of essays explores the hermeneutical importance of the New Testament's relationship to the church as the canon for God's people. In our exploration, Professor Lemcio and I appreciate the complexity of the history of the church's relationship to its biblical canon. We also realize that this complexity is only intensified by the contested nature of the very idea of a biblical canon, evinced by the well-known disagreements among scholars for whom the idea of a biblical canon has hermeneutical importance. For example, 'canon critics' emphasize the Bible's definitive content and its literary form, whether as a collection of authoritative writings or as an authoritative collection of writings, while 'canonical critics' emphasize the Bible's authorized role as the church's canon—an amorphous and more intuitive definition. For those who emphasize the Bible's normative content and its literary form, the hermeneutical importance of the final, canonical stage in the formation of the Christian Bible is elevated to ask the decisive question, 'what does the biblical text mean in its final "canonical" shape?' In one sense, their point is a practical one since the exegete can only speculate about the Bible's shape and substance in any of its pre-canonical stages (although speculate we all continue to do!). In another sense, however, they view the biblical canon as neither arbitrary in meaning nor mechanistic in form but as one concrete and permanent expression of the intentioned and dynamic interaction between the faithful and its rule of faith (see section III below).

For canonical critics, the Christian Bible is more than a collection of canonical compositions, shaped by religious intentions and insights into a discrete literary composition that itself envisions patterns of hermeneutical engagement. The Bible is also a 'canon' in a functional sense, with an authorized (or canonical) role to perform in shaping the norms for worship and witness for those who belong to the

Christian community. In light of this understanding of the Bible's canonical role, interpreters ask yet other questions about the meaning of biblical texts that focus the interpreter first of all upon the theological 'shape' of the church's identity as the church rather than on the literary shape of its biblical canon. From this perspective, the scholar elevates in importance the church's ongoing intentions for its biblical canon in answering the question, 'how do biblical texts help the church understand what it means to be today's church and do as the church ought?' (see section IV below). Although we label our hermeneutical agenda as 'canonical criticism', Professor Lemcio and I try to take both of these senses of the biblical canon seriously and integrally.

We finally concentrate our exploratory efforts on how the Bible, in its canonical form, should be received and read by the church in light of its role as rule of faith, by which Christian faith and life are both defined and nurtured for this generation of believers into the next. Indeed, we do not claim to offer brand new techniques of biblical exegesis; rather, we agree (even with some 'opponents') that our project is more like a 'renewal movement' within the guild of biblical scholars, aspiring to offer fresh perspectives and new sensitivities that bring balance to purely historical or literary critical renderings of biblical texts. As we understand canonical criticism, then, our work should be posited in the larger 'post-critical' enterprise. We do *not* intend to replace or displace critical exegesis, but rather to employ its various methods as a means to a hermeneutical (and ecclesial) end. That is, we seek to extend the fruit of critical exegesis to the life of today's church, which has always intended its Scriptures to play a formative role in shaping its ongoing life of worship and witness. Several essays in the collection will illustrate this preceding point, not so much to legitimize what we do within the guild of biblical scholars but rather to correct the impression of a few that canonical criticism is neo-fundamentalistic and inherently 'anti-critical'.

II

In part, the purpose of this collection is to chart, however roughly and tentatively, the topology of the land occupied by (at least two) canonical critics. If the primary clues for our interpretive enterprise are recovered from the earliest history of the church's relationship

with its biblical canon, then we would chart three dominant formations found on that ground. The *first* is found at the point of origin, when a text, subsequently included in the biblical canon (however decided), is formed as the literary product of a particular author's response (however composed) to a particular crisis (however construed) of a particular congregation (however identified). The immediate interest of canonical critics in the formation of a biblical text at the point of origin is a rather narrow one, focused not so much by historical or literary concerns but by the idea and *Sitz im Leben* of a biblical canon. Thus, historical and literary questions are asked again of the biblical text in order to inform responses about its ongoing authority and meaning for Christian faith and praxis. The fundamental continuity between the original and canonical *Sitze im Leben*, and between historical/literary criticisms and canonical criticism, is especially important in the modern study of the fourfold Gospel as Professor Lemcio demonstrates in Part I of this collection. Again, his purpose is to illustrate how a canonical perspective facilitates the movement of meaning from the historical Jesus to his current disciples as mediated by the evangelists' narratives of him. His work with the 'Parables' and 'Love Commands' of the Synoptic traditions is a self-conscious effort to integrate historical (especially the Jewish background of Jesus's teaching ministry) with redactional and canonical dimensions, about which B.S. Childs has remained uninterested and J.A. Sanders has only recently begun to discuss.

In addition, a growing concern among canonical critics is the continuing significance of those interpretive strategies found within the Bible itself: the hermeneutics that helped authors fashion their biblical texts may very well continue to guide the modern interpreter of those same texts. The recognition, for example, that biblical texts are really 'intertextual' enhances the exegete's ability to discern the author's intended meaning. That is, New Testament writers composed their narratives or letters with other texts in mind that made more coherent the message behind what is written. In fact, most of these 'sub-texts' now embedded in New Testament writings echo the author's own Scripture and reflect the author's strategy for adapting sacred text to the spiritual crisis that threatens to undermine his audience's faith in God. In my view, these allusions to or citations of the author's biblical canon construct a hermeneutical environment within which the theological rendering of his composition can be

more effectively executed. In this sense, I claim that some of the narrative literature of the New Testament, such as the Acts of the Apostles or even the Apocalypse, is a species of midrash, perhaps *aggadic*, where the texts of the narrator's Bible interplay with his story of Jesus or of earliest Christianity to bring focus to the theological meaning of 'the events that have been fulfilled among us' (Lk. 1.1) and to define more clearly as a result the theological boundaries around the 'true' Israel of God. The real objective of intertextuality as a critical method, then, is not finally literary. Certain texts, which are initially associated together because of their literary resemblance, *are given significance by the biblical writer because they are thought to be theologically analogous as well.*

The importance of reading biblical texts as 'inter-texts' is elevated in hermeneutical value by a canonical perspective: the hermeneutics of the author helps determine the hermeneutics of the faith community that picks up his ancient composition to reread it again as an authorized vehicle for the word of the Lord. In this sense, the relationship between a biblical writer and his biblical canon is paradigmatic for the ongoing relationship between the church and its canon. Especially in my essays, 'Peter, "Son" of Jonah' and 'The Apocalypse of the New Testament in Canonical Context', I have tried to introduce and explore these ports of inquiry, most often in conversation with the programmatic work of others.

The *second* formation is of the biblical canon itself, enshrining both the historical process and its final literary product, the New Testament. At this port of inquiry into the discipline, Childs is our principal (although not only) collaborator. According to Childs's programmatic work in canon criticism, the New Testament must be viewed and so interpreted as a complex unity. Different writings, first preserved as 'scriptural', have been crafted together over time into a canonical whole in order to enhance the Bible's usefulness to the church as its rule of faith. For example, titles and prologues have been added to canonical collections and individual writings to guide better the church's reading of them as its biblical rule of faith. The Bible, then, is the literary product of the last of several integral stages that constitute the pre-canonical history of biblical texts; and it is this canonical precipitate that comes to the present church complete with several built-in clues about how to read it in a way that nurtures or corrects the church's faith.

Even the prior redactional activity that reshaped and revised certain individual compositions into their subsequent canonical form is vested with hermeneutical import. If the intention of this later redaction was to aid the faith community in recognizing the value of these writings for forming its theological understanding and nurturing its spiritual vitality, as Childs maintains, then the artifacts of both the redactional and canonizing processes become important clues for rereading these same writings in light of the church's canonical intentions for them. Therefore, the interpreter should not be uninterested in the various stages the composition went through from its point of origin to its final biblical form, even though canonical criticism is finally interested in the 'synchronic' study of a biblical text, exegeted at a moment when the Bible reached its final literary and theological whole.

Many of my essays seek to extend if not also to fine-tune Childs's original insight, especially in the light of the Sanders 'triangle' (see his Foreword to this volume). In particular, 'The Acts of the Apostles in Canonical Context' considers the hermeneutical importance of the title provided Luke's composition by the canonizing community as well as its pivotal location within the New Testament canon. Two other essays, found in Part III, 'The Problem of the Multiple Letter Canon' and 'The Promise of the Multiple Letter Canon', pursue these same hermeneutical concerns but with respect to the New Testament letters. Here, I consider especially important the inter-canonical relationship between the two corpora of New Testament letters, Pauline and Catholic. Parts of 'The Apocalypse of the New Testament' explore the hermeneutical value of the title, prologue and location of the Apocalypse within the New Testament. While one should resist making too much of how specific books are arranged within a particular collection (although I think there is some value in doing so for the fourfold Gospel), we would contend that specific texts found at the 'seams' of the New Testament can be exploited in constructive ways. In sections of 'Acts in Canonical Context' and 'Apocalypse in Canonical Context', and then especially in 'Romans 1.1-15: an Introduction to the Pauline Corpus of the New Testament', I argue that Acts 1.1-11, Rev. 1.1-3 and Rom. 1.1-15 respectively are hermeneutically crucial both for introducing a particular unit of canonical literature and for better understanding the relationship between discrete parts of the canonical whole.

Among the most crucial decisions the New Testament interpreter must make in constructing a hermeneutical model are those pertaining to the 'unity and diversity' of theological conception and literary convention within the New Testament. The appended essay, which introduces a canonical account of 'New Testament Ethics', was written in 1983 and was an initial attempt to understand the relationships between different New Testament theologies as 'self-correcting and mutually informing'. In this study, I argued that theological unity is neither textual nor thematic; rather, it is *hermeneutical* and results from the interpreter's arrangement of New Testament theologies into 'canonical conversations' that best meet the church's purposes for its biblical canon. This essay extends the work of Professor Lemcio, who earlier in 'Gospels and Canonical Criticism' (1981) challenged the problems of both non-critical and alternative critical studies of the gospels. His important polemic continues in his other essays, broadening his investigation beyond the multiple and diverse recensions of a common tradition to include multiple and diverse narratives of Jesus. By ignoring the multiple and diverse character of the fourfold Gospel, some interpreters fail to hear and respond to the full gospel and sometimes 'confuse Reality for a single perception of it'. This concern leads Lemcio to emphasize the 'intra-Gospel dialectic', which views multiple Gospel traditions as achieving a more constructive application for the contemporary church. Especially in his 'Father and Son in the Synoptics and John' (1992), Lemcio suggests a means of relating the four Gospels together as a whole while emphasizing their individual literary differences. This is especially not true of the modern criticism of John's Gospel, which is always studied in isolation of or even in adversarial relationship to the Synoptic Gospels. Actually, on a particular theological issue (e.g. the relationship of Jesus as Son to God as his Father), the four Evangelists make contrapuntal variations on the same theme; only when the point is scored within the context of a fourfold Gospel is Jesus's sonship properly nuanced and fully understood as a theological norm.

While a number of metaphors work well to express creatively the importance of finding coherence in the Bible's theological plurality, our preference is *conversation*. Naturally, there are different kinds of conversations between people. Likewise, the interpreter can relate texts together for different reasons and with different results. Virtually every New Testament theology written during the modern

period attempts to render the New Testament's own theological pluralism coherent in one of two ways; that is, interpreters arrange the diverse New Testament theologies into two kinds of 'canonical conversations'. First is the 'synthetic' conversation, where diverse New Testament theologies are integrated to form a systematic or dogmatic unity, resulting in a 'New Testament' theology quite unlike anything found in the New Testament itself. The interpreter joins the conversation much like the respondent at a scholarly meeting, who after listening to various papers 'with prejudice' takes the best of each and integrates them together from one's own perspective into a more definitive alternative. An integral unity has been achieved in this case, but at the expense of the diverse contributions of each. Second is the 'supplementary' conversation, where one New Testament theology is simply added to still other New Testament theologies to form a collection of New Testament theologies. In this case, the interpreter joins the conversation much like a moderator, who listens 'without prejudice' to each paper in turn, seeking only to clarify the contribution of each participant without ranking them in preferred order or relating them together in a complementary way. The pluralism of alternatives is retained but without relating them to achieve an even greater whole.

Canonical critics have a more *dialectical* conversation in mind. A dialectical conversation best envisions the relationship between canonical writings, whose literary form is fixed at canonization, and whose theologies enshrined therein do not change. The theological and moral bounds established by those biblical texts are inherently stable and disagreements between biblical writers will therefore always remain. In this sense, canonical conversations must remain in dialectical tension and never issue in textual or even theological synthesis since to do so would de-stabilize and so 'de-canonize' its diverse parts. Accordingly, the canonical interpreter comes to value the Bible's own diversity in a way that is similar to those kinds of conversations that debate points of common interest in order to achieve a increased measure of ideological balance and rigor and to understand better the whole of life and faith as a result. The interpreter does not presume to walk away from these debates to find their biblical participants in total agreement; and their disagreements may actually increase the interpreter's awareness how each part of the New Testament is important for a truly biblical theology. In fact,

point and counterpoint often work together better than either harmonies or parallels to expose the potential weakness of the one when taken *to the exclusion* of the other.

Finally, however, the unity of New Testament theology is hermeneutical rather than textual. The interpreter's recognition of the promise of multiple biblical theologies is possible when they are skillfully arranged into dialectical conversations in light of the canon's authorized role within the faith community in order to lead the faith community away from a distorted understanding of God's gospel and toward a life of worship and witness that is more fully formed by spirit and truth. For example, my essay, 'Ecumenicity and Ecclesiology', contends that Paul's idea of the church or the various ideas collected within the non-Pauline letters is each incomplete by itself. More than incomplete, for the interpreter will inevitably distort the epistolary teaching about the church if only one of its various ecclesiologies, Pauline or non-Pauline, is elevated to a canonical status to the exclusion of the rest. A New Testament theology of the church, then, must be the yield of an interpretive strategy that seeks to relate the parts together as an interdependent whole; only then can the biblical theologian create a dynamic portrait of how the whole New Testament defines the church, which we argue is a truer and more useful portrait than merely describing the sum of definitions found within the New Testament letters.

My essay, 'James and Paul in Pre-Canonical Context', moves the discussion backward from the literary shape of the received New Testament canon into the second century to consider the pre-canonical history of the New Testament conversation partners, James and Paul. Again the focus is narrowed to reconsider an earlier stage in the formation of the New Testament canon in exploration of the meaning and significance of those very same theological tensions that ultimately were included in the final biblical canon. My point is partly to correct the standard reconstruction of the canonizing process which has been historical and 'atheological' almost without exception. I suppose that additional insight into the very purpose of a Christian canon can be gained by investigating the emergence of the idea of canon (i.e. a theological construct) together with the emergence of canon lists (i.e. historical applications of that theological construct). Moreover, against the opinion that the first canon lists were fashioned in arbitrary ways, a study of the theological and ecclesial reasons behind

the formation of the New Testament only helps to clarify the theological 'whys and hows' behind the church's gathering together and arranging of certain writings.

Professor Lemcio's appended essay, 'Ephesus and the New Testament Canon', pushes this discussion even farther back by exploring the implications of the fact that so much diverse literature and so many different 'apostolic' persons 'shuttled' between that cosmopolitan church and other Christian centers. That is, what we claim about canonical *literature* in general may very well be 'controlled' in part by a particular historical-sociological reality.

The theological yield of these two studies aids the interpreter in understanding why and how diverse writings and theologies, such as those preserved by Pauline and Jacobean Christianity, were finally collected and arranged into a 'self-correcting and mutually informing' biblical apparatus for the formation of a 'holy catholic and apostolic church'. The same import may well emerge from similar investigations of the pre-canonical relationship between the Synoptic and Johannine Gospels, between the Gospels (especially Lukan) and Acts, more generally between deuterocanonical and canonical writings (e.g. the Apocalypses of Peter and John), or even more specifically between multiple textual families of canonized writings (e.g. the two texts of Acts, Western and Alexandrian). The prospect is promising indeed!

Finally, the *third* emphasis of canonical criticism, illustrated by this collection, is on the teleological nature of biblical hermeneutics. That is, the interpreter must be concerned with what results from interpretation, and whether what results conforms to the church's intentions for its biblical canon. On the one hand, it is the very property of the biblical canon to draw lines that include some, while excluding others from Christian faith who either belong to another religious tradition or who lack faith in God. The church submits before its biblical canon with the profound desire to be the church in worship of and in witness to the Bible's God and not someone or something else. In 'Paul and James in Pre-Canonical Context', I try to illustrate this point by showing how the canon took on a more 'prophetic' shape in order to teach believers what theological convictions and moral values do *not* belong to the church. Yet, at the same time, the biblical canon also has a 'pastoral' task to nurture the faith of all who share in common the Bible's story of God's salvation

of all things. The catholicizing church was also the canonizing church, which formed the biblical canon in order to form the church catholic.

Our point is this: if canonical hermeneutics is centered by the ongoing relationship between canon and community, then the act of interpreting biblical texts must aim at the formation of a distinctively Christian people. In our view, the inter-textuality and inter-canoncity that characterize the sacred texts themselves will in part and in whole also characterize how a sacred people—in part and in whole—interprets the Bible. While most of our essays try to demonstrate how stable texts might be adapted to changing contexts with theological profit, it is the explicit purpose of ‘Law and Gospel, Church and Canon’ to provide a model of how specific New Testament themes (‘Law and Gospel’) are adaptable to the ongoing witness of a particular (i.e. Wesleyan) communion of believers (‘Church and Canon’). To be sure, this third formation consists of all sorts of subtle shapes implicit in the Bible’s own particularity and universality which are continually manifested during the history of its interpretation. Yet one of our convictions is that the Bible provides more than a reminder that its unifying story as well as its diverse narratives establish the normative limits of the church’s unity and pluralism. In ‘Ecumenicity and Ecclesiology’, I argue that the biblical canon itself suggests a normative pattern for ecumenical engagement; in this sense (and others), the whole is greater than the mere sum of its parts. Thus, the theological unity and diversity found between particular and diverse communions of believers should reflect the theological unity and diversity found between those particular and diverse compositions of the Bible. Each communion finds its own particular legitimacy in a particular part of the biblical canon; but each communion recognizes the legitimacy of other communions by recognizing their confessional antecedents in different parts of the biblical canon.

As critical to the shape of this third formation, however, is the Bible’s role in relating together different communions of believers. While the canon functions to distinguish among those inside the church from those outside its faith, it also functions to distinguish between different communions within the faith and to facilitate their conversation with one another. Analogous to the biblical canon, particular communions are related to other communions as part of a self-correcting and mutually informing whole. Ecumenical engagement, patterned after the Bible, must not be reductionistic, seeking

only after that lowest common denominator that unites all denominations together. What remains behind is a very faint shadow of the whole truth. Rather an appreciation of what it means to be the whole church and to do as the church ought is gained only when its various communions are celebrated, each in turn by the others, and only when those various communions are then related together in ecumenical dialogue in ways that 'teach, correct, rebuke and train' the whole church. Even as the distinctiveness of Pauline or Jacobean or Lukan or Johannine or Petrine Christianity is preserved by critical exegesis, so also must the distinctiveness of Roman Catholicism (in its various parts), of Protestantism (in its various parts) and of Orthodoxy (in its various parts) be preserved by a critical ecumenicity. Only when the church catholic understands that its faith is a 'pluralizing monotheism' and only when it understands its pluralism as a gift from God, functioning as the church's built-in apparatus of ecclesiastical checks and balances, can ecumenical dialogue produce a people better able to worship and bear witness to the one true God.

Robert W. Wall
Easter, 1992

PART I

THE FOURFOLD GOSPEL OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

Chapter 1

THE GOSPELS AND CANONICAL CRITICISM*

Introduction

In recent years, the study of canon by two eminent Old Testament scholars, Brevard Childs and James Sanders, has raised important questions about the use of Scripture for theology and ethics. Before we attempt to assess the implications of their conclusions for the New Testament, especially the Gospels, it is necessary to set the so-called 'canonical criticism' within the context of earlier and concurrent views.

One common way of 'doing' theology in a precritical or anti-critical mode is to treat Scripture as a quarry of data about God, persons, the world, etc. By depending on one's knowledge or a concordance, one then collects information, wherever it may be found, about these topics. No matter where the material comes from, it is complementary and of equal weight. The text is read 'flatly'. Little, if any attention is given to genre, literary contexts, historical circumstances, etc. Sometimes, the central, organizing principle emerges from the professional expertise of the scholar. Thus, the heavily forensic, moral-governmental cast to Grotius's theology was a function of his career as a jurist.¹

Related to such a 'complementary' reading of the text is harmonization, which gained a certain sophistication with Tatian in the middle of the second century. This scholar did away with the divergences of the multiple Gospel canon to produce a single, smooth, consistent narrative of Jesus' life. The result was so influential in the Eastern Church,

* This essay first appeared as E.E. Lemcio, 'The Gospels and Canonical Criticism', *BTB* 11 (1981), pp. 114-22.

1. H.O. Wiley, *Christian Theology*, II (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1952), pp. 252-54.

especially in Syria, that for a time it displaced the canonical Gospels. And, though never achieving canonical status in the West, Tatian's *Diatessaron* became extremely popular, as evidenced by the numerous European translations which have survived.²

Eventually, even Syria returned to the fourfold Gospel canon, despite the difficulties which diversity and multiplicity brought with them. Of course, the suppression of written harmonies did not prevent harmonistic exegesis which flourished. Yet, when this failed, one could appeal to the principle which underlay the diversity. The supreme exponent of such a reductionism was Origen. When unable to harmonize plural accounts of the same or similar teaching or event in Jesus' life, he resorted to the mystical or spiritual truth lying behind and beneath what he was prepared to acknowledge as 'material falsehood'.³

There were more sensitive theologians like Calvin who, even in his harmonistic commentary on the Gospels, exhibited a keen historical judgment in observing that Matthew collected teaching from various times and settings into the block of material called 'the Sermon on the Mount'.⁴ Luther, exercising a daring christocentricity, ranked the New Testament writings according to the clarity with which they proclaimed Christ. Little wonder then, that of the Gospels, John's headed the list.⁵ However, despite these historical and theological sensibilities, we must conclude that there is nothing of the all-pervading, historical consciousness which began to emerge with the Enlightenment. One could appeal to the whole of Scripture as authoritative for faith and practice while engaging in various degrees of harmonization, reductionism and preferential treatment.

For those scholars who tried to take the Enlightenment seriously and still remain Christian, Scripture became a mine of historical rather than dogmatic information which theologians and ethicists appropriated to their tasks. Thus, during the nineteenth century, the

2. H. Merkel, *Die Pluralität der Evangelien als theologisches und exegetisches Problem in der alten Kirche*, XII (Bern: Peter Lang, 1978).

3. Origen, *Commentary on John X.4*, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, X (ed. and trans. A. Menzies; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), p. 383.

4. D.W. and T.T. Torrance (eds.), *Calvin's Commentaries: A Harmony of the Gospels: Matthew, Mark and Luke*, I (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), p. 168.

5. E.T. Bachmann (ed.), *Luther's Works*, XXXV (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), pp. 361-62.

primary goal was to recover the so-called historical Jesus so that one might pattern belief and behavior on his life.⁶ This conviction, chastened to be sure, is reflected currently in Joachim Jeremias's first volume of the *Theology of the New Testament*. Here is essentially a systematization of a lifetime's effort of recovering Jesus' *ipsissima verba*. A less ambitious cadre of scholars has been content to elicit at least his very voice (*vox*) or mind (*mens*).

Form and tradition critics, less certain of this endeavor regarding its possibility and legitimacy, attempted instead to trace the history of the early church's beliefs about Jesus from the tendencies of the Synoptic tradition and from various kerygmata and confessions. This approach is evident as the principle upon which Bultmann's *Theology of the New Testament* is organized, as a glance at the table of contents quickly confirms.

Redaction criticism narrows its attention to four particular moments of that larger history, the circumstances which called forth the Gospels as creative, literary-theological achievements. The Evangelists were not merely faceless tradents in an amorphous 'early Church', but pastors/theologians sensitive to the needs of particular congregations.⁷ Literary critics (and here we shall include the structuralists) are less concerned about the redactional process used by the evangelists to achieve their ends than they are about the final product of redaction and how its structure and dramatic action communicate to the reader or hearer.⁸

Together, these approaches were an advance over the earlier ones. However, new problems emerged. Theologians and ethicists felt obliged to prefer Mark and exclude John as the basis for their 'Lives of Jesus'. Furthermore, the authority for faith and life lay not in any text but behind it, in the scholar's often speculative and imaginative reconstructions. In the process, the diverse and multiple character of the documents was ignored too.

The difficulties were only somewhat alleviated in form, redaction and literary-critical study. In fact new questions were raised. At what

6. A. Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (New York: Macmillan, 1961).

7. N. Perrin, *What is Redaction Criticism?* (London: SPCK Press, 1970), pp. 21-39.

8. N. Petersen, *Literary Criticism for New Testament Critics* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), p. 70.

stage of the church's developing beliefs about Jesus was one to locate authority for belief and behavior? A naive primitivism regarded the earliest kerygma and creed as best. But supposing they had been immature or even positively false? Moreover, a deliberate or merely practical preference for this tradition or that Gospel has its drawbacks too. When theologians favor Luke in formulating a liberation theology, does this not run the risk of being rather sophisticated proof-texting? Of course no single verse is lifted from its Lukan context, but in effect one is appropriating an individual component of a multiple, evangelic corpus which is often thematically and literarily interdependent. Furthermore, one is in danger of simply proclaiming the theological and ethical agenda designed by an individual evangelist for a particular, historical situation rather than the word of God through his Christ to the church today. Such preferential treatment has serious consequences. Myopia can lead to ignorance. Concentrating narrowly upon a single tradition or Gospel runs the risk of idolatry by confusing reality with a single perception of it. Failure to give other witnesses their legitimate place promotes heresy—the opposite (I shall later argue) of the Gospel canon's catholicity.

Canonical Criticism

Within this complex debate, some of which they have generated, Childs and Sanders raise common questions, although their answers vary sharply. To what extent, in what sense and how should the canon be considered as authoritative when Scripture is appealed to in theological and ethical reflection?

Childs's fundamental claim is that the canonical text alone is the medium of divine revelation. Only the literary precipitates of the original *Sitze im Leben* have survived. What matters is a text's *Sitz im Leben des Kanons*. Historical criticism is useful only in bringing one to the meaning of a text in its final, canonical form and status. It is this which has nourished the life of the church throughout most of its history. Not the Isaiah(s) of history but the Isaiah of canon brings the community to faith and obedience. As a member of the believing community within which canon emerged, the biblical scholar must acknowledge this datum with full theological seriousness. Of course, Childs does not deny that God has revealed himself in the history of Israel, Jesus and the church. Rather, he insists that these are not iden-

tical with historians' reconstructions of those histories. Furthermore, such reconstruction is not only often impossible to achieve, it is also illegitimate as the basis of theology and ethics. (One is here reminded of the arguments leveled by dialectical theologians against the foundations of liberal Christianity in the twenties and thirties.⁹)

While it would be a mistake to regard Childs as a 'canonical fundamentalist' whose efforts turn the clock back to the precritical era, it is nevertheless fair to observe that he has not yet developed a coherent and comprehensive account of the continuity between the original saving events, the canonical text, and appropriate historical and theological methods of bridging the two polarities. Positively, he has raised questions that cannot be ignored about the historical and theological status of Scripture's final, canonical form.

If Childs emphasizes the canon as a *product* of the community's faith, Sanders stresses its *process*, a phenomenon which both preceded and followed the moments of 'intense canonical activity' which gathered certain authoritative documents together. This process consisted in preserving the reports of God's speech-acts in ancient contexts in a manner that could adapt them to contemporary ones. Here canonization and hermeneutics become almost identical phenomena.

Furthermore, the canonical product contains multiple ways (paradigms) of assessing and communicating the speech-acts of God to his people and their responses to him. These paradigms emerged during a millennium and a half across five cultures, producing a rich diversity of idiom, language and point of view. And, since all of these are legitimated by the written canon, none can claim final and absolute allegiance. There is a mutual relativizing going on all the time so that the only absolute is God, rather than a particular way of perceiving, communicating and responding to him. Sanders calls this the 'monotheizing pluralism' of canon.

Within the canon is a hermeneutical mode which employs two theological perspectives in a circumstantial way: God's steadfastness in maintaining covenant obligations and his creative freedom to judge his people when they violate the covenant and to devise new responses in the face of different circumstances. This theological stability and adaptability is reflected in the way God's spokespersons maintain or adapt tradition. Like them, the sensitive interpreter must determine

9. B.S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), pp. 46-106.

which category better suits the needs of the community and how it should function: as a support in the hour of distress and weakness or as a challenge to the tendency to confuse one's power, wisdom, government and righteousness with God's.¹⁰

Such diversity is less important for Childs who tends to work with it dialectically on the level of the text as it is illuminated by major commentators throughout the history of Christian and Jewish interpretation.¹¹ In addition to moving among biblical texts, Sanders uses the full range of critical disciplines to discover the means by which they were adapted in various contexts. While he has not given a systematic account of the process and its relation to the original events and the final form of the text, Sanders does grant the historical-critical enterprise positive, theological validity. There is in his method a more comprehensive attempt to recognize that throughout the Church's life, interpretative traditions have paralleled the text in an effort to enable it to speak again. One could say that historical and canonical criticism at its best are 'our way' since the Enlightenment of doing the same thing.

A Test Case: The Gospels

Childs's insistence upon the product of canonization, that is, that which the believing community preserved, and Sanders's greater stress upon the processes which brought it into being and made it perennially relevant because adaptable may be twin foci through which to view New Testament phenomena, too. Yet one should not proceed too quickly. The internal shape of the canon, consisting as it does of numerous genres and sub-units, requires that we attend to particular features that may not be characteristic of other sub-units. Paul's manner of citing the Old Testament and Jesus tradition does not concur with the Evangelists' or James's. Consequently, one cannot simply align them all when appealing to Scripture for our warrants.

Although limitations of space forbid a thoroughgoing study now, the point may be illustrated by focusing on the multiple Gospel

10. J.A. Sanders, *Torah and Canon* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), p. 116; and J.A. Sanders, 'Hermeneutics', *IDBSup* (ed. K. Crim; New York: Abingdon Press, 1976), pp. 402-407.

11. B.S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), pp. 42-46.

subcanon. Perhaps the issues raised by Childs and Sanders can be illustrated here more clearly than elsewhere. The nature of the fourfold Gospel corpus consists in two polarities which exist in perpetual tension: the preservation and adaptation of tradition. (And we might go further than both to say that the written canon which emerged sanctioned what was to be preserved as well as the mode and scope of its adaptation.)

Several features, literary and theological, warrant treating the Gospels collectively as well as individually. There is no other biblical sub-unit of its kind. Multiple, parallel accounts of the same person or event are not to be found elsewhere. The closest example might be the story of David in 2 Samuel and 1 Chronicles, and yet the canon separates them into different sections: the Former Prophets and the Writings. Nowhere in the New Testament is there material both by and about the central figure of the New Testament. Although Jesus tradition was preserved elsewhere in the early church (Rom. 12.14, 20; 1 Cor. 7.10, 11; 9.14, 23-26; Jas 2.5), here it was appealed to 'with a vengeance'. Furthermore, the Gospels' theological outlook constitutes a unity. While one can agree that the discontinuity between Jesus or the Gospels and Paul has been overdrawn, it is still not possible to argue that Paul merely presupposed both the extent and the outlook of the evangelic tradition. The apostle would agree that the earthly Jesus was God's final and foremost word to humankind; but it does not appear that he thought it of vital importance (in the sense that the Evangelists did) to know what he had said about God's will and what the response of his people should be. For Paul, it was what the risen Lord had 'said' to him that mattered most. So far as the Evangelists were concerned, the word of the risen Christ was intimately bound up with the words of the earthly Jesus.

Other factors invite, if not demand, us to view all four 'synoptically'. Without denying that each was addressed to a particular situation, it is time to protest that points made about their circumstantial character have been over-done. Their literary and theological interdependence says as much. Something quite standard about Mark led Matthew to preserve (and of course often adapt) 90 per cent of his material. Luke, too, felt obliged to incorporate half of Mark's Gospel and either share with Matthew or incorporate from him the material designated as 'Q'. Even if John was ignorant of or deliberately avoided the Synoptic tradition, he did make his point by employing a

similar genre. And, of course, there are those who argue that the Fourth Evangelist knew one or more of the Synoptics. At the very least (and this is not inconsiderable) the Passion Narrative represents among all four a significant amount of common ground.

Certainly Matthew and Luke (and Mark by implication) often disregarded the importance of the literary-theological contexts and ecclesiastical *Sitze im Leben* of their predecessors when they applied the tradition to their own day. But where the traditions were left exactly 'as is' or essentially intact, they assumed that the truth preserved was standard and that subsequent *Sitze im Leben* would at least be similar enough. Consequently, there is a stabilizing and universalizing phenomenon occurring as well as an adapting and contextualizing one. In other words, the Evangelists assume some fundamental things about God's deed in Christ and the standard needs of his people that transcend particular times and places.

Yet, in thus putting the matter of stability, I do not want to minimize the nature or degree of adaptation which went on. Stylistic and apologetic changes excluded, substantial modifications (in instances which can hardly be Jesus' own repeated utterances) represent the word of the living Lord being addressed to various circumstances. This insight of the early form critics complements the sentiments of the venerable Bishop Papias whose long life straddled the first and second centuries. To the plethora of books, he preferred the 'the living voice' preserved in the oral tradition.¹²

Perhaps this is the genius of the multiple Gospel canon: it illustrates vividly that the living voice cannot be frozen into a single, written form, that its rich undertones and overtones may not be limited to a monotone. Rather, the one but polyvalent word has inflections and nuances that dare not be filtered out by a narrow selection of witnesses. Yet there are limits. Words cannot mean anything and everything. From a field which eventually grew to two dozen or so, these four and no others were admitted. Such 'standard deviations' from the words of the earthly Jesus were not thought to conflict with the mind of Christ in the way that the others did.

At this point, the New Testament scholar might object that this sort of approach goes beyond the boundaries of one's specialty because the

12. Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 3.39.3-4, in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, I (ed. and trans. A.C. McGiffert; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), p. 171.

canon by this time reflects a catholicity wherein the tradition was stabilized, standardized, universalized and legitimated. But the nature of that catholicity is such that it tolerated (if not celebrated) process, particularity, diversity and pluralism within the Gospel tradition: *e pluribus unum* in an enviable sense. One ought not to forget that this second-century corpus has allowed us to view (along broad lines, anyway) the tendencies of the tradition and its appropriation by the Evangelists in four, concrete circumstances during the *first century*.

Consequently, even the 'pure' New Testament scholar may feel at home in another *Sitz im Leben* besides that of a Gospels-producing atmosphere in the latter part of the first century. This is the subsequent circumstance which prompted them to be collected into a corpus, *der Sitz im Leben des Kanons der Evangelien*. Even at this late date (for a *Neutestamentler*), the church exercised great restraint in avoiding either preferential treatment of one or of harmonizing all into a single, non-controversial story. Although future generations might succumb to one or the other of these temptations, early in the second century the church risked the stigma of a multiple and diverse canon. In so doing, it bequeathed forever four paradigms by which to 'conjugate the verbs of God's activity' in Jesus.¹³

If this assessment of the Gospels is correct, what then are some implications for Gospels' study *per se* and for the manner by which one appeals to this part of Scripture as in some sense authority for Christian faith and practice? At least one implication is that comparative Gospel study will need to assume status as an end in itself rather than as merely a source for gathering raw material for the redaction critic. The documents must rather be viewed as providing data for the development of canonical hermeneutics, a sample of which follows.

The Beatitudes

The point can be made most sharply if we take as our subject the Beatitudes in Mt. 5.1-12 and Lk. 6.17-26. It would not be unfair to say that Matthew's version has been appealed to more in the church's preaching and instruction than Luke's. John Topel has estimated that of nearly a thousand entries in a recent bibliography covering the entire Christian period, only 3.5 per cent have attended to the Lukan version. Probably the advent of redaction criticism has lessened the

13. Sanders, 'Hermeneutics', p. 407.

imbalance somewhat in the last 25 years during which roughly 23 per cent of studies on the Sermon focused on Luke's. Perhaps the appeal to Luke by liberation theologians and others who are concerned about the church's attitude toward economics, politics and society has increased the attention, too.

Further work on the Lukan sermon must be encouraged to balance things out, since the canon itself gives neither priority. But two questions beg to be answered. Why has the inequality occurred at all, and what shall we do with both once equilibrium has been achieved? A historical theologian will need to answer the former query, but New Testament scholars must address the second. Supposing we could achieve consensus on the materials, methods and results of the Evangelists' redaction, what then? How does one determine the biblical understanding of blessedness? Is it the poor in spirit or the poor? Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness or the hungry? How can theology and ethics draw upon both instead of resorting to preferential treatment, harmonization or reductionism?

We can attempt an answer to these vexing questions only by admitting that the essential historical issue (what did Jesus teach about blessedness?) and the traditio-historical ones are so problematic that one cannot as yet appeal to any kind of consensus or convincing alternative by which to chart the process of adaptation from original *Sitz im Leben* to canonical context. The data are not firm enough and our tools are too blunt. Yet perhaps some intimation of earlier issues might still be discernable by observing the Evangelists from a canonical point of view.

The place to begin is with some attention to the theological and religious atmosphere within which Jesus and the Evangelists lived, moved and had their being. A brief excursion into the Old Testament and Jewish background of the Beatitudes (an exercise in the history of Jewish religion) discloses that much of the vocabulary and theology of both the Matthean and Lukan versions can be accounted for in two wisdom psalms, 34 and 37 (where the greater concentration occurs). The coextensive vocabulary and phrasing (apart from the introductory 'Blessed') is striking, especially in the LXX (see also Isa. 57.15). But so is the inclusive idea of spiritual poverty ('the poor and needy' is parallel to the 'upright in heart' in v. 14) and economic poverty (the little which the righteous have is better than the wealth of many wicked, v. 16; see also vv. 21, 26). Furthermore, the future reversal

of the fortunes of both the wicked rich and the righteous poor, which appears clearly only in Luke, is also embraced within Psalm 37. (Such a contrast is not entirely absent from Matthew's version if the αὐτοί is intensive: these [and not the others] will inherit the earth, etc.)

Furthermore, this ideal was maintained, or at least was claimed, in the theology and common life of the Qumran sect. In fragments of their commentary on Psalm 37 (4QPs 37), it is clear that they interpreted this passage to speak of themselves. Moreover, the sectarians referred to themselves as the 'poor of spirit'. Since the expression is the construct state in Hebrew, it functions in contexts which refer either to the inner condition of the faithful (i.e. 'the poor in spirit', cf. Mt. 5.3) or to their voluntary, economic state (i.e. 'the poor who have the spirit'). The latter use resembles Lk. 6.20.¹⁴ Here the context suggests that the addressees are the followers of Jesus and not the poor in general.

In reality, such an integrated ideal was (and is) often bifurcated into a kind of ethical dualism. Yahweh's commitment to the kingship and Temple, interpreted unconditionally *à la* Nathan (2 Sam. 7.11-16) led to a disregard for moral responsibility which some prophets blamed for the downfall of the monarchy (Jer. 7.1-15). Or, it was thought that faithful, cultic observance was possible without attention to social and economic justice, another dichotomy which the prophets denounced (Isa. 58). Matthew casts Jesus in the prophetic mold of restoring the missing element of a larger whole. In ch. 23, which structurally forms an intimate, though remote, context for chs. 5-7 (esp. 5.20), Jesus upbraids the scribes and Pharisees for not practicing what they preach (vv. 2-4) for attending to outward purity without concern for the inner life (vv. 26-29). It is not as though the externals are unimportant. By reminding them of the 'weightier matters of the law' such as justice, mercy and faith, Jesus does not deny the validity of tithing which ought to be done (v. 23).

This drive toward a righteousness higher than the Pharisees' (5.10) dominates the near environment of the Beatitudes. It is of a deeper kind which describes the inner attitude that lies at the heart of external acts. Thus, anger is as serious as murder, the predatory eye as adulterous as the act itself (5.21-30). Such an understanding of

14. D. Flusser, 'Blessed are the Poor in Spirit', *Israel Exploration Journal* 10 (1960), p. 5; and D. Flusser, 'Some Notes to the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12, Luke 6:20-26)', *Immanuel* 8 (1978), p. 42.

righteousness seeks God's approval in secret, not the public approval of persons (6.1-18). Of course, one must have food and clothing; but concern for these should not consume one's existence (6.19-21, 25-32). If God's government and his righteousness are sought above all, they will be forthcoming (v. 33).

How intriguing that Matthew, whose Gospel opens with such an internal, spiritual aspect of righteousness, concludes with its complement. In the most detailed description of final judgment in the New Testament (25.31-46), the blessed (here εὐλογημένοι, v. 34) are described as righteous (v. 37) because they (Gentile nations? Christians?) ministered to the least of Christ's brothers (Christian missionaries? the needy anywhere?) who had been hungry, naked and imprisoned (vv. 37-40).¹⁵ Therefore, one cannot claim that Matthew's understanding of blessedness (the poor in spirit, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness) excludes, in an absolute sense, the economic dimension. Rather, the overall redactional schema of Matthew's Gospel leads us to conclude that they represent an effort, perhaps an exaggerated one, to restore a missing element in the Judaism (and Christianity) of his day.

A similar case could be made for Luke. As with the first Evangelist, his ordering of the traditions sets the stage for the Beatitudes in ch. 6. In the Magnificat (1.52, 53), there resounds the theme of the great reversal (see Ps. 37 throughout) which will change the fortunes of the poor and rich, weak and powerful. From the Baptizer's hell-fire and brimstone preaching (3.7-15) to Jesus' sermon in Nazareth (4.16-21), the prevailing theme is God's good news to the poor and oppressed. It should come as no surprise, then, that in Luke's Beatitudes, stress on the inner quality of the blessed is absent (Mt. 5.4, 5, 7-9) and that blessings instead are pronounced upon the poor, hungry and distressed (6.20, 21). Moreover, woes fall upon the rich, full, happy and well-reputed (vv. 24-26).

Yet, Jesus' audience is not simply the vast crowd which came from everywhere to the plain (vv. 17-19). The clear data from the context suggest the economic poverty and hunger of the disciples (v. 20) who had earlier left their livelihoods to follow Jesus (5.1-11, 27-28). No one else could be described as being abused for the sake of the Son of

15. J. Mánek, 'Mit wem identifiziert sich Jesus (Matt. 25:31-46)?', in S. Smalley and B. Lindars (eds.), *Christ and Spirit in the New Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), pp. 15-25.

Man (v. 22). Furthermore, their experience is compared with that of the prophets (v. 23). The reference is clearly to God's spokespersons, his loyal representatives. However, the same must be said of those who receive the woes. Here the second-person form of address is constantly sustained, and those thus identified are compared to the false prophets who enjoyed a good reputation in their day (v. 26).

So, while underscoring real poverty and hunger in a way that Matthew does not, Luke nevertheless does not neglect the 'spiritual' aspects of blessedness. To make his point, he portrays Jesus as challenging a sector of Judaism (and consequently Christianity) which had excluded economics from its concept of true blessedness. Support for this analysis comes from Luke's second volume, which recounts the earliest church in Jerusalem practicing economic poverty (Acts 2.44-45; 4.32-37). This behavior and its attendant motivation was taken so seriously that Ananias and Sapphira forfeit their lives when it is discovered that they had given to the church only part of the proceeds from property which they had sold (5.1-11) and falsified the report of how much money had been made from property sold.

Might one go further? If we take seriously the ancient testimony of Papias about the factors which determined the form and content of Peter's preaching (the needs of the community), then perhaps we can cautiously draw some further conclusions regarding the Evangelists' respective *Sitze im Leben*. By examining the 'positive print' of his Gospel, we inferred that Matthew challenged a community tending to forget about the deep, internal resources necessary for producing good fruit (7.15-20). Luke served notice to a community 'at home' in the world, enjoying the fruits of piety: good reputation and material success which so often lure one from the original blessedness. In both instances, each Evangelist separately restored the integrity of themes expressed so naturally and holistically in passages such as Psalm 37 and embodied, according to their documents, by the sectarians at Qumran.

In time, the original *Sitze im Leben* within which the Gospels emerged vanished. Only their literary precipitates remained. Yet, the church of the late first or early second century, in drawing Matthew and Luke together, thereby recreated canonically those original polarities which called the Gospels forth. In other words, Matthew and Luke 'spoke' to each other in the way that they had once addressed their respective communities. In the process, the integrity