Childs and the Canon or Rule of Faith

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> In fact … canonical criticism … is simplistic. Basically it has only one idea: the controlling place of the canon. To others this may fall apart into several conflicting ideas, but to the canonical critic himself it is all one idea. There is of course complexity even in the canon, but all that complexity can be dealt with by the one simple idea.… The canonical principle leaves the believer at peace, alone with his Bible.
>
> — James Barr

> Criticism of my understanding of canon emerges as a recurrent theme in some of the responses of my colleagues. It is occasionally claimed that it is imprecise, unanalytical, and encompasses a variety of different phenomena. I feel that the complexity of the process being described within the OT has been underestimated, and that one is asking for an algebraic solution to a problem requiring calculus.
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> — Brevard Childs

Locating the work of Brevard Childs (1923–2007) can be difficult.[1] A great deal has been written about what his canonical approach amounts to, not all of it sympathetic, not all of it helpful (critics can of course be either one without being the other). The fact that many of the portraits on offer do not much resemble Childs's self-presentation tends to obscure the scholar's actual voice, and it exacerbates the attempt to situate his contribution. Nowhere is this truer than in the multitudinous detractions of James Barr (1924–2006), who charges that "canonical criticism [*sic*]

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1. An earlier version of this essay appeared as the first chapter of Daniel R. Driver, *Brevard Childs, Biblical Theologian: For the Church's One Bible* (FAT 2/46; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010). Revisions and English translations from that book's North American edition (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012) have been incorporated into the body of the text. Thanks to Mohr Siebeck for permission to reproduce the work here.

… is simplistic," that the only thing its several features have in common is that they co-exist in the same mind.[2] For Barr the term "canon" does not stand for a workable approach to biblical exegesis, but instead masks profound confusion. Childs, on the other hand, maintains against criticism like this that he would not offer "an algebraic solution to a problem requiring calculus."[3] Readers of Childs's work and of the controversy it has provoked thus face rather stark alternatives. Is the canonical approach a methodological train wreck, or is it a sophisticated attempt to address complicated hermeneutical problems?

In answering this question some have split the difference. Childs offers important insights, it is affirmed, and yet due to the confusion in and unworkability of his program, his method must be thoroughly rebuilt. The canonical approach is flawed but can be salvaged.[4] Still others have welcomed Childs's proposals as highly salubrious. Christopher Seitz, for example, counts himself with those who judge Childs's Biblical Theology "as the most brilliant proposal for theological exegesis offered in recent memory" (if "one unlikely to gain the sort of foothold necessary to transform the church in its use of scripture").[5] But the relationship between student and teacher is less than straightforward in this instance, as evidenced by the way Seitz and Childs inform one another's work on Isaiah. Seitz dedicates his 1991 study *Zion's Final Destiny* to three honored teachers, one of whom is Childs, even as the book reconsiders Childs's main work on Isaiah up to that point (*Isaiah and the Assyrian*

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2. James Barr, *Holy Scripture: Canon, Authority, Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 168. Barr uses "canonical criticism" despite Childs's protests. On its limitations as a descriptor for Childs's approach, see Gerald Sheppard, "Canonical Criticism," *ABD* 1:861–66.

3. Childs, "Response to Reviewers of Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture," *JSOT* 16 (1980): 52–60 (52).

4. Major attempts at rehabilitation include Mark Brett's *Biblical Criticism in Crisis? The Impact of the Canonical Approach on Old Testament Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), Paul Noble's *The Canonical Approach: A Critical Reconstruction of the Hermeneutics of Brevard S. Childs* (Leiden: Brill, 1995) and Georg Steins's *Die "Bindung Isaaks" im Kanon (Gen 22): Grundlagen und Programm einer Kanonisch-Intertextuellen Lektüre* (Freiburg: Herder, 1999).

5. Christopher Seitz, *Word without End: The Old Testament as Abiding Theological Witness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 109. I follow James Barr's practice of capitalizing "biblical theology" when I mean a specific instance of the genre and not otherwise.

Crisis, 1967).[6] Childs in turn dedicates his 2001 Isaiah commentary to Seitz but does not hesitate there to probe and challenge the argument of *Zion's Final Destiny*. It hardly simplifies matters that Childs's sharpest critics and his strongest advocates share in the testing and refinement of Childs's thought over decades.

Gerald Sheppard, another of Childs's students, aptly describes part of the challenge here. "Childs has shown an ability to change his mind on issues and approaches over time. Ambiguities or lacunae at later stages in his work cannot be uncritically clarified by appeal to earlier positions. Yet what persists from his earlier work may remain presupposed by later formulations."[7] To take just one instance, the 1970s argument from "midrash" seen in the late addition of Psalm titles is essential background to the argument for "canonical shaping," a ubiquitous theme in Childs's oeuvre. At the same time, the term "midrash" itself is increasingly rejected. Through the 1980s Childs came to view it as a mode inappropriate for modern Christian exegetes.[8] Then again, care should be taken not to exaggerate this change dynamic. Seitz also emphasizes major strands of continuity in Childs's work over the years, and he observes "that already in 1970 Childs had laid out the basic defining features of the approach. These have been modified only subtly or in extending efforts." He points to no less than five instances of "durable and sustained interest" to be found, starting with *Biblical Theology in Crisis*: (1) critique of historical criticism, (2) special prioritization of the final form, (3) "observations on the status of the Hebrew and Greek text-traditions," (4) critical but appreciative attention to pre-Enlightenment exegesis, and (5) "biblical theological handling of the two Testaments, in which the Old retains its voice as Christian Scripture, and Biblical Theology is more than a sensitive appreciation of how the New handles the Old."[9] That Childs's thought develops over time does not make it a moving target.

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6. Christopher Seitz, *Zion's Final Destiny: The Development of the Book of Isaiah: A Reassessment of Isaiah 36–39* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), x: "Ironically, much of Childs's own later work on canon has had a decided influence on the sorts of questions and modifications I have proposed here, vis-à-vis his original work."

7. Gerald Sheppard, "Childs, Brevard (b. 1923)," in *Historical Handbook of Major Biblical Interpreters* (ed. Donald McKim; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1998), 575–84 (575).

8. For details on this development see chapter 6 of Driver, *Brevard Childs*.

9. Christopher Seitz, "The Canonical Approach and Theological Interpretation,"

But perhaps the greatest initial difficulty confronting those who wish to understand Childs is neither the need to find him amidst his many readers, nor subtlety in the development of his thought, but rather the sheer magnitude of his project. This has a couple of aspects. First, his writings adopt a cumulative scope. *Biblical Theology in Crisis* exhibits several hallmarks of the canonical approach, yet Childs would spend the next twenty-two years advancing the purpose adumbrated there. As he remarks a decade on, just after the arrival of his landmark *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (1979),

> Most of the crucial issues such as the relationship of the two testaments and the other kinds of judgments beyond exegesis which are part of the hermeneutical task, I have not been able to address directly within the scope of an OT Introduction. [In *Biblical Theology in Crisis*] I tried to cover some of these larger issues. Only after the book had been published did I realize that the groundwork had not as yet been carefully enough laid to support a theology of both testaments. Therefore, I decided to reexamine the foundations before pursuing biblical theology any further.[10]

Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture could only be part of the reexamination, and here in 1980 he forecasts his next two major volumes, *The New Testament as Canon: an Introduction* (1984) and *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (1992): "This descriptive task is far from complete. A study of the New Testament from a canonical perspective would also have to be executed before one could adequately address the central issues of biblical theology."[11] Thus the publication of *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* signals the completion of a longstanding personal goal,

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in *Canon and Biblical Interpretation* (ed. Craig Bartholomew et al.; SHS 7; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 58–110 (59).

10. Brevard Childs, "A Response [to James Mays et al.]," *HBT* 2 (1980): 199–211 (199).

11. Ibid. See the preface to Childs, *The New Testament as Canon: An Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984): "I would like to emphasize that this volume is an Introduction to the New Testament. It is not a biblical theology, nor does it attempt to treat in detail the whole range of questions which involves the relation of the two Testaments. It is, of course, still my hope to have time and energy one day to address these issues" (xvi).

and one with major antecedent steps.[12] The issue is not just that Childs's work is voluminous, but that it comprises a coordinated effort. It virtually asks to be read as a corpus. Second, it is not possible to be an expert in all the modes and subject areas his writing covers—from biblical theology's history and quandaries of method, to commentary on particular biblical books, to the broad contours of each testament alone and both together, to the Bible's expansive history of reception—all of which appear to be ingredient in the task (his struggle) of understanding the form and function of the Christian Bible, Old Testament and New, as one witness to the church across its total life. Such a vision goes far beyond merely keeping abreast of scholarship on Exodus or Isaiah or Paul.

Is Childs himself difficult to understand? Some well-known scholars have said as much.[13] I myself sympathize with Roy Harrisville and Walter Sundberg, who wonder that "almost all of Childs's critics have either misunderstood, half understood, or ignored, clumsily or artfully, what has persistently served as his primary concern."[14] If anything, Childs's work is repetitive, especially in rehearsing this concern. On Harrisville and Sundberg's reading it is just this:

> For Childs the Bible is more than a classic and indispensable witness to God's concern and action, however embodied. Its understanding is more than a contemporizing of the church's traditions; its ontology more than a paradigm, and more than a documenting of the human experience. For Childs the Bible, in the context of the church's confession, is the instrument of encounter with the living God.[15]

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12. Christoph Dohmen frames the matter well in his preface to Brevard Childs, *Die Theologie der einen Bibel* (trans. Manfred and Christiane Oeming; 2 vols.; Freiburg: Herder, 1994–1996), 11–14; trans. of *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), which hereafter is abbreviated *BTONT*.

13. As Rolf Rendtorff puts it (review of Childs, *BTONT*, *JBTh* 9 [1994]: 359–69), "I do not understand what it means to claim that the Old Testament testifies to Christ (not a coming Messiah, but Jesus Christ). A hermeneutic that ignores basic historical facts is incomprehensible to me" (367).

14. Roy Harrisville and Walter Sundberg, *The Bible in Modern Culture: Baruch Spinoza to Brevard Childs* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 324–25.

15. Ibid., 325.

To put Childs's career thesis in other words, the historically shaped canon of scripture, in its two discrete witnesses, is a christological rule of faith that in the church, by the action of the Holy Spirit, accrues textual authority. This is the figure in the carpet, so to speak, and its outline is nothing like as difficult to spot as the one sought in the fictitious writings of Henry James's Hugh Vereker. But neither is it an easy thesis to unpack and defend. This again is part of why Childs speaks of the struggle to understand Christian scripture. The bafflement of many of his reviewers turns on the strangeness of his vision in the modern world. Terence Fretheim's conclusion is both frank and revealing: the "particular formulations" in *BTONT*, he writes, "so often reflect a world other than the one in which I live."[16] Though expressing this less directly, many others seem to feel a similar alienation, and from this perspective Childs appears as a brontosaur who survived cataclysm only to plod through a smouldering landscape. That is, the queries critics have posed often sound less like "What does he mean?" than "What is he still doing here?"

There are indeed tensions in the canonical approach even if they are not as severe as some have charged. Elsewhere I discuss whether or not their sum is an inconcinnity.[17] Here I simply want to unpack two ways of locating or framing the work of Brevard Childs. The first touches his vocation as a biblical theologian, and the second, the relationship of his notion of canon to history. Both topics show Childs's commitment to some tremendous and acknowledged challenges. Both also suggest that his approach is far from simple. I hope to give some impression of the approach's aims, what problems it identifies, and how on its own terms these are solved or mitigated. As a charitable point of departure, I also want to raise the possibility that Childs's promotion of canon as a governing framework need not be seen as dogmatism, obstinacy or the mutterings of a simpleton, but can be appreciated as a knowledgeable embrace of an intricate, knotty subject.

Childs as Biblical Theologian

Childs ventured into many cognate fields over his academic career. After completing four years of doctoral work at the University of Basel—this period included a semester at Heidelberg in 1951 as well—he began teach-

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16. Terence Fretheim, review of Childs, *BTONT*, *CBQ* 56 (1994): 324–26 (326).
17. See chapters 2 and 9 in Driver, *Brevard Childs*.

ing Old Testament at a small Wisconsin seminary (now defunct) in 1954. Four years later, in 1958, he accepted a post at Yale University, where he taught until his retirement in 1999.[18] For some years he studied Jewish midrash in earnest, first with a local rabbi and then with Judah Goldin at Yale. In the meanwhile he produced a series of form critical studies in the vein of his German-speaking instructors. Later, upon writing his introduction to the OT, he devoted no less than five years to researching an introduction to the NT. The aim was to "read as widely as possible in an effort to do justice to the integrity of this discipline."[19] His next step toward biblical theology was the comparatively slim *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* (1985). After finally realizing a Biblical Theology of both testaments in the same year he was made Sterling Professor of Divinity (1992). He then returned to the OT proper by writing a technical commentary on Isaiah, despite a series of health issues that he feared would keep him from completing the task. Reprieves in his illness permitted him to give a focussed kind of attention to church history, moving far beyond his early work in the history of exegesis, for which the Exodus commentary (1974) is commonly remembered, with *The Struggle to Understand Isaiah as Christian Scripture* (2004). A notable theme in the latter title is the problem of allegory in Christian exposition of the OT. Finally, he once again turned his eye to the NT with the posthumously published *The Church's Guide for Reading Paul: The Canonical Shaping of the Pauline Corpus* (2008). The manuscript had been sent to the publisher just days before his death on 23 June 2007, at the age of 83.

How should one classify ranging work of this sort? Looking for precedents, something like Rudolf Smend's study of the work of W. M. L. de Wette presents a possibility. That study falls into two parts: there is de Wette the *Alttestamentler* (part 1), and then de Wette the *Neutestamentler* (part 2).[20] The neat division does not suit Childs very well, however, and

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18. The best previous account of Childs's biography is found in Harrisville and Sundberg, *Bible in Modern Culture*, 309–10. Though brief, it incorporates a personal correspondence with Childs about his life. Sheppard's earlier, longer account in *Historical Handbook of Major Biblical Interpreters* is still useful but contains a few errors. See also Daniel Driver and Nathan MacDonald, "Childs, Brevard S.," *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception* 5:126–27.

19. Childs, *New Testament as Canon*, xvi.

20. Rudolf Smend, *Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Wettes Arbeit am Alten und am Neuen Testament* (Basel: Helbing & Lichtenhahn, 1958).

actually is not broad enough. In my judgment, a more general and slightly ambiguous title is most appropriate in his case—Childs as biblical theologian.[21] All parts of his work come under the biblical theological umbrella in some way. Because the designation is contested, though, it calls for a little explanation.

To begin with, Childs freely acknowledges that difficulties attend the genres he undertook. Note what he says about the task of writing an OT Theology, for instance. The context is a symposium on Jewish-Christian dialogue held in early January 1985, the year *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* appeared:

> From its inception, it was characteristic of Old Testament theology that it always had to contend with serious methodological uncertainties. Although it was often called the crowning achievement of the whole discipline, it appeared as though its leading practitioners were always glancing warily about at other subdisciplines, full of concern that some new literary, historical, or philological discovery might threaten the enterprise.… Not only was the discipline loosely defined and constantly shifting, but certain fundamental tensions continue to pose questions as to what form an Old Testament theology should take. Is this academic discipline only descriptive, or does it necessarily include an element of constructive theology? What is the relation between an Old Testament theology and a history of Israel? Are its structuring principles historical, systematic, or an eclectic combination of both? And finally: what is the relation between Jewish and Christian theological interpretations of the Hebrew Scriptures?[22]

These are all among the questions he takes up at various points in his work, although it is worth underscoring that his driving concern at this juncture is theology of just the First Testament. He admits that it would be "supremely arrogant" to propose a quick solution to a nest of problems so complex they seem to inhere in the discipline. Nonetheless, he commends an approach to scripture marked by constitutive features of Christian

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21. Childs refers to himself as a biblical theologian at least once (*The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary* [Louisville: Westminster, 1974], 88).

22. Brevard Childs, "Die Bedeutung des jüdischen Kanons in der alttestamentlichen Theologie," in *Mitte der Schrift: Ein jüdisch-christliches Gespräch—Texte des Berner Symposions vom 6–12 Januar 1985* (ed. Martin Klopfenstein et al.; trans. Ulrich Luz and Eva Ringler; Judaica et Christiana 11; Frankfurt: Lang, 1987), 269–81 (271–72).

exposition, features which to his satisfaction have not been adequately pursued in the critical or postcritical era. "I would like to address some of these agonizing methodological questions in some other way."[23] A key element of the prescription is a reminder that OT theology has almost always been—is perhaps irreducibly—a Christian preoccupation. If so, the ecumenical dilemma for OT exegetes becomes how to appropriately handle a Jewish canon now functioning as OT within the operations of church theology.

Biblical theology itself—more than just Old plus New, "as if one could spend the first semester with Eichrodt and von Rad and the second with Bultmann and Jeremias!"[24]—is for Childs fundamentally a bridge-building exercise, an arena for theological reflection on the entire Christian Bible in which biblical scholarship and dogmatic theology meet to illuminate the object they share. Its "major function … is to provide a bridge for two-way traffic between biblical exegesis and systematic theology's reflection on the subject matter."[25] Childs obviously entered this space as an OT specialist, and by his own admission he was not as successful coming up to speed in systematics as in the NT. "In spite of the challenge of trying to gain competence in both testaments, this task paled into insignificance before the difficulty of gaining entrance into the field of dogmatic/systematic theology. Anyone who has ever studied under Karl Barth is left with the lasting sense of inadequacy just from remembering the standards of thoroughness which he required of his students."[26] That is, Childs never attempted a Church Dogmatics. I doubt that his ambition ever reached that far. He made efforts at proficiency in the formal discipline of theology, although these struck him as inadequate.[27] Yet biblical theology's connecting purpose is to rejoin scripture and theology. It serves something other than dialogue for its own sake, or whatever other goals might be desirable in a strictly academic context. It arises first from a church situation, and

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23. Ibid., 272.

24. Childs, *BTONT*, xv.

25. Ibid., 481, cf. 551. See also Christine Helmer, "Biblical Theology: Bridge over Many Waters," *CurBS* 3 (2005): 169–96.

26. Childs, *BTONT*, xvi.

27. "From my library shelves the great volumes of the Fathers, Schoolmen, and Reformers look down invitingly. I have also acquired over the years many of the great classics of the Reformed and Lutheran post-Reformation tradition. However, life is too short for a biblical specialist to do more than read selectively and dabble here and there" (ibid.).

as such it principally serves the unity of the Christian confession of one God. This ecclesial context drives Childs's concern for "the oneness of the biblical witness," or the "oneness of scripture's scope" that he insists "is not a rival to the multiple voices within the canon."[28] Exactly how to articulate scripture's unity, at both the exegetical level and the hermeneutical or theological level, admits a range of answers, but for Childs the basic confessional imperative inherent in the question is experienced and voiced at every turn.

So when Gerhard Ebeling writes of an "inner unity" to the discipline in a classic essay on the meaning of biblical theology (1955), Childs picks up the language: "The Christian church responded to [the canonical scriptures] as the authoritative word of God, and it remains existentially committed to an inquiry into its inner unity because of its confession of the one gospel of Jesus Christ which it proclaims to the world."[29] At least three points of clarification need to be made about this claim. First, it is fair to say that the Ebeling-Childs line, which foregrounds unity, reverses the priorities of J. P. Gabler, who for convenience's sake is often credited with calling biblical theology into existence. Childs admits this by calling Ebeling's definition a redefinition, and "a return to a pre-Gabler position in so far as he once again joins the historical and theological elements."[30] Gabler had advocated a sharp distinction in his inaugural lecture at Altdorf in 1787, a distinction between religion and theology, between things of "historical origin" and "didactic origin," between "the simplicity of what they call biblical theology" and "the subtlety of dogmatic theology."[31] Procedurally this entails further distinctions, not only between OT and NT, but also Paul and the gospel writers, right down to the level of each individual author.[32] Yet Gabler does not envision the final divorce of biblical from dogmatic theology, and one can only guess how he might have addressed the evaporation of his hope to eliminate "doubtful readings" of scripture in pursuit

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28. Ibid., 719, 725.

29. Ibid., 8.

30. Ibid., 7.

31. John Sandys-Wunscha and Laurence Eldredge, "J. P. Gabler and the Distinction Between Biblical and Dogmatic Theology: Translation, Commentary, and Discussion of His Originality," *SJT* 33 (1980): 133–58 (137).

32. In order to establish proper comparisons of biblical ideas to "universal notions," he prescribes first "diligently isolating the opinions of each author" (ibid., 142).

of "the Christian religion of all times."[33] Ebeling and Childs reflect very different historical moments when compared to Gabler. Furthermore, it would be a serious mistake to assume that Childs (the only one of the three actually to attempt a Biblical Theology) nullifies all distinctions in the name of unity. We have already seen evidence of the way he accords Jewish studies, OT and NT scholarship, and systematic theology their own integrity as disciplines. His language of "discrete witnesses" is also relevant here. Perhaps it is not too trivial a generalization to say that, in the centuries between Gabler and Childs, the burden of keeping Christian theology intact came to overwhelm the need to keep its domains apart. As Ebeling's essay concludes, the concept "biblical theology," the false understanding of which caused theology—contrary to the original intention—to split up into different disciplines, when rightly understood points back again to the unity of theology—not of course a unity achieved by abolishing the different disciplines, but a unity consisting in the right theological use of the different disciplines, each of which has its own peculiar task and yet each is "theology" in the sense of participating in the scientific expression of the Word of God.[34]

The task is to hear "the inner unity of the manifold testimony of the Bible," and the call is for "the intensive co-operation of Old and New Testament scholars" and indeed of all theological specialists, including dogmaticians and church historians. Should collaboration be achieved, Ebeling submits that "'biblical theology' would not then be a rival substitute for dogmatics and would hardly correspond either to the pietistic ideal of a 'simple' theology, but would be an uncommonly complex exercise in historical theology."[35] This ideal counters the trend toward hyper-specialization and realigns a standard view of biblical theology; simultaneously, it denies the simplicity of pure notions that Gabler desired. In each of these respects Childs stands with Ebeling.

Second, Childs is quite frank about what constitutes the "inner unity," and it is far from the old enthusiasm for universal religion: a biblical theologian has to do with "inner unity because of … the one gospel of Jesus Christ." At the center of Childs's approach, then, is a startlingly specific

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33. Ibid., 143.

34. Gerhard Ebeling, "The Meaning of 'Biblical Theology,'" in *Word and Faith* (trans. J. W. Leitch; London: SCM, 1963), 79–97 (96).

35. Ibid. He continues, "then it would be able also for its part to assist dogmatics towards a clearer grasp of the question of what constitutes scriptural dogmatics."

confession of the lordship of Jesus Christ. To be sure, he is not the first biblical theologian to make this move. In the end there is an expressly christological side to Old Testament inquiry for one of his teachers, Gerhard von Rad, however reluctantly acknowledged by von Rad himself, however often overlooked by von Rad's other students and successors. Yet for Childs the *Christuszeugnis* of scripture's witness is fully embraced by 1992 and forms the heart of his *gesamtbiblische* theology. Sometimes the utter difficulty of the assertion sounds out loudest. "To be sure, it remains hard to specify what it means to find a reference to Christ in the Old Testament, and struggling with this problem cuts to the heart of biblical theology."[36] Just how should one move from the verbal or literal sense of the the OT to its true theological substance, identified by Childs as knowledge of God in the face of Christ? Most traditional Christian exegetes do so readily. Von Rad's hesitancy in the twentieth century, and Childs's in its own way, is symptomatic of a dilemma facing biblical scholars who feel compelled to take similar steps in a critical age. All the same, *BTONT* undertakes the search for, and upholds the proclamation of, one thing from two testaments, namely, the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Third, specificity about Christ puts extra strain on the biblical theologian's ecumenical obligations. If OT theology was once presumed the crown of OT scholarship, this has not been the case since about the time Childs first waved the tattered banner of biblical theology in 1970. Jon Levenson, in an essay exploring shortcomings in the OT Theologies of Eichrodt and von Rad, effectively describes the less certain climate that has gained predominance over the field of historical critical scholarship.

In North America, the emergence of religion departments and Jewish studies programs and departments has further contributed to the dethronement of Christian theology, indeed any theology, as the organizing paradigm for the study of the Hebrew Bible. As a consequence, in the elite academic world, those for whom the term "Old Testament" is more than vestigial have been put into the unenviable position of an ex-emperor who now must learn how to be a good neighbor.[37]

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36. Brevard Childs, "Biblische Theologie und christlicher Kanon," *JBTh* 3 (1988): 13–27 (24). Compare idem, "Gerhard von Rad in American Dress," in *The Hermeneutical Quest: Essays in Honor of James Luther Mays on his 65th Birthday* (ed. Donald Miller; Allison Park, Pa.: Pickwick, 1986), 77–86.

37. Jon Levenson, *The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism: Jews and Christians in Biblical Studies* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 32.

Given these circumstances, one can appreciate why a theologically minded Lutheran Old Testament scholar like Fretheim judges *BTONT* as "a theological retrenchment"—a failure precisely in its ability to cope with the new climate—and "more as a somewhat belated end of an era than as … an imaginative venture that charts new directions."[38] Fretheim probably underestimates the extent to which Childs broke with those he gladly claimed as his teachers (interestingly, Levenson quotes Childs in support of his critique of von Rad). But by voicing deeper misgivings about the ability of *BTONT* to address "the complex realities of the contemporary world," Fretheim makes the potentially damaging point that Childs's tendency to dismiss newer theological efforts by liberation, process, feminist or postmodern theologians puts him out of touch.[39] The canonical approach is just too traditional to have relevance or impact. Are most historic forms of Christianity automatically out of touch, though? The attempt simply to clear and restore old paths—much older than von Rad, or even Gabler—does not exclude the possibility of dialogue with those cutting other trails. Commenting from a Jewish perspective, Levenson sees potential, if only partly actualized: "Founded upon a historical particularity—the Protestant canon—Childs's method harbors a potential for respect for other historically particular traditions."[40] This despite (or seemingly because of) the fact that a frank confessionalism comes built in, with high liability for offense. "The role of canon often calls for a parting of the ways," writes Childs near the front of his last book.[41] How much capacity does Childs's work have to advance in-house or interreligious dialogue? Readers will be of different minds, though fairly quickly one confronts real limits on the possibility for consensus. There is still the option Levenson advances, that creedal particularity sets the foundation for a more substantive exchange than Gabler could have imagined, although if so, the most productive front is likely to be the one shared by people who wish to heal the breach between scripture and tradition rather than to celebrate or exploit it. Protestant though he be, it is hardly by accident that Childs has been relatively well received by certain Jewish and Catholic biblical specialists.

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38. Fretheim, review of Childs, *BTONT*, 324.

39. Ibid., 326.

40. Levenson, *Hebrew Bible*, 122.

41. Brevard Childs, *The Church's Guide for Reading Paul: The Canonical Shaping of the Pauline Corpus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 44.

To this point I have sketched ways of locating Childs vocationally, chiefly as a biblical theologian, and of locating his work, ecclesially and ecumenically, as a body centered on the oneness of the Bible's scope and grounded in a christological confession. Naturally, more could be said on each score. First, though, another thing shown by this preliminary tour bears repeating. Childs took his project very seriously, never underestimating the difficulty of mastering so many different subject areas. Though he was uncommonly studious, he owns up to limitations in the broad personal competence he sought. We have seen the acknowledgement, too, of "agonizing methodological questions" in the operations of OT theology, as well as genuine hesitation about what it means "to find a reference to Christ in the Old Testament," particularly with respect to what has been called the double reception of the Hebrew Bible. If we can credit statements like these, if he truly feels the weight of "agonizing methodological questions" including those in the list cited above, and if with him we share an impression of the number and width of historical, religious and disciplinary chasms to be spanned, then there may be some sense in talking about calculus after all.

Canon and History

Generosity toward constructive theological work with canon runs against the prevailing mood. The canonical approach is a nonstarter, according to a common worry, because biblical scholarship oriented by or to church teaching blocks the free investigation of historical periods and sources that is central to the biblical scholar's mandate. Robert Kraft, for example, speaks of the "tyranny of canonical assumptions." For him, and for not a few members of the Society of Biblical Literature he addresses, to speak of canon at all is to introduce a seriously distorting anachronism. "Historically responsible philological work, of course, does not pay attention to these boundaries, either as limits … or as touchstones."[42] Kraft's view is as straightforward as it is widespread: history trumps canon.

This attitude has not helped Childs's reception, reinforcing a habit of incredulity toward the logic and self-presentation of the canonical approach visible especially in the literature on Childs's so-called method. Criticism

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42. Robert Kraft, "Para-mania: Beside, Before and Beyond Bible Studies," *JBL* 126 (2007): 5–27 (17–18).

has been so severe at times that one senses why in his later work he wants to "resist the practice of some immediately to characterize [his] approach as 'canonical,' since the label has only engendered confusion."[43] Yet in the end he neither abandons the term nor amends his use of it along the lines suggested by his critics. Therefore, to clear the ground for a better hearing, it will be helpful to outline the trajectory of his thought on the relationship of canon and history—categories that stay in tension to the very last: in that sense canon never trumps history for him—and then to suggest the advantage of canon as an umbrella term. In other words, my purpose in this section is to clarify Childs's thought at a crucial point where it has often been misunderstood. The hope is to forestall premature dismissal of a proposal that has proved so counterintuitive that it is commonly rejected out of hand. Is not the recourse to canon a retreat from history into dogma (a "dogmatic flight from the difficulties of historical work," in the words of Manfred Oeming[44])? If not, why not? How can Childs's dogmatic (in the word's more positive sense), theological deployment of canon accommodate all that we know about the extremely complicated history of canon?

Those who instinctively associate "canonical criticism" with antihistorical dogmatism would do well to consider when and where Childs went to school. True enough, in the background was the sort of conservatism that resists the incursions of "higher" criticism. As the mature Childs puts it in a correspondence with Harrisville and Sundberg, "it took me some years to get beyond Hodge and Warfield."[45] It is hard to say exactly when he overcame the legacy of old Princeton, which he probably knew first in the Presbyterian church his family attended in Queens, New York,[46] but there is solid evidence that it happened before he had his doctorate. Like many of his peers, Childs's formal education was interrupted by World

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43. Brevard Childs, *Isaiah: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), xii. He continues, "I hope that this commentary will be judged on its own merits apart from any prior concept of what a 'canonical' reading ought to entail." The same request could well preface all of his work now.

44. Manfred Oeming, *Das Alte Testament als Teil des christlichen Kanons? Studien zu gesamtbiblischen Theologien der Gegenwart* (3rd ed.; Zürich: Pano, 2001), 204–5 (195–96 in Oeming, *Gesamtbiblische Theologien der Gegenwart: Das Verhältnis von AT und NT in der hermeneutischen Diskussion seit Gerhard von Rad* [2nd ed.; Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1987]); cf. ibid., 216 (209 in 2nd ed.).

45. Cited in Harrisville and Sundberg, *Bible in Modern Culture*, 310.

46. Childs was born in Columbia, South Carolina, on 2 September 1923, and baptized Episcopalian, but the family moved north because of the father's poor health.

War II. Anticipating the draft, he elected to start at Queens College, near home, rather than to go away to university. He was there little more than a year. In October 1942 Childs enlisted in the US Army.[47] Barely nineteen, he prepared to sail for Europe. On his sister's account, he had by then already taken a serious interest in theology, aided by the leader of a student group at Queens who helped guide his extracurricular reading.[48] Recollecting the weekly letters she exchanged with her brother during the war, the sister tells how Childs worked to teach himself Greek while aboard the RMS Queen Mary.[49] He returned to the United States in 1945 for redeployment to Japan, but Truman's atom bomb kept this from happening (he was on leave, visiting his sister, when it fell). As he waited to be demobilized, Childs completed several correspondence courses through the Army Education Program, earning enough credit through the University of Michigan to graduate with an AB and an MA in 1947. From there he went to Princeton Theological Seminary (Bachelor of Divinity, 1950), and then back to Europe, to Switzerland and Germany.

Against this backdrop, it is interesting to think about what motivated Childs's selection of material when, in the summer of 1995, he submitted a small box to the Princeton Seminary archives. In addition to later papers, letters and manuscripts, there is a syllabus from an introduction to the New Testament taught by Bruce Metzger in 1948. And there are Childs's own scrupulous notes from a course on the parables of Jesus, with Otto Piper

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47. According to U.S. Army enlistment records (The National Archives, http:// aad.archives.gov/, accessed 23 October 2009), Childs enlisted in New York on 17 October 1942.

48. Did it include Hodge or Warfield?

49. "I always have that picture, of this nineteen year old heading into war, and he was teaching himself Greek. And he said, everybody was gambling—they had crap tables going and the money was this high—and here's Bard, working away. There was something so typical about Bard's determination" (recording of a personal communication with Anne Childs Hummel, 22 November 2008). During the war, while moving from France into Germany—he was in transportation, not the infantry, though according to Hummel he advanced with the front into Germany—his sister was in school at Wellesley College. She remembers writing for advice on a required year-long course on the Bible. The course introduced her to biblical criticism, and it shook her confidence in scripture. She wrote to her older brother about the issues it raised several times, sometimes twice a week. Childs responded regularly, reassuring his sister. "It was the content of what he said, but more than that it was the assurance that this wasn't the only way to look at it, that gave me great confidence," Hummel recalls. Unfortunately, their wartime correspondence has not survived.

in 1949. Apart from a copy of his Basel dissertation (1955), the only other testament to his student days is a paper written for Walter Baumgartner in 1952, with Baumgartner's feedback in the margins. A hardworking source-critical analysis of Exod 13:17–15:21 that searches out the hand of L, J, E, or P verse by verse (at the end Baumgartner praised it as a "sorgfältige und wohlüberlegte Arbeit mit verständigem Urteil [careful and well considered work with insightful judgment]"), the paper indicates something important about the early direction of Childs's work in the Old Testament. If initially Childs inclined toward Greek and the New Testament, he left Princeton with something else in view. (By Harrisville and Sundberg's report, his influences at Princeton were "few" and "largely negative."[50]) The paper also shows clearly that Childs went to Basel for what it had to offer in the Old Testament, not for Karl Barth.[51] Finally, whatever parallels one might be tempted to draw between Childs's years of study on the European continent and those of Charles Hodge a century and a quarter before, the most obvious are disanalogous. In terms of their attitude to German criticism, the outcomes for these two learned men were fundamentally different.[52] Was there symbolism for Childs, with respect either to the famous old Princeton school or the seminary he would have remembered, in leaving this particular paper in its archives?

Early and Late Attitudes to History: From 1952 to 2008

Entitled "The Deliverance of Israel at the Crossing of the Sea," the Baumgartner paper bears a curious relation to Childs's subsequent work. Let me give some indication of its flavor. The piece begins by making detailed observations about the chosen text, noting alternate readings from the old Greek, the Syriac, the Samaritan Pentateuch, and so on. Exodus 13:20, for instance, is judged to be "very corrupt." In a subsequent note on literary analysis the same verse is ascribed to P, because P has the most developed geographical tradition (he is following Baentsch, Holzinger, and Noth, against Beer

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50. Harrisville and Sundberg, *Bible in Modern Culture*, 310.

51. The relationship of Childs to Barth has been widely misunderstood. As I demonstrate in chapter 3 of *Brevard Childs*, Childs cautiously warms to Barth only later, at Yale, although he heard Barth lecture in his student days.

52. See the published form of a dissertation Childs directed: Marion Taylor, *The Old Testament in the Old Princeton School (1812–1929)* (San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press, 1992), esp. 50–55 and 74–79 on Hodge.

and Eissfeldt). Other verses are separated into two or more strands, though P is said to be hard to distinguish from E. Next, Childs reconstructs two main sources under the headings "The Account of the Yahwist" and "The Account of EP." The former lacks any account of Israelites crossing the sea. Much of the subsequent discussion concerns "geographical-historical problems," such as the meaning and location of the יַם־סוּף in different traditions. With von Rad and especially Noth, Childs decides that the "localization" of the sea is secondary, that in fact accounts of the Exodus contain two distinct localizations. All of this is standard historical-critical stuff, of course, conversant with the best research of the day. Given the approach for which Childs is now known, what is most remarkable here is his rejection of ostensibly more conservative options. Noth's account of incongruous traditions is preferred to Pedersen's case that the whole of Exod 1–14 is a historicized "passah festival." A twenty-eight-year-old Childs writes,

> It has been convincingly demonstrated that the slaughter of sheep, the smearing of its blood on the tent posts, and the eating of bitter herbs, belonged to the ancient nomadic sacrifice customs. However, while this connection is clear, the weak point in Pedersen's argument is the actual connection between the passah legend and the exodus tradition. *To be sure, in its present form, the passah legend is a preparation for the exodus*, and the passah festival is a "Gedächtnisfeier [memorial celebration]." *But an organic, primary connection fails between the traditions*. Noth sees this correctly, in my opinion, when he criticizes Pedersen at this point.… The Passah festival was originally a sacrifice customary among the "weidewechselnde Wanderhirten" before the departure for the summer pasturage. The yearly "exodus" was historified and took on the meaning of the once-and-for-all departure out of Egypt. Once the relation was created between the festival and the exodus tradition, the historifying was carried out all along the line.[53]

Apart from seven short notes on undiscussed problems, this is where the essay ends. Remarkably, its basic analysis was rehearsed twice in Childs's later work, finally being reworked for the appropriate chapter in his Exodus commentary. Two years before that, in 1972, Childs (then aged

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53. Brevard Childs, "The Deliverance of Israel at the Crossing of the Sea (Exodus 13:17–15:21)" (graduate paper written for Walter Baumgartner, University of Basel, 1952; in the Brevard S. Childs Manuscript Collection, Princeton Seminary archives), 12–13, emphasis added.

forty-eight) also used the paper as the backbone for the fourth lecture (of five) in the James Sprunt Lectures at Union Theological Seminary in Virginia. Something had shifted, though. The title for the lecture series that year was "Canon and Criticism: The Old Testament as Scripture of the Church," and session four was called "The Crossing of the Sea in its Canonical Context."[54]

What changed? In *Brevard Childs, Biblical Theologian* I give an account of major threads of continuity and change across Childs's work. To summarize, the first of two big turns happens on the road to *Biblical Theology in Crisis*—1970 is a convenient marker. The second relates to a clarified understanding of the relationship of church and synagogue, involving concerns he sometimes calls the "mystery of Israel" and the "mystery of Christ." It happens in the early 1980s. At present, though, it is important to say that the change is more subtle than has often been supposed. The double reworking of the Basel paper is a case in point.

First, the paper was reworked for the 1972 Sprunt Lectures. Lecture 4 uses Exod 14 to explore an instance of "one of the most difficult problems of faith and history."[55] The existence of sources is presupposed. There are "two basically complete, and yet different, accounts of the event at the sea," though Childs pleads for "more flexibility in describing them than is often allowed."[56] Then, in language straight from the old postgraduate paper, the J account is given under one heading, and the P(E) account under the next. After this, however, his analysis pushes in a new direction:

> Following the source analysis, the historical critical interpreter usually makes some comparisons of the two accounts and tries then to draw historical and theological conclusions. In my judgment, before any such move it is basic to seek to understand the whole account in its final form.

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54. Copies of all but the first lecture are housed at Princeton Theological Seminary. The first is "The Canon as a Historical and Theological Problem," and I cannot say whether its exclusion is deliberate. Papers 2, 3, and 5 are, respectively, "'II Isaiah' in the Context of the Canon," "The Canonical Shape of the Psalter," and "Daniel in the Context of the Canon." Revisions of all this material made its way into subsequent publications.

55. Childs, "Canon and Criticism: The Old Testament as Scripture of the Church" (James Sprunt Lectures, Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, Va., January 1972; in the Brevard S. Childs Manuscript Collection, Princeton Seminary archives), 26.

56. Ibid., 27. "This reservation is simply to share the feeling of many Old Testament scholars that the minute divisions have often gone beyond the evidence."

> There is another witness which must be heard, namely the final redaction. How does the chapter function as a whole?[57]

This question was not asked in 1952. Quite the contrary. Now, though, he attends to "the present form of the biblical text," arguing that "the final form of the story has an integrity of its own."[58] Is the earlier account undone? Has he inadvertently joined leagues with the likes of Pedersen, or even surpassed him in the move toward harmonization?

Not necessarily. Importantly, Childs suggests "that there is a canonical integrity which cannot be identified with simply literary unity."[59] The run-up to his Exodus commentary includes other, closely related work that does not directly reprise the Basel paper. The most sophisticated is "A Traditio-Historical Study of the Reed Sea Tradition" (1970), which makes some adjustments to the slightly earlier "Deuteronomic Formulae of the Exodus Traditions" (1967, in a Festschrift for Baumgartner, actually). In the later essay Childs articulates his view that the Song of the Sea in Exod 15 is dependent on the conquest tradition: "It seems highly probable that the influence stems from the Jordan tradition which has been projected back to the earlier event rather than in the reverse direction."[60] For J, the event at the sea was part of the wilderness tradition, but through a variety of influences, including the Deuteronomic concern for centralization, it became linked (in P) to Israel's primary saving event, the Exodus, with consequences for how Passover was understood. The analysis in 1970 is more up to date. It includes Frank Cross and George Coats, for instance. Noth, though, is still preferred to Pedersen. What has been introduced to the discussion for the 1972 lecture, in full awareness of complex underlying sources, is a historical and theological account of the contribution of the redactor. "The biblical writer is aware, both of the variety within the tradition, and the two levels of divine activity, which combined ordinary [J] and wonderful [P] elements." To leave the account arrayed according to "a pattern of historical development runs counter to the intention of the final narrative."[61] At one level this is simply an historical observation. At

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57. Ibid., 28.

58. Ibid., 31.

59. Ibid., 27.

60. Childs, "A Traditio-Historical Study of the Reed Sea Tradition," *VT* 20 (1970): 406–18 (414; cf. 410).

61. Childs, "Canon and Criticism" (Sprunt Lectures), 31.

another, the text's full history stands as a warning against the hegemony of historical development as the sole critical framework. "The canonical redaction operates as a critical judgment against such moves and bears witness how the various parts are to be understood."[62] At yet another (higher?) level—from a theological vantagepoint—the "critical judgment" of the canon aligns with scripture's witness to the church, a major theme of his Sprunt Lectures.

> The work of God is not buried in past events that are dependent on the scholar's reconstruction, but is attested plainly by the law and the prophets. That which the historian characterizes as a late literary fiction, the church confesses to be the full witness of God's redemption made possible through the continued activity of the Holy Spirit within the community of faith.… To the question, how then did God redeem Israel at the sea, the Christian can only reply: Read the scriptures. Here is found the beginning of the story of God's redemption, which brought the Church into being and continues to provide it with life.[63]

History raises some troubling theological questions for a person of faith, such as, "What if the Exodus did not 'actually' happen?" Childs acknowledges the issue without attempting to address it. What he does instead is to complexify what counts for history in the first place. After the final form, there is the long history of effects in "the community of faith"—synagogue as well as church, as he often says elsewhere, though his own native context is patent—a variegated history with its own sets of context and reality.

By 1974 all this research and reflection had been drawn into a much larger project. Chapter 9 of *Exodus*, "The Deliverance at the Sea (13:17–14:31)," repeats the basic juxtaposition of contexts.[64] It introduces a third recension of the J and P(E) accounts (the only one published), and then incorporates and builds on exegetical observations from 1972. Oddly enough, we arrive at a position from which to see the development of Childs's template for *Exodus*. Chapters start with a bibliography and a translation of the text under consideration. Most then have six sections, some omitting one or more of the last three:

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62. Ibid., 32.

63. Ibid.

64. "There is some value in rehearsing the story according to each of the two main sources. However, the case will be made in the exegesis for the integrity of the composite accounts" (Childs, *Exodus*, 220).

1. Textual and Philological Notes
2. Literary and Traditio-Historical Problems
3. Old Testament Context
4. New Testament Context
5. History of Exegesis
6. Theological Reflection[65]

A way of investigating items 1 and 2 had been established at Basel in the early 1950s. Subsequently, for reasons that will have to be explored later, an array of biblical theological preoccupations fills out the scope of investigation. To the extent that reorientation of item 3 to the received text was novel, it must also be said that Childs's emphasis on "final form" surfaces with a broad complement of orienting theological concerns. This took time, and in the preface to *Exodus* we catch a glimpse of the route taken:

> My academic interest in the book of Exodus goes back some twenty years to an unforgettable seminar on Moses which was conducted by Professor Walter Baumgartner of Basel in the summer semester of 1952. Well-worn copies of Dillmann, Gressmann, Driver, and Noth indicate their constant use over two decades. Active work on this commentary extends over ten years. During that period I have gone through many different stages in my own thinking. Somewhere en route I discovered that Calvin and Drusius, Rashi and Ibn Ezra, belong among the giants. I have tried to show why these great expositors—the term "pre-critical" is both naïve and arrogant—need to be heard in concert with Wellhausen and Gunkel.[66]

"Somewhere en route" is vague language—maybe deliberately so. However Childs may have discovered the importance of the tradition, the essential point is twofold: Calvin and Drusius, Rashi and Ibn Ezra quite concretely fill out language of "the community of faith"; and, again, they add further historical dimension to a text that has so very many historical dimensions.

It has been said that *Exodus* represents the source-critical Childs, allegedly distinct from a new-critical or "final form" Childs known elsewhere. In truth, after Basel the acknowledgment of reconstructed biblical history never goes away.[67] Some will be surprised to learn how permanently

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65. The scheme's rationale given in ibid., xiv–xvi.

66. Ibid., x.

67. Reconstructed history mostly means tradition history, in Continental style,

Childs commits himself to an investigation of the diachronic, even though he refuses to let it have the last word. A 2008 comment about Acts, for instance, sounds almost intensely historicist: "The canonical function of Acts in relation to the whole New Testament, but especially in relation to the Pauline corpus, can be correctly described *only* when one reconstructs the historical process leading to its canonization."[68] Yet the statement lines up with a major purpose of his final study, which is to explore the relationship of two sometimes contradictory histories of canon. Although earlier works refer to Martin Kähler's understanding of *Geschichte* and *Historie*, Childs's *Church's Guide* develops the relation of this pair of words to an extent that surpasses all of his previous discussions. The terms signal overlap and divergence "between critical, historical exegesis and confessional, canonical understanding of biblical interpretation."[69] He defines them this way: "*Geschichte* is the historical reflections on events and conditions carried on within a confessing community of faith. *Historie* is the attempt to understand events from an objective, scientific analysis, applying ordinary human experience, apart from any confessional content, as the measure of its credibility."[70] Maintaining the tension between these perspectives is essential. Those who dissolve the tension tend to give maximalist or minimalist accounts of *Historie* on the assumption that *Geschichte* stands or falls with it, evoking either way Childs's characteristic dissatisfaction with options on the "right" and "left" of the theological spectrum. Kähler's terms are therefore also linked to conservatism, which fuses *Historie* and *Geschichte*, and liberalism, which separates them permanently.[71] For Childs, in contrast to both, canon and history are neither antinomies nor twins.

Put differently, tension between *Historie* and *Geschichte* parallels a tension between secular history and sacred history, mirrored in a life spent working in the modern university for the sake of the church. In a sense the theological problematic is not new, except insofar as a different

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although sometimes one finds judgments about "what actually happened." On the historicity of the crossing of the sea in particular, see *BTONT*, 100, cited below.

68. Childs, *Church's Guide*, 223, emphasis added.

69. Ibid., 16.

70. Ibid., 165.

71. It is interesting to see the reasons Childs distances himself from Scott Hafemann's maximalist account of Paul and history, for instance (ibid., 125–26). For a fuller account of Childs between "left" and "right" see my "Later Childs," *PTR* 38 (2008): 117–29.

and sharper dialectic emerges after the rise of critical biblical scholarship. Church fathers and reformers sometimes wondered about how to handle scripture if it came into real conflict with good science (consider Augustine's last commentary on Genesis), though none anticipate the hermeneutical reversal described in Hans Frei's *Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* (1974). Thus when Childs speaks of "canon" and "community of faith" in the singular, as opposed to the plurals commonly seen in literature oriented more exclusively to secular history, it is fair to spot a rough analog to Augustine's "city of God."[72] As a theological category, canon bespeaks the unity that governs Childs's description of the Bible's function as a testimony to one God in church and world. One might as well speak of "canon" and "canons" as *Geschichte* and *Historie*.

Then again, standing on the other side of a hermeneutical watershed, Childs's work is deeply marked by the gap that opens between what Frei calls the "history-likeness (literal meaning) and history (ostensive reference)" of biblical narrative.[73] Much as his thought overlaps with Frei's at this point, though, Childs prefers to speak of reading the Bible as "witness" instead of as "source." The most obvious departure from categories of realistic narrative: "witness" implies a confession. As Childs explains while introducing Old Testament aspects of his *BTONT*, "The contrast lies in viewing history from Israel's confessional stance, from within a community of faith, rather than from a neutral, phenomenological reconstruction. However, in spite of insisting on a basic distinction in the way of viewing history, the problem remains that a subtle relationship continues to obtain between these two perspectives." Another difference from Frei, then, as from nearly all exegetes working before the Enlightenment, is Childs's readiness to make critical judgements about the relationship of history on its canonical presentation to history as reconstructed by modern scholars. It can range from high correspondence to almost total noncorrespondence.

At times Israel's confessional witness overlaps fully with a common public testimony, and a confirmation of an event such as the destruction

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72. Writing of *The City of God* in this connection, Childs explains: "The effect of this Augustinian typology was to develop a powerful theological thesis respecting the unity of God's purpose within history. However, history as such remained fully subordinated to theology. It is, therefore, not by chance that no serious attention to the history of Israel for its own sake emerged until the Renaissance" (*BTONT*, 196).

73. Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 12.

of Jerusalem in the sixth century can be elicited even from foreign and hostile nations (Ezek 26:15ff.; 36:16ff.). At other times there is virtually no relation between Israel's witness (e.g. the crossing of the sea, Exod 14) and extrabiblical sources. Usually there emerges some sort of connection, even when remote or contradictory (cf. the manna stories of Exodus and Numbers). The theological challenge is to pursue an exegesis of these passages in such a way as to avoid the rationalistic assumption of a common reality behind all religious expression or the threat of supernaturalism which would deny in principle any relation between an outer and inner side of historical events.[74]

There are good reasons why Childs calls all of this an "approach," even when he sits loose to the epithet "canonical." Hearing the confession (more than making one himself) is the bedrock:

The goal of a new approach is to seek to do justice to the theological integrity of Israel's witness while at the same time freely acknowledging the complexities of all human knowledge and the serious challenge of modernity to any claims of revelation. Whether one calls a new approach "canonical," "kerygmatic," or "postcritical" is largely irrelevant. I would only reject the categories of mediating theology (*Vermittlungstheologie*), which seeks simply to fuse elements of orthodoxy and liberalism without doing justice to either. The fact that one falls back on the problematic term "dialectic" is merely a sign that there is no comprehensive philosophical or hermeneutical system available that can adequately resolve with one proposal the whole range of problems arising from the historical-critical method.[75]

The contrast, then, is not properly between liberalism and conservatism. Instead, the need is for biblical theologians "to work in a theologically responsible exegetical fashion,"[76] a duty with at least two major dimensions. On the one hand, "the biblical material" must be handled "in a way which is critically responsible."[77] This mode gives attention to the discrete witnesses of both testaments and to their constituent parts. It also resists "biblicist, external appropriation of the various parts of the Christian Bible without the required exegetical rigour of the theological discipline."[78] On

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74. Childs, *BTONT*, 100.
75. Ibid., 99.
76. Ibid.
77. Ibid., 94.
78. Ibid., 336.

the other hand, the material calls for a response. It makes a "coercion … on the reader. There is a 'reader response' required by any responsible theological reflection."[79] Christians feel this coercion differently than Jews, and those who adopt an inside perspective feel it differently than those outside do. From his Christian position Childs rises to a "struggle of faith by the church and the individual Christian of today [that] continues to focus on God's promises in his word," though this too must come to expression within "disciplined theological reflection."[80]

At issue is how to let Christian discourse on the Bible be at once public and faithful. Orthodoxy can be broad, though it comes under strain once biblical history and ostensive history drift apart. It becomes an acute "struggle" when the half-measures propped up by a residual Christendom finally collapse—when emperors are deposed and face the prospect of learning to be good neighbors, or when the institutional space left for faithful pursuit of Christian theological disciplines at elite schools diminishes to such an extent that it may be wondered just how much public real estate remains. If historicists successfully overthrow the "tyranny of canonical assumptions," then Childs may indeed be known as one of the last giants of a bygone era. That remains to be seen. Whatever the outcome, the fraught ground between sacred and secular is the conceptual space Childs attempts to occupy. If the ecclesial context of his work is fundamental, as I suggest, the university context is no less important. His commitment to both institutions explains why he simply must grapple with history, including history in reconstructed rather than merely final form.

Canons Broad and Narrow

Given what has already been said, it is appropriate to inquire after canon as an historical concept before offering an account of canon as a live dogmatic concept. What is canon from the vantage of *Historie*? Canons inhabit history, after all, if they are real. Can Childs's metacanon cope with the many canonical facts on the ground? Scholars of biblical canon formation regularly say that there are as many canons as there are religious communities, and there is truth in this. For many it is also axiomatic that canon must be sharply distinguished from scripture, in part because most communities

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79. Ibid., 335. Admittedly, this is a peculiar way of using the phrase "reader response."

80. Ibid., 336.

that cherish a canon stand at some remove from the communities that produced the scriptures in it. If canon is late, relative to scripture, then there is at least a possibility that a given community's theology of its canon is arbitrary, or at least nonessential, to scholars who are trying to account for the theology in or arising from the scripture preserved in canons. It seems like a classic case where free historical investigation stands to overturn the established orthodoxy.

There are arguments for and against the strict separation of scripture from canon. In the English-speaking world the argument for such a distinction stems from Albert Sundberg's influential *The Old Testament of the Early Church* (1964), and it has been advanced in various ways by James Sanders, John Barton, Eugene Ulrich, Lee McDonald, and a host of others. Elsewhere and in an earlier day Theodor Zahn had looked for the church to have its core canon in place by the end of the first century, but Adolf von Harnack argued persuasively for a second-century date. Today there is a near consensus that the fourth century is the proper *terminus*. It is in line with this that McDonald and Sanders ask, introducing their hefty compendium *The Canon Debate* (2002), "With such a long delay in the church's use of the term 'canon' to describe a closed body of Christian scriptures, one may well ask why there was an emergence of 'canon consciousness' in the church of the fourth century C.E. and little evidence of it before?"[81] Examples of this position could easily be multiplied, and another will be given shortly.

Then again, another historical assessment sees a consciousness of canon emerging far earlier, coincident in meaningful ways with the distinct concept "scripture." In 1953 Isac Seeligmann spoke of a *Kanonbewußtsein* within the Jewish Bible itself, tacitly expressed in what might now be called innerbiblical exegesis or proto-midrash. By 1967 Childs had noted Seeligmann's argument and soon began to adapt the notion of "canon consciousness" within scripture in his own proposals.[82] A dissenting minority has followed this alternate (and prior) usage of "canon consciousness," including some of Childs's former students.[83] One also

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81. Lee McDonald and James Sanders, eds., *The Canon Debate* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 2002), 13.

82. See chapter 6 in Driver, *Brevard Childs*, for an account of I. L. Seeligmann's "Voraussetzungen der Midraschexegese" (VTSup 1 [1953]: 150–81), and of this important essay's place in the early development of Childs's approach.

83. See the 2005 taxonomy of literature on canon in Brevard Childs, "The Canon

thinks of continental scholars such as Christoph Dohmen. Although he knows that the first clear references to the canon as a list of books do not appear until the fourth century—the Muratorian fragment aside, Athanasius lists twenty-seven canonical books of the New Testament in 367—Dohmen defends an alternate definition of canon: "rather, the term highlights the norming function of books and collections of books that are already available and designated by a variety of terms, such as scripture, holy scripture (or books), Miqra, Law, Torah, and Prophets."[84] By these lights "canon" emerges much earlier than the fourth century CE. It is something the early church inherits, in incipient form at least, from the pre-Christian synagogue.

How does one make sense of the difference between these two trajectories, each of which seeks to account for the same body of historical evidence? Possibly the single greatest difference hinges on narrow and broad definitions of canon. An anxiety shared by many who incline toward narrower usage is that broader use imports anachronistic dogma by applying the term too early.[85] In the extreme one might even say that the the ascription of canonicity always belies the historical situation. Canon is not a real concept at all but sheer ideology. And one can find representatives of this extreme view. Writing of John Van Seters's critique of the term *redactor*, Thomas Römer asserts: "I agree with Van Seters, that one should not use the term redactor for the editors of the 'final form' of a text, *since such a final form never existed*."[86] As the remark is neither qualified nor

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in Recent Biblical Studies: Reflections on an Era," *ProEccl* 14 (2005): 26–45; repr. in Bartholomew et al., *Canon and Biblical Interpretation*, 33–57. Of note are Stephen Chapman, *The Law and the Prophets: A Study in Old Testament Canon Formation* (FAT 27; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), especially 106–10, and Christopher Seitz, *The Goodly Fellowship of the Prophets: The Achievement of Association in Canon Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), especially 43–45, 53.

84. Christoph Dohmen, *Die Bibel und ihre Auslegung* (3rd ed.; Munich: Beck, 2006), 20.

85. As Steins rightly insists (in Egbert Ballhorn and Georg Steins, eds., *Der Bibelkanon in der Bibelauslegung: Methodenreflexionen und Beispielexegesen* [Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2007], 115), contra Hubert Frankemölle (*Frühjudentum und Urchristentum: Vorgeschichte—Verlauf—Auswirkungen* [Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2006]), an early application of the term canon is not anachronistic if the word's meaning fits the situation it describes.

86. Thomas Römer, *The So-Called Deuteronomistic History: A Sociological, Historical and Literary Introduction* (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 49 n. 10, emphasis added.

explained, it is difficult to know what he means. Manifestly final forms do exist. For the Hebrew Bible the Aleppo Codex is an obvious and splendid example. Taking this for granted, Römer appears more to mean that "final form" is an empty concept, wholly alien to the biblical situation. Canon, then, intrudes on history; or to be precise, it intrudes on the sort of history that would see editions of Deuteronomistic History (so-called) as a more basic textual and historical reality than Former Prophets. Römer's hyperbole permits a stark division between canon and history, but this actually seems rather rare among those who study canon formation. Most operate with at least a tacit awareness of their stake in the appropriateness of a community's theology of its Holy Writ. If canon is rejected, in other words, it is typically because canon is a false dogmatic concept, not because it is not history. Canon is not replaced by sheer history, typically, but by the evidently more suitable category scripture. Scripture then stands in the breach, inviting a historically chastened theology of, say, the Protestant church's Bible. An irregular exercise of negative theology takes place (not canon!) by which something deemed too rigid is supplanted by something broader and more flexible. The bifurcated use of "canon consciousness" that stems either from Seeligmann or from Sundberg is not explained by the bald rejection of dogma, in many cases, but by divergent formulations of right dogma.[87]

Adoption of a broad semantic range for canon has made Childs and those who follow him outliers in recent discussions. As a striking example, consider the impasse that halts traffic between Childs's work on the Pauline corpus (2008) and Craig Allert's *A High View of Scripture? The Author-*

Toward the end of the book comes an acknowledgment that something changes. There is a "transformation of the book of Deuteronomy [which] was the end of the Deuteronomistic History" and the beginning of the "Former Prophets" (182). Absent any explanation of this transformation, however, the reader is left with the impression that the change lacks deep logic and is therefore mostly arbitrary.

87. In addition to John Webster's skill as a dogmatician, one advantage of his "frankly dogmatic" account in "The Dogmatic Location of the Canon" is precisely that it is frank (in John Webster, *Word and Church: Essays in Christian Dogmatics* [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001], 9–46). He "assumes the truth of the church's confession of the gospel, regarding that confession as a point from which we move rather than a point towards which we proceed" (11). Studies of canon formation have different goals, but relative to Webster they have a methodological weakness if an ostensibly historical category, scripture, is made a surrogate for a more obviously dogmatic category, canon, and then quietly becomes the vehicle for dogmatic judgments.

ity of the Bible and the Formation of the New Testament Canon (2007), titles that would appear to coincide as much in theme as time. Allert, a Canadian and self-described evangelical,[88] follows his more technical first monograph with a pastorally minded book about "how an understanding of the formation of the New Testament canon may inform an evangelical doctrine of Scripture."[89] Childs, as we have seen, navigates from the historical Paul to the canonical Paul with the aim of elevating regard for theological aspects of a historically shaped corpus. Both authors define "canon" early in their books, where some pretty fundamental disagreement begins. As from 1970 and counter to a "narrow, history-of-religions definition," Childs defends "a far broader definition that does justice to the theological dimension of the term. The early Christian church was never without a canon since it assumed Israel's Scriptures as normative."[90] Allert, on the other hand, takes for granted that "canon" should be restricted to mean "a closed collection of texts to which nothing can be added and from which nothing can be taken."[91] He also states flatly at one point: "The church existed before the Bible."[92] In each case, the goal is obviously sound dogma rather than no dogma. What is at stake in this in-house debate about the character of Christian scripture? And from a wider perspective—with regard to those who insist on bracketing religious commitments, insofar as that is possible—what does it matter if one broadens canon or abandons it for scripture? Is history distorted in either case? A brief comparison of Childs and Allert can shed light on both questions. Childs's approach is far from the only way to handle the difficult intersection of history and theology at the point of what the church's canon is and does, but I do hope to illustrate how the broad use of canon that has bemused so many of Childs's readers can be both theologically advantageous and historically defensible.

Falling in line behind Sanders and McDonald, then, Allert defines "canon consciousness" as the express knowledge of a closed list of canoni-

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88. Evangelical in Allert's sense should of course be distinguished from evange-lisch in the German sense (and as adopted by Webster).

89. Craig Allert, *A High View of Scripture? The Authority of the Bible and the Formation of the New Testament Canon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 173, cf. 10. His first title is *Revelation, Truth, Canon and Interpretation: Studies in Justin Martyr's Dialogue with Trypho* (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

90. Childs, *Church's Guide*, 4 n. 4, cf. 253.

91. Allert, *High View?*, 9 n. 1, cf. 37.

92. Ibid., 76.

cal scriptures and so as something that does not properly emerge in the church until the fourth century.[93] More uniquely, he makes additional efforts to reform a semi-popular evangelical understanding of the Bible as having quite definite boundaries: sixty-six books in total, inerrant in the original autographs. Against this, Allert brings evidence of how much apocryphal literature is cited by the very Fathers who set parameters on the church's New Testament, and of how broad the Fathers' sense of inspiration tends to be. North American evangelicals need a thicker ecclesiology, he insists, by which they stand to gain an appreciation of the historically porous boundaries between canonical and noncanonical scripture, and ultimately between scripture and tradition. This is the setting for a "realization that the Bible grew up in the cradle of the church," which leads to his clam that "[t]he church existed before the Bible."[94] At this point, however, he ventures into awkward historical-theological territory. If the target is just a "Bible, Holy Spirit, and me" view of *sola scriptura*, then one can see his point. If, on the other hand, he is making a theological claim of the first order, then the claim is open to question. Even on strict historical grounds, what weight does one give to the fact that the early church took as its theological inheritance and point of reference the Jewish scriptures? Allert makes much of the notion that the church did not receive a canon, but rather scriptures on the way to canon—does this mean the church had no Bible? Or what does 1 Cor 15 mean in saying that Christ died according to the scriptures? On a few occasions, Allert refers to the "content of Christianity," but the crucial question goes unasked: before and as the NT came into being, how did the church apprehend this content? Saint Augustine can hardly settle the matter, yet it is challenging to remember that even at the brink of the fifth century he sees in the Old Testament "such a strong prediction and pre-announcement of the New Testament that nothing is found in the teaching of the Evangelists and the apostles, however exalted and divine the precepts and promises, that is lacking in those ancient books."[95] In short, in Allert's work the role of the Old Testament in the crucial first centuries of the church's life is not adequately explained.

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93. Ibid., 52, 68, 131. Allert actually equates the consciousness of canon with datable lists. "If, as some argue, the early church consciously created and closed a New Testament canon at the end of the second century, why does the proliferation of canon lists begin to appear only in the fourth century?" (131).

94. Ibid., 76.

95. Augustine, *Contra Adimantum* 3.4 (PL 42:134). Still, as David F. Wright points

Like Allert, John Webster worries about the mislocation of canon by some Protestants as "a relatively isolated piece of epistemological teaching."[96] But from a dogmatic standpoint Webster better arbitrates the oft-emphasized correlation of canon and community. Is ecclesiology the base on which doctrines of canon and scripture build? What then of revelation, of the triune God's saving action and self-communication? "The question … is whether it is more appropriate to speak of the people of the book or the book of the people."[97] Evidence that Allert lacks a satisfactory answer to this question, in theological and historical terms, can be seen in the trouble he has connecting second- and fourth-century definitions of canon. Tellingly, his argument pivots midway through when he backs away from the narrow "canon as list" definition posited at the outset. Allert explains:

> Even though we have here predominantly been using the word with reference to a list of texts, its initial use has nothing to do with texts.… In the latter half of the second century, "canon" for Irenaeus meant the Rule of Faith, the content of essential Christian belief. This was also true of other church fathers.… Soon the word "canon" moved from this more fluid usage to refer to concrete things, such as conciliar decisions, monastic rules, clergy, and finally to a list, index, or table—something with which a person can orient oneself.[98]

From here the discussion vacillates between apparently contradictory senses of the key term, from the plural canons of the early church to the one canon that arrives late. Allert's conclusion merely reiterates the tension, and thus falters where it might have approached a more coherent doctrine of scripture than the thin one he deconstructs.

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out ("Augustine: His Exegesis and Hermeneutics," in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation* [ed. Magne Sæbø; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996–2013], 1.1:701–30 [714]), Augustine revised this passage to read "almost nothing" in his *Retractationes*.

96. Webster, "Dogmatic Location," 9.

97. Ibid., 24. In places Allert seems to favor the latter and certainly emphasizes it strongly. For instance, "The Bible must be viewed as a product of the community because traditions of the community provide the context in which Scripture was produced" (Allert, *High View?*, 145, cf. 84–86).

98. Ibid., 78–79. Is the second century's more abstract canon of truth not something with which a person could orient oneself?

The second century has rightly been identified as very important in the canonical process.… The four Gospels rose to preeminence and a Pauline collection was circulating and received as authoritative in most congregations throughout the empire. Indeed, there was a core collection of Christian documents. But we must measure this statement and not read a later concept of written canon into the second century. It is quite likely that the formation of a closed collection of Christian writings was not paramount in the mind of the second-century church. This is indicated especially by its reaction to … heresies: they were countered not with a written canon, but rather with the canon of truth. If the written canon was paramount, we should expect to see a preponderance of lists following these great heresies, but this is precisely what we do not see—until the fourth century.[99]

There is no reason to doubt that the meaning of "canon" (or rule) shifts in the passage of time from Irenaeus and Tertullian in the second and third centuries to Eusebius and Athanasius in the fourth. What is open to question is whether "a preponderance of lists" is the *terminus* with which the final significance of canon is to be identified. Canon is a fourth-century phenomenon by definition, in that case, and has only incidental links with earlier phenomena by the same name. Allert therefore laments "the unfortunate claim that the Bible itself is the Rule of Faith, or that when the Bible came into existence (second century), it became the Rule of Faith."[100] If there have been naive attempts to collapse the difference here—Allert finds examples among evangelical scholars—it does not follow that more informed attempts to span the gap are also unproductive. To the contrary, it is altogether unlikely that the church's two-testament canon should have no relation whatsoever to its *canon et regula fidei* in the period before questions of the New Testament's scope were settled. Allert's hiatus between two ancient canons, paralleling the modern hiatus between scripture and canon, is almost the *reductio ad absurdum* of a widespread definition.

In contrast to Allert, Childs actively exploits the polyvalence of the word "canon," which for him is an expansive cipher. For instance, in a response to reviewers of his 1979 *Introduction* he speaks of "a rule of faith called canon."[101] And already in *Biblical Theology in Crisis* he notes, "In its original sense, canon does not simply perform the formal function of

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99. Ibid., 129–30.
100. Ibid., 83.
101. Childs, "Response to Reviewers," 52.

separating the books that are authoritative from others that are not, but is the *rule* that delineates the area in which the church hears the word of God. The fundamental theological issue at stake is not the extent of the canon, which has remained in some flux within Christianity, but the claim for a normative body of tradition contained in a set of books."[102] Childs draws this insight from a few theologians and church historians. Karl Barth is one. Another is Hans von Campenhausen, whose *Die Entstehung der christlichen Bibel* (1968) is praised by Childs in 1970 and is known to Allert in English translation (1972):

> The one rule and guideline, the only "canon" which Irenaeus explicitly acknowledges, is the "canon of truth," that is to say: the content of the faith itself, which the Church received from Christ, to which she remains faithful, and by which she lives. By this is meant neither a Summa of dogmatic propositions nor an unchangeable confessional formula nor even the sacred Scripture as such, however certain it may be that the latter teaches and contains this truth.[103]

Yet another is Bengt Hägglund, who draws the following conclusion in a 1958 study of *regula fidei* in the patristic period: "It is no accident that the Greek word for *regula*, κανών, increasingly became a firm designation for holy scripture. The original witness is therefore not only 'canonical' because it represents the authority of the prophets and apostles, but also because it is the bearer of revelation, mediating the reality of salvation."[104] Or to quote Webster again on a point that I think Childs would appreciate, "a canon which is only a useful accident, only tradition, cannot rule."[105] In terms of Allert's discussion, the second-century sense of canon as a rule of

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102. Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), 99, emphasis added.

103. Hans Freiherr von Campenhausen, *The Formation of the Christian Bible* (trans. John Austin Baker; London: A&C Black, 1972), 182; trans. of *Die Entstehung der christlichen Bibel* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1968).

104. Bengt Hägglund, "Die Bedeutung der 'regula fidei' als Grundlage theologischer Aussagen," *ST* 12 (1958): 1–44 (39).

105. Webster, "Dogmatic Location," 18. Further on he argues: "Unless it is set in the larger structure of divine action and its creation of human response which we call revelation, "canon" can become simply "rule"; its normative status becomes its own property, rather than a consequence of its place in the divine economy. Above all, reference to divine action falls away.… But as a function of revelation, the canon is not merely a list or code; it is a specification of those instruments where the church may

truth or faith dominates in Childs's thought, but this contains rather than rivals fourth-century and other subsequent senses of canon.

In conclusion, let me file three observations about the importance of seeing canon as *regula fidei* in Childs's last book on Paul. First, *contra* Allert: "The Christian church was never without a canon."[106] Because canon is broad rather than narrow, Childs can make tenable historical claims that avoid underestimating the role of what came to be known as the Old Testament. Second, the semantic exchange between canon and *regula* operates in the background in *Church's Guide*—it is taken for granted on the basis of earlier work—and yet without it the task of outlining the contours of the Pauline corpus falls to pieces. Sketching Paul's canonical profile is a way of getting more specific about how the parts of the corpus interrelate, and how, together with the whole company of prophets and apostles, the corpus functions in and constrains the church's christologically ordered life. Third, however, canon's dogma is no less basic than canon's history. Childs's increased specificity about the role of both parts of the Christian Bible as one *Christuszeugnis* has troubled some readers of his *BTONT*, though the category that grows to prominence in his final book is not Christology but pneumatology. A lengthy treatment of the life of the Spirit in Paul sets the stage for this claim about how Christianity's authoritative tradition is actualized in each generation of the saints: "It is the church's confession of the role of the Holy Spirit as the divine presence at work that continues to enliven and transform the written Word of Scripture into the living Word for today."[107] Plainly this is dogmatic language. It arises out of a particular Christian confession. Yet if there is just one point to underscore in view of many scholars' unease about canon as a dogmatic concept, it should be Childs's acknowledgment that canon is unavoidably a dogmatic concept. What would it mean to treat it "merely" as history? Historians have a right to banish erroneous dogma from the biblical period. If canon attaches to scripture, on the other hand, it should with the proper qualifications be allowed to stay. Is there, as some have seen, a *Kanonbewußtsein* deep in the formation of the literature itself? That depends on what a person means by canon. But in all probability church teaching and academic research on canon alike will be

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reliably expect to encounter God's communicative presence, God's self-attestation" (28–29).

106. Childs, *Church's Guide*, 61; cf. 4 n. 4 and 253–54.
107. Ibid., 128, cf. 62–63, 77, 97, 112–38, 167, 255.

better served by those who start with plausibly robust dogmatic conceptions than by those who shy away from scant ones and so risk letting bad dogma distort their history.